# Masorti Judaism Omer Counter 5781





# Introduction

The forty-nine days which mark out the Omer and separate the festival of Pesah from that of Shavu'ot have long been seen as a prime opportunity for self-reflection and character development. Two practices are common, both of which have inspired this project. One is the very old custom of reading a chapter each week on Shabbat afternoons of Pirké Avot (Fundamental Chapters); the other, more recent, is to see the weeks as representing the chain of being (*Seftrot*) in the Kabbalistic imagination – using each week (and each day within each week) as an opportunity to dwell on a quality of Divinity.

This project is precisely neither, but a little bit of both. We have taken seven *middot* (character attributes) which are often explored and expanded in Musar (ethical development) texts, and used them to frame each of the seven weeks that mark out the Omer. Rather than bombard the user with text, we have opted to rely on the language of image and symbolism. For each of the seven days in a given week, a carefully curated image is paired with a brief caption by one of our Masorti Judaism clergy team. Sometimes the links between these images and words to the theme of the week is obvious, other times it is more abstract. In each instance, it is not there to teach, but to inspire.

Our hope is that you'll count the Omer along with us, and in doing so, flip over one page each day and be inspired by the conflation and connection of an illustrative image and an insightful caption. Hopefully, these daily dedications provoke your own thoughts about the theme: what does it mean to be patient? What does equanimity – a quite abstract concept – look like? Through these questions, we can arrive at a further knowledge of ourselves, and a deeper spirituality based in character and psychology as much as behaviour and community. In the words of the 16th century mystic, R' Hayyim Vital: "The need to be careful of character attributes is greater than the need to fulfill the commandments, because when one improves their character, then they will effortlessly fulfill the commandments." [Sha'aré Kedushah, 2:1]

May this season of growth and development serve all of us to inspire a process of introspection as we move through the Omer. If we do so, then we can stand at Har Sinai, at the end of these seven weeks, all the more prepared to consider the commandments, since we will have already contemplated our characters.

R' Zahavit Shalev and R' Adam Zagoria-Moffet, co-editors



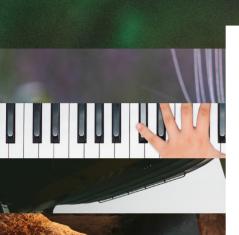


# Blessing of the Omer

First recite the blessing:

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with *mitzvot* and commanded us about the counting of the Omer. בְּרוּךָ אַתָּה יְהֹוֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁע קֵּדְשָׁנִוּ בְּמִצְוֹתִיו וְצִוְנוּ עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר:

Then add the day as appropriate, stating both the day and the week (ie: 'Today is the ninth day of the Omer, which is one week and two days') Various formulae exist, and the counting itself can be said in any language which you understand. Fuller instructions and accompanying liturgical poetry or *kavanot* can be found in any Siddur (typically under Weekday Ma'ariv or in an appendix).



# סבלנות Savlanut

Patience Tolerance Endurance





Can't make life faster, can't slow it down; Give me wisdom to accept what I can't change

R'Jonathan Wittenberg

One Day 29 March 2021

DAY 1 OF THE OMER



30 March 2021

One who reviews their studies one hundred times is not comparable to one who reviews their studies one hundred and one times.

R' Chaim Weiner (after Hagigah 9b)



DAY 2 OF THE OMER

Like water cutting rock, over a lifetime the Torah can shape our hearts.

R' Roni Tabick



No Weeks Three Days 31 March 2021



All these hold me: the blue of the sky, the passing clouds, the rocks which have formed over thousands of years, the grains of sand beneath my feet. Aspects of the endurance of the Divine all around me and the temporary nature of all life.

R' Oliver Joseph



### DAY 4 OF THE OMER

סבלנות Patience

No Weeks Four Days 1 April 2021

סבלנות Patience

No Weeks Five Days 2 April 2021 The miracle of the burning bush was that the bush remained unconsumed by the fire. How long must Moses have watched the flames before he noticed that the leaves were not burning away? Sometimes, slowing down helps us to notice miracles.

R' Natasha Mann

DAY 5 OF THE OMER



3 April 2021

Alert. Awake. Ready. She will make her move when the time is right, however long that takes. When to hold back? When to pounce? Her instincts will guide her and she will 'know' what to do at the right time.

R' Danny Newman

DAY 6 OF THE OMER

We do not discover who we are; we build who we are. We are what we build. Working out what to build is called 'Talmud Torah', implementing it is called 'Halakhah', keeping our eyes focused on a worthy target is called 'God'.

סבלנות

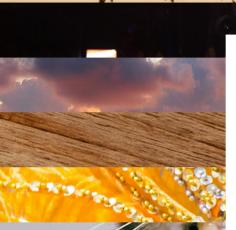
Patience

One Week No Days

4 April 2021



DAY 7 OF THE OMER





Enthusiasm Alacrity Fervour





5 April 2021

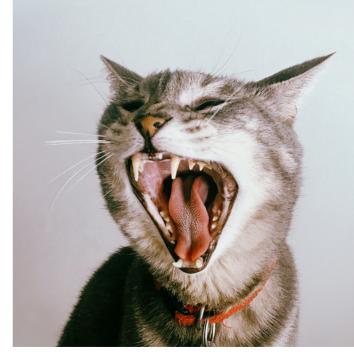
I'm reminded of drafting cyclists, tucking in to avoid headwinds. As the leader tires, they flick an elbow signaling that they intend to recover at the rear as another takes over at the sharp end; a glorious metaphor for society as it should be.

R' Jeremy Gordon

DAY 8 OF THE OMER

What are we ready to take on today? Open up, and seize the moment!

H' Bex Blumenfeld



DAY 9 OF THE OMER

זריזות Enthusiasm

One Week Two Days 6 April 2021 Remember when you were little and you looked out the car window at another car and, just for a moment, it looked like it wasn't moving at all? We only become aware of our speed through life, our motion and momentum, by looking outside of ourselves, even just for a moment.

R'Adam Zagoria-Moffet



7 April 2021



### DAY 10 OF THE OMER

# Help me breathe in wonder, to inspire my passion to care for the world.

R' Jonathan Wittenberg





DAY 11 OF THE OMER



# I'm ready for the world!

# H' Jacky Chernett

9 April 2021



One should awaken themselves like a lion to get up in the morning to serve their Creator, so that it is they who awaken the dawn.

R' Chaim Weiner

(after Shulhan Arukh OH:1)

זריזות Enthusiasm

One Week Six Days 10 April 2021

DAY 13 OF THE OMER

Get up, get going, there's no time to waste. Lift yourself, lift each other – we are stronger together.

זריזות Enthusiasm Two Weeks No Days

11 April 2021

DAY 14 OF THE OMER

R' Roni Tabick



Piety Devotion Loving-Kindness



To protect life and to worship are both pieties. I cannot hold everything at once. I may not always find connection and time to care for others. Noticing struggle is step one to finding love for ourselves which grows into devotion to God and others.



R' Oliver Joseph

חסידות Piety Two Weeks

One Day 12 April 2021

## DAY 15 OF THE OMER



13 April 2021

The Prophet Amos famously did not consider himself a prophet. He defined himself instead by his work with animals and trees. If even a prophet with a mission can see himself primarily as a caregiver, perhaps we should too.

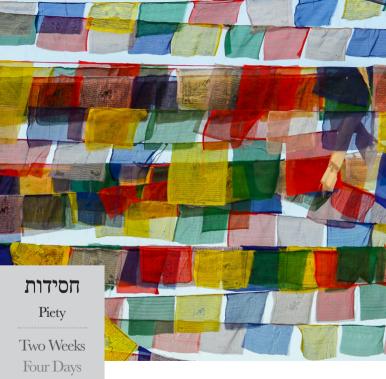
R'Natasha Mann

# DAY 16 OF THE OMER

**הסידות** Piety Two Weeks Three Days 14 April 2021 Am I my brother's keeper? Yes, you are. We all are. We are interconnected in ways that our rational minds cannot understand. The connection comes from the heart, from the soul. Embrace everyone's basic goodness.

R' Danny Newman

DAY 17 OF THE OMER



15 April 2021

It is easier for us to recognise and applaud the infinite varieties of human piety than it is to be pious.

Other people's piety can seem exotic and heartfelt, multicoloured and expressive, but we have allowed ourselves to see our own as mundane.

R'Joel Levy

### DAY 18 OF THE OMER

I don't much like the word 'charity' from the Latin to care. The word misses any sense of obligation, of refusal to accept hunger, of the insistence on the dignity of all humanity. Far better than handouts would be 'justice' or Tsedakah.

R'Jeremy Gordon

## DAY 19 OF THE OMER

# חסידות

Piety

Two Weeks Five Days 16 April 2021 What unique keys will unlock the chambers of your heart and soul? What will unlock your feelings of devotion to God and your compassion for others? What things are harder to unlock and what things are easier? Are some keys lost forever?

H' Bex Blumenfeld



## DAY 20 OF THE OMER

17 April 2021



The mitzvot we do for one another are more important than those we do for God. Why? Because if we focus too much on serving God we might forget to serve others, but in serving others we serve God at the same time. God is the Other we reach through others.

> R'Adam Zagoria-Moffet [After Ba'al haSulam]

18 April 2021

### OMER D AY ΗE



נדיבות Nedivut

Generosity Abundance Magnanimity





19 April 2021

Nothing is as wonderful and character-forming as the love for a child.

H'Jacky Chernett

DAY 22 OF THE OMER

Thanksgiving: Let me be appreciative in receiving, generous in giving, and not take life for granted

R' Jonathan Wittenberg

נדיבות Generosity Three Weeks Two Days 20 April 2021

### DAY 23 OF THE OMER

# "I looked up again, and I saw a flying scroll ... "

*R' Chaim Weiner* [Zechariah 5:1]

נדיבות

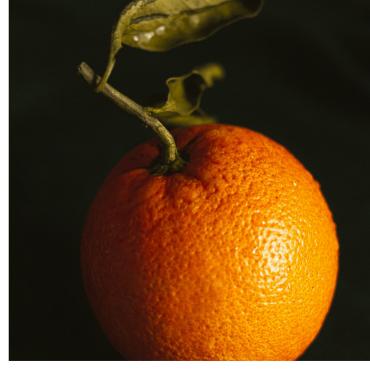
Generosity

Three Weeks Three Days 21 April 2021

DAY 24 OF THE OMER

There is goodness everywhere, and the world overflows. Breathe it, feel it - and respond in kind. Pass on the generosity you have received.

R' Roni Tabick



### DAY 25 OF THE OMER

נדיבות

Generosity

Three Weeks Four Days 22 April 2021



Bloom like a blossom in the field' [Psalm 103]. The entirety of our life, opening up like a flower, shining like a star. Yet truth be told. the dream is that we may shine many times during our lifetime, for most day follows night, highs follow lows.

R' Oliver Joseph

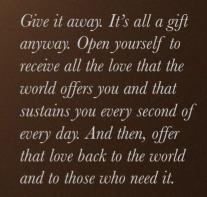
### DAY THE OMER F 9 -6

The mitzvah to leave the edges of our fields to the needy appears first in the Torah among ethical commands, and second in a passage about festivals. When we feel blessed by abundance, we are prompted to ensure that everyone has enough.

R' Natasha Mann

נדיבות Generosity Three Weeks Six Days 24 April 2021

### DAY 27 OF THE OMER



You can't take it with you.

R' Danny Newman

DAY 28 OF THE OMER

Generosity Four Weeks No Days 25 April 2021

נדיבות



אחרייות Aḥarayyut

OFF ON PRINT

TAX-

Responsibility Leadership Duty





Democracies are very good at promoting diversity, individuality, creativity; but what happens when we all need to pull in the same direction?

R' Joel Levy

# 26 April 2021

DAY ТНЕ OMER 2 9 O F

Jeremy Bentham believed moral behaviour was driven by a sense of being watched; transparency as ethics. God, Jeremiah counsels, knows the inner workings of our kidneys and heart. What if we acted as if that was indeed the case?



#### DAY 30 OF THE OMER

אחרייות

Responsibility

Four Weeks Two Days 27 April 2021



At the end of the day, who do you feel accountable to?

H' Bex Blumenfeld

DAY 31 OF THE OMER



29 April 2021

Many of us are quite able and quite quick to honour our duties to animals in our care.

Why then, do we struggle so much to approach our responsibilites towards each other the same way?

R'Adam Zagoria-Moffet

DAY 32 OF THE OMER

## A fixed length. A finite capacity. Choices to be made.

R' Zahavit Shalev



### DAY 33 OF THE OMER

30 April 2021



1 May 2021

Help me do what I can as best I can, inspire others to do likewise, and refuse to let life get me down.

R'Jonathan Wittenberg

#### DAY 34 OF THE OMER

'The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.'

> *R' Chaim Weiner* [Song of Songs 2:12]

אהרייות Responsibility

Five Weeks No Days 2 May 2021



#### DAY 35 OF THE OMER



SI

## ענוות Anavut

Humility Modesty Diffidence





The Tower of Babel fell because they cared more for bricks than people. What are the bricks that we value more than human life? What false assumptions have we made? In humility, let us reevaluate our priorities and return to God.

R' Roni Tahick

One Day 3 May 2021

#### ТНЕ OMER DAY 3 6

'To each [star] God gave its name' [Psalm 147]. The stars in the sky make me feel small. They are to me like the ancestors who came before me, all the stories told, the lessons learnt. I cannot begin to imagine every light that was and all that is.

R' Oliver Joseph

ענוות Humility Five Weeks Two Days 4 May 2021

#### DAY 37 OF THE OMER

'Katonti.' When Ya'akov thanks God, he utters the phrase: 'I am made small by all Your lovingkindness.' What does it mean to be made small by something beautiful? This is like standing below the stars and experiencing awe at the breadth of eternity.

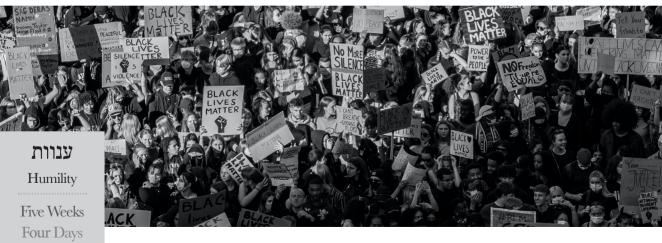
R' Natasha Mann

ענוות Humility Five Weeks Three Days 5 May 2021

#### DAY 38 OF THE OMER

Humility means taking up the right amount of space. Not too much and, more importantly, not too little. Moses was the most humble person that ever lived. When you hear the call, listen carefully, find your community, and speak your truth in the world.

R' Danny Newman



DAY 39 OF THE OMER

6 May 2021

Does the fact that each of us will soon be gone, leaving behind barely a trace, undermine our core commitments? If not, why not? What are we committed to that transcends the brief span of a lifetime?



## ענוות Humility Five Weeks Five Days 7 May 2021

R' Joel Levy

#### DAY 40 OF THE OMER

Every one of our body's atoms is traceable to the thermonuclear furnaces within high-mass stars that exploded more than five billion years ago. We are stardust brought to life – and we have only just begun.

> *R' Jeremy Gordon* [Quoting Neil deGrasse Tyson]

ענוות Humility Five Weeks Six Days 8 May 2021

DAY 41 OF THE OMER

Everyone has two pockets. When feeling discouraged, reach into the right pocket and read the note 'For my sake the world was created.'

But when feeling high and mighty, reach into the left pocket and find the words 'I am but dust and ashes?

> H' Bex Blumenfeld [After R' Simha Bunim]

Humility Six Weeks No Days 9 May 2021

ענות







## השתוות Hishtavut

Equanimity Self-Control Serenity



'Shiviti Adonai leNegdi Tamid' [Psalm 15:8]. I have placed God before me, always – but 'placed' is literally 'balanced.' How do we balance the presence of Divinity in our lives? The verse answers: we place the Divine before us, always – delicately and dedicatedly.

R'Adam Zagoria-Moffet

השתוות Equanimity

Six Weeks One Day 10 May 2021

#### DAY 43 OF THE OMER



11 May 2021

Slow down.

Take your time.

Patience and calm, are gifts for you.

Slowly,

slowly...

H' Jacky Chernett

DAY 44 OF THE OMER

The swan is seen as a symbol of peace and grace because it seems to float effortlessly across the water. Yet, underneath, its legs are spinning, churning water to propel it forward. How do we pursue life vigourously and still retain a calmness above water?

R'Adam Zagoria-Moffet



Sometimes, movement looks like stillness (and stillness looks like movement).





A person should always be soft like a reed, not stiff like a cedar.

This is why the reed was chosen to be the quill with which to write Torah scrolls, tefillin, and mezuzot.

> R'Adam Zagoria-Moffet [After Talmud Ta'anit 20b]

Five Days 14 May 2021

DAY 47 OF THE OMER

We live in a whirlwind of activity. Are we immobilised by inhibition or do we face the future with equanimity? Are our insecurities undermining our convictions? Today, let's quiet our doubts and resolve to build a world of justice and lovingkindness.

R' Daniella Kolodny



DAY 48 OF THE OMER

15 May 2021



16 May 2021

Tomorrow we hear the riotous cacophony of Matan Torah – can we stand at the foot of the mountain and be still, be present, be ready?

We will do and then we will understand.' Prepare today to hear the voice of God tomorrow.

R'Adam Zagoria-Moffet

DAY 49 OF THE OMER

We made it to the mountain.

Hag Same'ah!

#### S H A V U O T

## **Photo** Credits (All images courtesty of Unsplash)

#### эиО дээМ

Suol ANN uosjan Baw sofont Warden Suy untipuof Jock Van der Spoel uny opung unling xijV

#### ом'Г АээW

ysiquəy shify ISOW SHOW nwy mysof ypdp7 Kuiə.iə£ .101601. UDI Can With Red Hat young pysonsy

Меек Т ћгее

protomps punk

элгд яээМ

nuontuks

JUNN CROWN punt uosymf

ggn D van

upp oppuy

Week Four

tysunnəz pand

unstation nature səpnBəY mən7

Lungppps ap unpf

ounday sund phonda

nus on

ypg ppnf

105 Day

Ohaya Eddine Bentaleb

nuture Hauter SHIDIDA SIZA

иэлэс хээм

uəununn nuuəəl

man Carlon 920212119125 opperson ounsson pusopp sm7 omste old anny

Week Six

 $M_{MM} T$ iysmoym2.ivH prymW Suof op ywW nounzpoling puow 2əpuəjəW sm7 uosuyof of Ay

rysmanusi A Jampa Аригн улард  $ynp \partial y$   $\partial ynp \partial y$ oyuəpuarg mnf John Hubl

n F sunszsD

Others

pory uras

loStw uouns

ərysuqv2 səypəəH

nsurg synnig

Suga Sugony

supporting this project. to Masorti Judaism for contributed words and all of the clergy who A special thank you to

