

Rabbi Maya Glasser  
Sermon: Shabbat Naso  
May 29, 2020

*“Limnot yameinu ken hodah, v’navee levav chochmah.”*

This verse from Psalm 90 states, “Teach us, Eternal One, to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart”.

What does the idea of counting our days rightly mean for us?

As we finish the holiday of Shavuot, we have just ended a time of Counting in our calendar: the Omer. The Omer marks an important period for us as Jews. It begins on Passover and concludes on Shavuot. It starts during a period of slavery, and takes us not only to liberation, but to becoming the Jewish people, and receiving the Ten Commandments. This is a lot of ground to cover in 49 days. Yet, with each day of the Omer, we notice the passage of time in a unique way. We think about our communal journey. What makes us a Jewish people? How can we continue to learn, grow and change? How do we number our days in a significant way, to obtain wise hearts?

I think this year, that our Omer is longer. We are on an unfamiliar journey, and along the way we have been counting much more than 49 days. A pandemic has trapped us, compelling us to spend lots of time with ourselves, perhaps take advantage of new learning opportunities and ways to access learning, and find different milestones to mark our communal journey; indeed, we have been exploring unprecedented ways to recognize what even makes us a community.

In honor of the end of the official Omer, I decided to do an accounting of our Jewish calendar tonight. Our extended Omer has been uncertain, chaotic and nebulous, yet at the same time, our holidays and rituals have provided comfort and stability. We can use them to count our days in our journey to obtain wise hearts.

On February 26, just about three months ago, the Hebrew month of Adar began. We are told "*mi she'nichnas Adar, marbim b'simcha*", "when the month of Adar arrives, our joy increases." Adar is the happiest month of the year. It focuses on happiness and celebration. At first our joy increased with our 30th annual balloon drop, carnival, costumes, and candy. However, in the middle of March, amidst our Purim celebrations, we were advised that we should no longer have group gatherings in our building. During a holiday that invites us to imagine reality turning upside down, our world actually did. We rapidly cancelled major events, informed all of you, and began to brainstorm how to operate our temple on screens. We counted our days with new and old opportunities, such as Havdalah on Facebook Live, story time for our kids, regular classes for students of all ages- just not in person. We continued to come together and study Torah, Tanach, Talmud, the language and values of our people.

Our building may have been empty, but Anshe Emeth never closed.

We then entered the month of Nissan. Still getting used to living our lives on Zoom, we held our services, classes and programs. Passover, our holiday of springtime, new beginnings, and redemption, was different. Virtual seders separated us physically, yet connected us with those who might not have been able to travel to celebrate in person. "*Avadim hayinu*", our Haggadah tells us, we were slaves, "*atah b'nei chorin*", now we are free. We did not feel so free, but we slowly became accustomed to logging in and entering passwords every time we wanted to connect. It became slightly less awkward for only one voice to be singing at a time during services. We began to find new ways to be a community, like discussing

Jewish TV shows and teaching one another skills from our own homes. Days started to run together, but we did our best to count them in meaningful ways.

Our building was still empty, but Anshe Emeth never closed.

The month of Iyar began at the end of April. Learning and community continued. Physically distant, yet spiritually together, we counted our days with our usual annual events to mark the end of another year together. Our Congregational Meeting, so full that not everyone could log in, celebrated the major accomplishment of burning our mortgage. We elected a new AETY board, with our teens stepping up to lead us into the future. We installed them and our new adult officers and trustees with ancient words from our tradition. We celebrated our Religious School, honoring our teachers and acknowledging all of the learning and growth that happened this year. We heard from our articulate and wise High School graduates, who demonstrated their strong foundations and immense poise as they navigated a senior year that no one could have dreamed of. As each day went by, one sometimes indistinguishable from the next, we counted the time by learning from one another, praying together, and gathering on the screen.

Our building continued to be empty, but Anshe Emeth never closed.

Last week, yet another new month arrived, Sivan. We were busy greeting many of you in person, distributing challah. We handed out blessing cards, and also shared blessing with one another with enthusiastic waves, smiles under our masks, and precious moments of conversation and connection.

On that same day, President Trump announced what we already knew—that religious institutions are essential. In remarks at the White House he called on state leaders to allow churches, synagogues, mosques, and all other houses of worship to re-open.

Throughout Adar, Nissan, Iyar and now Sivan, our beloved community has remained essential. On Shavuot just last night and earlier today, we were all at Sinai receiving Torah. We proclaimed, “*na’aseh v’nishmah*”, first we will do, and then we will listen. And that is what has been happening over the past few months. Your temple staff, clergy and leadership took the actions of moving our congregation online, making sure that every member received a phone call, and continuing our regular services, classes and programs. We acted instinctively, doing, and then listening, in order to make virtual Anshe Emeth the same Anshe Emeth we know and love. Of course we are essential. We’ve counted the days, weeks, and months, and we spent them together, doing our best to ensure that everyone feels connected and that our Judaism provides stability and comfort even during the most unprecedented times.

Our building remains empty, yes- but how can we re-open if we never actually closed?

*“Limnot yameinu ken hodah, v’navee levav chochmah.”*

“Teach us, Eternal One, to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart”.

And since our building has been empty, we have counted together:

Adar, Nissan, Iyar Sivan.

Purim, Passover, Shavuot.

12 Shabbat services

11 Facebook Live Havdalahs

Nine weeks of Religious School

11 Talmud classes

6 YouZooms

7 Virtual Onegs

32 Shabbat morning Adult Study classes

A whole lot of committee meetings, quite a number of funerals, a handful of births and engagements, and tons of prayers...and counting

*Eloheinu, v'elohei Avoteinu v'Imoteinu:* Our God, and God of our ancestors who also lived through unprecedented times- You know that we Jews are always gathering, traveling on a journey together. We never stopped. You have given us a beautiful and essential tradition by which to mark time and live meaningful lives. Stay with us, in our hearts, and through our screens, through the days, weeks, and months ahead. May we always strive for wise hearts, for strength to continue building our sacred community, and for the capability to see and count the infinite blessings all around us. Amen.