

Pesach
Counting Towards Sinai
Rabba Claudia Marbach
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The Torah tells us that we left Egypt **יָצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם** We left in a hurry. A reasonable choice given that Pharaoh might change his mind - he seemed to have had a track record of doing so - and a few days later he does -pursuing Bnei Yisrael to Yam Suf. The Midrash¹ records a debate about whose actions were in haste - the Egyptians, the Jews, God's? The midrash settles that the rush was God's, reasoning that since we are told that all the torments of Egypt will never be repeated, if we rushed to redemption from Egypt then the ultimate redemption will be more orderly. The Chizkuni tell us that it was a plan on God's part so that we would have matzah to remind us forever of the rush. As if we are going to forget! Yetziat Mitzraim is mentioned 50 times in the Torah!

The Zohar explains God's rush to get us out in spiritual terms. The Kabbalist tell us that the world was created with 50 levels of holiness, the highest called binah - wisdom. They said that while in Egypt Bnei Yisrael had descended to the 49th level of impurity. If God had not taken us out at that moment we would have been lost, incapable of redemption - or as we say at the Seder - we would still be slaves in Egypt². So there was a rush. God was not only saving our bodies but also saving our souls. We needed to do teshuva in a serious way.

The Mei Shiloach says that on that first Leil haPesach, God revealed God's great light and honor **יקר** to the Jewish people. God and not an angel who redeemed us. For a night we were forgiven.

Shlomo Hakohen Rabinowicz, the Tiferet Shlomo, takes it one step further: So great and holy was that night, he wrote, that God connected to each and every person of Bnei Yisrael and brought us out of our degradation. As it is written **כַּחצוֹת הַלַּיְלָה אֲנִי יוֹצֵא בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם** Towards midnight I will go out among the Egyptian. He says that in addition to the Makat bechorot, God was revealing God's self to the Bnei Yisrael. Usually, says the Tiferet Shlomo, God spends the midnight hours with the righteous in Gan Eden but this night God was among the people. At that moment in time God connected with us and redeemed us. That was the great Shabbat of teshuva of being in the moment.

So how do we get back to that amazing unification with God - that at onement? The Mei Shiloach tells us that counting the Omer is the answer. That by doing something every day, meticulously we climb back to God. R. Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir's taught that God commanded

¹ Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 12:11:1

² הַזֹּהָר חֲדָשׁ רִישׁ פ' יִתְרוֹ

usefartem lachem, “count for yourselves” — *sefartem* means not only count but “purify” and “clarify,” for yourselves, for your own sake and your own purification.” Day by day, methodically and systematically we work our way to God not through great miracles but through the everyday messy work of life . We seek not chaotic freedom but freedom through mitzvot. Or as it says in Pirkei Avot commenting on (Exodus 32:16): "And the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tablets," do not read "graven" (harut) but rather "freedom" (herut), for there is no free man except one that involves himself in Torah learning; And anyone who involves himself in Torah learning is elevated.³

How do we attain this higher level through counting? The Kabbalist see the time of the Omer as a time of personal reflection and ethical introspection in order to be worthy of Matan Torah. Or as it says in Tehillim⁴:

Teach us to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart. לְמִנּוֹת יְמֵינוּ כֵּן הוֹדַע וְנִבְא לְבַב חֻקָּמָה.

They assigned each of the seven weeks a different attribute or sefira to work on and in a fractal pattern each day of the week cycles to repeat that pattern so that we can really focus, until we get to 49. Ready to receive the Torah on Shavuot. This is teshuva in the nitty gritty. Every day there is an assignment and things to do. For example, today is *תּוֹדָה שְׂבַח*. Loving kindness of loving kindness. How do we start any process of teshuva or clarification? With kindness to ourselves and those around us. May you have a productive omer.



Rabba Claudia Marbach received semikha from Maharat in 2018. She runs a pop-up beit midrash for women in Boston, called One Night Shtender and co-runs a partnership minyan called Yedid Nefesh in Newton, MA. Rabba Claudia has served a middle school teacher at JCDS Boston, a pluralistic Jewish Day School, for fifteen years, where she developed the Rabbinics curriculum, taught tefillah and moral dilemmas. Rabba Claudia received her BA in English from Barnard College, and JD from Boston University. She studied at Michlala, Drisha and Pardes.

³ Pirkei Avot 6:2

⁴ Tehillim 90:12