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Seven Complete Weeks: A Shavuot Reflection

Douglas Aronin

As we complete the seven week count of the Omer and prepare to welcome the holiday of Shavuot, it's worth pondering why, alone among all Jewish holidays, Shavuot is anticipated in this unusual manner. Carefully and methodically, for a full seven weeks, we count the forty-nine days that link Pesach and Shavuot. Why?



The most common explanation is that the link between Pesach and Shavuot is intended to highlight the link between the Jewish people's liberation from Egyptian slavery on the one hand and its acceptance of the Torah on the other. We celebrate Pesach as Zeman Cheiruteinu (the Season of our Freedom), but the Jewish concept of freedom is very different from its American counterpart. God's words to Pharaoh, as conveyed by Moses, were not simply "Let My people go", but "Let My people go, that they may serve Me." (Ex. 7:26) Only when they accepted the obligation to serve God through Torah was the Jewish people's liberation complete.

But there's a problem with this explanation for counting the Omer. According to most authorities, the Torah's commandment to count

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Louis Sutker

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From Rabbi Louis



Purim is behind us for this year.

We disguised ourselves under the masks that truly revealed us. We reflected on how close we came to extinction. One more time. We laughed and made a lot of noise to drown out our fear. Many people chose to stay home rather than celebrate Purim.

Pesach is upon us. We restrict our diet to non-yeasted bread – matzah. We eat this flat

bread with bitter herbs. We temper the bitterness with charoset, made from apples and wine plus other ingredients. We reflect on what it means to be free, and what it means to be a slave. We rejoice in the aspects of our lives that are free, and express sorrow for those still enslaved, and for the parts of us that are enthralled with the security of being owned by other people or other ideas. We ask difficult questions. The Talmud states that only one-fifth of the Jews were actually willing to leave the restrictions of Egypt and that group almost had to be chased out.

Pesach is soon gone.

We, then, are on the countdown until we observe the anniversary of being given our great Teaching. We call that day Shevuot. On that day, we had direct contact with G!d; each one of us carries the memory of that encounter, buried deep in our soul-genes. Not very long after the encounter, we became impatient (sound familiar?), and decided that the path of an invisible G!d was too difficult; so we built an image to worship. Now, we stay up all night studying, to atone for falling asleep at the original presentation. Some of us fall asleep despite our best intentions.

Every year, every day, every moment we trace the highlights of our journey. As individuals, as families, as Jews, as human beings. We face creation, revelation and the possibility of redemption.

May all of us use the freedom of our willfulness to help each other contact and discern our authentic selves from so many choices as we continue our journies together.

rav Louis

President's Message

Hello Temple Family,

With the coming of Spring, many of us find ourselves in a bee hive of activity as we come out from the cold of winter. As Passover approaches there is lots of planning and much preparation in order for us to come together with our families and our community. Many volunteers are ready to begin mobilizing as our Community Seder nears. It is heart-warming to see the number of people who came forward to volunteer their time to make this year's Seder a success. There has been a lot of interest from the congregation and from non-members who are planning to attend this year's Seder. My wife, Louise, is coordinating the dinner preparation. With her great knowledge of food, the dinner is sure to be delicious this year. I want to thank everyone who so willingly volunteered to help make this Seder happen.

Mark your calendars for our upcoming Mother's Day Music Concert. It will be an exiting evening filled with wine and music. This fundraising event occurs on Sat. May 12 at 7:30 pm. Also as a fundraiser, we will be selling potted mums for Mother's Day. Sharon Shalinsky will be taking orders for them. Honour that special person on Mother's Day by treating her to a wonderful evening concert and a lovely potted mum. We hope you will support us in these fundraising efforts.

We are in the midst of setting up our Nominating Committee. Anybody interested in taking part on the new Board of Directors, please contact me. This rewarding work helps bring us closer together as a community.

Normally I'd be reporting on the Rabbi's Saturday Service, as well as the Interfaith Dinner and Open House that we are hosting this month. With our Julie and Reva moving to their new house at the end of March, the newsletter deadline has arrived before these events so I'll report on them in next month's edition. Mazel Tov to Julie and Reva for finding their new home. I wish them good luck in their move and much enjoyment in their new abode.

On behalf of my wife Louise and myself, I want to wish everyone a happy Passover.

L'shalom,

Neal



May 12th, 7:30 pm at the JCCV

Mothers' Day Concert

(à la Boston Pops)

Cheese or fruit plate, wine and candlelight.

Hot Klezmer music by *Without A Net*,
and Klassics to Klezmer with *Duo West*.

Could lead to a little dancing ...



Seven Complete Weeks, continued from page 1.

the days from Pesach to Shavuot applies only when we can bring the Omer offering (Lev. 23:15), i.e., when the Beit haMikdash (Temple) is standing and sacrifices may be brought. Our count of the Omer today is not a Biblical commandment but merely a rabbinic commandment in remembrance of the Beit HaMikdash. But if the purpose of the count is to reinforce the link between freedom and Torah, then why should it matter whether the Beit HaMikdash is standing or not?

Part of the answer is that while Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah, that is not all that it celebrates. Another focus of the holiday is on the Jewish people's inheritance of the Land of Israel, and the centrality of Jerusalem. In Parshat Pinchas, which enumerates the festival sacrifices (Num. 28:26), the Torah mentions Yom haBikkuriim (the day of the first fruits) as one of the names of Shavuot, and we know from Parshat Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:1-11) that the bikurim were brought to the Beit HaMikdash and were accompanied with a declaration that specifically linked our liberation from Egypt with our inheritance of the Land of Israel and by implication (through the reference in v. 9 to "this place") with the Beit HaMikdash as well. Similarly, when, at the Seder, we express our gratitude to God (in Dayeinu) for all that He has done for us, we begin with the exodus from Egypt and end not with the giving of the Torah (although that is one of the events mentioned) but with the building of the Beit HaMikdash.

It seems then that the process that began with our liberation from Egyptian bondage needed three additional elements in order to be complete: receiving the Torah, conquering the Land of Israel and building the Beit HaMikdash. The Torah's commandment to count the Omer encompasses all of these elements. But what is the substantive connection that links them?

There is a hint of the answer, I think, at the end of the Book of Ruth, which we read on Shavuot. After recounting the birth of Ruth's son Obed, the book tells us (4:17): "he was the father of Jesse, father of David." The book's text could end there, but it doesn't. Instead it adds an additional five verses (v. 18-22) recounting the genealogical line from Peretz, Judah's son, to King David.

What's the purpose of that addendum? It's not there to tell us of the link between Ruth and David, for the previous verse already told us that. Its purpose, apparently, is to stress the link between David and Peretz. The aspiration for that link had been stated before (4:12), but these verses come to stress that the link was actualized.

What's so important about the connection between Peretz and the House of David, of which Ruth is the

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Jewish People Around the World

GERMANY: Anne Frank's family belongings, including furniture, pictures, drawings, thousands of letters and toys, most of which had been stored in a Swiss attic for decades until discovered by accident in 2001, will be displayed in the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, the family's hometown. PHOTO: Anne with her mother and sister. Frankfurt, Germany, 1933. <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/anne-frank-s-belongings-head-back-to-frankfurt-80-years-after-family-fled-nazis-1.416502>

[Seven Complete Weeks](#), continued from page 4.

progenitor? As we learn in Parshat Vayeishev (Gen. 38:12-16) Peretz was the son of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. Tamar had originally been the wife of Judah's first-born Er, who died. When his brother Onan did not fulfill the duty of levirate marriage with his brother's wife, he too died, and Judah, afraid to lose any more sons, would not allow his third son Shelah to take her in marriage. Tamar thereupon disguised herself as a prostitute and enticed Judah to have relations with her, and Peretz was the first born of that union. Judah's response, when Tamar confronted him with proof that he had fathered her child, was to concede: "She is more righteous than I" (38:26)

The Davidic line, and the Messianic redemption that will flow from it, are the ultimate products of Peretz. The story of Judah and Tamar exemplifies the Torah's view of redemption, and how different it is from that which prevails in Christian thought, with its notions of immaculate conception and virgin birth. To Christians, redemption has its origin in perfection. For Jews, by contrast, redemption has its origin in teshuva (repentance) and atonement.

The most important function of the Beit HaMikdash when it stood was to facilitate atonement, which is the reconciliation with God that flows from teshuva. The final words of the "Dayeinu" section of the Haggadah that we read on Pesach acknowledge our gratitude to God for giving us the Beit HaMikdash "to atone for our sins." (Iekhaper al chatoteinu). But what is easily overlooked is that the need for atonement is an inevitable result of receiving the Torah.

The freedom we were given on Pesach could not be complete until we received the Torah and thereby committed ourselves to God's service. But receiving the gift of Torah would not be liberating unless it included a mechanism for reconciling with God when, as is inevitable for fallible human beings, we fall short of the Torah's demands. Absent such a mechanism, there would always be a tension between the freedom we celebrate on Pesach and the Torah we celebrate on Shavuot.

Perhaps the Torah, by limiting its commandment of counting these seven complete weeks to those periods of history when the Beit HaMikdash (or its predecessor, the Mishkan) was available to effect atonement for us, is acknowledging that we cannot truly experience freedom in Torah unless a mechanism for atonement is available. And maybe the Sages, by maintaining the counting of the Omer as a rabbinic commandment even when we do not have the

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Tzedakah: A way of life.

Kolot Mayim Supports Food Bank

Please bring food donations for the James Bay Community Project Food Bank to the JCC on Friday nights. We have a beautiful box for your contributions, which are deeply appreciated. Packaged goods as well as produce are welcomed.

Donations of cans of beans and soup are especially needed.

For more information, please contact
Reva Hutkin, 388-4161,
or Ann Gougeon-Ryant, 384-9351.

*The Board of Directors,
on behalf of the entire congregation,
extend their sincerest condolences
to Joe Gougeon-Ryant
on the loss of his brother, Maurice.*



Seven Complete Weeks, continued from page 5.

Beit HaMikdash, were expressing confidence that the Jewish people, even in exile, can find alternative mechanisms for atonement. Whatever the circumstances of history in which we find ourselves, we can always, by making use of the spiritual tools that are available to us, experience ultimate freedom through our attempts (imperfect though they may be) to meet the challenge of Torah. And the more we persevere in the struggle to meet that challenge, the more confident we can be of recovering the ultimate tool of atonement under the guidance of David's ultimate descendant.

Chag sameach.



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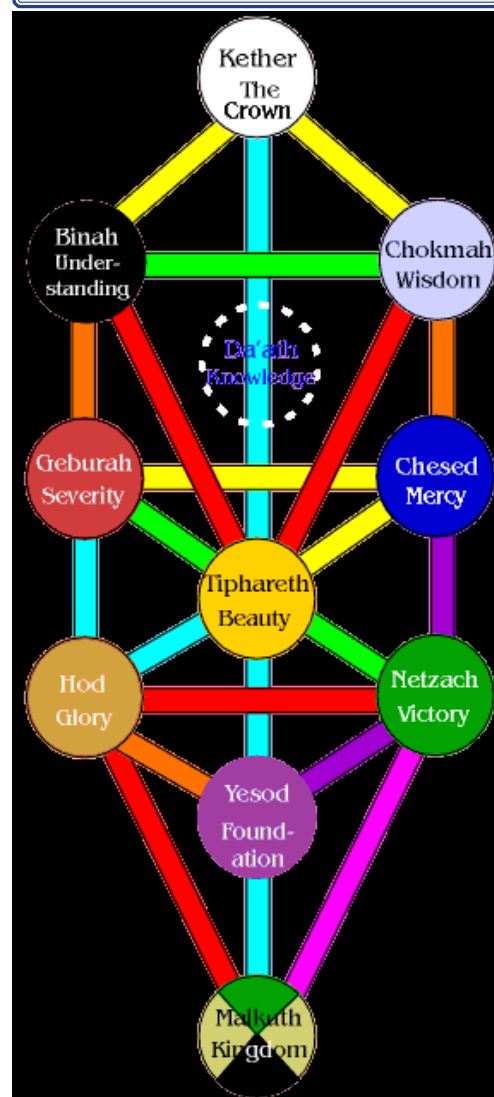
Torah Study

Saturday April 21st
at 4:00 pm

at the home of
Rabbi Louis
1135 McClure Street

This month, Rabbi
Louis will conclude his
Introduction to Kaballah

Everyone is welcome.



<<http://media.photobucket.com>>

The Victoria and Vancouver Island Jewish Burial Society

The Jewish Burial Society of Victoria and Vancouver Island is a service organization founded to assist all Jews with end of life requirements. We administer four totally separate and distinct sections in the Hatley Memorial Gardens and provide space for all persuasions of Jewish life from orthodox to secular, complete with cremation if specified.

The Society works with the Victoria Chevrah Kadisha in preparation of the body for burial, and works with the family in all ways to ensure that the concern and embrace of the entire community for the bereaved.

While we are a non profit Society, regretfully, end of life does not respect one's pocketbook, and costs are dear. There is a small membership charge that must be paid to become a member of our Society, and arrangements for this, and for burial requirements may be made at any time. We recommend dealing with one's self and saving the pain and expense of the survivors at a very stressful time.

The first stage of the beautification program is now complete. This consists of a network of paved pathways and a sign identifying the Jewish Community Section of the cemetery. In the very near future we hope to see a number of trees planted and a bench or benches placed. In the spring we hope to have a formal Service of Consecration at the cemetery, to which the whole of the Jewish community will be invited.

For additional information on a highly confidential basis, call Joel Fagan (250 477-2006), Jack Shalinsky (250 477-1012), or Michael Goldberg (250 598-9094).

April 2012
Nissan-Iyar 5772

THE VOICE

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Chai חַי

**Donations received
since the last newsletter:**

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

In memory of Dorothy's parents,
Sonia and Harry Agulnick -
Dorothy & David Torontow

Donations to the Fund - *Dorothy
and David Torontow, Joe and Ann
Gougeon-Ryant, Julie Elizabeth &
Reva Hutkin*

In honour of the 60th birthday of
Dr. Stan Shortt - *Merial & Peter
Barwin*



JCCV PAGE

JCCV Newcomers' Group

If you are new to our fair city, and want to meet other Jewish people socially, give Joanne Helm a call at 778-426-2996, or email her at <helmj@shaw.ca>.

**The Jewish Community Centre
will be closed**

**Saturday April 7th
through Monday April 16th.**

in Observance of Passover

Re-opening Tuesday April

JCCV Food-for-Thought Luncheon

Monday April 30th, 2102
12 noon - 1:30 pm

Dr. Eike Kluge

will speak on

Ethics of Police Conduct

More info in the Shalom

Call the JCCV at
250-477-7185 to reserve.

Please Hold this Date — You Won't Want To Miss It!!



Jewish Community Centre of Victoria **Fundraising Dinner**

Olive Grove Restaurant
4496 West Saanich Road

Sunday, May 6, 2012
Cocktails at 5:30 pm
dinner at 6:30 pm

Fabulous buffet menu,
music and draw prizes

Tickets (\$50 per person)
will go on sale in February 2012

Part of the cost (\$36) will be a tax deductible donation to the JCCV.

Additional information is available in the Shalom.



Nejama A. Ferstman Music Therapist Music teacher, facilitator, enthusiast Bachelor of Music Therapy

If you or a loved one is in need of support with social cognitive learning challenges, mood disorders, memory loss, chronic illness, palliative care, rehabilitation, convalescence, peri-natal, and more.

The music therapist and client join together in listening to music, singing, playing instruments, composing, moving to music or improvising in order to achieve therapeutic goals. **No previous musical experience necessary.**

A music therapist is trained to use music as a tool to stimulate those connections inherent between music, mind and body, contributing to an improved quality of life for the individual. link Institute for Music and Neurologic Function, Concetta Tomaino, NY

nuhunni@gmail.com

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Leon Zetler

Store hours:

Monday–Saturday: 9:30AM - 6:30PM

Sunday: 10AM - 6:00PM

Kolot Mayim Mitzvah Day Toy Drive

The **deadline** for toys and books for children six and under is **Sunday, April 27th**. These are for Kolot Mayim's contribution to Mitzvah Day.

Please bring offerings to Shul on any Friday evening. Your contributions will ensure we have a successful contribution to a worthy cause.

Reva Hutkin,

Chairperson,
Social Action Committee

Mitzvah Day April 29, 2012

An event sponsored by Congregation Emanu-El

We are inviting all members of the Victoria community to join us for a day of kindness and community service. Mitzvah Day is an opportunity for people to spend a few hours helping a variety of organizations that provide important social services in our community.

We have had a wonderful response (thank you!) and there are only 10 volunteer positions still available. If you would like information, please phone or email:

Jackie Saunders-Ritchie
at 250-595-2973 or <jsaundersritchie@shaw.ca>, or
Sheila Connelly at 250-598-4339 or
<connellyhome@shaw.ca>.

Cash donations are most welcome. We rely on your generosity to pay for Mitzvah Day supplies. Charitable tax receipts will be provided.



Those we remember ...

OBSERVED DATE	CIVIL DATE YEAR OF DEATH	HEBREW DATE YEAR OF DEATH	NAME	RELATIONSHIP	MOURNER
April 1, 2012	April, 2006	<i>Unknown</i>	Alex Aiken	Uncle	Martin Hergt
April 1, 2012	April 1, 2005	21 Adar II 5765	Martin Spigelman	Husband	Phyllis Chuly
April 3, 2012	April 3, 1959	24 Adar II 5719	Alvin Knight	Grandfather	Heather Gatland
April 3, 2012	April 13, 2003	11 Nissan 5763	Maurice Fogel	Friend	Caroline Hergt
April 4, 2012	April 4, 2010	20 Nissan 5770	Rita Ryant	Sister	Joe Gougeon-Ryant
April 5, 2012	April 5, 2004	14 Nissan 5764	Blanche Dinning	Mother-in-Law	Julie Elizabeth
April 6, 2012	April 6, 1990	11 Nissan 5750	Rose Sher	Grandmother	Don Sher
April 7, 2012	April 7, 2002	25 Nissan 5762	William Baker	Husband	Arlette Baker
April 9, 2012	April 9, 2010	25 Nissan 5770	Keith Young	Brother	Gail Parrish
April 10, 2012	April 10, 2002	28 Nissan 5762	Hyman Stern	Father	Gilda Good
April 11, 2012	April 11, 2011	7 Nissan 5771	Denny Solo	Brother In Law	Jacqueline Seigel
April 11, 2012	April 17, 2006	19 Nissan 5766	Elfriede Szabo	Grandmother	Caroline Hergt
April 11, 2012	April 25, 1970	19 Nissan 5730	Linda Quinn	Sister	Susan Halpert
April 18, 2012	April 18 2004	27 Nissan 5764	Lillian Sher-Kalisky	Aunt	Don Sher
April 18, 2012	April 18, 1989	13 Nissan 5749	Louis Kalisky	Uncle	Don Sher
April 22, 2012	April 21, 2004	30 Nissan 5764	Elfrede Maroke	Aunt	Caroline Hergt
April 22, 2012	April 22, 1974	30 Nissan 5734	Elias Gans/Eliyahu ben Moshe	Father	Michael Gans
April 22, 2012	April 22, 2005	13 Nissan 5765	Jean Gary	Aunt	Ellen Wagman
April 22, 2012	April 22, 1979	25 Nissan 5739	Julius Nestel	Father	Gail Nestel
April 23, 2012	April 23, 2010	9 Iyar 5770	Denise Berry	Friend	Kezia Allen
April 23, 2012	April 23, 2006	26 Nissan 5766	Sonia Wagner	Grandmother	Ian Aaron
April 29, 2012	April 29, 2008	24 Nissan 5768	Alex Aiken	Uncle	Martin Hergt
April 29, 2012	April 29 2008	24 Nissan 5768	Margaret Sugarman	Mother	Sandy Fagan



Mums for Moms
...and all the other women with whom you share happy Spring days.

Spring is here! Mother's Day is Wōming! And Kolot Mayim makes your gift selection easy!

Plan on giving a carefully selected potted mum, and support Kolot Mayim's school children at the same time.

More information to follow in mid-April but for now, know your gift decision is made ...and yes, we will offer personal delivery again this year!

April 2012				Nissan-Iyar 5772		
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 9	2 10	3 11 7-9 pm Jews of Spain JCCV	4 12	5 13	No Kabbalat Shabbat Service Erev Passover	Ta'anit Bechorot 5:30 KM Seder 1st day P.
8 16 Omer 1 2nd day P.	9 17 Omer 2 3rd day P.	10 18 Omer 3 4th day P.	11 19 Omer 4 5th day P.	12 20 Omer 5 6th day P.	13 21 7:30 Kabbalat Shabbat, led by Michael Gans Omer 6 7th day P.	14 22 Omer 7 8th day P.
15 23 Omer 8	16 24 Omer 9	17 25 Omer 10	18 26 Omer 11	19 27 Omer 12	20 28 7:30 Kabbalat Shabbat, led by Joel Fagan Omer 13	21 29 Shemini 4:00 Torah Study chez rav Louis Omer 14
22 30 Omer 15	23 1 Iyar Rosh Chodesh Omer 16	24 2 Omer 17	25 3 Omer 18	26 4 Omer 19	27 5 7:30 Kabbalat Shabbat, led by Joe Gougeon-Ryant Omer 20	28 6 Tazirla- Metzora Omer 21
29 7 Omer 22	30 8 12 noon Food for Thought Luncheon at JCCV Omer 23	White squares indicate days Rabbi Sutker is with us.				

Making the Omer Count: A Kabbalistic Journey of 49 Steps

The evening of the 2nd Seder we start counting the Omer. It is 49 days until Shavuot, when we celebrate receiving the Torah. Each of the 49 days has a combination of Kabbalistic Sephirot, each with its own mystical qualities.

Come to 2 evenings of learning how you can use the Kabbalistic Sephirot to help you be a better person, to be the person you'd like to be

1st evening, Sunday April 1st at 7:00 pm

2nd evening, Sunday April 22 at 7:00 pm

Cost: \$20.00

Workshop Leader: Dr. Charlotte Sutker

Charlotte is a Spiritual Director who is passionate about helping people develop a deeper relationship with the self, others, and God.

The workshop will be held at Charlotte's home – 1135 McClure Street

**To register call Charlotte at 250-361-1698 or email her at ravencas@shaw.ca
Please register by Thursday, March 29th**

