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Simultaneous Joy and Pain: The Wisdom of the Counting of the Omer

By Rabbi Wendi Geffen, 5/01/2013



This year at our Passover seder, I experienced something deeply powerful which I had not felt in the context of Passover before. We spend much of our seder going around the table, each reading a section from the Haggadah out loud. Generally, our seder is populated partially by adults and partially by very young children, so we move from adult to adult, skipping over the smaller folks at our table. But this year, when my husband finished reading his part, our kindergarten-age son said he'd like to read.

Suddenly, space and time expanded for me, though I assume it continued at a normal pace for everyone else. In what must have been only a second between my son's request to read and his starting to pronounce the Haggadah's words, his entire life flashed through my mind, from his birth until that moment. In those 5 ½ years contracted into 1/60th of a minute, I felt profound, overwhelming joy, and at the same time, an all-consuming sadness. Joy that my son could do what he was doing – that he could read, was growing up, was becoming increasingly less toddler-like – and sadness for exactly those same reasons.

This time of year, we Jews find ourselves amidst the annual observance of *Sefirat HaOmer*, the Counting of the Omer. Beginning on the second day of Passover, each day we say a blessing and literally count the day and week of the seven-week cycle leading up to Shavuot, which falls on the 50th day. What began as an ancient agricultural/spiritual holiday to mark the weeks between barley and wheat harvests has significantly evolved.

Thanks to the rabbis of the Talmud, we understand the Counting of the Omer as the communal spiritual reenactment of our ancestors' process of journeying from Egypt to Mt. Sinai, where they were given the Torah. Thanks to the [Continued on page 4.](#)

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From Rabbi Louis



DIFFICULT CONVERSTATIONS

The Jewish people have had problems historically with conversing with each other about difficult topics. The problem exists today also.

Perhaps the most difficult to discuss is the current state of Israel. The discussants tend to very quickly move to the extreme of "My country

right or wrong" or to "Not my country wrong or wrong." Very quickly forgotten are the guidelines for effective communication such as letting your neighbour know what you have heard them say and guessing at the feelings and needs that underlay their statements, and being able to be empathetic with positions that may bring up feelings of anger, shame and helplessness.

To begin discussing some of these difficult topics it is helpful to agree on "ground rules" and to have a facilitator who is perceived as neutral or at least fair by all sides.

Torah reminds us of the underlying reason for obeying the commandments to the best of our ability. "You shall be Holy for I God, your God, am Holy." The difficult example that we are trying to follow is the path of Holiness (Kedushah). This involves both separation and unification, and it is not an easy path.

When we engage in difficult conversations, the first thing that tends to disappear is our ability to listen to each other. Listening does not only happen with our ears. Listening also happens with our hearts.

There are always difficult conversations. They occur between nations, between friends, between lovers and between enemies who are potential friends. Our Torah and traditions teach us a way to engage in these difficult conversations. "Shemah Yisrael....!", "Listen Israel....!" Each one of us is "Israel." The word "Shemah" also implies "Pay Attention!" and in another context "Gather together."

May the members of this Holy Kehilah of Kolot Mayim continue to have the courage to engage in difficult conversations and to develop hearts that have ears.

r. Louis

President's Message



Shalom Kolot Mayim family,

Kolot Mayim-At-Home has been kick-started with a musical jam and Havdallah at the home of Reva and Julie. There were six attendees, two played stringed instruments, two on the harmonica, three on the drums and the rest on various percussion instruments. The Havdallah ended a lovely Saturday Night. Gerry Marks will be showing a movie at his home on May 22nd, and Joe & Ann Gougeon-Ryant will show another film on

June 3rd. Both events require an RSVP, as space is limited. See details on page 4.

Get well wishes to Arline Leshner and Kis Brink, both of whom may be visited at the Royal Jubilee Hospital.



Interlaced: Stories, Faith and Community, sponsored by the Intercultural Association had a joint meeting with the Hindu and Muslim communities hosted by Kolot Mayim at the JCCV. We exchanged stories and enjoyed High Tea Jewish style. The next group to host everyone will be the Hindus, at their temple on 1934 Cultra Avenue, Central Saanich on Sunday May 5th at 1:00. Once again, I urge everyone to attend.

"Sponsor An Oneg" has taken off. Arlette sponsored one to honour her parents in remembrance of the Shoah and Dorothy and David sponsored one in honour of their 60th anniversary. Let Julie know if you want to do this, and she will let Rennie know to send it out on his weekly update. There are more to come! Arlette will be sponsoring another oneg on Friday May 10th in honour of Rennie Parrish and all his work to make our Onegs so beautiful.

Our beautiful Tzedakah box always awaits your donations. We missed services one Friday night, and were delighted to discover that this box was quite full. Obviously, some people had taken advantage of the many specials available every week at various grocery stores in town..

Sunday, May 5th is the deadline for new or gently used books to be donated for Mitzvah Day. Thanks to Joel for letting us store these in his library and to Sandy who is co-chair of the Mitzvah Day committee and who initiated our project. Books will be donated to the Single Family Resource Centre.

Join Michael Gans on June 1st for a showing of the documentary, *Visa al Paraiso*. The filmmaker Lillian Liberman, will be present to discuss her film. Showing is at 7:00 at the JCCV, and reasonably priced at \$5.00. There is no movie scheduled for May.

Shalom until next month,

Reva

[Simultaneous Joy and Pain continued from page 1.](#) Kabbalists, we also understand the Omer time as an opportunity to refine and perfect as we leave our individual *Mitzrayim* (Egypt) and whatever narrow parts of ourselves hold us back – and then travel to a place areas of our own lives where we, too, can be open and receptive to whatever Revelation awaits us.

In either case, the most important is the idea that we count *up*, not down, to express our ancestors' and our own increasing excitement as they – and we – step closer toward Revelation.

But the period of the Omer is also overshadowed with the tone and rituals of mourning, including the prohibitions against haircuts, shaving, or getting married (except on Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the Omer). The question is: Why the sadness and mourning, if the time should have been completely celebratory? Our ancestors were finally free of Egypt and would soon culminate their seven-week trip with the momentous, holy experience of meeting the Divine and receiving the Torah. Not much to be sad about, right?

When we think about our own journeys out of whatever enslaves us, though, into moments of liberation and redemption and, ultimately, to moments of real awakening and revelation, what are they really like? Are they filled only with excitement and joy? Or are they more complicated than that?

As a rabbi, I have seen this complexity – simultaneous joy and sadness – particularly (but not exclusively) at lifecycle events, both feelings evoked by the same experience. They manifest in tears that society and Hallmark commercials suggest are wholly joyous but that I know also contain honest sorrow. In these moments, we live in both worlds, but we have to make a choice: Which sensibility will we let color our experience? When we arrive at these crossroads, one the path of joy and optimism and one the path of sadness and regret, how do we choose which route to take?

The Omer tradition, linking Passover to Shavuot, gives us the answer. This set of seven weeks enables us to live in the real, complicated world of emotional complexity, fully, experiencing both joy and sadness – incarnate in each day of the counting – but when the last day of the Omer concludes, the mourning ends. There is a reason the Revelation happens on the 50th day – the day *after* the last day of the counting: To experience Revelation, we can't be in mourning. We have to release it and acknowledge that we have a choice to make. Will we view life a diminishing, increasingly limiting countdown to the end – a road that ultimately leads us back to Egypt, to the death of the spirit? Or will we see life as an opening to opportunity, joy, and the promise of a Revelation?

The wisdom of the Counting of the Omer is that it enables us to live in both worlds for a bit. The moments when only a second passes, but a lifetime flashes through our mind's eye, between *Mitzrayim* and the Mountain, that's when the real awakening happens. But you can't stand at Sinai unless you leave behind the past and *Mitzrayim* behind, opening yourself to the only place there really is: the present.

Rabbi Wendi Geffen serves North Shore Congregation Israel in Glencoe, IL.

This post is an abridged version of Rabbi Geffen's original post. The full piece is published at [Pri HaGeffen](#).

Published: 5/01/2013, <http://www.reformjudaism.org/>

Kolot Mayim-at-Home

Wednesday May 22nd at 7:00 pm

Gerry Marks is pleased to show the movie, *Daniel Deronda*, by George Eliot. It was written in approximately 1870 and predicts the Jews returning to Israel. It is approximately 3 hours long so we will start at 7 PM. He can accommodate 8 people only, so please RSVP to him at 250-382-7460 or email <gmarks9@shaw.ca>.

Tuesday, June 3rd at 7:30 pm

Joe & Ann Gougeon Ryant invite up to four people to a viewing of the film, *In Darkness*, which describes the true events of surviving the Holocaust by being hidden in the sewers of the Lvov Ghetto. Not an easy movie, it portrays nonetheless the audacity of the human spirit, unexpected generosity to others and personal transformation. Numbers are limited by the size of our TV room so we are operating on a first-come, first-serve RSVP system. Call 250 384 9351 or email <jgougeonryant@shaw.ca> to reserve your spot.

Shavuot

*This year, the all-night study
will take place entirely at
Congregation Emanu-El,
1461 Blanshard Street,
beginning at 9:00 pm.
with the Ma'ariv service.*

*At approximately 4 am, people will go to
Rabbi Louis and Charlotte Sutker's home at
1135 McClure Street, where they will complete
the last learning at about 4:30 am. Sha'harit
services at sunrise will be held outside by the
fire in the back yard at approximately 5:30.*

*Some refreshments will be provided, but feel
free to bring cheese cakes, cheese blintzes, cheese
and crackers — you get the drift — and wine or
other beverages.*



Sponsored Onegs

Please consider hosting an Oneg Shabbat.
It's a great way to honour an occasion or an
individual, and introduce new people to our
congregation.

We will provide the tea, coffee and juice,
as well as advertise the event; you provide
the munchies and the people. What could be
simpler?



Upcoming Onegs:

May 10th Oneg sponsored by **Arlette Baker**

in honour of Rennie Parrish.

June 10th Oneg sponsored by **Arlette Baker**
in honour of Rennie & Alec's 10th Anniversary,
and Kis's Conversion.

June 21st Oneg sponsored by **Reva Hutkin** in
honour of Julie Elizabeth's Bat Mitzvah.

May 2013
Iyar-Sivan 5773

THE VOICE

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Attention all Service Leaders and Wannabees

The third and final
meeting for all
Service Leaders,
current *and* hopeful,
will take place on

Monday June 3rd
at
7:30 pm
at
Rabbi Louis's home,
1135 McClure Street

Hope to see you there!

Chai חַי

The following donations have been
received since the last Voice.

Happy 60th Anniversary to **the**
Torontows – Arlette Baker , Peter
& Merial Barwin, Joe & Ann Gougeon-
Ryant

Morris Bleviss in memory of his father.

Jewish Movie Night

Host: Michael Gans

Visa al Paraiso (Visa to Paradise)

Meet the Filmmaker: Lillian Liberman

Saturday, June 1, 2013 at 7:00 pm

Jewish Community Centre of Victoria

The Jewish Community Centre of Victoria,
the Jewish Federation of Victoria and Vancouver Island,
the Consulate of Mexico in Vancouver and
the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies at the University of Victoria
invite you to a special showing of

Visa al Paraiso (Visa to Paradise)

A documentary about diplomat Gilberto Bosques, who as the Mexican Consul in France saved many Jews and Spaniards before the outbreak of World War II.

The filmmaker, Lillian Liberman is coming to Victoria from Mexico City to present her documentary and will be at the screening to discuss her film with us.

Date: Saturday, June 1st
Time: 7:00 pm
Place: Jewish Community Centre of Victoria (JCCV)
3636 Shelbourne St
250-477-7185
Admission: \$5.00 per person includes popcorn, coffee and dessert





Tallit Making Workshop

Final meeting is split:
Thursdays May 9th & 23rd
at 7:00* pm

at 1135 McClure Street

Bring someone to help tie tsitsit.

** Note eareilir time.*

Tzedakah: A way of life.

Kolot Mayim Supports Food Bank

Hundreds of people rely on the various food banks in town. Torah tells us to leave the four corners of our fields for those in need; in 2013, this could be translated to mean the 4 corners of our shopping carts!

At Kolot Mayim, our Tzedakah Box has been pretty empty lately. I urge everyone to bring a little something to Shul on Fridays. We support two food banks: Jewish Family Services and the James Bay Community Project Food Bank. There are often sales at the various stores, so surely, one could find a can or package for under a dollar. Check for case lot sales; you could bring one can from the case each week. If everyone brought one can each week, it would go a long way to helping those in need.

Thank you for your support.



Kolot Mayim-
at-Home:
Musical Jam
and Havdallah
at Reva and
Julie's

Top & Middle
photos: Reva
Hutkin; bottom:
Julie Elizabeth





Decalogue,
parchment by
Jekuthiel, Sofer, 1768
wikipedia.org

MITZVAH DAY May 5, 2013

*An event sponsored by Congregation Emanu-El
and other faith-based groups*

We are inviting all members of the Victoria community to join us for a day of kindness and community service. Mitzvah Day is a wonderful opportunity for people in Victoria to spend a few hours, helping a variety of organizations that provide important social services in our community. After consultation with these agencies to determine what projects they would need and welcome, with your assistance, we will provide such help as gardening, cooking, and spring cleaning.

It is our hope that Mitzvah Day will make a meaningful difference to these agencies. We also hope that volunteers will become more aware of the needs and opportunities for service in our community, and might consider adding a volunteering component to their lives after Mitzvah Day.

This day of social action is *entirely* the work of volunteers. As funding for these projects is completely donation-driven, we welcome your financial support for supplies. If you would like to make a contribution, please go to congregationemanu-el.ca and specify "Mitzvah Day" under "donations." Tax receipts will be provided.

Registration is open until April 28th, and is on a first come, first registered basis. For registration details, please see the Mitzvah Day website - mitzvahdayvictoria.ca

For more information, please contact the co-chairs of Mitzvah Day:
Jackie Saunders-Ritchie at 250-595-2973 jasaundersritchie@shaw.ca
Sandy Fagan at 250-477-2006 faganis@shaw.ca

2013 PROJECTS

1. Anawim House: spring house cleaning, working with residents
2. Blanshard Community Centre: helping to paint a mural with community members for the children's playground
3. Family Project: art project/note-book decoration for seniors, and preparing birthday backpacks for young children at Single Parent Resource Centre
4. Harrison House: community kitchen soup cooking event with resident participation
5. Kiwanis House Society: preparing casseroles
6. Rock Bay Landing Shelter: foot care provided by foot care nurses
7. St. John the Divine Food Bank: dividing peanut butter, and possibly other items, into

Poetry and Art Page

Saba

by Gavin Wyer

Rabbi, teacher, guide
I claim no right
Yet I will seek you out
Because my God calls

While I rail and fight
and deny to the end
I will do this thing
because my God calls

So I stand naked
uncertain and fearful
waiting for my truth
because my God calls

I will risk the osses
however great they come
I can do no less
because my God calls

Thus I pray for respite
and there is none
but to go forward
because my God calls

I have so little knowledge
and still less understanding
of this path I must walk
because my God calls



Birthrite

by Gavin Wyer

Is this my birthrite
to stand with these men
who's sacred brotherhood
goes across time and space
to the very beginning of God
and who's unrelenting pain
scars the souls of all men

Is there truth also mine
in a final deception cleared
and long awaited homecoming
beckoning from generations lost

Is my final name revealed
to be known at last as one
and claim the heady burden
of title drowned in blood
to join the endless chain
of unbroken family pride
that comes with such a cost
and gives no quarter

Is this the secret knowledge
tattooed upon my soul
that my bone and blood and skin
remember still in quiet places
where God waits discovery

Does this thing lay claim to me
while I yet with hesitance
explore forbidden texts
only to find nae unspoken
resides within the seeking



Untitled

by Gavin Wyer

The words are sacred
They are truth
Always truth
Take from me
My life's blood
But not the words
These I will give
For they were never mine
Truth will outlive me
As the pen does not lie
I will trust the words
And take the gravest risk
To verify what I know
The words
This is all I know
All I have ever known
Or will ever know
The certainty of the words



L to R: Aleph-Bet Midrash;
The Strange World of Adolf
Hoffmeister: Jewish cemetery in
Prague I (1966); Alef, prince de
la creation by Shinta S. Zenker.
All posted on pinterest.com

Those we remember ...



CIVIL DATE YEAR OF DEATH	HEBREW DATE YEAR OF DEATH	NAME	RELATIONSHIP	MOURNER
May, 2006	<i>unknown</i>	Nieves Molina	Aunt of	Grace Sandell
May, 2002	<i>unknown</i>	Rita Son ofner	Grandmother of	David Levinson
May 1, 2008	27 Nisan 5768	Manly Norman Spigelman	Brother of	Steven Spigelman
May 4, 2012	11 Iyar 5772	David Ritt	Friend of	Dorothy & David Torontow
May 5, 1995	5 Iyar 5755	Mark Krasnick	Brother of	Jeffrey Krasnick
May 6, 1989	1 Iyar 5749	Joseph Yacowar	Father of	Hal Yacowar
May 6, 1984	4 Iyar 5744	Mary Miller-Finklestein	Aunt of	Don Sher
May 8, 1975	27 Iyar 5735	Isadore SimpSon of	GrandFather of	Bill Katz
May 23, 2009	29 Iyar 5769	Gila bat Miryam	Friend of	Eric & Geneveie Brandt
May 10th	<i>Unknown</i>	Barry Fox	Brother of	Barbara Fox-Juchau
May 11, 1992	8 Iyar 5752	Lou Cohen	GrandFather of	Michele Butot
May 13, 1983	1 Sivan 5743	Alice McCulloch	Grandmother of	Rennie Parrish
May 13, 2010	29 Iyar 5770	Christine McLean	Friend of	Rennie Parrish
May 17, 1964	6 Sivan 5764	Mignon Cohen	Friend of	David Sandell
May 15, 2010	2 Sivan 5770	Mort Mickelson	GrandFather of	Max & Jac-Lyn Mickelson
May 15, 1992	12 Iyar, 5752	Robert Shnay	Father of	Frederica Bowden
May 15, 1992	12 Iyar, 5752	Sam Finger	Father of	Jerry Finger
May 16, 2012	24 Llyar 5772	Ann Rhodes	Friend of	Kis Brink
May 19, 2011	15 Llyar 5771	David Kelley	GrandFather of	Jessi SimpSon of
May 19, 1990	24 Iyar 5750	Morris Hibloom	Father of	Karen Hibloom
May 23, 1997	17 Iyar 5757	Goldie Ryant	Mother of	Joe Gougeon-Ryant
May 23, 1991	10 Sivan 5751	Son ofia Preuss	Mother of	Jennie Preuss
May 25 2005	16 Iyar 5765	Evelyn Berke	Mother of	Joel Fagan
May 26, 2010	13 Sivan 5770	Robert Estin	Brother in Law of	Lesley Wicks
May 26, 2011	22 Llyar 5771	William Cravatts	Cousin of	Arlette Baker
June 15, 1987	18 Sivan 5742	Ernie Ashford	Father of	Murray Ashford
May 28, 2010	15 Sivan 5770	David Jonathan Negin	Son of	Celia and Morris Negin
June 22 2011	20 Sivan 5771	Dora Sandell	Mother of	David Sandell

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, regrettably, 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.

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).

*Friday May 24th
Join Rabbi Louis
for a Family Service
at 5:00 pm
to be followed by
a Pot Luck
Vegetarian Dinner.*



Torah Study

Saturday May 25th
at 4:00 pm at Rabbi
Sutker's Home, 1135
McClure Street.
Everyone is welcome.

May 2013					Iyar-Sivan 5773	
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
White squares indicate days Rabbi Sutker is with us.			May 1 21 Iyar	2 22	7:30 pm Kabbalat Shabbat Service led by Joel Fagan	Behar- Behukotai Shabbat-Mevarekim 4 24
5 25 1:00 pm Storytelling JCCV	6 26	7 27	8 28	9 29 7:00pm Tallit-making Workshop I	10 30 7:30 pm K. Shabbat 1 Sivan Service led by Joe G-Ryant Rosh Chodesh Oneg by the Arlette Baker	11 2 Bemidbar
12 3	13 4	All-Night Stud 9:00 pm Emanu-El Erev Shavuot	15 6 Shavuot	16 7	17 8 7:30 pm Kabbalat Shabbat Service led by Michael Gans	18 9 Naso
19 10	20 11	21 12	22 13	23 14 7:00pm Tallit-making Workshop II	24 15 5:00pm FAMILY Kabbalat Shabbat Service led by Rabbi Louis + Pot Luck dinner	25 16 Beha'alotekha Torah Study 4:00 pm at Rabbi Louis's home
26 17	27 18	28 19	29 20	30 21	31 22 7:30 pm Kabbalat Shabbat Service led by Julie & Katrina Hannevelt	Shelah Lekha Shabbat-Mevarekim



Living Our Faith Through Stories – An Interfaith Bridging Project
including the Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu Faith Communities.

Joint Workshop #2: “Gathering the Stories” Hosted by the Hindu Community:

FREE EVENT!

- ◆ Multi-part project featuring storytelling workshops: How do you “live” your religion?
- ◆ All members of the Jewish, Hindu and Muslim faith communities—men, women, and children are welcome to participate.
- ◆ Share how your faith impacts your daily life.
- ◆ Learn and develop your storytelling skills.
- ◆ Build new relationships across faith groups.
- ◆ Celebrate religious diversity.
- ◆ Promote understanding.

Concludes with an Interfaith Storytelling Event & Performance at the Belfry Theatre in June 2013.



For more information on the project: Contact Paulina Grainger, Arts and Outreach Coordinator:
T: 250-388-4728 ext. 138; E: pgrainger@icavictoria.org www.icavictoria.org

Stories, Faith & Community is funded by EMBRACE BC and supported by Kolot Mayim Reform Temple, Victoria Hindu Temple, and Ismaili Muslim Community.

At the Hindu Temple, 1934 Cultra Ave, Central Saanich
Sunday, May 5, 2013, 1- 4:30pm
For map of directions go to <http://www.victoriahindutemple.com/contact/>