

Your Guide to Personal Freedom

By: Rabbi Simon Jacobson

We live in a world that has increasingly embraced the inalienable right of every person to be free. It would seem that we are more free than we've ever been, conquering time and space with the World Wide Web, palm pilots, and digital do-it-all pens. But for all this prosperity and high tech, are you more free of your inner demons and scars, of oppressive employers or pressures? Are you more free in your relationships, free of jealousy, anger or substance abuse?

The reality is we are all slaves to something – to work, or a relationship, to fear, or food, to a lack of discipline, or too much discipline, to love, or a lack of love. The word Mitzrayim ('Egypt' in Hebrew) means limitations and boundaries and represents all forms of constraints that inhibit our true free expression. The Jewish people's redemption from Egypt teaches us how to achieve inner freedom in our lives. After leaving Egypt the people had to traverse the desert for 49 days until they were ready to reach the purpose of their Exodus - receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. This 49-day process is the key to true freedom. Enslavement is a habit that needs to be broken and transformed over an extended period of time – a time that is refining and healing.

With the mitzvah of counting the forty-nine days known as Sefirat Ha'Omer, the Torah invites us on a journey into the human psyche, into the soul. There are seven basic emotions that make up the spectrum of human experience. At the root of all forms of enslavement, is a distortion of these emotions. Each of the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot is dedicated to examining and refining one of them.

The seven emotional attributes are:

1. Chesed – Lovingkindness;
2. Gevurah - Justice and discipline;
3. Tiferet – Harmony, compassion;
4. Netzach – Endurance;
5. Hod – Humility;
6. Yesod – Bonding;
7. Malchut – Sovereignty, leadership.

The seven weeks, which represent these emotional attributes, further divide into seven days making up the 49 days of the counting. Since a fully functional emotion is multidimensional, it includes within itself a blend of all seven attributes. Thus, the counting of the first week, which begins on the second night of Pesach, as well as consisting of the actual counting ("Today is day one of the Omer..") would consist of the following structure with suggested meditations:

Week one – Chesed: Lovingkindness

Day 1 - Chesed of Chesed: LovingKindness in Lovingkindness

Love is the single most powerful and necessary component in life. It is both giving and receiving. Love allows us to reach above and beyond ourselves, to experience another person and to allow that person to experience us. It is the tool by which we learn to experience the highest reality – God. Examine the love aspect of your love. Ask yourself: What is my capacity to love another person? Do I have problems with giving? Am I stingy or selfish? Is it difficult for me to let someone else into my life? Am I afraid of my vulnerability, of opening up and getting hurt?

Exercise for the day: Find a new way to express your love to a dear one

20 April

Shemini (Mevorachim Hachodesh)

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Day 2 - Gevurah of Chesed: Discipline in Lovingkindness

Healthy love must always include an element of discipline and discernment; a degree of distance and respect for another's boundaries; an assessment of another's capacity to contain your love. Love must be tempered and directed properly. Ask a parent who, in the name of love, has spoiled a child; or someone who suffocates a spouse with love and doesn't allow them any personal space.

Exercise for the day: Help someone on their terms not on yours. Apply yourself to their specific needs even if it takes effort

Day 3 - Tiferet of Chesed: Compassion, Harmony in Lovingkindness

Harmony in love is one that blends both the chesed and gevurah aspects of love. Harmonized love includes empathy and compassion. Love is often given with the expectation of receiving love in return. Compassionate love is given freely; expects nothing in return – even when the other doesn't deserve love. Tiferet is giving also to those who have hurt you.

Exercise for the day: Offer a helping hand to a stranger

Day 4 - Netzach of Chesed: Endurance in Lovingkindness

Is my love enduring? Does it withstand challenges and setbacks? Do I give and withhold love according to my moods or is it constant regardless of the ups and downs of life?

Exercise for the day: Reassure a loved one of the constancy of your love

Day 5 - Hod of Chesed: Humility in Lovingkindness

You can often get locked in love and be unable to forgive your beloved or to bend or compromise your position. Hod introduces the aspect of humility in love; the ability to rise above yourself and forgive or give in to the one you love just for the sake of love even if you're convinced that you're right. Arrogant love is not love.

Exercise for the day: Swallow your pride and reconcile with a loved one with whom you have quarreled.

Day 6 - Yesod of Chesed: Bonding in Lovingkindness

For love to be eternal it requires bonding. A sense of togetherness which actualizes the love in a joint effort. An intimate connection, kinship and attachment, benefiting both parties. This bonding bears fruit; the fruit born out of a healthy union.

Exercise for the day: Start building something constructive together with a loved one

Day 7 - Malchut of Chesed: Nobility in Lovingkindness

Mature love comes with - and brings - personal dignity. An intimate feeling of nobility and regality. Knowing your special place and contribution in this world. Any love that is debilitating and breaks the human spirit is no love at all. For love to be complete it must have the dimension of personal sovereignty.

Exercise for the day: Highlight an aspect of your love that has bolstered your spirit and enriched your life...and celebrate

Week two will examine the seven aspects of Gevurah, week three Tiferet and so on for seven weeks. Upon conclusion of the forty-nine days we arrive at the fiftieth day - Mattan Torah. After we have achieved all we can accomplish through our own initiative, traversing and refining every emotional corner of our psyche, we then receive a gift ('mattan' in Hebrew) from above. We receive that which we could not achieve with our own limited faculties. We receive the gift of true freedom - the ability to transcend our human limitations and touch the divine.

This is an excerpt from "A Spiritual Guide to Counting the Omer" by Rabbi Simon Jacobson. This unique book is now available the Meaningful Life Centre [online store](#).

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