

Rabbi Jill Zimmerman

Journey:

An *Omer* Workbook

**Your Guide for the
49 Days of Counting**

2023 EDITION

Cultivating a
Path with
Heart

Introduction

Every spring as bulbs begin to peek out of the soil from their long winter nap, we relive an epic story that is newly relevant each year and in each generation. On the Jewish holiday of Passover, the Israelites journey from the narrow place of slavery into freedom.

In telling this story every Passover we remind ourselves and our children that freedom is possible. We do not have to stay stuck. We can join hands and move.

This paradigmatic story of the Israelites and its themes of liberation are entirely personal to the Jewish people, to us as individuals, and universal as well.

In addition, the Exodus narrative provides a guiding metaphor for each one of us as we seek to unbind ourselves, and to bring awareness to the societal injustices that continue to plague our world.

This powerful story has wings that fly after the Passover *seder*. Being released and redeemed from how we are bound is the beginning. For seven weeks (forty-nine days) commencing the second night of Passover, we count each day until our arrival at Mount Sinai, on the festival of *Shavuot*.

This spiritual practice is known as “Counting the Omer/Sefirat HaOmer.”

“Last night (at the seder) we began – once again – to live inside a metaphor. We imagined ourselves leaving Egypt in haste toward an unknown promised land, toward a covenant that had not yet been revealed. Like our ancestors, we became living poetry, believing in something that we could only know once we arrived, believing in something that could not be fully understood with words.”¹

¹ [ALDEN SOLOVY, HAGGADAH COMPANION: MEDITATIONS & READINGS](#)

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This season is one of soul development. It mirrors the reflection we do during the month of Elul, preceding the fall High Holy Days.

This Journey workbook is a guide to your own soulwork during the Omer period.

The goal is to reflect on how you can move beyond your current limits and become your best self.

For your soulwork, the metaphors of the epic journey from slavery to freedom will be your guide: recognize your shackles, cry out for change, take the risk to wander from your known narrow places into the unknown wilderness. And seek to arrive at your own “promised land.”

Poet and liturgist Alden Solovy writes about the power of this entire season:

I invite you to imagine how you can become “living poetry” as you use this workbook to reflect on your own experience of growth and possibility.

A New Way of Looking At This Season

In 2014, my study partner, Rabbi Cindy Enger and I reimagined and co-created an approach to counting the *Omer* as one that speaks to the stages of spiritual journey.

We created a seven-step structure that explores the themes that unfold anytime we leave the known and enter into the unknown. I will be using this seven step framework in this *Journey* workbook.

Seven Steps of Spiritual Journey

- Waking up
- Setting Out
- Entering the Wilderness
- Being in the Unknown
- Finding Our Way
- Becoming the Vision
- Arriving

– RABBI JILL ZIMMERMAN
& RABBI CINDY ENGER, 2014

About Journey & the Urgency of Now

Some journeys we choose. Other journeys choose us. For the past three years, we have traveled a journey we did not choose as we navigated through a worldwide pandemic.

There are other journeys that we may not have chosen: illness, caregiving, losses, and aging.

There are transitions and journeys we welcome, as well: grandchildren, moving, retirement, and new freedoms.

Every time you make a transition from the known into the unknown, the possibility of transformation glimmers below the surface:

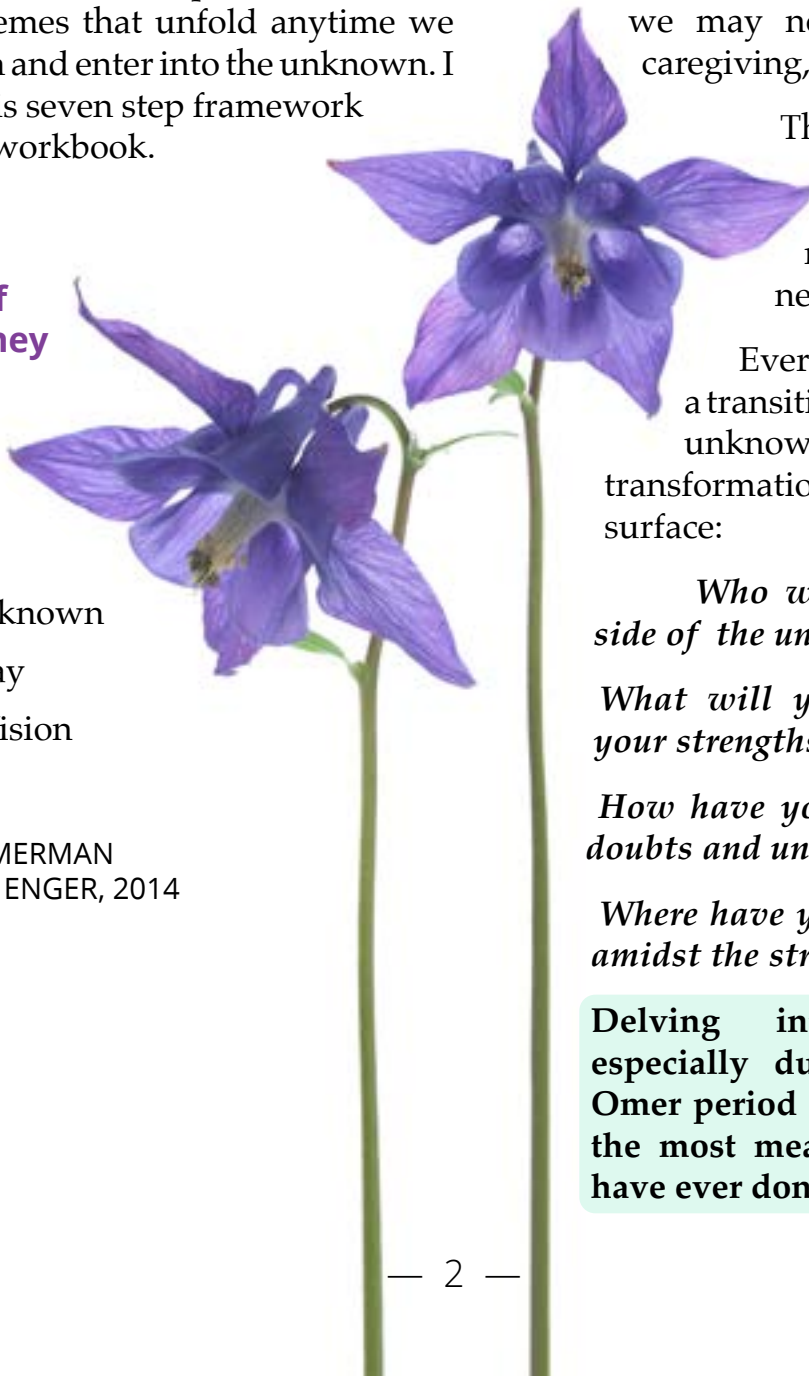
Who will you be on the other side of the unknown?

What will you have learned about your strengths and fears?

How have you confronted your own doubts and uncertainties?

Where have you found joy and refuge amidst the struggle?

Delving into these questions, especially during this time of the Omer period of Journeying, might be the most meaningful soul-work you have ever done.



About the Omer Period

According to Jewish tradition, we count the forty-nine days from the Exodus (Passover) until we arrive at Mt. Sinai on *Shavuot*. It is there that we receive Torah (Wisdom.)

This 49 day period was originally rooted in the spring harvest, as an *omer* is a measure of grain.

Detached from its agricultural roots, "Counting the Omer" became known as a season of soul refinement.

We dust off the shackles of all that crushes our spirits and ready ourselves to receive the wisdom that comes through the process.

Traditionally, we "count the omer" by saying a blessing each night (the Jewish day begins the night before.)

With this *Omer Journey* workbook, you can dedicate some time each day to your own spiritual development.

Central Metaphor of This Season

The following verse from Psalm 118 lays out the map of the territory and launches our exploration. The word for "Egypt" in Hebrew is "*mitzrayim*" which literally means "a narrow or constricted place."

From the place of Narrowness, the Psalmist cries out and is answered with Spaciousness:

*Min HaMetzar karati Yah,
Anani vamerchav Yah*

מִן־הַמֵּצָר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה עֲנֵנִי בְּמַרְחֵב יְהוָה

*From the Narrow place I called out to God
who answered me with the Divine Expanse.
(Traditional translation: "Out of my straits I
called upon the Eternal, God answered me with
great enlargement.") Psalm 118:5*

מַרְחֵב

*wide open space, spaciousness, expanse, broaden
(merchav)*

מֵצָר

a narrow place (mitzar)

מִצְרַיִם

Egypt (mitzrayim)

*Into this spaciousness/vastness, we journey. As
we will see, it is full of wandering through the
unknown and many surprises.*



How To Use This Book

Journey is divided into seven weeks with each week containing seven days. There are core texts for each week, and a question for each day.

You can begin at the beginning and count the *omer* in sync with others around the world. Or, you can jump into any week or questions that feel especially relevant to you in your own journey. For a calendar of dates, [click here](#) to visit my website.

Do whatever works for you. You may want to find a journal where you can write to all the questions. Or, arrange to meet with a friend/partner (*chevruta*) to study the texts and respond to the questions.

Better yet, sign up for the upcoming [Omer Journey Course](#) to study the texts.

Music and poetry are included to aid your soul-work.

Let's begin.

Blessings to you,

— RABBI JILL

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[@rabbijill](https://twitter.com/rabbijill)

PS: *I would love to hear about your experience with this workbook. Please write to me at rabi@ravjill.com.*



RABBI JILL ZIMMERMAN

4-Session Course : Spiritual Journey Through the Omer

4 Tuesdays or Thursdays

Tuesdays at 5 pm PT (8 pm ET):

April 11, 18, 25 and May 2

Thursdays at 9:30 am PT (12:30 pm ET):

April 13, 20, 27 and May 4

REGISTER FOR COURSE

<https://ravjill.com/journey2023>

These Omer resources are made available by YOUR contributions. Please support our work here.

<https://ravjill.com/support>

Waking Up



Every spiritual journey begins with waking up. We situate ourselves in the present moment.

Our core text for this week is the Israelites crying out in pain as they feel the bondage of their 400-year slavery. We do not know if the slavery suddenly got worse because of a new ruler, or if the weight of their chains finally became too unbearable.

Core Text: The Cry For Help

A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

– EXODUS 2:23-25

כג) וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הַרְבִּיִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ
 מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה
 וַיִּזְעְקוּ וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָּם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים
 מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה: (כד) וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
 נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־
 אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב: (כה) וַיַּרְא
 (אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּדַּע אֱלֹהִים: 0)

The Israelites’ suffering takes expression and to this, God responds. It seems impossible that God actually “forgot” them so perhaps the point being made by the text is that the Israelites, in crying out, *remembered themselves*: it is all too much.

This recognition of our own pain is the birthplace of our journey and ultimately, our liberation. We may not know what the next step is, but we begin by telling ourselves the truth of our experience. In this way, we become known to ourselves.

“The courage to walk out of the pain that is known into the pain that cannot be imagined, mapless, walking into the wilderness, going barefoot with a canteen into the desert...

– MARGE PIERCY¹

1 FROM THE POEM, [THE MAGGID IN THE ART OF BLESSING THE DAY](#)

– ANTONIO MACHADO
CAMPOS DE CASTILLA (1912)

Week 1: Reflection Questions

1. What does “waking up” mean to you right now? What have you woken up to in the past year?
2. Make a list of all the words that would describe your state of mind & feeling-tone over the past year’s journey.
3. What new set of circumstances have found you?
4. What part of your particular journey this year involves recognizing pain or suffering?
5. In your life, when has your waking up involved noticing discomfort and how did this contribute to your spiritual journey?
6. In your own experience, when have you “made your own road by walking” – as Machado writes in the quote below?
7. What resources might you need for the new journey you

“Wanderer, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking. By walking one makes the road, and upon glancing behind one sees the path that never will be trod again. Wanderer, there is no road — Only wakes upon the sea.”

Setting Out



are beginning?

Once we awaken and know we need to take action, we begin to gather ourselves to set out on our journey. Remember, the journey may be a physical move, but it also can be transitioning to a new way of thinking or being. This often requires enormous courage.

The core text for this week is *Lech Lecha* from the book of Genesis:

Lech Lecha: Go Forth

God tells Abraham: Go. Leave your country, the place you were born, your parent's house, and.....go to a land that I will show you."

- GENESIS 12:1

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ
וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
אֵרְאֶה:

In this text, God speaks to Abraham for the first time. God instructs Abraham: *Lech Lecha*: which can mean either "Go forth" or "Go to yourself." In this second meaning, perhaps Abraham is leaving his home in

order to discover his innermost being and soul purpose.

Rabbi Cindy Enger and I write about this stage in the journey:

Every "setting out" involves preparation to leave the familiar and step forward into the unknown. We point ourselves in a new direction. We set an intention, imagining a better future, even if our vision of that unknown place, that "promised land," is not yet fully formed. Our hope propels us forward, giving us courage to step out, and ignites our imagination as to what could be.

"The soul wants to be in touch with that deep place from which life flows..." writes Thomas Moore. "The best way to fulfill this desire is to give attention to the images that arise as independent beings from the springs of day-to-day imagination." *

With one foot in the familiar and one foot stepping into the possible, we need to be gentle with ourselves as we acknowledge the courage we must gather to move forward.



– RABBIS CINDY ENGER & JILL ZIMMERMAN, JOURNEY OF THE SOUL: MAKING THE OMER COUNT

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, my beloved teacher and mentor expands our understanding of what it means to “leave everything behind”:

Lech Lecha - Go Forth³

Abraham, our father,
Was simply told to leave.
Go forth from your land and from your kindred
and even your father’s house.
To the land that I will show you.



This is the setting out.
The leaving of everything behind.
Leaving the social milieu. The preconceptions.
The definitions. The language.
The narrowed field of vision. The expectations.
No longer expecting relationships, memories, words, or letters to mean what they used to mean. To be, in a word: Open.


If you think you know what you will find,
Then you will find nothing.
If you expect nothing,
Then you will always be surprised.
And able to bless the One who creates the world anew each morning.
So it is with setting out on the path of liberation, leaving everything.
He would even have to discover
The way he would discover
While he was on the way.
Of him it was said, A man who set out and did not know
for which place he was destined. (Tanhuma Lekh-Lekha 3).*

3 KUSHNER, LAWRENCE. [HONEY FROM THE ROCK](#). WOODSTOCK, VT JEWISH LIGHTS PUBLISHING, 1994 (PAGES 24-26).

– LAWRENCE KUSHNER

Week 2: Reflection Questions

8. In what ways have you left “home” – either physically or emotionally?
9. What was the most difficult part of leaving? What were the unexpected gifts?
10. How have you assembled your courage before when you know you needed to make a move?
11. In what ways are you being called to journey forth right now?
12. Who or what will support you in taking your initial steps into the unknown or a new way of being?
13. What do you need in order to muster the bravery to walk into the unknown?
14. What small step might you take today to begin?



“And you? When will you begin that long journey into yourself?”

– RUMI

Entering the Wilderness



Inevitably in any journey, especially one that involves your soul-growth, you encounter the wilderness. In Hebrew, the word for wilderness is *midbar*. It is a place of both barrenness and endless possibility.

The core text for this week is from Exodus about the long and winding road of the desert wilderness. Getting from “here to there” was not a straight shot. *How true is that of any journey?*

The text has God saying that the reason the people were led on a roundabout path was because they “may have a change of heart” when they encounter challenges. But as the author, Sue Monk Kidd points out, the long way around is often the route of transformation.

Core Text: The Long & Winding Road

Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.” So God led the people round about, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt.

– EXODUS 13:17-20 (PARASHAT B'SHALACH)



In this stage of the spiritual journey, you may lose faith, or question the wisdom of even setting out in the first place. You may realize that the maps you thought would guide you are outdated and lead you astray.

However, there are blessings and gifts in the wilderness. Here is a wonderful teaching from the Talmud:

When a person makes him/herself like the wilderness, free/open to all, Torah (Wisdom) is given to him/her as a gift, as it says, "from the wilderness, a gift.


- (TALMUD, NEDARIM 55A: ON NUMBERS 21:19-20)

שְׁעוֹשֵׂה אָדָם אֶת עַצְמוֹ כַּמִּדְבָּר שְׁהוּא
 מוֹפְקָר לְכָל תּוֹרָה נִיתְּנָה לוֹ בְּמִתְּנָה
 שְׁנֵאמַר וּמִמִּדְבָּר מִתְּנָה



Week 3: Reflection Questions:

15. Write or share about a time that you were in the wilderness or desert, either geographically or metaphorically?
16. What did you notice? What did you learn?
17. What have been the detours on your journeys?
18. What have been the gifts of your own encounters with the wilderness?
19. The people went out armed for battle. What kinds of support might you need to deal with challenges and difficulties on your journey?
20. How has being in the wilderness led to transformation in your own life?
21. How might you accept and move through fear on your journey?



“Transformations come only as we go the long way round, only as we’re willing to walk a different, longer, more arduous, more inward, more prayerful route. When you wait, you’re deliberately choosing to take the long way, to go eight blocks instead of four, trusting that there’s a transforming discovery lying pooled along the way.”

– SUE MONK KIDD⁴

4 WHEN THE HEART WAITS: SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR LIFE’S SACRED QUESTIONS

Being in the Unknown



The spiritual journey requires enormous strength, bravery and faith. It depends on our ability to tolerate the “I don’t know” place.

These past three years of the pandemic has truly been a time of the unknown. It has been difficult to live with so much uncertainty.

There is great power in learning to tolerate “not knowing.” In fact, when you can admit that you do not understand, or are not sure when things will change - you can settle down into truly being present with *what is*.

For those of us whose identity has been tied up in our expertise or positions of power, it can be difficult to admit how much we do not know.

Plus, when our knowing becomes reified, we stop paying attention or listening because we **think** we already know the end of the story. When we do that, we close ourselves down to what might unfold.

Our core text for the week is the following prayer that Rabbi Enger and I composed in 2014. It was pre-pandemic and yet is still so relevant right now.

I’ve added a few more verses to the end that speak to the wilderness of right now. Please feel free to add your own.

In the prayer, we acknowledge the many different wildernesses of our human experience. While we may not know the path forward, it is powerful to recognize and tell ourselves the truth of what we are enduring.

Prayer For The Unknown⁵

For the wilderness of coping after a life-partner dies...

For the wilderness of walking with a loved one leaving us slowly through dementia...

For the wilderness of walking with a loved one struggling with addiction...

For the wilderness of receiving a difficult or terminal medical diagnosis;

For the uncharted terrain of being in a generation that followed all the rules but cannot find good jobs, or pay back student loans or afford to live on their own...

For the desert of chronic illness and pain, especially when it is invisible to others...

For the desert of being laid off, fired, or outsourced from one’s work...

Prayer For The Unknown⁵ (continued)

For the uncharted terrain of aging, when the body can no longer do what it used to and the mind cannot retrieve certain memories or once-common words...

For the wilderness of relationships that have ended and those that never came to be...

For the wilderness of infertility...

For the wilderness of having children of any age with special needs...

For the wilderness we encounter after a tornado, earthquake, fire or mudslide tears down the house...

For the desert of depression, isolation and anxiety that diminishes enjoyment of daily life...

(UPDATED 2023, RJZ) For the wilderness of continuing uncertainty and changes around covid guidance...

For the wilderness of denial, division, misinformation and fear...

For the desert of not knowing how to best help refugees fleeing from war and oppression...how to stand up against fascism and domination...

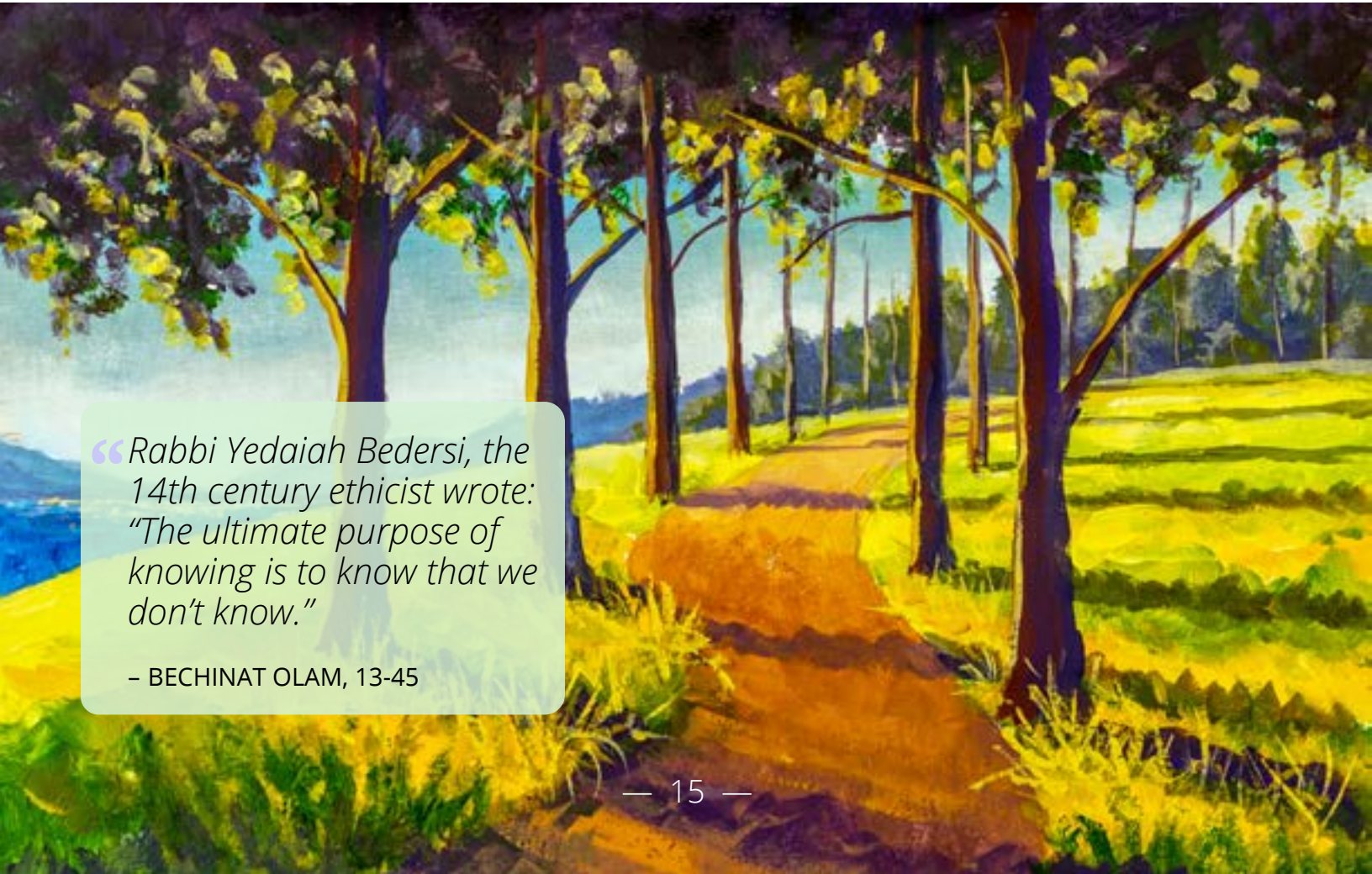
For our wandering in all of these wildernesses, we ask for strength. We ask for courage to step forward, knowing that the way is unclear. We ask to be seen and heard, just as we are, in this place of the unknown. We ask for glimpses of truth to be revealed in their own time.



5 RABBIS CINDY ENGER & JILL ZIMMERMAN, JOURNEY OF THE SOUL, MAKING THE OMER COUNT, 2014

Week 4: Reflection Questions

22. When you have been in the realm of the unknown, what was especially challenging for you?
23. In that unknown time or place, what helped you navigate?
24. What might help you relax into “not knowing”?
25. Who are your role models for being present and comfortable with not knowing?
26. Write about an experience you have had in your life of not knowing. What were the lessons of that period of time?
27. In terms of the past year, what has been the most difficult for you in terms of knowing/not knowing?
28. When you have allowed yourself to rest into not figuring everything out, what has unfolded for you? What have been the unexpected gifts?



“Rabbi Yedaiah Bedersi, the 14th century ethicist wrote: “The ultimate purpose of knowing is to know that we don’t know.”

– BECHINAT OLAM, 13-45

Finding Our Way



This week is about encountering the obstacles that are part of any journey, whether it is spiritual, physical, or emotional.

In this part of the journey, you may get lost and even forget why you set out. Inevitably, something happens for which you could not have planned. It is normal and natural to consider giving up at this point.

You may even think that it would have been so much easier if you stayed where you were. Falling back asleep or forgetting your intention may seem like the best option.

And perhaps, you may be getting a glimmer of a way forward, an opening on the path.

Maybe, like in the following story, which serves as our core text for this week, you have found some companions along the way:



Finding a Companion⁶

Once our master Rabbi Hayyim of Zans [19th cent.] told a parable:

A man had been wandering about in a forest for several days, not knowing which was the right way out. Suddenly he saw a man approaching him. His heart was filled with joy. 'Now I shall certainly find out which is the right way,' he thought to himself. When they neared one another, he asked the man, 'Brother, tell me which is the right way. I have been wandering about in this forest for several days.'

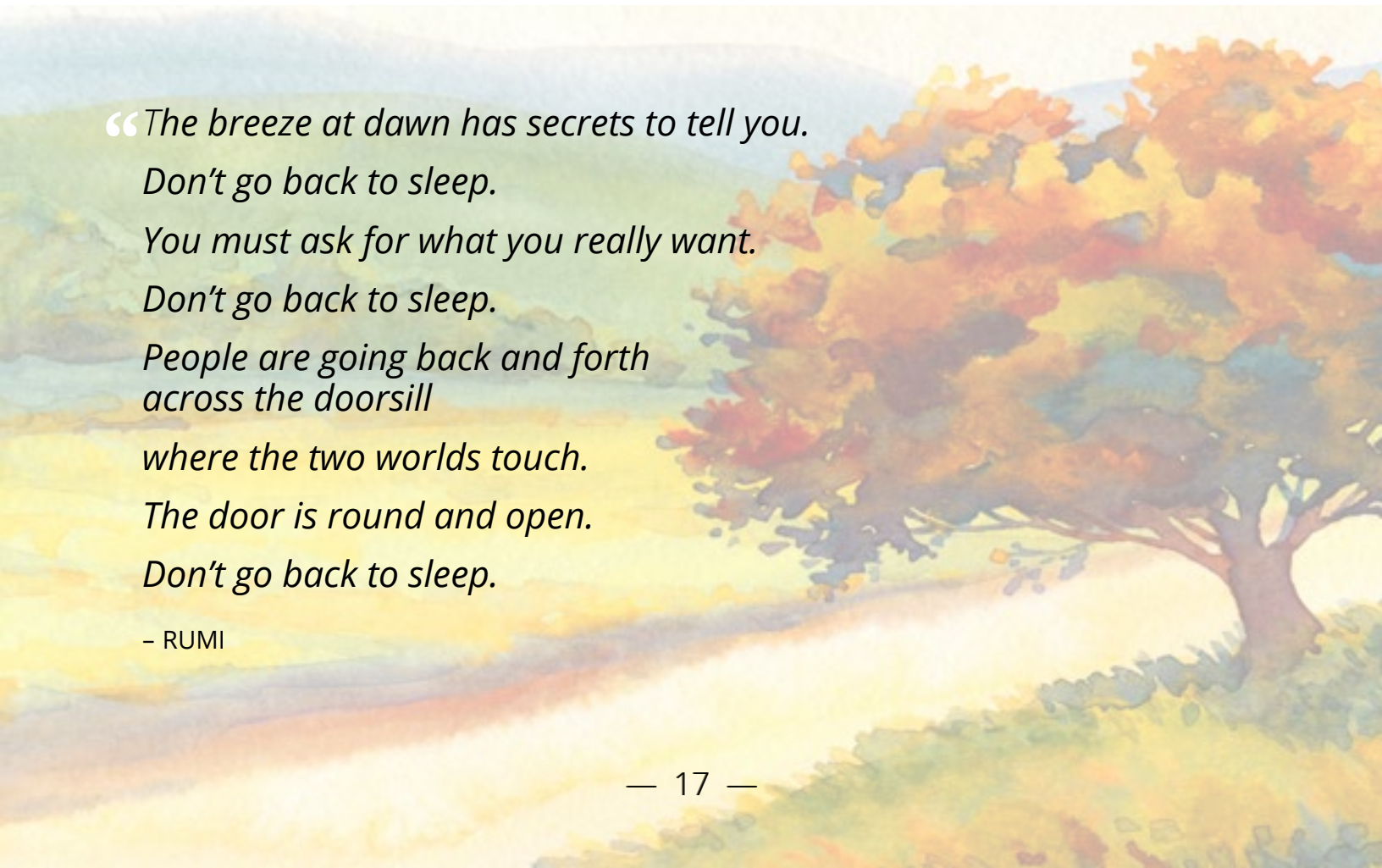
Said the other to him, 'Brother, I do not know the way out either. For I too have been wandering about here for many, many days. But this I can tell you: do not take the way I have been taking, for that will lead you astray. And now let us look for a new way out together.'

Our master added: 'So it is with us. One thing I can tell you: the way we have been following this far we ought follow no further, for that leads one astray. But now let us look for a new way.'

⁶ AGNON, S.Y. DAYS OF AWE: A TREASURY OF JEWISH WISDOM FOR REFLECTION, REPENTANCE, AND RENEWAL ON THE HIGH HOLY DAYS. (NEW YORK: SCHOCKEN BOOKS, 1975)

Week 5: Reflection Questions

29. What is your habitual response to being lost? Do you stop for directions or help?
30. Who in your life have been companions when you were finding your way?
31. In your journey right now, what obstacles are you experiencing?
32. What advice would you give a friend who was doubting the rightness of the path they had set out on?
33. What does “falling back to sleep” look like on your journey?
34. How might you stay awake, as the poet Rumi suggests?
35. Who might you reach out to be a guide on your path or a support?



*“The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don’t go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don’t go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth
across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don’t go back to sleep.*

- RUMI

Becoming the Vision



At this point in the journey, we have an opportunity to make a choice, as we will see in our core text from the book of *B'midbar* (In The Wilderness):

“We looked like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we must have looked to them.” The community broke into loud cries and wept.

- NUMBERS 13:32-33

When you get scared, do you continue on toward your vision of who you can be? Or will self-doubt and fear convince you to turn back around?

Rabbi Enger and I wrote this about why this was such a critical juncture for our ancestors and how we might learn from it:



What The Scouts Teach Us⁷

It is in this phase that we stand on the precipice of a new way of being in the world.

In parashat *Sh'lakh l'cha* from the book of Numbers (in Hebrew: sefer B'midbar - In Wilderness), Moses sends a group of scouts to survey the Promised Land ahead, to see what it was like, to get a taste of what was awaiting them. He selected leaders from each tribe. The group of twelve went into the land, observed the people, the produce, the place and returned to Moses and the rest of the camp to report back.

Ten of the scouts reported to the community that the land was indeed flowing with milk and honey but impossible to conquer. The inhabitants, they said, were gigantic:

However, the other two scouts, Joshua and Caleb, reported that the land was exceedingly good and that, with God's help, they would be able to enter the land. Joshua and Caleb pleaded with the Israelite community not to be afraid.

What The Scouts Teach Us⁷ (continued)

This episode was the turning point for our Israelite ancestors. Only Joshua and Caleb will make it into the Promised Land. All the others will die in the wilderness. They are dor ha-midbar, generation of the wilderness. For this generation born in slavery, oppression has been internalized too deeply; they cannot break through to see themselves through God's eyes or as the people they were created to become.

We carry with us aspects of all twelve of the scouts. We know what it is like to see ourselves as grasshoppers. But, we also have the capacity to call up the courage required to become the grand vision for which we were created.

At this precipitous moment, we pause to reflect on what it will take to Become the Vision.



Rabbi Sheryl Lewart z"l wrote a blessing for moments when we need courage:

May you leave behind
all the stories that echo in your mind
and go forward to realize the unique mission
of your own precious life.

May you feel strong and courageous
as you travel to fulfill
the purpose of your creation.

May you awaken to your potential,
and honor the core truth of your soul
even if it feels inconvenient or impossible.

May you be a source of courage
to all you meet on life's journey.

May you face your fears
And know you have what it takes
to vanquish them.⁸

Amen

7 RABBIS ENGER & ZIMMERMAN, IBID

8 BLESSINGS FOR LIFE'S JOURNEY: TRANSFORMATIVE MEDITATIONS AND READINGS BY RABBI SHERYL LEWART

Week 6: Reflection Questions

36. At what points in your life have you felt “like a grasshopper”?
37. How did you overcome your feelings and thoughts about not being strong enough to realize your vision?
38. Tell about a time when despite part of you feeling “small”, you carried on with your journey?
39. Who might you reach out to when you need courage or who can remind you of your own strength?
40. What is the vision that you have about who you want to become and embody at this moment in your life?
41. What are the stories you tell yourself about your potential? How many of them echo voices you heard growing up?
42. If you were to describe your own “promised land” - what would it look like? Who is there? How do you feel?



Arriving



When the journey we are on is physical, it is possible to claim “I have arrived.” You get to your destination, unpack your stuff, and start to settle in. A new journey begins.

For spiritual and emotional journeys, “arrival” may be difficult to define. For example, if you want to embody a new way of thinking or being, you may get a tentative sense of “arrival” when faced with a circumstance in which you think and respond differently.

Similarly, you may all of a sudden discover that you now “know” something in your bones, that you may have doubted before.

We have two core texts this week. In the first, the great Hasidic master, the *Sefat Emet*, posits that the spiritual journey is about discovering your own personal teaching (see next page). As you move through your life, hidden aspects of your uniqueness are revealed.

The text also reminds us that we can learn from each and every person we encounter along the way. I often ask bereaved families regarding their loved one, “What was their Torah? What wisdom did they impart by the way they lived?”

In our second text, the poet Rilke reminds us that our journey may be smoother when we learn to “love the questions” our life presents us. This teaching harkens back to our work on “not knowing” and encourages us to be okay with all that remains unanswered.

Live The Questions

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue.

Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them.

And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.

Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

– RAINER MARIA RILKE
[LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET](#)



Week 7: Reflection Questions

43. Looking back over this past year, what have you learned about yourself?
44. What new questions do you have that you would like to “live into”?
45. How are you feeling about arriving at this new moment in time?
46. In what ways do you feel more open?
47. Who have been your companions on your journey?
48. What has been the most challenging part of this year?
49. In what ways does the *Sefat Emet* text inspire you as you continue on in your journey?

“Every person has his or her own piece of Torah. The complete Torah was given to the Jewish people as a whole. However, each person has a personal teaching, his or her own Torah, inside them. This is hidden within the soul. There is a piece of Torah that can be learned from every person.

– SEFAT EMET
RABBI JUDAH ARYEH LEIB ALTER⁹

⁹ THE SEFAT EMET REFERS TO THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF JUDAH ARYEH LEIB ALTER (1847-1905), POLISH JEWISH LEADER AND HEAD OF HASIDIM OF GUR.

Blessing for Counting the Omer

You shall count from the eve of the second day of Pesach, when an omer of grain is to be brought as an offering, seven complete weeks. The day after the seventh week of your counting will make fifty days. (Leviticus 23:15-16)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת
הָעֹמֶר.

*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'Olam
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al sefirat
ha'omer.*

*Holy One of Blessing, your Presence fills
creation, you make us holy with sacred
obligations and command us to count
the Omer.*



Music for Counting the Omer



Al Sefirat HaOmer

by Yosef Goldman

<https://youtu.be/S8hCiPI1tMQ>

[https://yosefgoldman.bandcamp.com/
album/open-my-heart](https://yosefgoldman.bandcamp.com/album/open-my-heart)



Min HaMeitzar

by Rabbi Deborah Sacks Mintz

<https://youtu.be/EMe4-ggSkdY>

You can find Rabbi Mintz here:
www.deborahsacksmintz.com

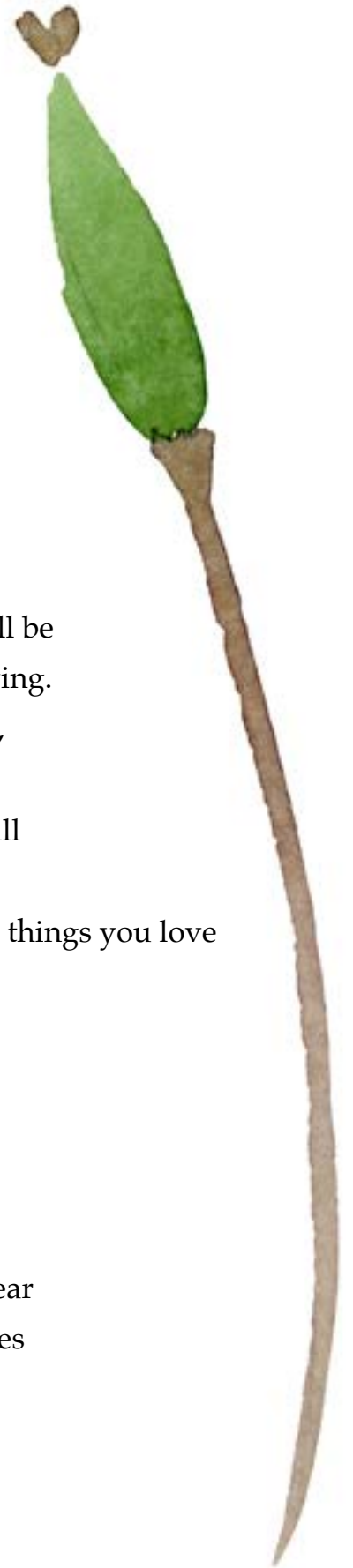
Journey Poetry

Joseph's Bones

If you are ready
To escape at last
The narrow place
You got yourself enslaved in,
Before you leave
You must find Joseph's bones--
A legacy of choices that you made
Which brought you here.
To seek them,
You'll go down beside the Nile
And send
Your soul to dive into the silt
To pry them, bone by bone,
Out from the sludge
That long ago
Encased them.
These bones are with you, now,
Upon your journey,
At every moment whispering in your ear
Of leeks and garlic.
Their silence will not come
Until you reach
The place of freedom,
Where you'll bury them
With honor in the earth.

Instead of bones
Your burden now will be
The choices of the living.
Therefore choose life,
If only for a time,
For narrow places will
Be close at hand
And you will sell the things you love
Again.
Joseph and Pharaoh,
These are part of life,
An old, old story
Which is told to you
So that one day
You will no longer hear
The clattering of bones
Behind your ear.

- MARK L. GREEN



Ready

“So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders.” – Exodus 12:34

You’ll need to travel light.

Take what you can carry: a book, a poem, a battered tin cup, your child strapped to your chest, clutching your necklace in one hot possessive fist.

So the dough isn’t ready. So your heart isn’t ready. You haven’t said goodbye to the places where you hid as a child, to the friends who aren’t interested in the journey,

to the graves you’ve tended.

But if you wait until you feel fully ready you may never take the leap at all and Infinity is calling you forth out of this birth canal and into the future’s wide expanse.

Learn to improvise flat cakes without yeast.

Learn to read new alphabets.

Wear God like a cloak

and stride forth with confidence.

You won’t know where you’re going but you have the words of our sages, the songs of our mothers, the inspiration wrapped in your kneading bowl. Trust that what you carry will sustain you and take the first step out the door.

– RABBI RACHEL BARENBLAT

SOURCE: VELVETEEN RABBI’S HAGGADAH FOR PESACH – VELVETEENRABBI.COM OR VELVETEENRABBI.BLOGS.COM/BLOG/



– DEVON SPIER, AUTHOR AND VISUAL POET
[WHATEVER IT IS GENTLY, QUIET MEDITATIONS FOR THE NOISE OF THE PANDEMIC](#)

And Fly: A Poem for Counting the Omer

Count your things.
Add them up.
Amass a pile of More.
Grab and gather
in forty-nine steps,
the firsts
of your herd,
your horde
your heart.
Count them
in countless succession:
All your best -
Your hopes.
Your sins.
Fill your tent;
load the baskets and bags
with counting
and counted riches that
smell of excess
and succulent
ripeness:
A bursting of Ready,
sweet and sour and sharp
all at once
on your tongue.
Count them all.
Gather them up;



Breathe in
seven breaths of seven
and lay them at
the waiting altar
that stands in the shadow of God.
Lay your counted glory there -
an offering:
a psalm of blessing
and hopeful benediction.
Lay it all down
and fly.

- [STACEY ZISOOK ROBINSON](#) ז"ל

Thank you.

Thank you for traveling this journey with me. The Jewish holiday we have been counting up toward is *Shavuot*, which celebrates the giving of the Torah/Wisdom on Mount Sinai.

This is Revelation with a capital **R**.

We have traveled seven weeks since we metaphorically left Egypt, the land of our constriction. We have wandered in the desert, refining our souls, so that we could be ready to receive Wisdom.

Rabbi Arthur Green writes about revelation:

“Revelation, like Creation, is an eternal process. The real faith-question regarding revelation, like that of Creation, is not “Do you believe that it happened just that way, so many years ago?” It is rather, “Are you present to revelation here and now?”

Rabbi Green points to an eternal truth: revelation happens in the present moment.

My deepest hope is that you have found this *Omer* workbook affirming and revealing. The entire purpose is to become our best selves. I hope the *Omer* this year has allowed you to unfold toward all that means.

Every arrival is actually the beginning of a new journey. We are never “done.” The spiral of life offers us new opportunities to learn and grow beyond our limitations, either set by others, or by ourselves.



Please connect with me on your favorite social media platform. Check out the spiritual community I founded and lead, [Hineni](#) to discover a vibrant community committed to mindfulness, loving connection and staying awake.

Supporting This Work

My rabbinical offerings, like this free workbook, are financially supported by the voluntary generosity of people like you. Please consider a donation so I can continue to offer them! Thank you in advance. To make a contribution, please visit ravjill.com/support.

Blessings on your journeys forever and ever,

— Rabbi Jill



Special Thanks

Thank you to the poets and musicians who graciously gave me permission to include their work. Very deep gratitude especially, to my *chevruta* study partner and colleague Rabbi Cindy Enger for co-creating this bold and powerful new way of envisioning the *Omer* as stages of spiritual journey.

I also want to share appreciation to our beautiful [Hineni Spiritual Community](#) who teach me about journey all the time. Also, a huge thank you to our Path with Heart team that helped create this ebook, especially our amazing graphic designer, [Jim Nelson](#).

4-Session Course : Spiritual Journey Through the Omer

4 Tuesdays or Thursdays

Tuesdays at 5 pm PT (8 pm ET):

April 11, 18, 25 and May 2

Thursdays at 9:30 am PT (12:30 pm ET):

April 13, 20, 27 and May 4

REGISTER FOR COURSE

<https://ravjill.com/journey2023>

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Path With Heart

With Rabbi Jill Zimmerman