

Pausing in the Pandemic

For each one of us, this is a very different time and a very different experience of time.

Some of us are isolating by ourselves and, thus, this is a very lonely time.

For some of us, this is a very challenging time, experiencing losses, illnesses, and trying to cope as best we can.



Some of us are out of work and many of us are in high-risk groups.

For some, it is a joyful time as children and parents have reconnected, finding more time to share.

For others, it is really hard – caring for young children, worrying about parents or both.

For all of us, it is destabilizing and anxiety-provoking.

What will the future bring?

Will [Remdesivir](#) be the cure that will allow us to survive this plague?

I hope so.

Will we have the resources we need to support ourselves and our families and our institutions?

What will our professional and personal lives look like?

It is quite a challenging time.

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Fortunately, our Torah offers insights to help us through this time. *Parashat Emor* enumerates many *mitzvot* including those about the hagim – the Jewish holidays.

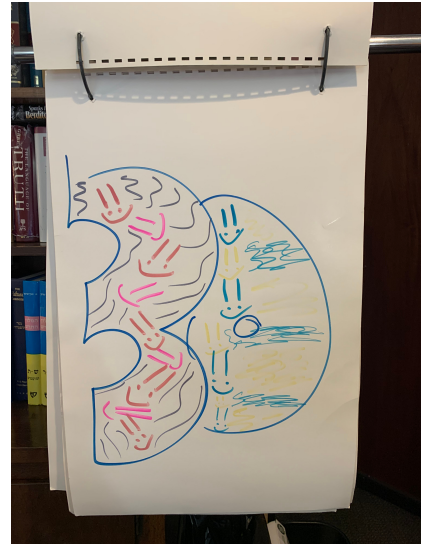
The reading describes this period between *Pesah* and *Shavuot*, the time of counting the *Omer*. Today is the 30th day of the *Omer*. [\[Or use the automated Temple Emunah Minyan Electronic Flip-Chart Omer Counter.\]](#)

The Torah says you should count from the day after Shabbat, which became a source of confusion for Jews, as described in Talmud (Menahot 65b). The Zaddokites and other groups read this literally, to start counting the *Omer* on the Sunday after *Pesah*. By the way, this is related to Christianity's practice where Easter always falls on a Sunday close to *Pesah*.

Our rabbis, however, did not read it like that. For them, Shabbat can also mean a holiday – a day when we pause. The rabbis understood this as referring to the first day of the holiday of *Pesah*, which is why we start counting the *Omer* at the second *Seder*.

[The *Kedushat Levi*, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, an 18th century Hasidic master](#) explained it this way:

“When an artisan makes something, and finishes it, we know why he made it and its true purpose. So, when he finishes his work and attains his purpose, he ceases from work (*shavat* – like the word Shabbat). And this is the same with God. After six days of Creation, God ceased from work.



“But God also created living beings, particularly those with intelligence to serve the Divine, and to know that God is the Creator, Fashioner, *Adonai*.

“When finally these beings are complete, and God is known by these beings, these intelligent beings, then there is another cessation, and it is called Shabbat.” A more complete Shabbat.

Then the *Kedushat Levi* adds one other piece – he says that the day after Shabbat can also be the day after *Pesah* because that is when these intelligent beings would be able to fully serve their Creator and God’s ideals.

And then he makes this awesome jump – the Torah says the counting of the *Omer* is for you – *lakhem*, not for God. We are the ones who are able to fully complete creation. When we were freed on *Pesah*, we could then fully bring God and God’s teachings into the world.

And then the Creation is complete because we can appreciate this world more fully. We can pause for Shabbat more deeply.

Once we are freed – physically or emotionally, once we can let go of some of the angst of the moment, we can appreciate what we have – how many blessings we have.

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We can apply this lesson to this time.

We are invited to pause, to stop amidst all this unknowing, to accept the fact that we do not know exactly what the future will hold for us.

It is okay to simply stop and let go.

For those working more during this time, breaks are even more critical.



And for those working less, the structure of time and the week are important.

I have been in many meetings where I and others have forgotten what day of the week it was.

And that's okay.

But when I use my computer even in a small way on Shabbat for a Zoom service, I realize the extent of the loss.

We need to keep Shabbat as best we can. Try not to use our devices for things beyond this service or moments of gathering family and friends.

We are trying not to use the chat function in our Shabbat zoom services so we can be together, but still keep Shabbat as traditionally as possible....

Take breaks.

For those of you on Zoom twelve hours a day, take even more breaks.

And stop for Shabbat.

Lift up the special moments that this time has presented us. While it is hard on Talya, our college-age daughter, to be home from school and miss most of this semester, what a gift and blessing it has been to have her with us.



We decided to make a bonfire for the first time in our backyard and we enjoyed roasting marshmallows a couple of Sundays ago.

And we invite you to join us on *Lag B'Omer* on Tuesday evening when we plan to sing songs, light a bonfire and tell stories together through Zoom.

Amidst the challenges of this time, there have been sparks of light: the people joining our *minyan* to say *Kaddish* from other *shuls*, towns, and cities including my classmate, Rabbi Ed Bernstein who was in *minyan* yesterday morning.

People joining a Zoom *shiva minyan* from around the globe who normally, would never have been able to participate in such a meaningful way. My ability to take a break and do the seven-minute workout with my son, Ari, on a Friday morning. More time for walks with Sharon and Matan with our dog Bamba.



One of the most special surprises happened to me last Shabbat.

At the end of services, I invited everyone to come up to our virtual *bimah* to wish the family a *mazal tov* and we will do that again in a few minutes today.

My aunt and uncle who retired after serving the Jewish community in Providence for many decades are friendly with the grandparents of the *Bat-Mitzvah* so they stayed to wish the family well and my mother, who has been coming to our services more and more also stayed.



After a few minutes, everyone left and I found myself alone on the Zoom with my mother and my uncle and aunt so we decided to eat Shabbat lunch together. Something that would never have happened, happened.

Pause and find the blessings of this time.

Let us utilize this time and especially Shabbat to connect as best we can.