

Your Omer Calendar

In Conjunction with Jewish Healing Month

In ancient times, as is true today, farmers (and everyone else) were anxious and excited for the day of harvest to arrive. A good harvest would mean plenty of food for the people. A poor harvest would mean that there might not be enough food. The Jewish community developed a way to acknowledge this anxiousness and excitement. We count the days toward the harvest, much as we would count the days toward a birthday or other important day. We call this ritual "Counting the Omer." The word Omer refers to a sheaf (bundle) of barley stalks.

People asked, "When should we begin to count?" The answer was to begin counting on the day after the first seder of Passover. (The Jewish community had noticed that the barley harvest coincides with the time period between Passover in early Spring and Shavuot in later Spring.)

If you begin to count toward the harvest on the day after Passover, then it is 49 days to the barley harvest which also corresponds to Shavuot; the holiday celebrating when the Jewish people received the Ten Commandments. And so, counting the Omer begins the day after the first seder and ends on Shavuot. Counting the Omer is a time to reflect on the themes of the Exodus from Egypt, such as how experiencing slavery helps us to treat others in a better way, and the idea that freedom is both release from bondage and acceptance of community responsibilities.

Another question people asked was, "How do we count?" The answer was to develop a special kind of calendar. That is what you have here, a calendar designed to help you count the days from Passover to Shavuot by coloring in each numbered petal as you count each day. Traditionally, counting the Omer takes place after sunset. Dinnertime or bedtime is a convenient time to count.

On the back are also some questions designed to stimulate reflection on what we enjoy in our lives. Set aside some time each week to sit down and discuss or think about the question for that week.



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JLW and BAJHC are beneficiaries of the Jewish Community Federation © Bay Area Jewish Healing Center 415/750-4197