

Today is one day of the Omer

היום יום אחד לעומר

Kindness within Kindness

Hesed be-Hesed



חֶסֶד שְׂבַחֶסֶד

*When I was young, I admired clever people.
Now that I am old, I admire kind people.*

— Abraham Joshua Heschel

Tonight is the second night of Passover. Many Jews have a second seder, and will recite the song Dayyenu, a long list of all of the separate actions which culminated in our release from slavery and our formation as a nation. Each one is counted as a separate act of Hesed from God. When we take the time to consider the many steps it took to bring us from slavery to freedom, we create space for awe and wonder, a space in which to fully appreciate just how amazing it is that we are here today.

Attention to detail can help us to become more aware of the many choices we make in our own lives that can result in either a kind or unkind outcome. There are many moments in the course of an ordinary day when we can choose to be kind, indifferent or mean. Perhaps a smile and ‘thank you’ to the driver of the bus as you are getting out at your stop, perhaps an extra moment to help a classmate or colleague gather their thoughts or collect their belongings. Maybe even just offering to do the dishes in an evening when it would be very appreciated. How will you choose to take your kind intentions and turn them into kind actions?

Share with Others:

Think of a time when someone did for you an act of pure kindness, and how that made you feel. Try to find at least one small way today to be kind for no better reason than that you thought of it.

Today is two days of the Omer

הַיּוֹם שְׁנַיִם יָמִים לְעֹמֶר

Strength within Kindness

Gevurah be-Hesed



גְּבוּרָה שְׁבִיחָה

Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair, but manifestations of strength and resolution.

— Khalil Gibran

Kindness is often perceived as an easy thing to offer, if only we were more inclined toward it. But sometimes, the strength in kindness is to be found in holding yourself back from rushing to help; allowing the one you care for to achieve or fall on their own, knowing you care, and feeling comfortable that you will *not* rush in to take over when things get tough. Good friends can be most supportive when they express confidence in each other's abilities, helping by assuring one another that they will be there supportively, no matter what. The Gevurah in Hesed says, "I know you can do it," or, "Let's do it together," rather than, "Here, let me do it for you."

Self-Reflection:

What is the hardest thing for you about Hesed? Do you think it takes more strength to help or not to help? Can you think of a time when someone helped you by stepping back rather than rushing in?

Today is three days of the Omer

הַיּוֹם שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים לְעֹמֶר

Beauty within Kindness

Tiferet be-Hesed



תְּפִאֶרֶת שְׁבַחֶסֶד

Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty.

— Anne Herbert

Tiferet — beauty and balance — is the ideal blend of Hesed and Gevurah. The word also conveys a sense of adornment; beauty that is outside of the usual experience. Tiferet b’Hesed is finding the beautiful inside the kindness. The graceful in the grace. We each have different notions of deep beauty, and it is usually not physical beauty that Tiferet is describing. Witnessing an act of unusual kindness, hearing a haunting melody or simply recognizing yourself in the words of something you read and being changed by the experience: all of these can be experiences of Tiferet.

In the Bible, Hannah pours her heart out to God in a prayer to conceive a child. She moves her lips, but makes no sound and Eli, the priest who observes her jumps to the conclusion that she is drunk. When she explains the situation, we can feel his harsh attitude change, and he wishes her well. In that moment of reframed understanding lays the balance and beauty of Tiferet she’beHesed. As Eli shifts his stance from condemnation to conciliation, his Hesed shines out because of the change in him through the aspect of Tiferet.

Brainstorm Together:

Is there an area in your family life where you might be less judgmental and more accepting? What would be the first step in making that change?

Today is four days of the Omer

הַיּוֹם אַרְבַּעַת יָמִים לְעוֹמֵר



Victory within Kindness

Netzach be-Hesed

נִצָּח שְׂבִיחָה

But remember, boy, that a kind act can sometimes be as powerful as a sword.

— Rick Riordan

The victory of Netzach beHesed is a victory by gentle means rather than brute force. The characters in the very popular books by Rick Riordan demonstrate these traits. They win by being kind, clever and open to unusual ideas. There are times when in order to be triumphant you have to find a new approach, something completely unexpected. The combination of Netzach and Hesed brings the understanding that grace can be experienced or shared in unusual ways. Something that seemed impossibly difficult can sometimes be turned around into an opportunity for unexpected growth and good.

Try This:

As you go through your day, look for an event, a story, a picture or experience to share tonight in which you found kindness, creativity and ultimately triumph. You can write about it or print and place the picture here:

Today is five days of the Omer

היום חמשה ימים לעומר

Glory within Kindness

Hod be-Hesed



הוד שבחסד

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind.

— Albert Einstein

Many people see Divine Glory in the ever-changing beauty of nature as well as its constancy: a setting sun is gloriously beautiful rather than terrifying because we know that it will rise again on the other side of the night; the order and arrangement of the stars in that night sky amaze us with their beauty, and also provide a reliable and ordered set of signs for navigation.

Though he lived through incredibly turbulent times in which unspeakable horrors happened, Albert Einstein, not a particularly religious man, nonetheless is remembered for his comment “God does not play dice with the universe.” It was this faith that there had to be an organizing foundation, and a sincere belief that it could be found, which must certainly have made it possible for him to continue to pursue his own ultimately successful path of observation, discovery and calculation, long after most people had given up on him.

Go Out and Learn:

Take some time today and tonight to go outside. Notice some of the details in the changing environment of spring. Are there trees just starting to bud, small shoots of flowers beginning to show? You might want to choose a particular tree or area to observe weekly over these seven weeks and watch the effect of the passage of time from early spring into almost-summer.

Today is six days of the Omer

הַיּוֹם שֵׁשָׁה יָמִים לְעוֹמֵר

Foundation within Kindness

Yesod be-Hesed



יְסוּד שְׁבַחָה

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

— Aesop

Finding the grounding, the foundation, of Hesed is the work of the everyday. It is relatively easy, and certainly much more gratifying, to do something big and flashy and generous — something others will definitely notice. It is far more difficult to be unflinchingly polite, no matter how irritating the situation, or to remember to acknowledge those who do the little things that make your day go more smoothly.

It is a show of great kindness (as well as patience) to slow down for someone who is having a hard time keeping up, and to go at their pace for a while. The Yesod in Hesed is found in the everyday routine, and the small kindnesses to others. Sometimes it might be as small a gesture as a smile and thank-you to the bus driver, or reaching down to pick up something. As we get into the habit of performing such small kindnesses, we might become, while never knowing it, the best thing that happened for someone else in any given day.

In Your Life:

This evening, sit with whoever shares this book with you and tell them about the small things they do that you appreciate more than you mention. Try to become more aware of the ways that your small actions and choices can mean a lot to others. These do not have to be spiritual or religious: you can unroll your socks before putting them in the laundry; a parent or caregiver might put something extra and fun into a child's lunch bag. These everyday kindnesses show an ongoing awareness that the little things you do affect others.

Today is seven days, making
one week of the Omer

הַיּוֹם שִׁבְעָה יָמִים שָׁהֵם
שָׁבוּעַ אֶחָד לְעוֹמֵר

Majesty within Kindness

Malchut be-Hesed



מַלְכוּת שְׁבִיחָה

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize at the center of the universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that its center is really everywhere, it is within each of us.

—Black Elk

As the cycle of the week concludes we find our most human selves in Malchut, majesty. It is almost impossible to behave with true Hesed toward others until we experience Hesed within ourselves. Awareness of ourselves as being the one in charge of how we choose to be allows us to see that same “self-ness” in others, and to respect it rather than ruin it. You are not made any better by belittling someone else; in fact, you reduce yourself in their eyes, in your own esteem and in the eyes of anyone who witnessed it.

When we conjure an image of an historical Native American, someone like Chief Black Elk, our image is likely to be of someone who walked in harmony with the land and did not seek the destruction of others. While this ideal might be more mythology than history, it gives us something to aspire to, as all good myths do. When we find the “Great Spirit” inside of ourselves, then walking in Hesed becomes a natural thing to do.

Self-Reflection:

What do you think your best personal quality is? How do you allow that to shine for others? (This is how you would find your own Malchut she’be-Hesed) What characteristics do you seek out in your friends?

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Visualization: Malchut be-Hesed

This exercise can be a good relaxation before bed or in a quiet space when you need to remind yourself of where your center is. Feel free to return to it as often as you wish.

In the quiet time before falling asleep tonight, re-read the quote from Black Elk. Visualize yourself walking comfortably and naturally through a forest. Listen for the wind in the trees and the rustlings and chirps of all of the living creatures. After you have spent a little time there, see if you can identify what some of your greatest strengths are. These are core characteristics that are always present inside yourself. Imagine yourself writing them in some way. Read the words you have written and see them as a permanent piece of who you are.

As you end your visualization, return from the quiet place of nature to your own living reality, carrying the certain knowledge of your strength like a note that you have written to remind yourself of something important.

If you know what your strengths are, it can be a resource you draw from as you face situations where you might be tempted to be less than your best self. See this strength as a tangible thing that you can actually reach out and touch in your mind's eye.

You may wish to write some notes and thoughts about your strengths. It can be helpful to remind yourself of the experience.