

Counting the Omer

Refining the Emotional Drives and Traits of the Human Heart



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Why Count the Omer? **by Barbara Robins**

Once again I have been watching and listening for that "ah ha!" of what I am to share with you. This month it came this evening, during a conversation with a dear friend of mine who recently completed a difficult divorce and retrieved her things from the marital house over the weekend. She was supposed to have two full days to move her stuff but when she arrived there, Saturday morning, her former husband said he was giving her only Saturday and none of Sunday and that he would call the police on her if she was there past the allotted time.

The timing of this was very interesting because I saw a similarity between the events of her weekend and a Passover event. Passover began this evening. Her experience reminded me of Pharaoh telling Moses he would let the Jews go into the desert for three days to worship but then changed his mind and sent the Egyptian army out after them.

I then explained to her that we are actually beginning of a 50 day period of time, the conclusion of which is a time of spiritual fulfillment. After we got off the phone I decided to research this "counting the Omer" period so I could give her a little more detail. Some of what I found I'm passing on to you as it can be enriching for us all.

BACKGROUND AND SPIRITUAL MEANING OF COUNTING THE OMER

Starting with the second day of Passover, we "count the Omer" each day, leading up toward Shavuot and the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. An omer is a unit of measure. On the second day of Passover, in the days of the Temple, an omer of barley was cut down and brought to the Temple as an offering. This grain offering was referred to as the Omer.

The counting is intended to remind us of the link between Passover, which commemorates the Exodus, and Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah. It reminds us that the redemption from slavery was not complete until we received the Torah.

A little side note here, Jesus was crucified on Passover and on Shavuot the Holy Spirit was given to his disciples. Christians know that day as Pentecost.

The Kabbalists explain that the 49 days that connect Passover with Shavuot correspond to the forty-nine drives and traits of the human heart. Each day saw the refinement of one of these attributes, bringing

the people of Israel one step closer to their election as G-d's chosen people and their receiving of His communication to humanity.

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 - Loving-kindness
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. Upon conclusion of the 49 days we arrive at the 50th 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.

Count the Omer--and Make the Omer Count

by Rabbi Shraga Simmons

The usual method is to count down toward the big day, whereas in the case of the Omer, we count up -- from one to 50. Why the difference?

The Jewish people left Egypt on Passover, and 50 days later (on the holiday of Shavuot) received the Torah at Mount Sinai. Today, in revisiting that Sinai experience, we observe a special mitzvah called "Counting the Omer," where we actually count aloud each of these days, beginning on the second night of Passover. (The Omer was a special offering brought to the Holy Temple during this season.)

Counting in anticipation of an exciting event is quite understandable. At one time or another, we've all probably said something like, "Grandma's coming to visit in a week and a half," or "Only 17 more days till my birthday!" But there's one subtle difference: The usual method is to count down toward the big day, whereas in the case of the Omer, we count up -- from one to 50. Why the difference?

LONG-TERM IMPACT

To understand, we first need to answer a more basic question: Why did God wait 50 days after the Jews left Egypt before giving the Torah? Why didn't He simply give it to them in Egypt, or immediately after their departure?

The answer is that the Jews were not yet spiritually equipped to receive the Torah. For over 200 years, they had been living in an Egyptian society known to be the world center for immorality and vice. Even without direct Jewish participation, these influences nonetheless permeated the air and seeped into their consciousness. The primary book of Kabbalah, "The Zohar," reports that in Egypt the Jews had slipped to the 49th level of spiritual impurity. (50 is the very lowest.) God could not give the Torah at this point. The Jews needed to grow up first, or else they would have squandered the opportunity.

The high-impact adventure of the Exodus -- 10 miraculous plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea -- launched the Jews into physical freedom. Yet the miracles of Egypt were only a jump-start to the spiritual possibilities that lay ahead. A one-time experience, as powerful as it is, does not permanently change anyone's emotional attitude. That is only possible through practice and adjustment over time.

It reminds me of a scene from the film "Trading Places." Eddie Murphy has gone from beggar to wealth in a few hours, and the first thing he does upon entering his own luxury apartment is to steal things! His physical body

had been transported to opulence, but emotionally he was left behind. You can take the Jew out of Egypt, but you can't take Egypt out of the Jew.

I've witnessed a similar phenomenon at the Discovery Seminar, a dramatic presentation of the rational basis for Jewish belief. Many people leave the seminar with the astounding conviction that God exists and that He gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. Yet without proper follow-up, the impact lasts but a few days. Real change occurs only through steady day-to-day growth and a commitment to a consistent program of contemplation and study.

Now we can understand why the 50 days of the Omer is counted in a forward progression. We begin the process at the 49th level of spiritual impurity, and every day we peel away another layer of gunk, to reveal the original, pure soul we each possess. That's why every step both reduces the negative number and increases the positive number -- the single step of peeling away a layer automatically reveals the corresponding positive side.

A TIME OF GROWTH

Classic Talmudic commentators say that the days of counting the Omer are the most auspicious for acquiring these spiritual levels.

This necessity for self-growth is stressed in the Torah's description of Abraham: "Abraham was old, he came with his days" (Genesis 24:1). "He came with his days" teaches us that Abraham used each of his days to the fullest extent. At the end of his life, he came to old age "with all his days" in hand. No day was without its requisite growth.

When it comes to children, we take for granted that growth and development is part of childhood. You don't expect a 10-year-old to act the same way he did at age five. But somehow as adults, we lose that impulse to continue growing. Yet should a 30-year-old act as he did at age 25? As adults, we could be using those five years in a very powerful way.

The formula for staying young is to continue growing. Losing that capacity at any age is tragic. Any time we're not growing and changing, we're not living. We're just existing.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

A major impediment to growth is the feeling of being overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. But Judaism is not all-or-nothing. If I cannot have 1,000 gold coins, does that mean I should not strive to have even one?!

The biggest reason people fail is that they have set a goal which is too lofty and unattainable. We inevitably fall short and get discouraged.

In Jacob's famous dream, God shows him a vision of a ladder reaching toward heaven. Spiritual growth, like climbing a ladder, must be one step at a time. By setting small, incremental goals, we will be encouraged by the periodic success. To make the plan foolproof, make your initial goal something you know you can reach. Tasting success will bolster your confidence and determination, and you can use this energy to strive for higher goals. Remember, the longest journey begins with just one step. And what goes in slow, will remain.

The story is told of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (19th century Europe) who took upon himself to lead an entire city back to Torah observance. He set up a weekly class and began by telling them, "If you have to work on Shabbat, at least try to minimize the violation." In today's lexicon, that would mean walking instead of driving, or setting your TV on a timer. With this approach, Rabbi Salanter was able over a few years to turn the community around to full Shabbat observance -- one step at a time.

Take pleasure in the times you achieved your goal, and use that as a motivation to improve further. Don't castigate yourself if you do not always succeed. No human being is perfect. The Kabbalists say that spiritual growth is "two steps forward and one step back." We will inevitably have setbacks. What's important is that we're heading in the right direction.

King Solomon tells us in Proverbs (24:16): "The Tzaddik falls seven times and gets up." The definition of a Tzaddik is not someone who never makes a mistake, but rather someone who, although he may fail, does not give up. He tries again and does not despair!

SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTING

One important principle to remember is that you are not competing with anyone but yourself. Secular society has accustomed us to compete against others -- whether in business or on the tennis court. Of course, healthy competition is good. But life is not a race to beat the other guy; life is only a race to conquer yourself. As we climb the ladder, it's more important which direction we're headed than which rung we're on.

Nowhere in the entire Torah is the date of Shavuot mentioned. It merely takes place at the end of 50 days -- because the key is to get there at your own pace, following these steps. To maintain growth, a good rule of thumb is to always be a bit uncomfortable. You don't want to climb a ladder and get stuck between rungs!

It also helps to reinforce your goals by writing them down. Writing helps a person to concentrate and clarify his thoughts. A business person would

surely write out goals and keep an accurate tally of their progress. In Judaism, this is called Cheshbon -- a spiritual accounting.

You may choose to keep a notebook for writing down these daily goals, and make a chart to track your progress. Place this in a conspicuous place like in your daytimer or on the refrigerator, and then review your goals by reading them aloud. The Torah, in describing the Omer, says, "count for you" (Leviticus 23:15) -- because each person has to do this for himself, speaking it aloud. Strategize!

As with anything, the key is consistency. Choose a convenient time and commit to working on this at least 15 minutes every day. Don't postpone learning for "afterwards," at which time it becomes late and you may be too tired. Say to yourself that you are going to dedicate 15 minutes and nothing is going to stop you. Close your door, unplug your phone, and log offline. If you need a daily reminder, try the buddy system.

Ideally, at the end of the Omer process, we will have experienced a journey of self-improvement and be ready to receive the Torah. The holiday we're working toward is called "Shavuot," which means "weeks." The name itself tells us that without the weeks of preparation beforehand, there is no Shavuot. So don't just count the Omer -- make the Omer count.

Today is 1 day of the Omer:

Be Aware of Every Moment

Imagine you're stuck in traffic, and another driver is taking dollar bills and throwing them out the window. You can't believe it. The guy is whacko. Every five minutes, another dollar flies out the window!

You probably never saw this. But you have seen someone throwing five minutes out the window.

It's not so bad for the first few minutes. But then the cash register starts ringing up more wasted time. Ding! Ding!

To become a great human being requires applying your mind constantly, until it pervades every fiber of your being.

It all begins with a decision, a commitment. Try saying aloud: "Life is an opportunity. I want to use my mind, and be constantly moving toward my goal."

You may notice some resistance as a little voice protests inside: "No way! All work and no play will make Jack a dull boy. C'mon, let's space out and watch TV!"

Does this mean being an obsessive workaholic? Of course not -- you still need to sleep!

Let's understand. "Constant striving" means that when you sleep in order to be more productive, then the sleep becomes part of your overall goal. It's the same with eating and exercise.

So what about relaxing?

Of course it's okay to relax. But relaxing means "changing gears." Your relaxation should be purposeful and directed. Think of something else that's not as exerting, but is still meaningful. For example, shift your focus to nature, music or art. Sometimes, even a simple change of scenery, a cold drink, or a breathe of fresh air is enough to recharge your batteries.

But don't space out.

We do this, because it is painful to be constantly aware, to be constantly "on."

To break through that pain, focus instead on the pay-off. When you are constantly aware, every experience becomes a lesson in life.

Human beings were created for pleasure. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden. In Hebrew, Eden means "pleasure."

When you commit yourself to what a human being was destined for -- a life of pleasure -- you will go out searching for the highest pleasures. Along the way, you'll make distinctions between pleasure and comfort, between necessary pain and needless suffering. And through the process, you'll discover the true meaning of life.

Make the commitment to discover life's deeper pleasures. It could be the difference between a useful life and a wasted one.

Today is 2 days of the Omer

Listen Effectively

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When the media hits you with another message, don't take the idea for granted. Listen for the message behind the message. Analyze and question.  
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Were you ever in an important conversation and you felt like you weren't getting your point across? You started shouting: "Do you hear what I'm saying? You're not paying attention. Do you hear me!?"

Everyone is guilty of this. How many times do we think we're listening to the other person, only to find out later that our mind was somewhere else? Before you decide whether to accept or reject an idea, before you argue, before you make statements, before you decry -- first make sure you're being objective. Otherwise, you're expressing an emotional prejudice -- not an intelligent opinion.

Effective listening means:

1. Hearing the words.
2. Understanding the message.
3. Putting it into action.

Today is 3 days of the Omer.

Say it Out Loud

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Articulate your beliefs out loud. It bridges the gap between lofty notions of the soul and the world of reality. In other words, you'll find out if you really believe what you say.  
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We come from a "quiet learning" society where "shhhh" is the rule. If you drop a book in a university library, people jump as if a bomb went off. Contrast this with a rabbinic study hall, where you're greeted by a rippling sea of sound. The uninitiated often ask: "How can these people learn with so much noise?!"

It's all a matter of habit. A country boy finds it difficult to sleep in the city because there's too much noise. Yet the city boy who visits the country also can't sleep - because the quiet is mind-racking!

To gain more clarity and wisdom, try saying things out loud.

Every person has a mantra. The mantra is your particular music, your individual joy of life. Particularly in learning, there's a certain musical rhythm that draws you deeper into the learning. If you study long enough, you'll get in touch with this tune. It is a tremendous help to get your engine moving. Start with your tune ... and you're in!

Take a moment and think: "What am I living for?"

Now try saying out loud: "I am living for..."

Notice the difference? Speaking our beliefs out loud helps reveal how closely we actually follow our principles for living, and if they truly resonate within.

Today is 4 days of the Omer

Introduce Yourself to Yourself

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Don't go through life making assumptions about who you are. Take the time now to "meet" yourself - before a crisis comes along and forces the issue.  
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Did you ever get on a train going somewhere, only to find that you're headed in the wrong direction?

The same thing happens in life. We set goals and make plans - and sometimes discover that we're on "the wrong train."

The heart is the seat of emotions. We say: "My heart is heavy, my heart is lifted, my heart is broken," etc. To understand your heart is to understand your true inner self.

Many people go through life making assumptions about who they are. They never take time to "meet" themselves. Don't be afraid of discovering that the "real you" may be different than the "current you."

Often a crisis hits at midlife when people ask: "What's my life about? Is this all worth it?" We've heard stories of people who suddenly change direction, quitting their job and getting divorced. You know, like the successful doctor who decides he never wanted to go into medicine in the first place -- so he drops it and becomes an artist.

Knowing yourself is the essence of being alive. If you don't know yourself, you are not living. If you don't know what makes you tick, you're a robot, a puppet, a zombie.

The process of self-discovery involves asking a series of questions, always probing deeper until the underlying truth emerges. Ask yourself 10 questions that you would ask an intimate friend. Then wait for answers. Don't worry, no one is going to poke fun at you.

1. What is the purpose of life?
2. What is my goal in life?
3. Why did I choose this career?
4. How do I spend my spare time?
5. What is my motivation for doing what I do?
6. What really makes me happy?
7. Am I as happy as I want to be?

8. Is it more important to be rich or to be happy?
9. What are my future plans? Why?
10. What are my secret dreams and ambitions?

Don't be surprised if the answers aren't immediate. This process can take many months. Stick with it and find out what makes you tick. The answers are hiding in there. After all, you have a fascinating partner.

Finally, the most important question to ask is:

"What am I living for?"

It sounds like a simple question, but many are embarrassed to ask it. A voice inside us says, "Nah, why ask such a basic question?" We're resistant because we know this requires a lot of difficult soul-searching. And when you thoroughly know yourself, then you have changed. You've changed your relationship with yourself and the world.

Today is 5 days of the Omer.

The Power of Awe

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In the face of tremendous force like the Grand Canyon or a hurricane, human beings feel small. Do we mind? No! It's exhilarating. It's the power of awe.  
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Imagine you're standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon with a majestic purple-and-orange sunset blazing across the western sky. You stand transfixed for an hour, then look up at the awesome expanse of stars. You are transformed, lifted, in awe.

B'aima literally means "with awe." Awe is an experience so powerful that it's paralyzing. On the other hand, we know awe to be extremely exhilarating. What defines an awesome experience?

When we look at the expanse of stars, we see power, beauty, harmony. We realize that each tiny star is actually a raging sun. And in the face of tremendous force, we feel insignificant by comparison. We realize our own weakness, our smallness, our mortality.

Yet surprisingly, this doesn't depress us. It inspires us. Because we're merged with the greater whole. That realization can be a source of tremendous positive energy. And if you know the secret of awe and use it effectively, you can actively release its power in day-to-day living.

The secret is to capture the experience in a way that you can recall it and harness that energy in the future.

Here's how to do it: The next time that awe strikes -- whether it's human achievement, or the raw forces of nature -- verbalize what you feel. Say aloud: That's awesome! As a little voice inside affirms, you feel a chill and an instant lift. But more importantly, the moment is concretized. You have a point of reference to draw on in the future.

The next step, of course, is to replay the awesome experience in your mind. Imagine, for example, that you have an idle moment while stuck in traffic. You project yourself back into the awesome experience, and suddenly the world looks different. You are on a different wavelength. This is no regular traffic jam!

Today is **6** days of the Omer

Mastering Fear

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Roller coasters and horror movies... we pay good money to be scared out of our wits. Find out how to harness the energy of "fear" for positive purposes.  
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The Hebrew word yirah means both "to fear" and "to see."

Fear is like any other emotion -- there are both positive and negative aspects. Negative fear is debilitating. Positive fear is exhilarating. On one hand, people say that fear is uncomfortable and threatening. We structure our lives to avoid it. On the other hand, people ride roller coasters and watch horror movies -- paying good money to get scared out of their wits!

People think that fear is paralyzing and reduces your potential.

Actually, the opposite is true. Fear can generate super-human feats. We've all heard stories about a mother who picked up a car to save her child trapped underneath. Facing fear is empowering. It gives you strength you never knew you had.

Fear is only damaging when you run away and don't confront it. Better to try and fail, than to have feared to try.

Too often, we miss an opportunity to excel because we say: "I can't. It's too much effort." For example, imagine you're asked to memorize one page of the phone book in 24 hours. "Impossible!" you say.

But what if you're held hostage and they say: "If you don't memorize one page of the phone book by tomorrow night, you're dead." No question you'll do it!

Here's a practical example. Do you want to get out of bed in the morning with a bang? Sure, but it's too much effort. How about if someone comes with a gun every morning? You'll get up with a bang, no problem!

Take advantage of the power of fear as a tool to tackle all your "I can't's." Make a list of these "I can't's" and put a price tag on them. What is the reward, and what is the consequence? Having this clarity will turn you into a very effective human being.

Today is **7** days of the Omer

The True Charisma

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Humility is not a sloop-shouldered inferiority complex. Rather, humility is "doing the right thing" and not being dependent on the opinion of others. That's true charisma!  
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A movie star enters the party: strutting, cocky, head raised. His manner shouts: "I'm great and we all know it." The room is silent with awe. Charisma!

This is counterfeit charisma. The movie star is totally dependent on external factors over which he has no control. Without the adoring fans, he has nothing.

Way #7 teaches that the path to genuine charisma is with humility.

Humility means "living with the reality that nothing matters except doing the right thing." "Doing the right thing" is a high level, but there's a higher level still. You also have to do the right thing for the right reason - i.e. "because it's the right thing to do." If you do the right thing for selfish reasons - e.g., so you can brag about your accomplishments - you'll end up feeling lousy about yourself.

The story is told of a great rabbi, on his death bed, praying with great intensity. His students were gathered around and asked, "Rabbi, what are you thinking at this moment?"

Answered the rabbi: "A little voice inside me is saying, 'Pray with great intensity so your students will be impressed.'" Even at the moment of death, this great sage was battling his ego!

True charisma comes when we disengage ourselves from the need for outside approval. So do the right thing for the right reason. No matter what the consequences may be. It's the greatest feeling in the world!

The bottom line: The more you rise above the need for others' approval, and develop your inner sense of self-esteem, the more charisma you will possess. And that's something no one can ever take away from you.

Today is **8** days of the Omer

Constant Joy

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Joy gives you the power, motivation and confidence to  
achieve things that otherwise seem too difficult to attempt.  
Better than a granola bar - joy is pure energy.  
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Do you remember the thrill of hitting a home run? Getting out on the last day of school? Riding your new bicycle? You jump with joy. Fantastic!

Joy gives you energy and makes you feel great. You can achieve all kinds of things that otherwise may seem too difficult to attempt. With joy, you're not afraid to talk to the guy sitting next to you on the plane. No problem! You've got energy, buoyancy. You're alive!

Learn to differentiate between real joy, which generates the power to accomplish, and illusory joy, whose burst of energy fades into a let-down. True joy comes from the pleasure of growth and self-actualization - when we conquer a difficult challenge, or experience a moment of clarity. When your team wins the World Series, or when you win the lottery, the joy is a delusion. Why? Because you did not change or grow. Joy is solely the result of your reaction to life, your commitment to turning every moment into a growth experience.

You're not reaching your potential unless you have joy. So whether you're studying, touring, working or relaxing, first get into a state of joy. It will give you a big boost of power and confidence.

So whether you're studying, touring, working or relaxing, first get into a state of joy. It will give you a big boost of power and confidence.

Today is **9** days of the Omer

Concentration

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We use just a small fraction of our mental capacity. Learn how to concentrate and avoid distractions. You'll achieve more goals!  
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The Olympic athlete stands transfixed, reviewing the jump over and over again in his mind: approach, takeoff, propulsion, landing. He is 100 percent focused. The goal is defined. The mind is pure. Time stands still.

Way #9 is purity. When we totally concentrate, we achieve intellectual and emotional purity.

It's often hard to concentrate. Our mind wanders all over the place. Get in touch with your mind. It's flopping all over. Freeze the frame: What are you thinking right now? Are you wondering what's for lunch?

We are what we think. Our ideas dictate reality. If someone thinks people are out to get him, it doesn't matter whether it's true or not, he will be afraid. Or if a smart child gets the idea that he's stupid, that will become his reality.

Just as you need purity of mind, you also need purity of heart -- "one emotion at a time." Different emotions can invade at the wrong time, and if you're not clear, you'll get pulled in too many directions.

Get in touch with your mind. What are you thinking and feeling?
Whenever you utter a statement, ask yourself, "Do I really mean this?" A false idea repeated often enough will become your reality -- even if at first you don't believe it.

Once you've developed the twin tools of intellectual and emotional purity, the next step is "integrated purity" -- putting it all together. Did you ever hear the expression, "Swing the bat from your toes"? The way you stand affects how you use your mind. When you get yourself 100 percent into the act, you are fully focused.

Today is **10** days of the Omer

Honor the Wise Person

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An apprentice gains firsthand knowledge by watching how an expert works. So too with wisdom. Don't read about it in a book; find yourself an expert.  
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Human beings like independence. We hate to admit that we need others. Most people would rather learn from their own mistakes, than learn from others. We imagine we'll just "figure it all out" as we go along. "I know I'm smart. I can work it out."

Life is too short for this. We're bound to make mistakes anyways. So why add those we could otherwise prevent? As the saying goes: "A fool learns from his own mistakes, a wise person learns from the mistakes of others."

Way #10 is "serving the wise." This means to: a) learn from him, and b) assist him. To succeed in life, you have to desire wisdom, and pursue it with enthusiasm. Hang around wise people and see how they apply wisdom to living. Ask a lot of questions, and keep asking as long as they're willing to give you the time.

Wisdom is the key to a meaningful life. You'd never dream of using trial and error in the operating room. So why leave your personal life to guesswork?

Today is **11** days of the Omer

Work it Through with Friends

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Companies test-market new products. To know the value of  
your ideas, find friends to give you straight, honest feedback.  
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Some roads can be traveled alone, but the road of life should not be one of them.

None of us has a monopoly on truth; that's why we need to discuss our ideas with others. It's vital that we find real friends - people with whom we can discuss our plans, feelings, ambitions ... everything.

Some people are so afraid to reveal their mistakes, that they'd rather be a recluse! The trick is to find friends who are sensitive enough to give positive feedback along with the criticism!

Criticism leads to growth. And growth is the excitement of life.

Today is **12** days of the Omer

Growth Through Teaching

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Until you share an idea, it remains but a hazy notion in your imagination. Transmitting the idea to others makes it real. You've taken it out of potential and made it a reality.  
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Most people don't think of themselves as teachers. "Me? A teacher?!" We view teaching as a profession that requires formal training and certification. Besides, we reason, there's probably a "natural ability" that makes someone a good teacher.

Way #12 is "discussions with students." To attain wisdom for living, teaching needs to be a basic way of life. Why? Because if you can't teach an idea, then you don't really know it yourself.

Remember in school when the math teacher asked, "Who knows this equation?" You raised your hand, and she said, "Go ahead, explain it to us." You started off, "Well, umm..." You thought you knew, but when you tried to teach it, you found out otherwise.

Having to explain an idea to others forces you to clarify it for yourself. You examine everything much more thoroughly - the details, logical progression, etc. And you'll become personally moved by the idea. As the Sages say: "I learned a lot from my teachers. I learned even more from my colleagues. But most of all, I learned from my students."

Until you share an idea, it's not yours. It remains but a hazy notion in your imagination. Transmitting the idea to others makes it real. You've taken it out of potential and made it a reality. By reaching others, you will reach yourself.

Today is **13** days of the Omer

Think About It

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We sometimes make snap decisions. Or we may mull over decisions for too long. Become skilled at the happy medium of good decision-making.  
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Human beings tend to lack patience when it comes to making decisions. We frequently want results - now! People may throw themselves into a certain decision - for better or for worse - just to get the decision out of the way.

On the other hand, others may mull over decisions for a long time because they don't have the confidence to make the right decision.

But as we know, decisions can come back and haunt us. And we ask ourselves, "Why didn't I think about this longer?"

The Sages say that whatever you encounter, study it four times. This process is compared metaphorically to the act of planting - because wisdom is for the soul what food is for the body.

1. PLOWING - The first time you go over an idea, it's just "breaking up the soil."

2. PLANTING - The second time, the idea is beginning to make sense. You're "putting seeds into the ground."

3. HARVESTING - The third time, you come to a full understanding. You're "reaping the wheat."

4. DIGESTING - The fourth time you integrate the idea into your life. You digest the idea and it "nourishes" your soul.

With all the things you want to achieve - and the short time you have to achieve them - putting time aside for deliberation is the best investment you'll ever make.

Today is **14** days of the Omer

Written Instructions for Living

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Jewish tradition says that Torah (the Bible) is the "blueprint for creation." When we learn the Bible, we are not studying an abstract and arcane text of the ancient world. We are engaged in discovering the essence of ourselves.  
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The Jewish people have a set of "written instructions for living" - the Bible, and also "oral instructions for living" - the Talmud. Jewish wisdom is incomprehensible unless both parts are working together.

Way #14 is "the written instructions." The Bible has three parts, totaling 24 books:

1. Torah - The Five Books of Moses, revealed to the Jewish people by God at Mount Sinai.
2. Prophets - God spoke to various prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) who transmitted messages strengthening the Jewish commitment to Torah.
3. Writings - The Writings (e.g. Proverbs, Psalms, Esther) emphasize God's message in a poetic style.

The Bible is the all-time bestseller and has made an enormous impact on Western civilization. Study the Bible at least once in your lifetime. It's a worthwhile experience.

"All men have an inalienable right" - straight from the Bible. "Love your neighbor" - the Bible. Isaiah's vision of peace adorns the United Nations. The biblical sanction to "proclaim freedom throughout the land" is engraved on the Liberty Bell.

You don't need to accept the existence of God to learn these basic lessons. Whether interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, community relations, or environmental concerns - Torah is the ultimate "owner's manual."

On a deeper level, Jewish tradition says that Torah is the "blueprint for creation." Everything in life can be found in Torah... if you ask the right questions, and possess the right set of tools.

Let's take an example. In Genesis chapter 18, Abraham is in the middle of

conversing with God. Then three strangers pass by and Abraham immediately runs to serve them. At this point the alert reader should question: Why would Abraham stop talking to God in order to help strangers? It doesn't make sense. Even an atheist would admit that talking to God is the ultimate experience!

From here we learn a profound spiritual lesson: Even more important than talking to God, is to be like God.

What does it mean to "be like Him"?

God created the world for our pleasure. Everything he placed here - fruit, hands, love - are manifestations of His kindness. This world is one big hospitality inn. So when you take the role of host, of serving your fellow man, you are like God. Abraham was wealthy and famous, yet it was not beneath him to serve strangers. He understood the lesson.

Read the Bible intelligently. It is a guiding force, as fresh today as it was 3,500 years ago. Don't discount its value without first making an effort to study it. Respect the Bible. It is a hidden treasure, a special message from God.

Today is **15** days of the Omer

Oral Instructions for Living

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Spirituality is not supposed to be a reference work sitting on the shelf. It's to be lived and internalized. If you gain a piece of wisdom, integrate it into living.  
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Most people are familiar with the "Written Torah" - the Five Books of Moses, the first 5 books in the Old Testament. But many are unaware that 3,300 years ago, the Jewish people also received the Oral Torah - the Mishnah.

In fact, the Oral Torah preceded the Written Torah. At Mount Sinai, God told Moses the 613 mitzvot (blessings), along with a detailed explanation of how to fulfill them. At that time, the teachings were entirely oral. It wasn't until 40 years later, just prior to entering the Land of Israel, that written copies of the Five Books of Moses were distributed to the Jewish people.

Way #15 is "the oral instructions for living." "Mishnah" is from the word l'shanen, to review. As with any piece of wisdom, you have to review and review until you know it by heart. That's the way to live. That's the way to grow. That's the way to become great.

In a 747, the pilot spends a half-hour going through a checklist, before even pulling the plane onto the runway. (If he didn't, don't get on the plane!)

A single word in Torah yields multi-layered understandings - if you know how to apply the right tools. The Torah can be understood on four primary levels. These levels form the acronym 'Pardes,' which means "orchard. The Torah is filled with delicious spiritual fruits, just waiting to be plucked and savored.

In fact, that's why the Almighty created us with the need for food. It's a sign that we need wisdom in order to grow. You can't say, "I ate yesterday," or "I ate years ago and now I don't need to eat anymore."

It's a mistake of Western society that people grow in one aspect but don't grow in others. Someone can become hugely successful in business, but be an adolescent in his spiritual life. Realize that just as your professional ambitions are not the same as when you were age 18, so too your approach to God has to mature and develop over time.

Furthermore, when eating, you have to chew the food and eventually

eliminate the waste. So too, in attaining wisdom, you have to think things over carefully and eliminate the poisonous parts.

Every night, go over your day. What did you learn that day? Write it in a notebook, or make little index cards. Then, on the first of the month, review your month. "What did I gain? What did I learn about living?" Not only will you be amazed and delighted with the wisdom you've gained, you'll be "hard wiring" it into your consciousness and integrating it into living.

Today is **16** days of the Omer

Apply Business Acumen to Living

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To compete in the marketplace, a business has to function at maximum efficiency. Apply those same core principles to your pursuit of a great personal and spiritual life.  
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Nobody can eat popcorn all day long without getting bored. But money? All around people are getting swallowed up by their career. "I've got a million dollars, but I want 10 million." Why? Because money is a symbol of pleasure. It has the allure of promising everything.

The key is to take that motivation for money, and apply it to the more meaningful aspects of life: relationships, spirituality.

If your business is worth it, then certainly "You, Inc." is worth it, too. Deal with yourself as if you're a big business. To compete in the marketplace, a business has to function at maximum efficiency. Imagine a worker who takes 10 steps to turn a bolt when he could have done it in two. Multiplied by 1,000 workers at eight hours a day, and that's a huge loss.

Apply this idea to your life. When you are ready to leave your house, where are your keys? Wherever you put them! If you're not organized, you could waste five minutes each day. How much of your life will you spend being a key seeker?

The solution? If this were a business, you'd create a filing system and have a folder labeled: "Keys." So do the same here - designate one place to put your keys every day.

Good living demands good planning. Because if you don't know your destination, you'll never get there. (Remember, Law of Attraction.)

Keep you eye on the bigger issues. Ask yourself: "When all is said and done, what do I really want? What is the ultimate? Life is too short to be heading in one direction, only to find out later that you're getting something entirely different. What is happiness? What is pleasure? This is the only way to make sure you don't later become liable for breach of contract - with yourself.

Today is **17** days of the Omer

Intimacy Power

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Intimacy is a powerful drive, second only to survival itself.  
Society uses it to sell movies, cigarettes and automobiles.  
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The illusion is that the more you satisfy an urge, the more you are satisfied. But in reality, the more you feed an urge, the more it wants. Even in the context of marriage, excess makes the relationship base and self-centered. Balance is essential.

In the Torah, the expression used to describe intimacy is "yadah," which means "to know." ("And Adam knew his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and had a child." - Genesis 4:1) Yadah denotes that intimacy is not just a physical act, but is a full emotional union between two people.

When a man and woman make a marital commitment, they form a deep spiritual bond. They give to each other, and are committed for a lifetime. Intimacy binds husband and wife together, because it teaches us to focus beyond ourselves.

There is an even deeper level to marriage.

Intimacy is one of the holiest acts we can perform. In fact, the Hebrew word for the marriage ceremony, "kiddushin," comes from the word "kadosh," holy.

Judaism says that the greatest physical pleasure is that which is done for a spiritual reason. That's why on Shabbat, the holiest day of the week, the Sages specifically enjoin couples to be together.

Bring spiritual awareness into your marriage. The secret to a really powerful marriage is to walk with God in the middle. Being kind to your spouse is a way of being like God, who created us to give us pleasure. Tapping into this mindset will give your marriage more meaning and ultimately, more pleasure.

Today is **18** days of the Omer

The Use of Physical Pleasure

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The physical world is for our pleasure. Spiritual growth comes through grappling with the mundane world in a way that uplifts and elevates.  
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Did you ever begin a stimulating physical activity and then discover you somehow can't extricate yourself? You pick up a bag of potato chips, and start eating two, three, four, five. Before you know it you're at the bottom of the bag. You didn't really want any more, but you couldn't stop. And now, you feel sick.

While physical pleasure is an essential part of enjoying life, at the same time, we have to know how to control it and harness it. Way #18 is "minimize physical pleasure." You cannot just eat chocolate bars the whole day long. That is not living.

Imagine you're dining on steak and French fries. The first bite, you focus intently on the pleasure, knowing just what part of the mouth tingles and how it lifts your spirits.

But what happens next? Before you know it, you're gulping it down.

When a connoisseur takes a glass of wine, the "drink" itself is just one aspect of the enjoyment. He sniffs it first, then puts a little in his mouth and swishes it around, checking the fruitiness and bouquet. Only if it passes approval will he swallow.

Next time you take a Coke, ask yourself: "How does this affect me? What does it do for me?" For most of us, 90 percent of the Coke goes straight to the stomach without ever passing the taste buds. We don't even have a chance to enjoy it.

To get back on track, "identify and intensify" your pleasures. Articulate exactly what is this specific pleasure: What makes it taste good, look good, smell good, feel good?

Be a gourmet of life. Focus and make sure you're getting the full pleasure. Swish it around in your mind and prolong its taste. The deeper appreciation will motivate and energize you.

Today is **19** days of the Omer

Minimize Sleep

~~~~~  
Sleeping too much is just as harmful as not sleeping enough.  
Minimize sleep - because on a deeper level, it's about  
"waking up" to life.  
~~~~~

You go to wake up your roommate at 7 a.m. He grunts, "Thanks, I'm up."
You return five minutes later to find him sound asleep. You shake him
again, "Get up already!" Half-opening his eyes, he says, "Yah, yah," and
drops right back to sleep.

Has this ever happened to you? Unfortunately, it's a fairly accurate
description of the way most of us lead our lives. We may say, "I can't
afford to waste time anymore. This is it! I'm going to start applying myself."
An hour later you've forgotten the whole thing. You went back to sleep.
The desire for living is the struggle against sleep. On a deeper level, it's
about waking up to life.

Of course, sleep has a positive aspect in that our bodies need it to
function. Sleep gives you a chance to become re-energized. It unravels
tension and allows you to heal, both physically and emotionally.

Sleep can be a mirage. The proof is that when you're full of excitement
and energy, you simply can't sleep.

Children are a perfect example. From the moment a baby opens his eyes,
he's up like a shot. "Another day ... new adventures ... so much to discover
... so much to experience ... waaaah!!!! Take me out of my crib!"

And did ever try putting a baby to sleep? No way! He's afraid of missing all
the excitement.

To capture this zest for living, you need to focus on the deeper purpose
and meaning of life. Look for fascinating, fulfilling activities. Learn how to
create joy in living, instead of just "waiting for it to happen." You are
excited. You are looking forward to a new day. You are fully alert.

Why do adults often crave sleep? Responsibilities weigh us down. We
want to crawl into bed and hide under the sheets just to get a breather.

Underneath it all, do you think it is good to be alive? Or are you trying to
escape from the struggle of life? If being alive is good, then sleep is an
escape.

Today is **20** days of the Omer

The Art of Conversation

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People today are busier than ever - commuting, flying, buying. "Conversation time" is diminishing. Is there no one listening out there?  
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Joe is walking down a darkened alley, when suddenly a man jumps out, brandishing a pistol.

"Don't shoot," Joe pleads, "I'll give you all my money."

"I don't want your money," says the man with the gun. "My whole life I've been trying to get someone to sit down and talk with me. Now I'm going to make you listen for one hour."

This story reflects a sorry aspect of the human condition. People today are busier than ever -- commuting, flying, buying. All in all, conversation time is diminishing. Who has time to talk?

Reflect back to yourself. You want to be understood. But is anyone listening?

Conversation is our tool to be in contact with other human beings. Unless we communicate, we're all alone.

As accustomed as people are to "speaking," very few actually "communicate." Speaking is natural and automatic. But communication is an art which must be learned and practiced. A "conversation" is a personal exploration of another person. The point of conversation is not to impress others or to enhance your popularity, but to learn about others.

Did you ever sit for hours on an airplane? You read all the magazines, and watch the in-flight movie. There is nothing else to do. Try speaking to the person next to you.

You have to warm up. Begin by saying "hello." Then ask simple, non-threatening questions: "Where are you from? What's your name?" This is just credential exchange. No harm, no weapons.

Yes, it is painful, because you don't know where it will go from there. But what are you worried about -- that he'll stand up and announce to all the passengers: "I'm seated next to a boring person!"

It's a shame to sit silently through the entire flight, and then "accidentally" get into a fascinating conversation just as you're parting ways.

Don't be afraid of being rejected or that you won't have anything intelligent to say. It won't kill you. You will learn how. Good conversations have to be cultivated and produced

Today is **21** days of the Omer

Laughter is Serious Business

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Laughter is a deeply spiritual emotion. Understand the dynamics of laughter and use it wisely.  
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The Talmud says when the great sage Rav lectured to thousands of students on serious Torah topics, he always started with a joke. Why?

Jokes have the power to grab our attention and focus our mind. Laughter can snap us out of melancholy, put things back into perspective, and provide the momentum to make the best of life.

Here's one of my favorite jokes:

A man is walking down the beach and comes across an old bottle. He picks it up, pulls out the cork and out pops a genie. The genie says "Thank you for freeing me from the bottle. In return I will grant you three wishes."

The man says "Great. I always dreamed of this and I know exactly what I want. First, I want 1 Billion dollars in a Swiss bank account." Phoof! There is a flash of light and a piece of paper with account numbers appears in his hand.

He continues, "Next, I want a brand new red Ferrari right here." Phoof! There is a flash of light and a bright red brand-new Ferrari appears right next to him.

He continues, "Finally, I want to be irresistible to women." Phoof! There is a flash of light and he turns into a box of chocolates.

Did you ever see a child fall and get a tiny bruise, then break into a fit of tears? What if you'd look at the child and say: "Oh-oh, I think we have to rush you to the hospital!"

The child laughs, because he recognizes the bruise is a small worry in the big context.

Laughter gets rid of gloom, aggravation, depression, worry -- all forms of tension. You don't realize how much tension you walk around with every day until you've had a good laugh to release that tension.

Did it ever happen that you are in a terrible argument with a friend, with bad feelings and bad vibes, when all of a sudden you start laughing?

Something struck you as ridiculous. All the bad feelings disappeared and you saw how absurd the whole fight was.

When we laugh at something, whether it's an idea, a person, or an absurdity -- we destroy it. Like any powerful weapon, therefore, laughter must only be directed against an appropriate target.

Of course, it's cruel to laugh at a crazy person. But go right ahead and laugh at crazy ideas. Laugh also at jealousy, pettiness, and fighting. Whenever you're surrounded by insanity, laugh it off, and you won't fall under its spell.

There is even an official "Jewish day of laughter" The holiday of Purim. (Book of Esther in the Old Testament) We get dressed up in funny costumes and act silly -- which is surprising since the Purim story is all about an impending annihilation of the Jewish people!

Laughter is an opportunity to transcend limitations that blind us to seeing God more clearly. Even when things look bad, even if we're suffering, in some way it has got to be all for the best, because there's a beneficent God behind everything, manipulating events for our good.

So we need a good laugh in order to loosen up, forget our anxieties -- and break down our walls. Then we can reaffirm our belief that God's world is good, and everything will work out.

Today is **22** days of the Omer

Conquering Frustration

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It's a tough world and we have to be persistent. Quitting is giving into frustration. Don't turn back. Accept the frustration as a challenge - and love it!  
~~~~~

Imagine you've just bought a brand-new sports car, and are taking it out for your first drive. As you approach a traffic light, it turns yellow, so you slow down carefully and stop. Suddenly someone bumps you from behind. As if this was not angering enough, the same driver backs up and bumps you again. Now, you're furious! Your beautiful, shiny sports car that cost a year's salary!

You jump out in a rage, ready to let the guy really have it ... when all of a sudden, a 6-foot-10 linebacker steps out of the car.

"Gee, sir," you begin in a much softer tone than originally intended. "It seems that you've hit my car. Are you okay? Do you have insurance?"

How did you shut off your anger so quickly?

On an intellectual level, we understand that anger is counterproductive. We possess the power to control our emotions. No matter how infuriating a situation is, we can put the anger aside and act civilly. Especially when standing up against a 6-foot-10 linebacker.

Joy is one of the greatest tools for eliminating anger and frustration. If we're sad, then we have less patience and tolerance for everything and everybody.

Yesterday when someone stepped on your toe, you may have snapped at him, "Watch where you're going!" But let's say that today you won the lottery and someone steps on your toe. "No problem, friend," you say with a big smile. "Have a nice day!"

Why the difference? Feeling relaxed, confident and upbeat keeps frustration and anger in check. Plus your physical health will benefit as well -- less ulcers, high blood pressure, etc.

Being able to bear frustration is one level of dealing with it. A higher level - often characteristic of those who achieve greatness -- is the resolve to love frustration and work with it!

If you think about it, you'll see that deep down you really do "love frustration." Imagine going out to buy a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. You bring it home, open the box and discover that all the pieces are in numbered order! It's infuriating! Why? Because you paid good money for a box of frustration and they've taken away the challenge!

Life is like a jigsaw puzzle. When you have a complex problem, first try to build the framework, an overall sense of how you want this to ultimately resolve. Then set about solving the puzzle ... one piece at a time.

Today is **23** days of the Omer

The Good Heart

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Human struggle is two conflicting inclinations - to either do the right thing, or to be selfish. Be aware of the inner struggle and increase your capacity to choose good.  
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We all want to be good, but it's not easy. If you ask an evil person and a good person the same question: "Are you a good person?" who do you think is more likely to say, "I'm good?" - the good one or the evil one?

The answer is the evil one! He could kick his own mother in the stomach and still think he's good. You say, "That's terrible! How could you do such a thing?" But he rationalizes and says, "You don't understand. She asked me to take out the garbage. If I do it, who knows what she'll ask for next? This could go on forever!"

The evil person always says that he's right. He doesn't bother trying to be good, so he never feels a struggle. He just assumes that he's good.

By contrast, the person who really tries to be good knows how tough a job it is. And he's always striving for a higher level.

There's a third type: The fully righteous person. He takes out the garbage and says, "It's my pleasure, Mom. You work so hard to take care of us. Thank you for the opportunity to express my appreciation!"

You know it's not right to refuse to take out the garbage, and your heart really wants to be good. But your other heart, the heart of desire, would rather stay inside where it's warm, reading a book in comfort.

Even as you're reading this, your soul is nudging you: "Pay attention - this will make me great!" But your body contradicts: "All this hard work and concentration is too painful. I'm doing just fine the way I am!"

With every decision, the two hearts clash and create a dilemma. To be triumphant in the battle, you have to focus on your innate desire to be good. Make it part of your mindset, and you'll see an observable effect throughout your day. You'll make more mature and effective decisions.

Today is **24** days of the Omer

Search for Wisdom

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Wisdom is what makes the wheels of life spin forward. Don't stagnate. Actively pursue wisdom.  
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There's a lot to learn about living. It may be possible to figure it all out on your own, but that's foolish and time consuming.

To be wise, you can't casually pursue wisdom; you have to actively go after it. More wisdom equals more life, more pleasure, and more meaning. It's the ultimate value. As King Solomon said, "If you desire wisdom like money and buried treasures, then you'll find it!"

Did you ever meet someone who is fascinated by every word the other person speaks, no matter who he is talking to? That's a rich life! As the Sages say: "Who is the wise person? He who learns from all people."

As important as it is to learn wisdom, it is also wise to exercise caution.

Suppose you were in a foreign country - where you had no friends or relatives - and you became sick. You would search with utmost care for a reputable doctor with valid credentials. Your physical health is at stake! We must be equally cautious with whom we entrust our emotional and spiritual health.

There are a lot of ideas out there, and each person has a different way of looking at things. Every creed, society and religion thinks they have the truth - capitalists, Communists, Republicans, Democrats, Jews, Christians, Muslims. The people growing up with these ideologies usually accept what they are taught. So who's right? How do we find truth?

Listen to the wise person, but don't accept him unconditionally. Be critical. If you see contradictions, ask. But give him a fair hearing. Give weight to what he says, even if it goes against your prejudices. Resolve what you don't understand. And then live by the wisdom you are taught.

Today is **25** days of the Omer

No Pain, No Gain

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Pain is an unavoidable reality of life. Don't run away. The key to success is to learn how to accept the pain and grow from it.  
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What is the opposite of pain?

Nine out of 10 people will say, "Pleasure."

Incorrect. The actual opposite of pain is "no pain" - i.e. comfort. And while comfort may be very nice, it is not the ultimate pleasure. A person who goes through life chasing comfort will be very disappointed at the end - because if you spend your life avoiding pain, you will also avoid the deepest pleasures.

As much as everyone tries to minimize pain in life, the fact remains that pain is unavoidable. Everything has its ups and downs. Therefore, if we want to succeed in life, the key is not to eliminate pain entirely (for that is impossible), but rather to learn how to understand and accept the pain.

Often, the fear of pain is worse than the pain itself. An inoculation takes all of one second, but anticipation of the pain can last for hours beforehand.

The biggest fear people have, and the one most important to overcome, is the fear of facing up to reality. People would rather live an illusion than wake up to reality.

Why? Because if reality turns out to be something different than what we're used to, it means having to change our course in life. And that hurts!

Effort is a process that each of us has to go through. We have crucial life lessons to learn, and it's precisely for that reason our souls have come to earth in the first place. Our greatness is found in using our free will to resolve conflict, fight and accomplish. To bite the bullet and not run away.

Today is **26** days of the Omer

Know Your Place

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Every person has a unique contribution to make in this world.  
Figure out who you are, and where you fit into the grand  
scheme.  
~~~~~

Imagine the accountant standing in a roomful of doctors and pontificating on medical science. How foolish he sounds!

A key ingredient in wisdom is to know who you are, and where you fit into the greater scheme of things. Arrogance is a major barrier to growth. The "know-it-all" is smugly satisfied. Realize how little you understand. If you appreciate that wisdom is your most valuable possession, then you'll push for more.

Way #26 is "know your place." Do you know where you stand in relation to others? Realistically evaluate your strengths and weaknesses.

By learning how to make that calculation, you'll know when you're best suited for the job at this moment. If you are, then don't be held back by false modesty. It's your obligation to step forward and take the lead. On the other hand, it also means knowing when others are more suited, and stepping back into your place.

You can think the world of yourself, only to walk into a room of geniuses and find out that you have a lot more to learn. Or you can be down on yourself, only to walk into a room of under-achievers and find out that you're not so bad after all.

The Sages speak about carrying two slips of paper - one in the right pocket and one in the left. On one paper is written: "The entire world was created just for me" (Talmud - Sanhedrin 38a). On the other paper is written the words of Abraham: "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27).

Know your place. Before you begin talking, stop to think: Is this a time to step forward, or a time to step back?

Today is **27** days of the Omer

Happiness

~~~~~  
You can have everything and still be miserable. Or you can have relatively little and feel very rich. Happiness is a state of mind. Develop tools for how to get it.  
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A young man with an unusually happy disposition, was asked his secret. He replied:

"When I was 11 years old, I received a gift of happiness from God.

"I was riding my bicycle when a strong gust of wind blew me onto the ground into the path of an oncoming truck. The truck ran over me and cut off my leg.

"As I lay there bleeding, I realized that I might have to live the rest of my life without a leg. How depressing! But then I realized that being depressed won't get my leg back. So I decided right then and there not to waste my life despairing.

"When my parents arrived at the hospital they were shocked and grieving. So I told them: 'I've already adapted. Now you also have to get used to this.'

"Ever since then, I see my friends getting upset over little things: their bus came late, they got a bad grade on a test, somebody insulted them. But I just enjoy life."

At age 11, this young man attained the clarity that it is a waste of energy to focus on what you are missing. And that the key to happiness is to take pleasure in what you have.

Today is **28** days of the Omer

Protect What Is Precious

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A fence keeps a safe distance from danger. Take precautions. If you find a "hole" in your life, build a fence to avoid stumbling into errors.  
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What is the purpose of a fence? To guard and protect. If there's a hole in the middle of the street, the municipality comes and erects a fence so no one will get hurt by falling in. The fence keeps us safe from danger.

People relate better to specific procedures than to vague dreams and aspirations. So if you have any hope of actualizing a dream make a step-by-step, detailed plan. The more concrete the strategy, the more effectively it will work.

One way successful businesses do this is to have a system for quality control. Any business will rapidly lose market share if some products are shoddy, even if the others are perfect.

Throughout our lives, we cannot allow our performance level to shift every time we run into a problem. The key to success is to remain consistent. People who go through mood swings - up one day, down the next - have a much harder time achieving goals and sustaining relationships.

That's where the fence comes in. Without clear lines of demarcation, people can come up with all types of twisted logic to rationalize their behavior. For example, "my case is an exception," or "it won't affect me," etc.

If we've objectively set a fence, then at the moment of temptation, the door for rationalization is closed. Either something is permitted or it's not. There's no room for debate or subjectivity to color our reasoning.

A key "fence" is to resolve that when you undertake something, you are totally committed to carrying it out.

Every time you fail to follow through with a decision or an idea, you suffer not only from the waste of time, but the lack of self-confidence this creates. It wears away at your sense of credibility. After a while, you won't even make the effort anymore.

Self-esteem is the fuel that drives us to greatness. What could be more valuable? Don't let your self-esteem slide. It's worth protecting!

Today is **29** days of the Omer

The Subtle Traps of Arrogance

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Arrogance stunts spiritual growth. To avoid arrogance, distinguish between pride ("I'm better than the other person") and pleasure ("I'm not better, just fortunate").  
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Imagine winning the million-dollar lottery. You're overjoyed and ecstatic! Will you go around attributing your new wealth to incredible savvy and intelligence? Of course not. On the other hand, if you invent a product that makes a million dollars, you might start thinking a bit too highly of yourself.

There is a positive feeling that comes with accomplishment - and rightly so. But the 48 Ways says: Whenever you accomplish something, distinguish between "pride" and "pleasure."

Pride means: "I did it. This makes me better than other people."

Pleasure means: "Thank God I was given this opportunity to enjoy and to accomplish. I am not better, just fortunate."

Way #29 is "not claiming credit for oneself." Take a few moments and think about something you are really proud of. Does it make you feel more grateful - or more arrogant?

Today is **30** days of the Omer

Be Loved by Others

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The human desire to be loved is deep and natural. The most effective way to be loved.... is to love others. If you give warmth, you'll attract warmth.  
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Whether with family relationships, business partners or friends, the human need to be loved is deep and natural. We need it like oxygen.

Of course, that love has to be earned. King Solomon said: "As water reflects a face, so does a person's heart." In other words, if you project coldness, you will attract coldness; if you give out warmth, you will attract warmth.

Some people say "I can only give to someone I love." This is incorrect. The Hebrew word for "give," *hav*, is the same root as *ahava*, meaning "love." The Jewish idea is that giving is what leads to love. When I give to you, I have invested a part of myself. You then become more precious to me and I love you.

To be loved by others, you must become virtuous in their eyes. Do for them what you'd want them to do for you. This will identify you as a source of pleasure -- and everyone loves those who bring them pleasure!

When people love you, they want to help you become wise and wealthy. They'll invite you to social functions, and patronize your business. They'll give you good advice -- and eagerly accept yours. You will succeed in all areas of life.

Today is **31** days of the Omer

Seek the Ultimate Pleasure

~~~~~  
We can have lots of money, love and power. But no human being is truly satisfied unless he's in touch with the transcendent dimension.  
~~~~~

We all have moments of being struck by the awesomeness of life -- whether the birth of a baby, a canopy of stars above, a piece of majestic music, or a breathtaking sunset.

These experiences are both energizing and calming at the same time. They enable us to break beyond our own limitations and to merge our (relatively) tiny, insignificant selves with the greater infinite unity.

When all is said and done, no human being can be truly satisfied unless he reaches out and connects with the infinite transcendent dimension. We all seek to connect with that which encompasses all pleasures. Because nothing finite, nothing bound up in this world, can compare to the infinite.

Way #31 is Love The Place. In Judaism, God is referred to as The Place because God is not part of the universe, rather "the universe is part of God." He created space; He created time. There is no place where God is not found, and therefore everywhere is in Him. God is The Place because He transcends the entire universe.

If you want meaning and transcendence in life -- and you do -- then keep in mind that God is everywhere at all times, paying attention to you... and waiting for you to pay attention to Him.

Every pleasure you have can be related back to God as the source. Feel His presence constantly.

Today is **32** days of the Omer

Love Humanity

~~~~~  
Imagine having never seen another human being before.  
Realize the beautiful human ability to communicate,  
accomplish, and create. What fantastic gadgets!  
~~~~~

Imagine being on a deserted island and you had never seen another human being before. When you meet one for the first time, you'll be thrilled! He walks, he talks, he thinks. You know he's a gorgeous, incredible reflection of God.

How ironic if you met that same person in your hometown, you'd probably be indifferent.

Our mistake is that we take people for granted. There are so many of them, we get bored.

It's not good enough to love your spouse, or even to love God. You have to also love humanity as a whole. This may seem unfathomable. But it is the Jewish ideal. Hatred and strife are aberrations; peace among mankind is the way it's supposed to be. You'll find it straight in the Five Books of Moses: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

We can connect with, and love all human beings. Appreciate the beauty of the human ability to communicate, to accomplish, to create. This is part and parcel of every human being. They're truly fantastic gadgets!

If you haven't read the full text of any of these writings today's is a must read! I especially like the illustrations given about drilling a hole in a boat and what you do when you cut your finger. Just click, or copy and past the link below, into your browser.

Today is **33** days of the Omer

Fulfill Your Obligations

~~~~~  
Many people grumble about obligations as unpleasant aggravations. But fulfilling obligations helps actualize your potential and is the basis of self esteem.  
~~~~~

Human beings are pleasure-seekers. Most people seek pleasure in careers, vacations, cars and homes. In our generation, many people grumble about obligations as unpleasant aggravations. Perhaps that's why many today wait so long to get married. Imagine being tied down with responsibilities and children to support!

This is a shallow view. It may be difficult to fulfill obligations, but there's tremendous pleasure in getting done what has to get done. You're actualizing your potential. That's real meaning, real pleasure. It's energizing.

Way #33 is "love righteousness." Once you realize the pleasure of fulfilling obligations, it's much easier to carry them out. And if you have to do them anyway, you might as well take pleasure!

Today is **34** days of the Omer

Use Your Inner Guide

~~~~~  
Buried within the subconscious, in the farthest corner of our memory, lies the knowledge of everything we need to know about living. Now bring it to the forefront of your mind.  
~~~~~

We all want to do the right thing. Nobody wakes up in the morning and says, "I want to be bad." Even the criminal will try to justify his behavior as "good."

Yet if everyone claims to be doing "good," how do we know objectively whether we're doing good or not?

We can't simply look at the norm to gauge what's straight and not. We have to check it out for ourselves. We need a basic set of ethical laws for guidance. But that's not enough. Since circumstances constantly change, laws cannot be legislated to cover every possible case. So we have to cultivate an inner sense of the right thing to do.

Way #34 is "love the straight path." Don't blindly follow society's idea of "what's right." People tend to the path of least resistance, and the more difficult approach is often the "true" one.

Today is **35** days of the Omer

Love Criticism

~~~~~  
Criticism is usually seen as a personal attack. But think of what an Olympic athlete willingly endures from coaches! To reach your potential, seek constructive criticism.  
~~~~~

Do you love criticism? Probably not. Most people see criticism as a personal attack which triggers all kinds of defense mechanisms.

Way #35 is Ohev et ha'toch'achot -- literally "love criticism." Sounds ridiculous? Actually, a business will pay big money to hire consultants to tell them everything they're doing wrong! They'll hang a suggestion box -- and if there's a chance to improve business even the words of the janitor are considered by the CEO.

So why does that same CEO get angry when he comes home and hears suggestions from his wife?! The answer is that he's focused on making more money, but may not be focused on becoming a better person.

Realize that every mistake carries with it a negative consequence. By helping to clarify the personality flaw that caused the mistake, criticism can save you from future loss. Your friend will tell you when you've got spinach stuck in your teeth, while your enemy will smirk and say you look great! As the Sages say: "Better the criticism of a friend, than the kiss of an enemy."

Today is **36** days of the Omer

Handling Social Pleasure

~~~~~  
Don't spend your life trying to impress others. Because even if you convince others that you're great, have you convinced yourself?  
~~~~~

There once was a young man who always talked with his head tilted a bit sideways, because somebody once told him he had the profile of a famous actor. Most people didn't think he had an actor's profile; they thought he had a screw loose.

This is what happens when making an impression on others determine our actions. It's human nature to seek recognition for our achievements. Whatever we're proud of, we want others to know about it, too. Next time you're in a conversation, see how long it takes the other person (and yourself!) to start mentioning personal accomplishments.

Why are we so eager to impress people? Humans are hungry for meaning. But sometimes we don't reach the level we ought to. So we need to compensate with an artificial boost from others.

If people say that you're great, you can become convinced. A movie star who believes his fan mail is in trouble. Because he's built a house of cards. And when he falls, he'll fall hard.

Chasing after honor is a sign that you don't sufficiently respect yourself. It's like saying, "I might not amount to much, but if I can make others think I do, then I'm worth something." But it's not true. It's chasing "fool's gold" -- yellow and glittery, but worthless. Deep down you feel like a fraud.

Way #36 is "keep far from honor." It teaches us not to look to others for recognition, but to find it within ourselves. Figure out what you think is meaningful in life, and use that to drive you to greatness. People who are satisfied with themselves don't need public recognition to reassure their worth.

This is a classic body-soul conflict. The body is happy with the illusion that others think we're important. But the soul looks for what is truly meaningful. The body says: "Let's be important for the moment." The soul says: "Let's make it real." The body balks at the challenges involved. The soul knows the right thing to do.

Today is **37** days of the Omer

Never Be Bored

~~~~~  
Don't take life for granted. Don't casually accept the ecosystem, communication, gravity... Look for fresh insights. Reawaken the mystery.  
~~~~~

"I know that already...I've heard it all before...That old stuff is boring..."

Imagine losing your eyesight for a year, and then suddenly regaining it. The joy is boundless. Every "sight" becomes a point of focus and fascination.

People usually get tired of life when their ideas become fixed. The 48 Ways says that eternal youth is granted to those who are always willing to grow. Whatever your age, occupation, or station in life -- be fascinated with learning.

When we become used to something, we tend to overlook its intrinsic beauty. It loses its glisten and sparkle. Way #37 is "Never be satiated with your learning" -- in other words, don't let yourself slip into complacency.

Don't assume that your viewpoint is the only way. You may have heard an idea a thousand times before, but then someone presents it from a slightly different angle, and you say, "That's amazing -- I never thought of that before!" Listen to every concept as if hearing it for the first time. You'll be amazed at the deeper levels yet to discover.

Whatever you know, there is still more to understand about love, meaning, pleasure. Never be satisfied with your level. The more you learn, the more you realize how much there is to know! We only tap into a small percent of our potential.

Today is **38** days of the Omer

Responsible Decisions

~~~~~  
Every conscious moment is another decision. The cumulative impact determines the overall quality of life. And the most important decision is "What am I living for?"  
~~~~~

Some people think that decisions are made every once in a while, when a major issue comes up. But really all of life -- every conscious moment -- is another decision. From the instant we wake up, we begin to decide: What will I eat for breakfast? How will I greet my boss today? Even if we yawn, turn over and go back to sleep -- that's also a decision.

The cumulative impact of decisions, even though each is individually small, is what determines the overall quality of life. Way #38 is "don't take decisions lightly."

Of course, different decisions have different impacts. If you don't visit Disneyland, you miss out on Mickey Mouse. But if you don't acquire wisdom for a successful marriage, it can have tragic consequences.

For living, be serious. Ask yourself: What am I going to do today? This week? This year? What am I doing with my life? What are the possibilities? What can a human being achieve?

Today is **39** days of the Omer

Share the Burden

~~~~~  
A broken heart is worse than a broken arm. Sensitize yourself to the pain of others. It will give you renewed awareness and energy for living.  
~~~~~

When you're feeling down, has anyone ever slapped you on the back and said, "C'mon, cheer up -- you've got everything to live for!" You probably felt like clocking him. Why? Because even though he's trying to help, he doesn't feel where you're at.

Way #39 is "carry your friend's burden." In other words, be aware and share the pain of others. You can't cruise through life as if it's an obstacle course: watch out, here's a human being, manipulate him, score a point, one upmanship. That's not the way. You have to share the burden.

When someone is physically hurt, everyone jumps for bandages, water, CPR, whatever it takes. But when the pain is emotional or spiritual, if someone is depressed and suffering, we don't know what to do. So we avoid the situation. Yet these are the times we should go beyond ourselves to share another's pain. Because in truth, a broken heart is worse than a broken arm.

Be aware that everyone has dozens of burdens they're struggling with (whether they're conscious of them or not) -- problems of self-respect, unfulfilled plans, failures, doubts, inadequacies. That's all part of the challenge of sorting through life.

If you want to live in a "humane" world, you've got to get out of yourself and feel other people's problems. You can't live blindfolded in a world where "there's no one else except me." That's uncivilized... barbaric...

Today is **40** days of the Omer

Make Others Meritorious

~~~~~  
We all live in this world together. It's easy to take responsibility when someone is in physical danger. You're just as obligated when he's in spiritual danger.  
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Imagine you're staying at a hotel, and a guy in the next room climbs over the balcony and is going to jump. Will you step forward to help? Or will you stand aside and enjoy the excitement as the crowd yells "Jump! Jump!"

You know that you care. So what are you going to do to help? If he asks you, "Why shouldn't I jump," what are you going to say? Beyond this, do you even have the right to stop him if he wants to jump?

It's not enough just to "feel" another's problems. You've got to actually do something to help. The idea is not to "explain" or "preach" to someone who needs help. Be genuinely interested. Showing interest earns the trust of others, and makes them more open to you. Even if you don't tell people directly how to make their lives better, just the fact that you care develops their admiration for you, and allows them to learn from your good habits.

Today is **41** days of the Omer

Getting Into Reality

~~~~~  
There's something really breathtaking about life. Wouldn't you rather experience love than watch it in a movie? Get into reality. It's the real thing.  
~~~~~

Too many people today are living an illusion. They'll escape into the fabricated world of a movie, or into a virtual reality experience.

But isn't the most beautiful reality the one that's real? Isn't it better to see a fantastic sunset than watch it in a movie? To experience the thrill of adventure rather than simulate it in an amusement park? To achieve greatness rather than hallucinate you're Cleopatra?

Everyone has a sneaking suspicion there's something truly breathtaking about life.

So why are so many people miserable? Because they're not focused on reality. A person can create the impression that his act is together, though in reality he's deluding himself. Reality itself is absolute. At any moment, it's either night or day. You can sleep through reality, and choose not relate to it. But that's still what it is.

Way #41 is "set him into truth." Don't live a life of illusions. Get into reality. It's the real thing.

Today is **42** days of the Omer

Peace of Mind

~~~~~  
The world can be in turmoil, but a person can be at peace with himself. To attain internal equilibrium, focus on the needs of your soul.  
~~~~~

Everyone is pro-peace. But when Jews hail each other with that famous greeting, Shalom Aleichem -- "peace unto you" -- it really refers to a wish for inner peace. Because all the pleasures in the world are just stepping stones to peace of mind.

Way #42 is literally "set people at peace."

The Hebrew word for peace -- shalom -- comes from shalem, which means wholeness, completion and perfection. Real peace is much more than a cessation of war. In fact, peace of mind is independent of external circumstances. The world can be in turmoil, but a person can be at peace with himself. And vice versa: The world can be peaceful, but a person can be torn up inside.

Everybody at some time or another has felt inner conflict. This usually surfaces when a moral decision has to be made. The greater the moral decision, the greater the inner conflict.

The source of this battle is between the two opposing "human natures" of body and soul. The body gravitates toward transitory comforts and sensual pleasures. It desires to quit, to dream, to drown in passions, to procrastinate. The body says: Give me some food, warmth, a pillow. Let me take it easy.

The soul, on the other hand, desires meaning, accomplishment, permanence, greatness, reality and truth.

These two forces clash. We want to be tough, but we feel like being marshmallows. We want to be great, but we don't feel like making the effort. We want to be independent, but we feel like being seduced.

And even when we're not aware of it, this conflict is raging within us. Peace only comes when we resolve that inner strife.

Today is **43** days of the Omer

Fascination with Living

~~~~~  
Children live in a natural state of awe. To reclaim that energy, identify what fascinates you the most about life. Set goals for living and pursue them with relentless fascination.  
~~~~~

We've all experienced fascination so great that we're sitting on the edge of our seat. It could be a rollercoaster ride, or a brilliant lecturer, or a breathtaking scene. At that moment we are totally engaged in the thrill of living.

That's why a crisis -- though frightening -- is so stimulating. It demands 100 percent attention, a full unison of heart and mind. Imagine if you can reproduce that sensation in everyday life -- you'll be flying high!

Way #43 is "settle studies in your heart." This means that when you begin any activity, don't just bring your body along. Make sure your mind and heart are there, too. Connect your emotional needs to your intellectual appreciation. Otherwise, life is only half an experience.

Be completely absorbed in whatever you're doing. Whether you're studying geometry, cooking dinner, or raising your children -- be fascinated. Because when we're fascinated, we have a better attention span, greater retention -- and in the end we'll do a better job.

Today is **44** days of the Omer

Analyze the Issues

~~~~~  
The best defense against abuse is to question what you see.  
Use your intellect to uncover inconsistencies, irregularities  
and rationalizations.  
~~~~~

In today's world, if someone asks, "How are you," the standard answer is "fine." In fact, a Jewish joke defines "nudnick" (a bore or nuisance) as someone who, when asked how he is, actually tells you!

Way #44 is "asking and answering."

Basic questions can be applied to everything in life:

1. Define: What is the issue?
2. Deliberate: Why is this important to me?
3. Apply: What am I going to do about it?

We sometimes act in a way which contradicts our beliefs. "Questions and answers" helps us uncover our own inconsistencies and rationalizations.

There's a Jewish saying: "Nobody ever died from a question." This means don't be afraid to ask. There's nothing noble about remaining silent... and ignorant.

Through analyzing, a person takes a concept from the abstract and makes it real. And that's making life fresh and alive.

Today is **45** days of the Omer

Expand Your ideas

~~~~~  
Whenever you learn a piece of wisdom, extract what's relevant to your life. Develop it. Take it to its ultimate conclusions. Live with it.  
~~~~~

Information comes at us from many different sources. But at which point does someone else's idea become something we can call our own?

Way #45 is "understand and add." It's not enough to hear an idea. Study it, develop it, and add new dimensions. And then live with it. Only then will the idea become part of you.

Hearing a new idea means more than just listening with your ears. Hearing means to absorb the idea on a level that impacts you, and gets into your heart. When an idea reaches your heart, you're jolted into action.

Whenever you hear an idea, move it a little and make it your own. Moving an idea into another dimension makes it something altogether different, something real, alive and functional. And this is part and parcel of the unique human exercise of "free will."

Today is **46** days of the Omer

Learn In Order To Teach

~~~~~  
Don't grow only for yourself. If you have some worthwhile information, share it. By reaching others, you will reach yourself.  
~~~~~

Whatever you learn -- from books, lectures, or life experience -- do so with the goal of sharing with others. If it was fascinating, how did it change you? What did it teach you about living? And how can you transfer that insight to others?

Way #46 is "learn in order to teach." Don't grow only for yourself. If it's worthwhile, share it.

Imagine you're walking down the street and meet a space alien. He says, "I have come from a faraway galaxy to communicate an important message to earthlings." What's the first thing you'll do? "I have to tell everyone about this! What universe did you say you come from? How do you spell your name? Let me see those tentacles, do they really work?"

You begin weighing, thinking, analyzing, and focusing -- all because you have an audience waiting for your words.

Apply this technique to all life experiences. If you're returning from a vacation, think about what message you want to convey to your friends back home. Whatever you're doing -- at the zoo, a wedding, or reading the newspaper -- keep asking yourself: What is the value of this information? What does this teach me about life?

Take every opportunity. The next time you go to a concert, imagine you're a music critic for The New York Times. Everyone is eagerly awaiting your comments. They're going to translate it into Russian and Chinese. Do you see how this will affect your experience? Every wave of the baton, every crash of the cymbal will have your rapt attention. You're invigorated!

The idea of teaching makes many people uncomfortable. We may feel inadequate: Who am I to teach? I don't know enough yet. I'm far from perfect myself!

These are rationalizations. Because in fact, nobody is perfect.

The best teachers make mistakes; more at the beginning, less later on. It's like riding a bike or driving a car -- the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Nobody ever became a great teacher without flopping a few times. Just get started and teach as best you can. It will do wonders to help clarify your own viewpoint.

Today is **47** days of the Omer

Learn In Order To Do

~~~~~  
The whole point of wisdom is to make life better. There is no greater waste than to have a bunch of great ideas, and not to use them.  
~~~~~

When it comes to money and power, people are drawn toward wisdom. But when it comes to life lessons, people often don't pay as much attention.

Yet if you ask someone -- "Would you rather be wealthy and miserable, or poor and happy?" -- most people will say they'd rather be poor and happy. Why? Because the point of money is to be happy!

So why are so many people dedicating their lives to becoming rich, despite split family life, ruined health, moral compromise and other sacrifices of happiness involved in gaining that wealth?

It comes from the failure to translate an intellectual concept into practical reality. If an idea makes sense and promises you more effectiveness in living -- and you don't implement it -- that's crazy. It's living on two different levels, disconnected from reality.

The Sages say that when a person makes a mistake, he is temporarily insane. People wasting time, fighting with their own children, wallowing in depression and misery. That's crazy.

Way #47 is "learn in order to do." The whole job of living is to put into practice what you know. That's the difference between "philosophy" and "wisdom." You can learn the nicest ideas in the world and pontificate all day long. But if you don't apply them, you're a bit crazy.

Talk is cheap. Action takes commitment. If you undertake a deep commitment to change, it will positively impact the rest of your life.

Today is **48** days of the Omer

Educating the Educators

~~~~~  
Don't swallow wholesale what others say. Check it out. Ask questions. Does it make sense?  
~~~~~

Salespeople gain savvy each time a customer poses a new question -- challenging the salesperson to become smarter each time. Teachers are also in sales, trying to market an idea.

Way #48 is "make your teacher wise." Way #10 talked of the need to pick the right teacher. But that is only the beginning. We need to sharpen our teacher to achieve the maximum learning experience.

Don't be afraid to challenge. If your teacher has the truth, he is happy when his students are critical.

By questioning and challenging your teacher to articulate his position, you're actually sharpening him. As one of the great Sages said: "I learned a lot from my teachers. I learned even more from my study partners. But I learned the most from my students."

Today is **49** days of the Omer

Organize Your Mind

~~~~~  
The human brain is a sophisticated filing cabinet. How will you access that information? Organize what you know!  
~~~~~

Upon completing the 48 Ways, there is an additional crucial step: Organization.

Imagine an office where paperwork flows each day. The only way everything will be accessible is with a good filing system. You search for an urgent document... Frustration builds as you grasp for information you know is there, but cannot find. It's buried in a pile!

So too, the human brain is an extremely sophisticated office into which new information is constantly flowing. You've learned so many important lessons about living -- friendship, spirituality, business, coping with disappointments, patience, handling money, etc. It becomes a mass of unmanageable details. Where will you file it? How will you access that information in the future?

That's why the 48 Ways has an extra Way #49 -- "think over what you've heard."

If you can't process new info on the spot, then at the end of each day, review the main things you learned. For example, if you read a good article, verbalize the main points, and whatever you find valuable -- file it!

Furthermore, set aside time for review of what you learned. It's easy to forget things when you're not dealing with them on a daily basis. Reviewing not only helps you remember, but will reveal an interconnectness of ideas that you didn't see when learning things the first time.

Today is **Shavuot (Pentecost)**. It's the anniversary of Moses receiving the gift of the 10 Commandments on Mt Sinai over 3000 years ago. It's also the day Jesus' disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues and perform miracles. Today is a day to pause and be grateful for the gifts we are receiving.

The Rewards of Gratitude

~~~~~  
Acknowledge your gifts and be grateful to the source.  
Because if you know from whom you're receiving, you can  
always go back for more.  
~~~~~

In order to properly appreciate anything, we assess its value. That's why when someone gives us a material gift, we usually have no problem showing gratitude.

The 48 Ways says: Acknowledge spiritual gifts, too. Wisdom is certainly more valuable than gold, and the secret of happiness is more precious than a diamond!

As an exercise, make a list of the ideas you regularly espouse, along with the original sources you heard them from. Think of people who gave you wisdom for living. Did a friend set you straight on something? Your brother saved you from doing some stupid things? An employer gave you good career advice?

Now, let the source know how much you appreciate it. Consider as if the "thank you" is payment for the good idea. Enjoy paying this debt, don't loathe paying it. The pleasure that you'll give the other person is small payback for such an enormous gift!

When you acknowledge the source, you don't lose, you win. To fully appreciate a piece of wisdom, an insight into living, acknowledge the gift. Because by denying the gift, you downgrade its value. Therefore you won't apply it seriously -- because to you it doesn't have value.

Furthermore, if you are consciously aware of where your wisdom is coming from, then you're much more likely to go get more.

Direct others to the source as well. Let everybody know. When somebody else is happy, it doesn't steal any happiness from you. Actually, the more people who are happy, the easier it is for you to be happy.

When there's more wisdom around, the greater life becomes for us all.

Glossary

Mitzvah – Good deed

Omer – Unit of measure

Shabbat – Jewish Sabbath, day of rest

Shavuot – Holiday taking place 50 days after the beginning of Passover. Also known as Pentecost. Day the Torah was given to Moses. Day the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples.

Talmud – Books of commentary on the Torah

Torah – First 5 books of the Bible

Tzaddik – Righteous person. A title generally given to those who are considered to be righteous such as a spiritual master

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