

To : Shauna L Shapiro <shapiros@U.Arizona.EDU>,
hustjen@aol.com,
santerre@U.Arizona.EDU,
b_huston@hotmail.com,
jshap2000@aol.com
Cc : Johanna Shapiro <jfshapir@uci.edu>,
nswaynekc@aol.com,
"Deane H. SHAPIRO" <dhshapir@uci.edu>,
grossmnpd@cs.com

7 weeks
OMER

----- Attachment: -----
Subject : LOVE!
----- Message Text -----

Hi gang,

I'm writing this on April 26, the last day of the first week of counting the omer (the time between passover and shavuot---). We have crossed the Reed sea, are in a higher, new state of consciousness, have left the slavery of our narrow places, and GUESS WHAT!....we're not completely happy!

Yup, we're in the desert now, the wilderness. Basically, what has happened is we have left one state of consciousness, are in a new, higher state, but feel a bit adrift. This is new. We are pioneering, seeking the "promised land"; we have left enslavements, freedom from "bad habits" but have not yet "chosen" that to which we want to give our freedom---freedom for what? What higher, deeper purpose.

And further, in the wilderness, some of us (or some part of us)---as in the bible, begin to complain---oops, maybe I was happier back in the narrow place. At least it was familiar; I may have been a slave, but I was relatively safe. This is so scary in the wilderness....

So, the counting of the Omer gives us a framework for our travels in the wilderness. As noted, the first week, the major energy to look for is CHESED. LOVE. in fact, this whole past week has been the week of love.

And if you look with those glasses, you see so much love. Mom and I felt it in each of your homes, the warmth of the Seder, the love between parents and children, between Brett and Jena, between Shauna and Craig; further, I don't believe it's any coincidence that Nancy and Barry's wedding anniversary came during this week of love; and today, mom and I are celebrating our 30th anniversary. We started it playfully, then went out to breakfast watching the ocean (and eating great almond filled danish from Nancy!); we then walked down to the water (on an empty beach near coyote grille, and meditated, then did yoga together) (mom is so cute doing yoga!). Today is the last day of the week of love, and the minor energy, is malkhut---kingdom, majesty, surrender. Mom and I feel part of our love with each other is like a kingdom, it's majestic, and it involves surrender, in the context of love; what a wonderful energy for us for this day of celebration.

We thank each of you for your love; and wish you the same energy.

Attchmnt:

Subject : Strength, boundaries, respect: Week Two

----- Message Text -----

We are now in the second week of our journey in the wilderness. It is still critically important that we keep open to and willing to examine ourselves as we journey from slavery and our narrow places, to our "higher self": Mt Sinai. Leaving our narrow places (Egypt) and crossing the Reed sea does not mean there are no more "narrow places." As noted, the Israelites began to whine and complain--why did we leave, this is too hard, how unfair, etc.

The first week we examined the sacred energy of love. That was in some ways quite simple. This week, for me, is more complicated. How do boundaries, strength, reflect part of the sacred journey. Partly this seems sort of the law and order, rules and regulations energy. As Lao-Tzu said, you can't break the river into pieces, rather the river is one, and flows naturally. How can we see this strength and boundaries as sacred, healing, and helpful?

One way is to investigate where we find boundaries and strength in our life to be helpful. Craig's Zen garden is beautiful, flowing, delicate, yet it has firm boundaries of large rocks which delineate it. The Yin/Yang symbol of Lao-tzu has a dark and white area (each of which has a small circle of the opposite color within it.) Harmony is formed by boundaries graciously and gracefully intertwining. Even Lao-Tzu's river is only a river because of the banks.

But as we ground it further in our own lives, using our strength, setting boundaries (recognizing our own and other's limits) often is a difficult task. It is easy to become defensive when someone tries to set boundaries on us, (often by giving us feedback which they perceive to be constructive about some aspect of our behavior). And when we seek to set boundaries, how do we feel inside; is there some part that feels uncomfortable, which would rather just let the issue go. Since this is the week of strength and boundaries, our task is to investigate this energy, not let it go. Similarly, our task is to try to not get defensive when we receive feedback, but rather to notice how we handle it. All this is part of continuing our self-exploration, which we began in preparation for Passover, for leaving our narrow places.

I like to think of Gandhi's Satyagraha (truth force) as the model par excellence of strength and boundary wisdom. Gandhi felt that it was critical to show one's strength, to set boundaries --e.g., of self-determination. In the case of India and Britain, he stood up strongly (though non-violently) to Britain's colonial rule. He felt what they were doing was wrong, and they needed to hear that. However, he said, you should always respect the inner "oneness" of all, so that even as you fight against your "enemy--in this case, the British), you also respect your enemy. How much more so with loved ones! He also said that self-determination in the political sphere required self-awareness, and self-determination in the personal sphere: i.e., we need to try practicing what we preach!

Giving feedback, setting boundaries, exploring the range and limits of our strength needs to be done as part of the sacred path, recognizing, honoring, and respecting those with whom we set boundaries: whether it is part of our self, a loved one, a colleague, or in the political sphere. In that way power can be seen as sacred, strength and boundaries as tools which aid us while we continue the second week of our journey in the wilderness, moving toward Sinai.

As you are willing, give yourself permission to notice this week how and if these issues come up for you. If they do, honor them, explore them, and just maybe it's not coincidental that they come up for us at this time!

Cc : Johanna Shapiro (jfshapir@uci.edu),
nswaynekc@aol.com,
grossmnpd@cs.com,
vdaaei@aol.com,
wmikulas@uwf.edu,
rwalsh@uci.edu

Attchmnt:

Subject : VICTORY.....!?!
----- Message Text -----

We are now in week four of our journey in the wilderness. The spiritual energy of this week is victory.

Victory?!

I've been meditating on why would there be that energy in the middle of our journey from passover (leaving narrow places--freedom from enslavement) to shavuot (freedom to surrender ourselves to a higher vision). First, we're in the middle of the wilderness and we're still struggling with the narrow places which, though we are supposed to have left behind in Egypt, still seem to resurface. Victory energy hardly seems that salient. More like confused energy! Secondly, what comes up for you when you think of "victory?" At least at first glance, it doesn't seem like a very spiritual energy--fun, energizing, exciting, competent--but spiritual?

But Rebbe Nachman says all the energies during this seven week period are spiritual, and if we look closely, we will see that each week has a special energy that can help us on our journey. Ok, I'm willing to try, let's see what might be spiritual about victory this week. It's actually been pretty helpful the past three weeks: love, boundaries, beauty and harmony.

My first insight came from Josh's cat, and from a statement Johanna reminded me: (which is purported to be from the Talmud): We don't see the world as it is, we see the world as we are. Josh's cat beautifully illustrates this: at different times during the day I can be peacefully sitting/meditating in the living room. Sometimes Zoey the cat will come over to me, purring, and she seems to think I'm mother cat. She wants cuddles and strokes, brushing up against me. Later, I can be in exactly the same position, breathing peacefully and barely moving, and she will stalk me, attacking, jumping all over me (I've now changed from mother cat to prey). Still later, still peaceful, still breathing, she will back off, arch her back, and retreat (I am now predator)!

Just as Zoey the cat seems (at least anthropomorphically) to have many sides, or selves, so do we have many sides, or selves (or perspectives). The seven spiritual energies (sephira--which comes from the Hebrew root meaning saffire, or sacred energy--and which, interestingly is also the same root as for shapiro!) can be seen as manifestations of these different perspectives. They can help us see the many parts of ourselves, the many aspects of spiritual energy that make up a holy weaving, or journey.

So, if we put on the glasses of week four, victory, and understand them to be sacred glasses, we can see sacred "victories" all around. Some examples that have come to me in the past twenty-four hours: Last night mom and I went to Shabbat kallah singing services. We felt the "victory" of having survived lovingly another month together, to be able to share the service; we felt the "victory" of blessing our children, and those who love them. We felt the victory of being able to hold hands, knowing the blessing, and effort and grace it takes for love to occur.

This Shabbat morning I went to my spot by the ocean to do yoga and meditation, and felt the "victory" that at least some parts of my body are still flexible; I picked up a couple pieces of glass, and felt the small victory of helping heal and clean up the world (tikkun olam).

on a variety of prompts that each saw the world "how they were." For example, when asked to give "causal attributions" (ie. to say why) people were poor, conservatives generally said it was because they were lazy, not willing to work, trying to get something for nothing; liberals generally said it was because they had had bad luck, and attributed it to circumstances beyond the person's control. What was fascinating was that neither group knew anything about the poor person, and so what they saw was not the poor person, but their own views! This to me is an example of what I might call people seeking "false" victory--not seeing the world in its multifaceted complexity, but rather seeking to impose often "limited" ideas on others as a way of achieving "victory." We all do this, but the more we are open to understanding ourselves, and our own narrow places and biases, the more, I believe, we can begin to contribute to a more enlightened, thoughtful, and sacred dialogue in the political arena....

The second example is from Beethoven's Ninth, the "Ode to Joy." Mom and I have tickets to hear this performed at the end of the month. I've found that the more familiar I am with the music, the better I enjoy it at a live performance. So, each Sabbath I'm now spending time listening to it. Last week, during the "energy" of beauty and harmony, that is what I heard. Particularly in the fourth movement, I felt a chill, and even some tears, at the majesty of the music. There were several times I thought for sure the music was going to stop; it had reached such a magnificent crescendo. But it seemed like Beethoven didn't want to end it, and another incredible moving, beautiful, harmonious, uplifting passage followed.

This morning I listened again. This week, though, I was focusing on victory. Listening to the music, I felt wonder at the human spirit in general that such music could be created, and appreciated; what a triumph over despair. Then, I realized that Beethoven composed that music while deaf. He gave to the world what he could not hear played. What a victory over self-pity and self-doubt!

I began to think that maybe the reason the world victory is in the middle of the seven week journey (three weeks have passed since Passover, and after his week there are three more to go)--is to remind us to notice the small sacred victories. We have not completely broken all our bad habits, our narrow places that we became aware of pre-passover. But we have tried, and in some cases, we have made some progress. This is a week to honor and acknowledge our little victories, our overcoming some denial, gaining some greater awareness, engaging in a few degrees more compassion and caring. Yes, we're still in the wilderness, but yes, we can acknowledge and honor our progress on the journey.

Further, we can begin to see that "who we are" or better yet, "who we choose to be" or even perhaps better yet: "what sacred energy we allow to be manifest through us" will color and affect how we see the world. Two more examples, one from politics, one from Beethoven's ninth. I read an article this week that did a large scale research project on those who identified themselves as "conservative" and "liberal." The results showed

So, as we all journey in the wilderness during this fourth week, let's keep our eyes open for sacred victory energy big and small. We can begin to see how some of the energies of previous weeks combine: victory in love, victory in setting boundaries, victory in recognizing beauty and harmony.

Sometimes a victory will be pushing ourselves to be one step more open, more risk-taking; sometimes a victory will be the ability to let go, yield, surrender, forgive. Know that this week in particular, such victories are indeed sacred, and should be especially appreciated!

Attchmnt:

Subject : GLORY!.....HALLEL-YA! *Week 5*

----- Message Text -----

This week's sacred energy is glory (hod). It is a true gift---our task this week is to look for places in life where we perceive glory as a sacred energy. I take this to mean "God's" glory. Even as we are still in the wilderness (week five), and even if things may seem desolate and discouraging, our task is to find "glory."

The term halleluja comes from the hebrew words hallel (praise) ya (God). Our task this week is to find ways to praise God.

There is a profound psychological lesson in this week's energy. A few days ago I read a brilliant, scholarly article on the laws of emotion by a Dutch psychologist. One of the laws (technically title the law of hedonic asymmetry) basically says that in our natural state, emotions works as follows: when we have a good emotion, it passes relatively quickly. When we have a negative emotion, it can last a long long time! Think of your own experience. When something great happens, how long can you keep the excitement and joy of that great feeling alive. She says that joy naturally and quickly dissipates. But now think of a negative emotion: fear, greed, anger.....it's much easier to keep those emotions going for quite some time!!!

She argues that emotions exist for the sake of signalling states of the world that have to be responded to or that no longer need response or action. Once the no more action signal has sounded (i.e., if we get joy),

then the signalling system can be switched off. "That the net ~~qu~~ life, by consequences tends to be more negative is an unfortunate result. It shows that the human mind was not made for happiness, but for biological survival."

She does say, however, that this law, though natural, is not unavoidable, and can be counteracted.

The way to do this is by the effort of noting consciously and constantly as many positive things as you can on a daily basis. In Judaism, there are blessings for noting positive. The simple one is "baruch HaShem"---blessed is "the name." This is a way of saying, praise God, or Hallel-ja.

Our task this week is to look for ways to praise God, of seeing God's glory in our daily life. Words that come to mind are gratitude, thankfulness, grace, forgiveness, trust. All are ways to see the Glory of "God" and to give thanks for that glory. As our Dutch psychologist says "Enduring happiness seems possible, and it can be understood theoretically (!). However, note that it does not come naturally, by itself. It takes effort.

..... (Each energy has a positive aspect and a negative one. The potential negative one of glory is Pride." When we think of pride, we normally think of it as overconfidence, egotism. But pride also implies that we feel we can and must do it ourselves. But feeling that we are totally responsible for the outcome, though at times may be a useful belief system, can also be a problematic one.

For example, note your own energy now that we are ~~6~~ five weeks past Passover.I note mine is one of a little tiredness.....five weeks seems a long time in the wilderness.

^ Even though I see some progress and can acknowledge movement in a positive direction, there have also been battles, difficulties, obstacles. Sometimes I feel my own energy diminishing. The sacred energy of this week provides a wonderful antidote and counterbalance. Our task is focus primarily on the noting the glory of what is.....and saying praise for the energy of the universe that nourishes us and those around us.

Halleluya! Hallel Ya!

Subject : the mountain is in sight!.....

----- Message Text -----

I'm noticing a shift in energy....the last five weeks since Passover have been an effort to stay mindful of the narrow places that have been left. This has involved an effort to "discard" the past. Looking toward the future was less clear. There has almost been a sense of placing one foot before the other, going forth in the wilderness with a sort of blind trust that there is some "promised land" at the end.

But now, the energy feels like it is shifting. There are only two weeks until Shavuot. Almost miraculously, there is a renewed hope and energy. Shavuot represents, individually and collectively, a sacred encounter, an altered state experience in which we receive, understand, uncover, and/or discover a deeper wisdom and truth.

And this truth is not as much about leaving enslavements (freedom from our narrow places), but about freedom to surrender ourselves to a higher wisdom and understanding.

This week's sacred energy is yesod, which can be translated as FOUNDATION, OR LOYALTY. The question we need to ask ourself is what is our foundation, to what we are committed and loyal. We can look at this energy in itself, or with respect to the energy of the other weeks: e.g., one day looking at what is our foundation and where is our loyalty with respect to LOVE; a second day looking at what are our foundational loyalty to BOUNDARIES, VALUES. Where do we draw the line for that which we believe.

Next week's energy (the last week) is Malkhut: which can be translated as kingdom, or surrender. Putting these two weeks together, You can see, and feel the shift.....what is the deepest sacred wisdom, our inner kingdom, our values, to which we are willing to surrender ourselves.

I almost feel these last two weeks as a connected unity....looking for our foundation where we are willing to be loyal; in finding that we find our kingdom, that to which we are willing to surrender ourselves....We have gone from freedom from narrow places, and that has given us the strength to go to the higher level of freedom to: freedom to surrender to the deepest wisdom, values, to which we can aspire.

We've been preparing for Shavuot, in some ways, since the weeks before Passover. In the spiritual Jewish tradition, our preparations now deepen.

One way some have suggested is through our eating: whereas Passover is a feast, during the days before Shavuot, some turn to a more sparse, vegetarian diet. The point is less the content of what is done, but a way to show our selves a sign that we are preparing, cleansing, purifying ourselves to be open to the wisdom that we are about to receive.

This week, notice what is the core, the foundation that either is in your life, or that you would like to be in your life; to which you want to commit, in freedom, your "loyalty."

Further, begin to think of ways you might want to give a concrete signal to yourself, especially next week, and the few days before Shavuot, that you are preparing and opening yourself to the possibility of receiving a sacred wisdom experience....

With blessings of love and peace for the week.