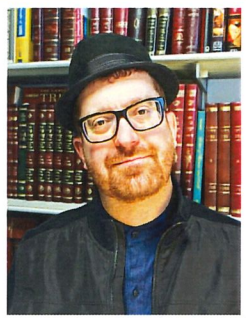


Living Our 'Mattering Map' (One Scoop at a Time): Tasting Each Day Journeying Through the *Omer*

Rav Aubrey Glazer



Every year, just as we're brushing the last crumbs of *matzah* off the table and rediscovering the *chametz* we were certain we cleaned, the Jewish calendar hands us a spiritual practice that is both beautifully simple and surprisingly slippery: count the days. One by one. All forty-nine of them. It sounds easy enough—after all, we can track our steps, our screen time, and the exact number of minutes until Shabbat—but the *Omer* has a way of

humbling even the most organized among us. Miss one night, and suddenly you're negotiating with yourself about whether "I definitely meant to count" counts.

But maybe that's the secret. The *Omer* isn't about perfection; it's about presence. It's about learning to make time count—not by squeezing more into our days, but by becoming more receptive to the life already unfolding within them. And this year, as our community takes on the *Omer* Challenge, we're adding a Dayton twist: count each night with your favorite flavor of Graeter's ice cream in mind, and mark your progress on the *Omer* Chart. Because nothing says "spiritual discipline" quite like a scoop of Black Raspberry Chocolate Chip—which you can taste together with your Beth Abraham family if you count all the way to *Shavuot*, when we'll meet at Graeter's on Far Hills on Thursday, May 21 at 5 PM, just before our *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*.

This invitation to make time sweet is more than a cute gimmick. It's actually a doorway into two very different but surprisingly complementary thinkers: Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, the 20th-century Kabbalist who reimagined Jewish mysticism as a psychology of receptivity, and Dr. Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, the contemporary American philosopher-novelist who argues that each of us carries a "mattering map"—an inner landscape of significance that shapes how we move through the world.

R. Ashlag, born in Warsaw in 1884, was a prodigy who devoured Talmud and Kabbalah with equal hunger. In the 1920s, sensing both spiritual yearning and rising danger in Europe, he emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* and settled in Jerusalem. There he wrote prolifically, translating the Zohar and offering a bold reinterpretation of Kabbalah centered on *ratzon l'kabel*, "the will to receive." For Ashlag, divine energy—*orot*, the lights—flows constantly, but the real spiritual work lies in expanding the *kli*, "the vessel of the heart," so we can receive more light with

humility, generosity, and courage. The lights are always shining; the question is whether we have made room for them.

Dr. Goldstein, born in 1950 and raised in an Orthodox Jewish home before earning her PhD specializing in philosophy of science, and becoming an award-winning novelist, approaches the inner life from a different angle. In *The Mattering Instinct*, she argues that human beings navigate the world through a "mattering map"—a shifting, evolving sense of what counts, what pulls at us, what we believe is worth our time and attention. Unlike R. Ashlag's mystical vessels, Goldstein's map is psychological and existential, but both thinkers insist that meaning is not static. It expands when we do. Which brings us back to the *Omer* Chart. What if the *Omer* Chart is not just a checklist but a miniature 'mattering map'? Each day we mark is a point of significance, a moment we choose to matter. Each count is a small act of receptivity, a willingness to let the day's light—its *or*—enter the vessel of our awareness. Each evening becomes a chance to redraw the map, to notice where our attention flows easily and where it resists, to see which qualities of the *sefirot* feel familiar and which stretch us. And yes, imagining your favorite Graeter's flavor each night doesn't hurt. A mental scoop of Buckeye Blitz can be a surprisingly effective reminder that spiritual work can be sweet, playful, and something you look forward to.

By the time we reach *Shavuot*, we will not only have counted forty-nine days—we will have cultivated forty-nine opportunities for receptivity. We will have stretched our capacity to receive wisdom, connection, and joy. And yes, we will have earned our community celebration at Graeter's, where we'll gather to honor the simple, profound truth that spiritual growth can be both meaningful and delicious.

In the end, the *Omer* leads us not only to ice cream but to Sinai itself. Our tradition teaches that when the Torah was given, its words flowed into the world like *chalav*—mother's milk—nourishing, comforting, and perfectly suited to the soul's capacity to receive. Ice cream may not be milk straight from Sinai, but it's a delightful reminder that revelation is meant to be tasted, savored, and shared. When we gather at Graeter's on May 21, gifted scoop in hand, we'll be practicing the very thing R. Ashlag and Dr. Goldstein both gesture toward: expanding our vessels, refining our mattering maps, and preparing ourselves to receive the Torah again—with sweetness, with openness, and with the joy of a community ready to be nourished by something larger than ourselves. Sometimes the path to revelation really does run through the sweetness of ice cream as our mini-mattering map for meaningful living.



PrayerLab Shabbat

Are you curious about the choreography of prayer and ritual life in the synagogue services? Join us on Saturday, April 11th for the next installments of our interactive prayer lab service. Bring your questions and curiosities.

Saturday, April 11 @ 9:30 am