



Institute for Jewish Spirituality™

Cultivating Mindfulness. Deepening Connection. Enlivening Jewish Life.

Omer 5781:

Netzach with Rabbi Jonathan Slater

Over the past three weeks, we have engaged with the divine qualities of *Chesed* (loving connection), *Gevurah* (wise boundaries), and *Tiferet* (balanced self). Each of those qualities is unique, but they also exist in relation with each other. It is not really possible, nor wise, to consider any of them separate from the others. And, in fact, that is one lesson of this practice of working with the *middot* during the Counting of the Omer: each *middah* interpenetrates the others, and each is depended on and modified by the others.

In each of these weeks we have met the *middah* of *Netzach*, energetic response/perseverance. This week we take it on in full. We will investigate and experience the ways in which we can respond and act with sustained energy, sometimes this way, sometimes that.

How shall we understand *Netzach*. It has different valences and meanings in the Bible, and they all influence how we can enact it in our lives. One meaning is “eternity” or forever (see, for one example, Ps. 103:9). The idea is that God is not bound by mortal limitations, by time. Therefore, nothing is beyond God’s capacity to bring it about. What is more, all time exists as one, so all eternity is present for God without distinction. What for us would take forever, is already so in God’s mind.

For our practice, this invites us to access the divine quality of “eternity” in our own lives. As our beloved colleague, Rabbi Myriam Klotz would say in yoga: can we “hold the pose” even when we feel tired, or our muscles are aching? Is there yet some more energy that we can bring to our efforts to deepen our spiritual capacities, to engaging in bringing justice, in loving more fully? How might we persevere in bringing about “that day” – the days of the Messiah, a time of righteousness and justice where all live without fear – with a sense of divine potential and power? How might love sustain us? What boundaries do we need to preserve our strength to persevere? What is the balance of love and limits that keeps us in the game? Etc.

Another meaning of *netzach* is to vanquish or overcome an opponent. This aspect relates to our need for energetic response. Who or what is our opponent? For now, let’s consider our “inner critic”, the voice we may all know that tells us “you can’t”: “Who are

you to engage in spiritual practice -- you could never really pay attention, let alone meditate!" "Why should you get your hands dirty, let someone else do it!" "There is just too much to do -- I could never get it done!" We might consider this our *yetzer hara*. It can easily keep us from living out our intention. Instead, we bring our energetic response; we engage our full faculties to live up to our deepest desire and spiritual yearning. When the *yetzer hara* says "no you can't" we respond: "who says?" and just get going. When the *yetzer hara* says, "not you" we respond "oh, you bet it will be me" and turn to our intention.

But, *netzach* is not about "powering through". Rather, it is bringing perseverance and our inner energies in the right proportion, and with the appropriate additional quality to meet the moment. Sometimes we bring love to our opponent; other times we set appropriate boundaries so that good can be done. This week pay attention to when effort and energy are called for. Notice what the circumstances are, and in what manner you are called to act (or NOT act). What does it take just now, in just this moment, to live out my true intention?

Go for it!