

TIFERET – BEAUTY

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO BEAUTY?

CHECK-IN

Share your name and response to the following questions: what is something beautiful that you've experienced in the last week? What did it make you think about?

OUR BRIT (COVENANT)

- ❖ Everybody's story is sacred: we commit to respectful communication.
- ❖ Listening is important for understanding: we commit to active and thoughtful listening.
- ❖ Our hearts are open when we feel safe: we commit to confidentiality.
- ❖ We will not try to fix, explain, or judge one another.
- ❖ We will allow for silences within the discussion so that everyone has the space to speak.
- ❖ As our Omer Groups are under the umbrella of Isaiah Together and the broader umbrella of Temple Isaiah, we will keep the values of each front and center.

COUNTING OF THE OMER

Hineini – I am ready to fulfill the mitzvah of counting the Omer.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ, וְצִוֵּנוּ
עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר.

Baruch atah, Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al sfirat haOmer.

Praised be You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, instilling within us the holiness of mitzvot by commanding us to count the Omer.

Today is the _____ day, which is _____ weeks and _____ days of the Omer.

May I understand and make the decisions necessary to live my life with an appreciation for beauty.

WHAT IS TIFERET?

As the Omer marks the passage between redemption and truth, *tiferet* marks the passage between *chesed* and *gevurah*, unbridled love and discerning strength. *Tiferet*, often translated as Beauty, is balance and empathy. It is the sense of harmony that gives us both order and love. It is also a sense of the beauty that is inherent in the creation of our world, a humility that places us as the recipients of the cosmic gifts of nature and the order of the universe.

Often represented by the human heart, *tiferet* sits at the center of the sephirot. We learn that *tiferet* is the force that fuels our ability to synthesize and process, to create beauty and order from the many elements of our lives and ourselves. We balance our pride, with the humility that comes with accepting our role in the endless process of creation. With this steadiness, we find beauty and compassion from the most central part of ourselves.

As we count the days between our deliverance and our declaration of meaning and purpose, *tiferet* marks a center point in our journey, forcing us to reflect on what it means to be human and what it means to acknowledge the journey of others.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

How do you understand *tiferet*? When have you experienced it in your life? Can you relate to the idea of beauty as balance or synthesis?

WISDOM FROM THE LITURGY:

*Al kein n'kaveh l'cha Adonai Eloheinu,
lirot m'heirah b'tiferet uzecha,
l'takein olam b'malchut Shaddai.*

Adonai our God, how soon we hope to behold the perfection of our world, guided by a sacred covenant drawn from human and Divine meeting. – Interpretation of Aleinu Liturgy¹

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) What do we mean by “the perfection of our world”? What is the connection between beauty and perfection?
- (b) What does it mean for the human to meet with the divine?
- (c) If perfection comes from the sacred covenant between us and the divine, what is our role in initiating that?

¹ Found in *Mishkan T'filah*, page 285 [589].

MORE ON TIFERET:

There was once a very wealthy king who owned many beautiful things. He had cloth tapestries, piles of gold, and statues made by the very best sculptors in the land. Of all of his belongings, his very favorite possession was the most glorious diamond you can imagine. It was huge—as big around as his hand. And it was pure—clear and flawless, without any marks or blemishes. He loved to go and sit with that diamond, gazing at its beauty and perfection.

One day when the king went to look at his diamond, he discovered to his horror that it had a long, deep scratch. He couldn't believe his eyes! What could have happened to his flawless diamond?

Immediately he sent for all of the best stone cutters and diamond cutters in his kingdom. One by one they came to inspect the diamond. Each looked at it closely and then sadly shook his head. The scratch was too deep. If they tried to polish it they might break the diamond into pieces.

Finally one last diamond carver came before the king. She looked at the diamond closely, gazing at it from every angle.

The king watched with bated breath as the diamond carver turned the diamond over and over, pursing her lips and shaking his head.

Suddenly the diamond carver's face broke into a big smile. "I know how to fix this, your majesty!" she exclaimed. "Leave it to me. In two weeks' time I will return your diamond to you, better than ever. However, you may not visit me during this time or check on my progress. You must wait until it is finished."

The king was very excited. Soon his flawless diamond would be back with his other lovely things, perfect again, the scratch removed. It took all the king's willpower to resist the temptation to visit the diamond carver to watch her work.

As for the diamond carver, day after day, night after night, she brought out her tools to fix that diamond. Bit by bit, she worked on that scratch. It was slow, tedious work. She knew she had to work carefully or the diamond could crack into pieces.

Finally the diamond cutter was finished. Carefully she wrapped the diamond in cloth to protect it, and she brought it before the king.

"Here it is, your majesty," she said. With a flourish she opened the cloth and presented the diamond.

The king gasped at what he saw. Where there had once been a scratch, a horrible flaw in his precious diamond, there was now an exquisitely beautiful flower carved into the diamond.²

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) What role does frustration play in creation?
- (b) Why does the diamond carver insist on privacy while she works? Does beauty require mystery?
- (c) What is the flawed material we are called to create beauty from?

MODERN VOICES:

Pride

by Dahlia Ravikovitch³

Even rocks crack, I'm telling you,
and not on account of age.
For years they lie on their backs
in the heat and the cold,
so many years,
it almost creates the illusion of calm.
They don't move, so the cracks stay hidden.
A kind of pride.
Years pass over them as they wait.
Whoever is going to shatter them
hasn't come yet.
And so the moss flourishes, the seaweed
whips around,
the sea bursts forth and rolls back
and still they seem motionless.
Till a little seal comes to rub up against the rocks,
comes and goes.
And suddenly the rock has an open wound.
I told you, when rocks crack, it comes as a surprise.
All the more so, people.

² Based on a tale told in the 1700s by the Jewish teacher, Jacob ben Wolf Kranz, Maggid of Dubno.

³ From *The Third Book*, Hakibbutz Hameuchad Tel Aviv (1970), tr. Chana Bloch and Ariel Bloch.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) What is it that makes the rocks crack? How does not moving allow the cracks to stay hidden?
- (b) What do you make of the title of the poem? How is the poem about Pride? How is it about *tiferet*? Where is *tiferet* in the crack of a stone??

A FINAL WORD:

Take a moment to share an appreciation from the learning today.