

Counting the Days

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

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These are weeks of waiting for many: students across the country are emerging from their preparation, and perhaps cramming, and now they and their families are counting the weeks till it comes to fruition in much anticipated results later in the summer.

We're counting the days in the Jewish calendar too. Next week is the festival of Shavuot, but unlike all the other festivals, the date isn't mentioned in the Bible; instead we're told to count seven complete weeks after Pesach, Passover, and to celebrate on the fiftieth day. These were harvest festivals in ancient Israel, marking the fruition of the wheat and barley, and Shavuot also traditionally commemorates the giving of the Bible, the Torah.

Learning is central to Judaism. "Torah", usually translated as "law", has the same ambiguity as "direction". "Rabbi" means "teacher." We celebrate Pesach with a festive meal that is designed to involve and engage the children – some of the customs have no other reason than to provoke their questions – and many people have the custom of staying up all night studying on Shavuot – something many might have experienced recently!

There is a rather enigmatic passage in the Talmud that will resonate with everyone who has just finished revising for exams – it says that reading something 101 times isn't like reading it 100 times. When you think about it, the point is actually obvious – when you really *think* about something, you always see something new, a new meaning, a new subtlety, a new connection with something else you know.

In the same way, as we count these 50 days from Pesach to Shavuot, we should find something new to celebrate every day, something new to learn every day, something new to value every day. And we should recognise that as the days become weeks, so the weeks become years. Time is not just now, but the vehicle that points us a better future.