

# A Modern Twist: What is “Torah Citizenship?”

## A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING FREE

**We are about to tell the story – our story – one more time.**

It’s a story we tell and taste. It’s a story about our never-ending journey – as a people, and as people – from the degradation of slavery to the awesome responsibility that comes with freedom.

**Being an engaged citizen cannot happen without being a free person.** This was as true for the ancient Israelites as it is today for individuals living under totalitarian regimes.

**The story of Passover, of moving from enslavement to liberation, allows the Israelites to receive the Torah at Mt. Sinai – and to accept the moral and civic duties contained within it.** So it is with us – being free and enfranchised citizens enables us to take on the rights, responsibilities, and accountabilities of being Americans.

Before we tell the story, let us discuss its lesson for us:

What do you feel is demanded of you as a free person guided both by Torah and the laws of our land? What, for you, does “Torah citizenship” mean?

**For millennia, Jews have negotiated living in foreign lands, under foreign rules and cultures.** Today, for most liberal Jews, it is the inverse: we are Americans first by identity and law, and Jewish on the edges. But this seder is an annual reminder of how these two halves of our identities are really one.

**We are free – to be Jews and to be Americans – and being free carries demands.** Powerless slaves lack the kind of choices that trigger moral consequences. Free Jewish

Americans make such choices every day – with our votes, our purchases, our acts of support or objection, and even with our silent acquiescence.

**Before we tell the story, let us discuss its lesson for us:** What do you feel is demanded of you as a free person guided both by Torah and the laws of our land? What, for you, does “Torah citizenship” mean?

**seder supplement**

**5777 | 2017**

**When to use:**

To be read at your seder right before “magid” (right after breaking the middle matzah and right before reading “*halachmaanya*”/ “this is the bread of affliction”).

# A Quick & Meaningful Spiritual Practice: **COUNTING THE OMER**

For these next seven weeks, the Leo Baeck Temple community will explore how Jewish wisdom informs what it means to be an **engaged citizen**. We will use the daily ancient practice of “counting the omer” between Passover and Shavuot to invite a daily reflection about being an engaged citizen today.

**Counting the omer began as an agricultural practice**, but it has since become an annual time of personal spiritual preparation for arriving at Sinai and receiving Torah. We hope you will open your spirits with us each day, as we explore the meaning of our freedom as Americans and as Jews.

**Beginning on the second night of Passover, Tuesday, April 11, and concluding on Shavuot, Tuesday, May 30** – you are

invited to participate in an experiment which aspires to fulfill the biblical ritual of counting the omer with a modern twist. Each morning, you will receive an email with a brief text – a taste of our Jewish tradition’s wisdom – inviting you to apply it to the responsibility of modern citizenship.

**How can we use this year’s journey from slavery in Egypt to the arrival at Sinai to become Torah Citizens?** There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Only the invitation to be curious and to uncover new and inspiring truths within Judaism and within ourselves.

## Counting the Omer: Day 1 of 49

### Week 1 / Day 1:

### Reflecting on Torah Citizenship through the Lens of Personal Responsibility

“A member of one’s household takes precedence over everyone else. The poor of one’s household take precedence over the poor of one’s city. And the poor of one’s own city take precedence over the poor of other cities.”

– *Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 71a*

### Question of the Day:

Why do you think our tradition urges us not to feel provincial or selfish for “taking care of our own” first?