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### **Teach Us to Number Our Days**

For many years, we sang Cantor Wally's song, "Teach Us to Number Our Days," at every service during the seven weeks of the Omer season. I discovered at our second-night seder that my three children can still sing it, verses and chorus, so firmly was it implanted in their memories.

Recently someone was trying to call this song to mind and asked me, Whatever happened to that sad, Your Days Are Numbered, song. Their comment made me reflect on the meaning of the text on which Cantor Wally's song is based, Psalm 90 v.12.

The most common translation of the Hebrew is probably (New International Version), "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Some translations are more explicit about the finite nature of our lives, as for example (New Living Translation), "Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom." The Old King James Bible took a more active approach: "So teach *us* to number our days, that we may apply *our* hearts unto wisdom."

This can be expressed in a contemporary idiom as (Contemporary English Version), "Teach us to use wisely all the time we have. Or teach us to make our days count."

Some translations turn the numbering of our days into keeping an account of our days, reminding me of the Musar practice of evaluating each day at its close and keeping a record of how one is doing.

Modern rabbinic translations include, “Teach us how short our life is, so that we may become wise,” or, “Teach us to number our days and help us to spend them as we should.”

Contemporary scholar Rachel Biale turns the verse into a question: “We count our days, that much we know how to do, but will all that counting lead us to wisdom?”

I want to offer one more possible interpretation.

In the book of Numbers, there are several times when God commands Moses to take a census of the Jewish people. It seems unnecessary to do this over and over—redundant, as not that much time has passed between one census and another.

Rashi asks: Why does God need the people to be counted so often?

And he answers, “Because they were dear to God, God counts them all the time—when they went out of Egypt, God counted them; when many of them fell for having worshipped the golden calf, God counted them to ascertain how many were left, when the *Shechina* (divine presence) was about to dwell among them, God again took their census, for on the first day of Nisan the Tabernacle was erected, and shortly afterward, on the first day of Iyar, God counted them.”

The rabbis offer a human analogy. A miser who loves his gold coins counts them over and over, so much does he appreciate having them. God counts and recounts the Jewish people, because of God's love and caring for us.

I wonder if that isn't the attitude this verse is trying to inculcate in us toward each and every day of our lives. Seeing each one as precious, of great value, something that we treasure and not just time to kill.

Slonimer Rebbe expressed this in the framework of his belief that each of us has certain unique repairs to make to our imperfect world. He taught that each day offers a special purpose for each of us, that there is a *tikkun* that can only be done by this person and only on this day.

May God help us to find meaning in every day of our lives and to see a connection to greater purpose in all that we do.