**D’var Torah Life & Legacy Conference**

**Tamra L. Dollin**

**May 16, 2016**

In this week’s **parsha, Emor**, we are commanded to count each day from the 2nd day of Pesach until the Omer –barley harvest- seven weeks later. As the holiday of Shavuot came to be associated with the giving of the Torah and not just the agricultural harvest, we began to understand a profound link between the journey from degradation and oppression (that we experienced as slaves in Egypt) to a place and time of freedom and revelation (when we received the Torah on Mt. Sinai). We count each day as we elevate our spirits to a higher state of awareness and being. Today we count the 23rd day.

**The Kabbalists**, mystics from Tzfat 16th century, see this time period as an opportunity for spiritual and personal growth as well. We can be better people now than when we began the journey 7 weeks prior. Then we were filled with fear, trepidation, anxiety - about what lay ahead. As we experienced our first taste of freedom, we began to cultivate loving-kindness, discipline and justice, compassion, humility and leadership.

This is the 4th week in that process, highlighting the quality of **Netzach**, which we understand as **endurance**, eternality. God, Torah, Shabbat, the story of the Jewish people, the land of Israel, the values our tradition teaches – these are eternal things. To be eternal, one needs persistence, purpose, determination.

Our Legacy professionals and lay leaders have all these qualities, and need to call upon them to create **enduring** legacies for their communities. This is not easy. **Year One begins with a roar.** It takes more than that to continue to motivate, inspire and push our organizations to create and enlarge their endowment funds. It takes endurance, persistence and determination – **Netzach** – to rewire the philanthropic culture of our communities; to make planning for our future a necessary part of the work we do today.

Celebrated researcher and psychology professor **Angela Duckworth** writes about the secret for anyone striving for outstanding achievement. Her book is called **“Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance”.** Recent research points to **GRIT** as the key ingredient shared by successful leaders. In other words, **Endurance**! She teaches us that ‘**Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare.’** We teach in our training about how Legacy Giving is about planning. It takes time. It’s the marathon, not the sprint. How can we cultivate the quality of endurance?

**Legacy is about endurance.** We want to ensure that the eternal values of our people live on and are transmitted generation to generation. We **want our own personal legacy to endure** – to live on and inspire those who come after us. We **want our relationships to endure** – to continue expressing our love and care even when we are no longer here. *That’s where our conversation* ***begins*** *with our legacy donors.*

Today is the 3rd day of the 4th week – corresponding to the quality of **Gevurah** – strength. To be able to accomplish the endurance, assure the legacy, our character must be strong. We must bring love, compassion and patience to the task of securing a Jewish legacy for coming generations.

During this time of **Sefirat HaOmer**, we also read Ethics of Our Fathers, **Pirke Avot**. We read in Chapter 3, verse 9 the words of **Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa**, who says; **‘Anyone whose actions are more plentiful than his wisdom, his wisdom endures.’** People may know Torah, they may be wise, but without concrete actions, that wisdom is limited. *It is the* ***donor’s legacy commitment, their GIFT*** *that is the action that assures their values endure.*

All of us gathered here together today and tomorrow are committed to and passionate about ensuring a vibrant Jewish future by actively building Jewish legacies in our synagogues, schools, organizations and communities. This year we are 160 strong.

There are those in this room who woke up this morning to a great day – filled with optimism and happiness. There are those celebrating graduates, welcoming children home who have, seemingly overnight, become young adults. There are some (I know of at least one, Kelly) who have recently been married – joined their lives with another for the wild adventure ride called life.

And, there are some struggling with an illness, for whom it was not easy to come and to wake up this morning – but they did it anyway. There are some who have recently experienced grief and are trying to regain their footing in a world turned upside down.

This conference is our chance to create relationships with one another, to learn from one another, develop new skills, meet new people and take home new ideas. ***Perhaps, in order to teach us to make each day count, our tradition instructs us to count…each…day.***

We hope you will gain in WISDOM, so that you will return to your communities refreshed, inspired and even more committed to ACTION.

On this 23rd day in the Counting of the Omer, may we all persevere in cultivating the quality of **Netzach** - **ENDURANCE**, coupled with **Gevura – strength** – so that, through our relationships with one another, we may create communities that endure – and last forever.