



Around the Shabbat Table

Shabbat Emor 5762

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This week's writer: Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan, Director of Nassau/Queens Services,

Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York

Introduction

This Shabbat, we read from the Torah portion called Emor, part of the book of Vayikra (Leviticus). The reading begins with a discussion of the *kohanim* (priests in the Temple). The *kohanim* were (and are) descendants of Aaron, who, along with his siblings, Moses and Miriam, led the Israelite people. The *kohanim* were required to observe certain laws, including limits on who they were permitted to marry, as well as telling them behaviors that they needed to maintain. Some of these laws, such as those barring *kohanim* from coming into contact with death (or even visiting a cemetery) are still observed by many traditional Jews who are *kohanim*.

The Torah then gives a description of the Jewish holidays. Shabbat is the first mentioned, and is the model for other holidays. The Torah then describes the *shalosh regalim*, three "pilgrimage festivals," on which, in ancient times, all who were able to travel were to go to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the festivals. These three holidays - Pesach, Shavout and Sukkot - are still a part of our holiday cycle, celebrated wherever

Jews live. The description of the holidays also includes the days that we now call the "days of awe": Rosh Hashana (which was not known by that name until much later) and Yom Kippur.

In the description of the holidays, the Torah does not specify a date for the holiday of Shavuot. Rather, this holiday is to occur exactly seven weeks (the word "*shavuot*" means "weeks") after the second night of Pesach. In biblical times, there was a grain offering given on that day of Pesach, and continuing grain offerings through the holiday of Shavuot, which was considered to be the time of the wheat harvest.

There is a tradition of counting off these days and weeks that connect Pesach to Shavuot. We are currently in the midst of this time period.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

When your family sits down together this Shabbat, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

I. In the Torah, the period between Pesach and Shavuot had agricultural significance, representing the early barley harvest and the later wheat harvest. Later, a tradition which says that the Torah was given on Shavuot developed. This tradition saw the seven week period between the two holidays as having spiritual importance: that we had achieved physical freedom on Pesach, but still had not received the Torah, which represents our spiritual freedom. It was a transition period.

What does it mean to be "in transition?" What are some of the changes that children go through as they grow up? How is our growing up similar to the "growing up" that the people Israel went through between the Exodus and the time of receiving the Torah?

II. There is a tradition which states that, some two thousand years ago, a plague broke out among the students of the great Rabbi Akiba, killing thousands of students. For this reason, the period of the "counting of the Omer," between Pesach and Shavuot, is regarded by tradition as a period of mourning. In many communities, weddings are not performed and other ways of diminishing our enjoyment are observed.

Why would the deaths of a Torah scholar's students be considered such a tragedy that people would still mourn many years later?

Are there scholars and leaders whose impact is so great that we would continue to recognize their loss many years after they have died? With your family, think of some examples of past leaders who we still remember today. Then, think of leaders who, if they or their followers were to pass away, would cause us to feel a major loss.

Towards an Action Agenda

Take a look at some of the places on the Internet that people use to "count the Omer":

The cover page of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations:

<http://www.uahc.org/>

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's web site suggests questions to accompany each day's counting:

http://uscj.org/item13_825.html

...And, even Homer Simpson gets into the act! Check out "The Counting of the Homer" at: <http://www.jvibe.com/homer/Welcome.html>



Shabbat Shalom!

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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