



Around the Shabbat Table

**Emor 5763
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Shalom!

Introduction

Parashat Emor (Leviticus 21:1-24:23) is unique because it addresses several important topics that are each important but are seemingly unrelated. The first of the topics deals with laws related to the Kohanim and are a continuation of the previous parasha, Kedoshim. There, the Torah outlined the duties of the *Kohen* and *Kohen Gadol*, the priest and High Priest. It also provided a framework for Jewish behavior since that portion was titled *kedoshim* (holiness) -- laws concerning the lives of the *Kohen* were in that chapter.

This week's parasha continues with other laws, such as whom a *Kohen* can marry and laws that govern a *Kohen's* ability to be in proximity to a dead body are in Emor. Some rules are: the *Kohen* may not come in contact with a body of a dead person with the exception of a mother, father, wife, sons, daughters, brothers and unmarried sister. Even today, traditional Judaism does not allow *Kohanim* to enter a house in which there is a dead body present or enter a cemetery unless it is for a close relative.

The *Kohen* is not permitted to marry a divorced woman. One interesting historical fact is that in 1936, the Duke of Windsor was obligated to abdicate the British throne because he wanted to marry a divorced woman. While he was not Jewish, it appears that the privilege of choosing a mate might affect who you are and how you were born not only in our tradition, but in other cultures.

Lastly, the *Kohen* was privileged to eat portions of the sacrifices. If for any reason he was ritually unclean he was not permitted to eat of that portion. He was expected to bathe and wait a specified amount of time to become reconsecrated and the resume his duties in the *mishkan*, the holy temple.



The second major topic of this parasha is kindness to animals. Some ways in which we are taught to be kind are:

- a. Animals are allowed to rest on Shabbat
- b. Plowing with a bull and a donkey harnessed together was forbidden because they are not equal in strength and the weaker might suffer
- c. If a man finds a nest of birds he cannot take the young. He must send the mother away, presumably to spare her feelings.
- d. An ox or other animal cannot be muzzled while threshing corn. Can you imagine working in a kitchen and not being allowed to even taste a morsel? The Torah teaches compassion for animals that can be employed by us today.
- e. Finally, although we are allowed to slaughter animals to eat, we are instructed to observe *shechita* (ritual slaughtering) which has been proven to be humane.

The final section of this *parasha* lists the various festivals and tells us something about each one.

In ancient times, the Jewish calendar, which is a lunar one, had to be fixed from month to month; depending on the appearance of the new moon. The dates varied from year to year depending on when the month of Nissan began. Therefore, Passover can come in March one year and April another. The Torah fixed the festivals so that Pesach comes on the 15th of Nissan, while Shavuoth, comes fifty days later. Rosh Hashana is always on the first of Tishrei; Yom Kippur falls on the tenth of Tishrei, and Succoth starts on the fifteenth of Tishrei. Shabbat, of course, comes each week on the seventh day of the week.

The final concept mentioned in the *parasha* has to do with damages. The Torah mentions “a break for a break, an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth”. The rabbis tell us that it was never understood and interpreted literally by Jewish courts. Even if it were taken literally in ancient times, I believe that for the last two thousand years it has come to mean fair compensation and not that an offender be bodily harmed. One should know that even as we practice compassion there are still human beings that practice torture and mutilation and in human behavior. It is interesting to me that institutions that govern governments have not been able to erase inhuman behavior, which the Jewish people addressed at least two thousand years ago.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

As your family shares a meal this Friday night, you might want to discuss the following questions:

1. How have you and your family practiced kindness to animals? Should more be done to promote this Jewish principle?
2. Can you think of other cases in which a man may have to give up his inherited position for the love of a woman such as the Duke of Windsor giving up his throne for the woman he loves? How does this compare to a *Kohen* no being able to marry a divorced woman so that he could still fulfill his ritual obligations as a *Kohen*?
3. If some one does something bad to you what should you do? Get him or her back in some unkind way or reach out to them in a meaningful way?
4. When you read this *parasha*, other than the timing of the holidays, what other rules of practice can be found that we employ today?
5. It is ironic that the laws pertaining to kindness to animals is given in the same *parasha* as some of the laws about animal sacrifices. What conclusions might you draw from this?

A Text to Wrestle With

In the story of the Book of Jonah, God takes pity on the people of the city of Nineveh. When Jonah challenges this, God asks:

...and should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons...and also much cattle?
(Jonah 4:11)

Given our *parasha's* teachings about sensitivity to animals, what do the closing words of the above quote tell you about God's motivation in saving the city of Nineveh?

Towards an Action Agenda

You can learn more about Judaism's attitude towards care of animals at:

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Judaism/animals.html>

To learn more about the protection of animals in Israel, to go:

<http://www.chai-online.org/index.htm>

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

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