

**Parshat Emor**  
**Holiness All Around**  
**Rabbanit Michal Kohane - Class of 2020**

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*In honor and in memory of my father, my teacher, Aharon Kohane, whose yahrzeit is this week, on Pesach Sheni.*

Leviticus, chapter 23, in the heart of this week's Torah portion, Emor, is a "go-to" chapter for a complete list of Torah holidays, from Shabbat, through Pesach, the count of the Omer, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. But are these really all the Torah holidays? And what happens before and after in the *parsha*? Is Emor just an amalgam of random topics, or can we find a meaningful connection between them?

Emor opens with the words "*Emor...* Say to the priests" (Leviticus 21:1). The verse continues with the words "sons of Aaron" (*ibid.*), possibly instructing the priests to remember to be like Aharon, the first High Priest. If so, we must wonder, what is so special about Aharon?

We first meet Aaron in the book of Exodus, happily going out to meet Moses. This joy should be a surprise to us. In the book of Genesis we learned much about sibling rivalry over parental love, inheritance, birthright, blessing, and continuity. For the first time, we encounter an older brother who is "joyful in his heart" (Exodus 4:10) at the greatness of his younger brother, ready to work with him and for him, together leading the nation.

In Pirkei Avot (1:12) we find:

Hillel says: Be of the disciples of Aharon, who loves peace and pursues peace.	הלל אומר, הוי מתלמידיו של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן לתורה.
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In Avot D'Rabbi Natan (12:3), we learn Aharon's method, whereby, when he would see two people in dispute, he would go to each of them and tell each separately how sorry the other one is, sitting with them until their hearts soften and each opens up to the other, "and when they met, they hugged and kissed each other."

Aharon becomes a symbol of love for humanity and the pursuit of peace. Even during the incident of the Golden Calf, he opted to stay with the People, trying to direct them to right action, demonstrating the basic quality the priests will need: the

ability to see the potential for good beyond the immediate, sometimes petty, here and now.

This ability to connect with what's beyond comes with a kind of a disconnect from worldly life, necessary for the priests. That's why a priest is prohibited from contact with the dead; has no land or job, making a living from donations and tithes; and is limited in whom he can marry. These restrictions were meant to protect the priest from life's crises, so he can be sort of a light for the People in their spiritual quest. In order to fulfill their task, the priests receive two gifts (or two roles): to serve in the Temple and to bless the People of Israel. In addition, the High Priest is given the ability to atone for all Israel for their sins before God on Yom Kippur.

Setting this at the beginning of this Torah portion, Emor, highlights the holiness of the people and their priests, along with the holiness of the Temple and therefore, that of the Land (to be continued in next week's Torah portion, Behar). Learning about the sanctity of time, Sabbaths, and holidays, helps us create a connection between one's self, place, and time.

And what about chapter 24? Chapter 23 ends with a strange short verse (23:44):

So Moses declared to the Israelites the set times of Hashem.	וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִצְוֵי ה' אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
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Why does the Torah need to state that after God commanded Moshe regarding the festivals, he did what God said? We do not have such a statement with the other *mitzvot* of the Torah. Why would we need this kind of "summary," especially if immediately after, chapter 24 begins again with the familiar verse (24:1):

And the Lord spoke to Moses to say:	וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
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One way to understand it is that Moses here (in chapter 24) teaches us about holidays that will be added in the future. That is why, after mentioning Sukkot, at the end of the list of holidays in chapter 23, we are commanded to light the menorah, possibly hinting at Hanukkah. Then, we're told about the show-bread and its twelve loaves, possibly hinting at the month of Adar, the 12th month of the Torah year with the holiday of Purim in it, celebrated with a lavish meal including, according to some traditions, delicacies made from cream of wheat. And finally, the case of the Israelite woman's son, a person who is half-Israelite, half-Egyptian, who is challenged in his

ability of speech, trying to clarify his national identity, perhaps hinting at the time when different identities will be blended to establish the State of Israel.

If so, we can see that Parashat Emor offers us not an amalgam of random topics but a prescription for how to combine the sanctity of people, place, and time. May we too get to experience glimpses of it, and contribute to holiness in and around us.

Shabbat Shalom.



Now back in Israel where she grew up, Rabbanit Michal Kohane continues to be a teacher of Torah and Talmud in Israel and abroad, while completing her chaplaincy certification. Prior to that, she was a long-time leader and educator in Northern California, serving as rabbi, Federation executive director and more. Most recently she was the Rosh Kehila of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn. Rabbanit Michal holds a BA in Studies of Israel and Education, an MS in Jewish Studies, an MA in Clinical Psychology, and holds a PsyD in organizational psychology. Rabbanit Michal's first novel, Hachug ("Extracurricular") was published in Israel by Steimatzky and she writes a weekly Torah blog.