



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Emor** (אֵמֹר, "Say!")
- **Chapters: Leviticus 21:1-24:23**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוְּנוּ לַעֲסֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion begins with laws pertaining exclusively to the priests (*kohanim*) of Israel. Because of their elevated status as those delegated to make sacrifices on behalf of the people (i.e., "to offer the bread of God"), the priests were subject to more stringent standards of purity and holiness than others in the community. For instance, they were forbidden to become unclean (*tamei*) through contact with a corpse, to marry a divorced woman, to shave their heads, and so on. They were to be entirely scrupulous as they carried out their duties. In addition, any priest who had a physical defect was forbidden to serve in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle.

The priests were never to defile the offerings of the people by serving in an unclean state, and likewise the people were never to eat any holy food devoted for the priests. Any sacrifice offered by the people was to be a healthy specimen (*tamim*) that was entirely defect-free. No animal less than eight days old may be sacrificed, and no animal may be slaughtered on the same day as its young. Any "thank offering" must be eaten on the day of its slaughter...

Moses then instructed the people regarding the holy days of the Jewish year (i.e., the *mo'edim*). These included the weekly Sabbath along with the spring holidays of Passover / Unleavened Bread / "Firstfruits" and - *exactly* 49 days later – the festival of Shavuot (i.e., "Pentecost"). In the fall, the first day of the seventh month was to be announced by blasts of shofars and the tenth day marked the solemn occasion of Yom Kippur. Five days after Yom Kippur was the seven day harvest festival of Sukkot. During Sukkot the people were instructed to wave "four species" of the produce of the land and to live inside temporary shelters (*sukkahs*) as they recalled how the LORD cared for them in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt. On each of these holidays the people were commanded to engage in special observances and to refrain from working at their regular occupations.

Immediately following the description of the required holidays, Moses reviewed the instructions for maintaining the lamps of the Menorah and for providing the weekly "showbread," or the twelve loaves of bread that were to be placed on the table within the Holy Place. The portion concludes with the incident of a man executed for blasphemy (i.e., abusing the Divine Name), and then provides the principle of *Lex Talionis*, or "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" concerning matters of governmental justice.



Basic Questions

1. What qualified someone to be a priest (kohen) of Israel? ¹
2. Are Levites the same as the priests? ²
3. There are three “classes” within the structure of Jewish society. What are they? ³
4. Why must we show special honor to the priests? ⁴
5. What does the word “priest” (or kohen) mean? ⁵
6. Who is the first priest mentioned in the Torah? ⁶
7. Israel’s priests were not allowed to defile themselves through direct contact with a corpse. There were exceptions to this, however. Who were they? ⁷
8. What is the only time when a priest may bury someone who is not a member of his household? ⁸
9. Whom may a priest not marry? ⁹
10. If an animal has a defect (מום), may it be offered for sacrifice? ¹⁰
11. If a priest has a defect, what is he not allowed to do? ¹¹
12. Can you list the eight “appointed times” listed in Leviticus 23? ¹²

¹ He had to be a direct descendant of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Aaron was the great grandson of Levi, the third son of Jacob. Levi had three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, but Aaron descended from Kohath. The lineage of Aaron therefore is as follows: [Abraham -> Isaac -> Jacob ->] Levi -> Kohath -> Amram -> Aaron. While all of Aaron’s male direct descendants are regarded as kohanim (priests), to be qualified to serve in the Tabernacle, they also had to be “defect free” – both spiritually (in the sense of not being ritually unclean) and physically.

² No, the Levites are descendants of Levi’s two other sons, Gershon and Merari. All kohanim are Levites, but not the other way around.

³ The Kohen, the Levi and the Israelite. While every Levite is an Israelite (a descendant of Israel), not every Levite (descendant of Levi) is a Kohen (descendant of Aaron), and not every kohen is “gadol,” the High Priest.

⁴ Because a King is honored when honor is shown to his servants.

⁵ Someone chosen to help draw others near to God. The Hebrew word kohen (כֹּהֵן) is thought to come from the word *ken* (כֵּן) meaning “yes” and the word *kivun* (כִּוּן) which means “to direct.”

⁶ Malki-Tzedek, the King of Salem, to whom Abraham offered tithes after his victory over the kings (Gen. 14:18). The author of the Book of Hebrews argues that his priesthood is greater than that of sons of Aaron since Abraham offered him tribute (Heb. 7:9-11).

⁷ He could bury his *closest* family members (mother, father, son, daughter, wife, brother, unmarried sister) as well as the “friendless” person (see note below).

⁸ To bury a “friendless person,” or someone who died and there is no one else to bury him. This is called *met mitzvah* (מֵת מִצְוָה), the obligation to bury the dead, which preserves human dignity by overriding the letter of the law.

⁹ A divorced woman, harlot, widow, or otherwise “profaned” woman. A high priest can only marry a virgin from Israel.

¹⁰ No, only defect-free kosher animals that are tamim (תָּמִיּיִם), “whole,” are permitted for sacrifice.

¹¹ He cannot serve in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle (and later, the Temple), though he can still partake of the offerings (terumah) given to the priests and tend the fire at the Copper Altar.

¹² Shabbat, Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Shavuot, Yom Teru’ah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.



13. What is the *first* holy day mentioned in this Torah portion? ¹³
14. What is the name of the first *month* of the Jewish year? ¹⁴
15. What are the three required pilgrimage festivals (שלוש הנגלים)? ¹⁵
16. What is the “Omer Offering” (קרבן העומר)? ¹⁶
17. What is the “Omer Count” (ספירת העומר)? ¹⁷
18. Why does God cause barley to grow faster than wheat? ¹⁸
19. What is offered on the holiday of *Shavuot* (Weeks)? ¹⁹
20. What is the name of the seventh month of the Jewish year? ²⁰
21. What special commandment is required for Yom Teru’ah (Rosh Hashanah)? ²¹
22. What does “Yom Kippur” mean? ²²
23. What commandments are required to celebrate Sukkot? ²³
24. What are the “four species” (ארבע מינים) used during Sukkot? ²⁴
25. What kind of oil was required for the menorah in the Tabernacle? ²⁵
26. What was placed on the golden table inside the Tabernacle every week? ²⁶
27. In Jewish tradition, who is given the first aliyah when reading from the Torah during a synagogue service? ²⁷
28. What does “chillul HaShem” mean? ²⁸

¹³ Shabbat, regarded as the “chief” holiday. There are at least 50 weekly Sabbaths in a Jewish year.

¹⁴ Nisan, sometimes called “Aviv” (spring), which usually falls in March/April of the Gregorian calendar.

¹⁵ Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

¹⁶ A “wave offering” presented on the day after Passover that dedicates the coming harvest to the LORD. No new food from the harvest (*chadash*) may be eaten until the ceremonial offering has been made.

¹⁷ A 49 day countdown that leads to the festival of Shavuot on the 50th day. After the Temple was destroyed, the countdown is meant to express excitement for the revelation of the Torah traditionally associated with this date.

¹⁸ As a reminder to feed our animals before ourselves. Kindness to animals is required by *tza’ar ba’alei chayim*.

¹⁹ Bikkurim (new fruit) and two leavened loaves (made from the first wheat harvest) are waved before the altar.

²⁰ Tishri (called Ethanim in 1 Kings 8:2) which usually occurs in September/October of the Gregorian calendar.

²¹ The blasting of the shofar, blasted at least 100 times during a typical Rosh Hashanah service. Teru’ah means “noise.” The sound of the shofar is meant to awaken teshuvah (repentance) and to recall the sacrifice of Isaac at Moriah.

²² The Day of Atonement.

²³ Living in a sukkah (“booth”), waving the “four species” (*arba minim*), and rejoicing in the LORD’s provision.

²⁴ Lulav (palm branch), Hadasim (myrtle branches), Aravot (willow branches), and Etrog (fruit from a citron tree).

²⁵ Clear, pure olive oil – made only from the first drop of a squeezed olive.

²⁶ Twelve loaves of unleavened “showbread” (*lechem ha-panim*), stacked upon a lattice along with incense and spoons.

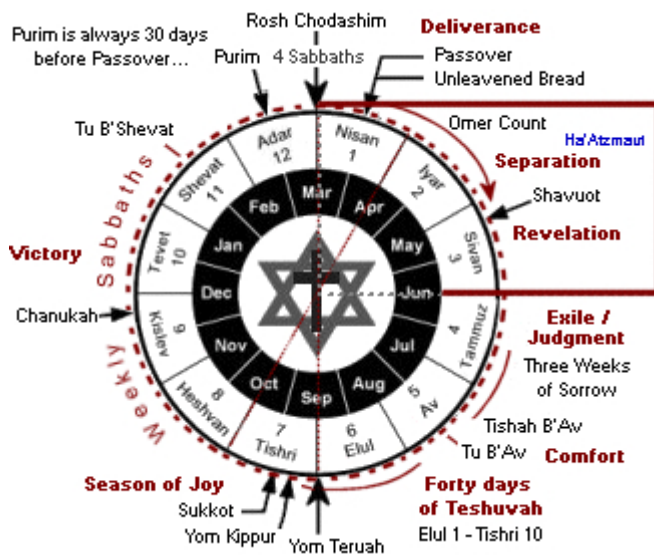
²⁷ A kohen. If no Kohen is present, the honor goes to a Levite, and so on.

²⁸ The “desecration of God’s Name” caused by blasphemy or bringing God’s Name into disrepute. The opposite of chillul HaShem is kiddush HaShem, “sanctifying the Name,” which sometimes can involve martyrdom.



Discussion Topics

1. The role of the Jewish priest (kohen) was to help others draw near to God. Discuss how Yeshua fulfills this role as our High Priest of the New Covenant (see John chapter 17).
2. The first priest mentioned in the Torah is Malki-Tzedek (מַלְכִי-צֶדֶק), the King of Salem to whom Abraham offered tithes after his victory over the kings (Gen. 14:18). The author of the Book of Hebrews states that Malki-Tzedek was “without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever” (Heb. 7:3) and then goes on to argue that his priesthood is greater than that of sons of Aaron since Abraham (and therefore Levi) offered him tribute (Heb. 7:9-11). Discuss the significance of how Malki-Tzedek pictures the High Priestly role of Yeshua.
3. The Jewish priest was required to be ritually clean and holy at all times. He was forbidden to be married to a divorced woman or a prostitute, was required to be free of any physical blemish or defect, and was held to a higher moral standard than other Jews. Discuss why you think God required these qualities in his priests. Doesn't all this seem “politically incorrect”?
4. The Torah's calendar is divided into two equal parts of exactly six lunar months each, both of which center on redemptive rituals and end with harvests. In some respects the fall holidays “mirror” the spring holidays on the divine calendar, and indeed, both sides of the calendar represent different aspects of God's redemptive plan for the world. Discuss.



“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”

(2 Cor. 1:20).

5. The penalty for blasphemy was severe, namely, death by stoning. Discuss what you think it means to “profane” the Name of the LORD. Why is it important to sanctify God's Name?
6. Discuss the “law of retributive justice” mentioned in this Torah portion (i.e., “eye for an eye” tooth for a tooth”), especially in light of Yeshua's teaching in Matthew 5:38-39.

For Next Week:

- Read Parashat **Behar** (Leviticus 25:1-26:2)