



## **Torah Reflections on Parashat Emor**

**Leviticus 21:1 – 24:23**

May 1, 2010

17 Iyar, 5770

I recently opened up the text of *Parashat Emor* to study with a fifth grade student. Together, we read these words, which God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites “These are My fixed times, the fixed times of the Eternal One, which you shall proclaim as sacred occasions” (Leviticus 23:1). The student was wide-eyed to discover that many of the holidays she celebrates today were described in detail in the Torah. “Can you believe we’ve been celebrating these holidays for so long?”

This ancient Torah portion not only tells us *when* to celebrate but *how* to celebrate these holy days: Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. Each day has its own list of commands, reflected in their prescribed active verbs: You shall elevate, you shall eat unleavened bread, you must count, you shall bring, you shall leave, you shall observe complete rest, you shall practice self-denial, you shall make offerings, you shall rejoice, you shall live in booths.

These days, accented by these verbs, begin to paint a picture, in miniature, of a life fully lived and experienced. The actions of these days tell the story of our lives: We regret and we rejoice, we bring and we leave, we observe and we elevate, we eat and we live. Other Jewish holy days were added to the calendar in rabbinic times. On Tisha B’Av, we mourn and we experience loss. On Chanukah, we make light and we remember.

These holy days suggest something remarkable: that all of our human experiences—from loss to delight, from low points to high, from sickness to health—all have their place not only in an individual’s lifecycle, but also in the fabric of our communal calendar and they have been embedded in the cycle of our years since ancient times. Our tradition tells us unequivocally: No matter what life brings you, you remain in the fabric of Jewish time, and in the pattern of Jewish life.

The fifth grade student with whom I studied summed it up well, “Some of these holidays make you sad. On some you celebrate. Some are sort of boring.” And such is life. Each of us experiences moments of disappointment. Each of us is granted moments for rejoicing. Sometimes life rolls along, unchanged, and is overwhelmingly tedious.

Torah reminds us this week that as we confront illness and loss, pain and healing, wellness and despair, certainty and ambiguity, and life and death, we remain in sync with the sacred rhythm of our people’s time.

In this knowledge we can take some comfort. Our life's experiences are not ours alone, but are shared with Jewish people across the globe and through out history. As Ecclesiastes teaches, "There is a time for every season under heaven."

Even a fifth grade girl, sitting in a rabbi's office, on the second floor of a synagogue building in Hollywood, California, seeks to understand and experience the fullness of life's journey. She lives her life in rhythm with yours. Yours with hers; these fixed times belong to all of us.

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