

Parashat Emor

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Taught by:

Kai & Marni



This week's Torah portion is *Parashat Emor*. We will be reading from *Sefer Vayikra*, the Book of Leviticus, Chapter 21, Verses 1-3. *Emor* means "speak." G-d tells Moshe to speak to the *kohanim*, the priests, about what they should do to be extra holy in order to serve in the Temple. *Parashat Emor* also tells us about the special holidays of the Jewish calendar, which make time holy throughout the year. The holy days connect us with our people, the land, the seasons, and with God. The first holy day mentioned is Shabbat, the day of rest.

Then come *Pesach* and *Shavuot*, followed by the fall holidays: *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot*. *Parashat Emor* also includes the *mitzvah* of counting the *omer*. All of us are commanded to count the *omer*--the days between *Pesach* and *Shavu'ot*. All year long, the *Kohanim* at our Holy Temple, offered wheat to God. In a ceremony from *Pesach* until *Shavuot*, an *omer* of barley (around a gallon) was added to the daily sacrifice. The *Kohanim* counted all of these days between *Pesach* and *Shavu'ot* on behalf of the Jewish People. Now we do the counting for ourselves. We count from the second day of Passover until just before *Shavuot*. That's 7 weeks of 7 days. 7 weeks x 7 days equals 49 days! The 50th day is *Shavuot*. Our rabbis taught the number of days of *sefirat ha'omer* is also the number of days from when we left Egypt to when we arrived at Mt. Sinai.

After teaching us about many of our holidays, the Torah continues on to give the Israelites the rule that when they enter the land of Israel, they are not to harvest their fields all the way to the edges and are not to pick up anything they have harvested that has fallen to the ground while they were harvesting. These fruits, grains, and veggies are to be left for poor people and for people from other communities that have come to live with us.



This same verse tells us not to gather up vegetables or pieces of grain that we might drop while we are harvesting. We have to let these lie on the ground for the poor and stranger to pick up. Wouldn't it be nicer to pick these up and put them in piles at the edges of the field for people who need them? Why might God tell us not to gather the things that are dropped?

After the part of the *parasha* that we read we learn that when the Israelites come to the Land of Israel and set up farms, they are not to harvest their crops all the way to the edges of their fields. We are taught that we need to leave the corners of our fields for poor people and for the strangers. Why do you think that God tells us to leave the corners of the field with unpicked vegetables--instead of the inside parts of the field?

Kai: I think God tells us not to harvest from the corners of the field so that when poor people take what they need so they won't destroy other parts of the rest of the field.

Marni: Corners of a field are easier to get to than the middle parts of the field, so--if people are really hungry and poor and need food--this makes it easier for them to take what they need.

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Marni: If a poor person saw vegetables or grains in baskets or stacked in piles at the edge of the field, they might think that a farmer is coming back for them and might not take what they need. They might not know that the harvest is for them if it is all gathered up and organized.

Kai: If we leave the vegetables on the ground then poor people will know that it is ok to take them.

