

My Torah portion is called Emor. In Hebrew, Emor means speak.

In my portion, there are many laws for the Priests, the Kohaneem. I had a lot of questions about these purity laws.

The laws tell the Kohaneem such things as who they could or couldn't marry, not to touch a dead body, and not to shave or gash their flesh.

The reason for these purity laws is so the Priests can be holy, serve at the Temple, and perform the animal sacrifices. Descendants of the Kohaneem still observe some of these laws today, even though there is no Temple now, and of course, no animal sacrifices.

One of the laws for the Kohaneem was not to come in contact with dead bodies. Coming in contact with a dead body would make a Kohain impure. A question I had was: Why is a person considered impure after they die?

In our tradition, our rabbis discuss and argue about what the Torah means. So I read about Jewish burials to find out more.

Even after a person has died, Jewish people believe that the body is still holy. Our rabbis compare a dead person to a damaged Torah. It's no longer usable, but still retains its holiness. This Torah is buried, just like a person.

It is a mitzvah to be with someone when they die and preparing the body and burying it are also mitzvot.

A mitzvah is a Hebrew word that has several meanings. It can be a commandment, or a moral thing to do, like an act of loving kindness.

Next Emor talked about the major Jewish Holidays to keep sacred. Though Jews have a lot of holy days, the most important one to keep sacred is Shabbat, (the day of rest).

Other major holidays are: Passover (when we left the slavery of Egypt for freedom), Shavuot (when we got the Torah), Rosh Hashanah (the New Year), Yom Kippur (when we fast and pray for forgiveness), and Sukkot (when we are reminded of wandering in the desert).

In the next part of Emor, we read about laws for the people.

Some of these laws are about how people should act toward God. For example, anyone who curses God would be put to death by the community.

When I first read this, my reaction was: Why would God need people to be henchmen and punish those who did wrong? Why didn't God just kill them or have the person die?

Later in this portion, it says that anyone who murders any human being is to be put to death.

I think the two laws contradict each other. We all know that murder is wrong, and against one of the Ten Commandments.

I think that what this section is trying to show is that God is giving us a choice and is testing us to do the right thing. Our rabbis teach that people have free will. We have a good inclination and a bad inclination, and it is up to us to choose. God has made us responsible for our actions, as well as the actions of others.

Also in this portion is the famous saying “an eye for eye.” Some people think ‘an eye for an eye’ is meant literally. Our rabbis taught us this is not the case.

For example, one story that was argued was what if a blind man pokes out someone’s eye? How could he be punished according to ‘eye for an eye’?

So for me, I think what ‘eye for an eye’ really means is that the punishment fits the crime.

Next are laws to protect someone’s possessions. For example, if someone kills another person’s animal they are to make restitution.

There are also laws to protect people. Such as, if someone maims another person, they are to pay appropriately.

All these rules I think have eventually come down into our own legal system and even our insurance system.

Emor was a difficult Torah portion, but I learned a lot.

Every person has a choice. We can make good decisions or bad ones.

Emor teaches us that we should make good choices and act with loving kindness to make the world a better place and to be a good person.