

Drash for Shabbat Emor by Sharon & Art Geiger

(This Drash was originally presented on May 1, 2015, Erev Sharon's Bat Mitzvah. Two modifications were made to account for the passage of time.)

Emor, as with the rest of Leviticus, is a list of commandments. The rules are divided into sections –priests, holidays, and penalties for committing “crimes.”

So what are these commandments? Let me summarize.

- Kohanim (Priests) must be male, of course;
- Kohanim need to be perfect physical specimens;
- Kohanim need to marry virgins;
- Kohanim may not defile themselves by touching a dead body, unless it is a close relative;
- A newborn calf, kid, or lamb must be left with its mother, minimally, for seven days before being considered for sacrifice;
- One cannot slaughter a mother and its offspring on the same day;
- The following holidays are specified:
 - Shabbat and we are all here;
 - Pesach;
 - Counting of the Omer;
 - Shavuot;
 - Sukkot, and;
 - Several others.
- Lighting a menorah every evening in the Sanctuary, and;
- The baking of a special bread every Shabbat. Has anyone seen the Challah?

Emor, when specifying the characteristics of Kohanim, sets the Kohanim apart from the people as a whole. Mark Kirschbaum, writing his own Drash on Emor, in 2012, for the *Tikkun Daily Blog*, reflects that there is a more egalitarian view. The Kohanim and the people are on the same level. “The Kohen cannot lord his position over others, as his position is solely a result of lineage, something which one doesn't earn, and can't be said to deserve.... ”

Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, writing for the web page My Jewish Learning, states “...these holidays are occasions for the entire family (and community, by extension) to come together and celebrate. By taking part one could feel in sync with the rhythm of Jewish life that guided the entire society....the holidays God provided give us the best access points for people to enter the community, to demonstrate how inclusive is the Jewish community, and to underscore their sacredness in the midst of a less than sacred world.”

From our Reform Jewish perspective, it is not surprising that we see the world as an egalitarian, inclusive society. As I look out on the congregation (pre-zoom and may we all be in the sanctuary, together, in the not too distant future), I see a congregation that is made up of many types of people – Reform Jews, as well as, probably, some Conservative and Orthodox Jews, secular Jews, non-Jews, atheists, agnostics, people of various sexual orientations, etc. All are welcome. From the same Reform perspective, the three hard-working women, Margie Lambert, Fran Haggerty, and Sharon Geiger, who were called to the Torah on May 2, 2015, can hold any position they desire in our movement. I could go on about Reform and Conservative practices that are accepted, without question, here in the United States and much of the world. My hope is that, these practices will be accepted, using a phrase normally used in a different context, *Next Year in Jerusalem*.

Shabbat Shalom.