

## 24 – Emor – Outline

### Intro and Review:

- general salvation pattern progression:
  - Passover: death and rebirth
  - Shavuot: being educated in the Word
  - Fall: receiving the Word on our hearts
  - Winter: putting flesh and bones on our salvation
- Review of recent portions via their names:
  - Shemini: “Eight”
    - moving beyond the natural cycle of seven to a higher level, eight
  - Tazria-Metzora: “When She Sows” – “Leper”
    - the beginning of growth (Tazria) is seeing our inner impurity (Metzora)
  - Acharei Mot-Kedoshim: “After the Death” – “Holy Ones”
    - after dying (seeing ourselves as a metzora), we find the answer in the Yom Kippur service which begins Acharei Mot; Kedoshim is the beginning of God holding up a “holiness mirror” to us, which both helps us see where we’re falling short and shows us the goal of holiness

### Emor Summary

- “Emor” = “Say”
  - “And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people...” (Leviticus 21:1)
- 2 Big topics:
  - holy requirements of the priests
  - God’s appointed times (mo’edim)

### Climbing the Holiness Mountain

- second half of Leviticus is focused on a single idea: holiness
  - so much so that these chapters have gotten the name “the holiness code”
  - all of Scripture is “spiraling upward,” but this section of Vayikra is special; “Vayikra” means “and He called,” and it’s like God is on high calling us upward
- why are we climbing this mountain through the Torah portions *before* we get to Sinai in the calendar (before we get to Shavuot)
  - God is holding up to us a holiness mirror, and He’s both helping us to see where we are falling short and giving us a picture of the goal
    - we should be looking at both the letter and the spirit of these laws and asking ourselves how we fall short
    - we should be doing the *work* of anticipation
    - practical suggestion: that we add to our daily prayers just a minute or two to express our desire to be holy, and a commitment to holiness, and

also let God know that we are looking forward to the next mo'ed, even as we do whatever we can now to change

### Placing Emor in the Flow

- the title, “Emor,” is focusing us on the idea of communication
  - God requires holy vessels to communicate His Word through; the idea of having a clean vessel for communicating the Word is not only an important part of the description of the holy life, it's central, near the middle
- Why are we coming to a portion focused on communication here near the middle of the holiness code section?
  - speech, talking, the word – this is a middle territory between the spiritual and physical, the invisible and the visible
    - thought is invisible
    - action and stuff are visible, concrete
    - but what is speech?
      - temporary disturbance of the invisible air
      - starts as a thought
      - becomes sound waves moving at 750mph
    - speech is in between thought and action, which is why the Rabbis speak of the progression of thought, speech, and action, placing speech in the middle
      - this is why our speech begins in the neck, which is the middle connecting area between our upper world (head) and lower world (lower body)
      - because words come in the middle, there is a lot of potential there for the process to be derailed or tainted by words that don't accurately represent the thoughts
- What does the priesthood have to do with the middle ground of speech?
  - the priests also stand in the middle, between God and mankind
    - Malachi 2:4-7: “So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.”
    - they take messages and gifts from God to man and from man to God
    - they have the responsibility of guarding and delivering and teaching the Word

- the priests have to accurately reflect the speaker behind them, particularly when it comes to how God is represented to the people
  - the priests' domain is the Temple, the connecting point of heaven and earth
- as messengers of the Word, they are held to a higher standard
  - regarding such things as contact with the dead, their appearance, marriage, and physical perfection for the priests who bring sacrifices
- How do the mo'edim fit into this middle area of speech and communication (Emor)
  - the work of the priesthood is intimately tied to the mo'edim
    - we can almost say that other than the Torah, itself, God's special days are the greatest tools the priests have for doing the connecting work God has entrusted to them; much of their connecting work occurs within the context of the mo'edim, which are connecting points in both time and space
      - because they are such important "vessels" for the priesthood, these days must also be sanctified, made holy
    - the mo'edim become occasions for great TEACHING, public reading forth of the Torah and discussions with Torah leaders
      - as we see Yeshua doing as a young man at the mo'ed of Passover
      - recall that the hill where the Temple is built is called "Mt. Moriah;" Moriah can be translated as "the Lord is my Teacher"
      - the haftarah for this portion, speaking of priests at a future Temple, connects the teaching function of the priests to the mo'edim in consecutive verses:
        - "They shall TEACH my people the difference between the holy and the common, and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean. In a dispute, they shall act as judges, and they shall judge it according to my judgments. They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all my appointed times, and they shall keep my Sabbaths holy" (Ezekiel 44:23-24)

### On Teaching

- Rabbis often connect the idea of education to this portion, partly through the word "emor"
  - the atypical formula that starts this portion emphasizes the verb "amar," "to say:" "Say to the Israelites, and say to them..." rather than the typical "Speak to the Israelites, and say to them..."
    - "speak," "dabar," is called "hard speech" and carries the idea of accuracy and precision
    - "amar," "say," is called "soft speech" and carries the idea of knowing your audience and adjusting your message for your specific audience

- in our day, teachers are more and more understanding the great value in adapting the message for a particular class, though they can only do so much when we put 20 or 30 kids in one classroom
- a few practical ideas from the Kehot Chumash
  - link to free downloadable Kehot Chumash: [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/4292310/jewish/Kehot-Chumash.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4292310/jewish/Kehot-Chumash.htm)
  - we are to be a kingdom of priests
    - whenever we are put in a situation where someone needs edification or correction, this is Divine providence
      - we need to be really careful with this, but we might be able to nudge a bit toward balance, with or without words
      - on the receiving side, we also need to develop the kind of humility that can enable us to receive loving criticism
  - R'Schneerson says that education in every context must be carried out primarily with soft speech
    - we must be able to empathize fully with our charges and tailor our style accordingly
  - the “essential ingredient of effective education through ‘soft speech’ is PRAISING the student.”
    - “All our potential ‘students’ possess infinite, latent good; by praising the good, we draw these positive qualities out of them, thus allowing them to actualize their potential to a far greater extent than they could have done by themselves. To be sure, when we assume the role of educator, we must be fully aware of the spiritual state of those whom Divine providence has placed in our care, assessing their failings and shortcomings honestly and objectively. However, we must at the same time give them the benefit of the doubt, attributing their misdeeds to the circumstances of their lives. Judging them in this way does not absolve them from the guilt of having succumbed to temptation, because God only places people in difficult situations if He has given them in advance the necessary strength of character to overcome such situations. If they fail to do so, it is because this God-given inner strength has not been allowed to manifest itself as it should have—and the reason for that is because we, who are responsible for educating our charges, HAVE NOT PRAISED THEM ENOUGH! Had we used our “soft speech” as much as we should have, we would have elicited our charges’ latent potential and inner strength. All educators should thus assume personal responsibility for the moral failures of their charges.”  
(<https://www.chabad.org/media/pdf/725/ergD7256508.pdf>)
    - the teacher needs to know his charges well enough to see past the flesh into the infinite spirit, praise the student for what he or she sees there, and, thereby, bring it forth
      - the most essential task of a teacher

- profound advice for not only the teacher-student relationship but all of us in all of our relationships
    - imagine if our prison systems weren't just punishing but helping prisoners to find their inner unique goodness and skills potential, what they have to uniquely add to society?
- the mo'edim are great times for parents to teach their children
  - impressionable times for kids
  - the mo'edim are not only for interaction with God but within communities and families
  - this education is particularly a male role, as the men stand in the position of priest for the whole family
    - fathers need to do the work of having the communication channels open in both directions – to receive from God, and to give what he receives to the family

### On the Mo'edim

- a key component of this whole Spiritual Seasons teaching series
- the calendar is a Rosetta Stone of sorts
- anciently, the tribe of Issachar was known to have many of Israel's greatest Torah scholars
  - "Of Issachar, men who had UNDERSTANDING OF THE TIMES, to know what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command" (1 Chronicles 12:32)
    - "of the times" is understood to be the calendar
- there's a lot of power in the progression of the mo'edim for understanding how God saves
- not called "Jewish holidays" but rather "God's appointed times," the mo'edim of Adonai
- another foundation stone to approaching the mo'edim: they are not just days for remembering historical events, and they are not just agriculturally-related; THEY ARE ALSO APPOINTMENTS ON WHICH GOD DOES THE WORK OF SALVATION IN US
- practically, how do we "meet" with God on these days?
  - we prepare mentally and practically
    - the work of believing and anticipating God's work
  - we don't work if the Torah says to not work (if at all possible)
  - we observe the commandments related to these days
    - we guard all the commandments, including those that only apply to the Temple (prayer replaces sacrifices, for example)
  - spend some time being quiet and listening, thinking about priorities, reassessing, re-centering on God
  - we make them holy through special food, our best clothes, and public prayer
    - we don't bring God our second best, as we read in this portion
- if at all possible, take these days off work

- as with resting on the Shabbat, in resting on these other days, we show God that we do not rely on our own hands for our provision
- these days are a foundation stone for our spiritual well-being, upon which our physical well-being is built
- R'Joseph Soloveitchik says that God actually infuses different times with certain characteristics, different personalities.
  - “When we refer to a holy day, we do not merely mean to signify that it is a day in which man somehow experiences holiness. The DAY ITSELF HAS AN INNER ENDOWMENT; A CHARISMA hidden in its very substance” (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Vayikra) (<https://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/understanding-mikraei-kodesh,19136>)
  - we don't want to let these days pass just doing what we would be normally doing; we want to enter into the special charisma of these days
- regarding Hanukkah and Purim
  - it's God Who originally created the uniqueness of these days
  - the Rabbis have seen veiled references to both Hanukkah and Purim in the text of Emor in the two topics that come after the seven annual mo'edim in Leviticus 23
    - the oil for the menorah – reference to Hanukkah
    - the 12 loaves of bread (called in Exodus “lechem panim”)—reference to God's hiddenness at Purim, called “hester panim”
  - God hid these special times in history for us to find
    - and He delights that we found them and offer these celebrations generation after generation as freewill offerings to Him
- the Omer commandment is found here in Emor
  - the two have a close connection
    - words are similar (exchange of an aleph and ayin)
    - we're reading Emor as we cross the middle of the Omer period
      - God is communicating (emor) to us now in a special way during the Omer
  - story from R'Raskin connected to the Omer, the movement from a low place to a high place: Rav Gavriel and his wife Chana Rivka ([https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video\\_cdo/aid/2948527/jewish/Polishing-Yourself.htm](https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2948527/jewish/Polishing-Yourself.htm) 26:45m)
    - a couple, who had great compassion on a fellow Jew in jail and secondly had great respect for their rabbi who requested a sum of money and third had the faith to see in this tragedy of imprisonment an opportunity for a great salvation, the faith that God would flip the evil and take them from a low place to a higher place

### Yeshua and the Omer

- What was Yeshua doing after His resurrection – all of those events happened during the Counting of the Omer
  - the Omer is a time for building step-by-step on a foundation that has just been elevated and, in a way, re-set

- for the young group of Believers, it was a dying time as they doubted their understanding of God's plan; they scattered, and separation is death
- a study in starting again at a higher level – Yeshua:
  - puts the flock back together
  - opens their minds to a deeper truth
  - gives them their mission in this world
  - empowers them to do that mission
- they needed tangible evidence, so He gave it to them – they are like newborn babes in a new world
- He empowers them by opening up the Scriptures to them (not just the two on the road to Emmaus, but the end of Luke says He did this for all of those gathered when He appeared to them)
- He gives them a mission: take the good news to the whole world
  - He gives a special commission to Peter as He is healing Peter from his guilt and shame:
    - special 3 part commission:
      - feed My little lambs
      - shepherd My sheep
      - feed My sheep
    - He is helping Peter undo his denials of Yeshua and simultaneously elevating Peter to the position of leadership for the young flock; he is to lead while they are little lambs, protect them as sheep, and feed them when they outgrow the need for milk
- He empowers them with the Holy Spirit, first breathing on them (seems to impart an authority) and then sending the Spirit at Shavuot (empowers them with an effective message and miraculous signs to help people believe their message)
- a main point here: God will provide everything we need for walking with Him at a higher level, through Yeshua
  - we will lack nothing that we need
  - trust Him as we step off onto a new path together

## 24 – Emor – Transcript (not exact)

Welcome to Beth Tikkun and our ongoing study of the Torah portions in the light of the calendar, which is our key for unlocking God's spiritual seasons in the year. This week we are in parsha Emor, Leviticus 21-24. God's spiritual curriculum in the year is called "salvation." We go through the whole process of salvation every year, from death and rebirth at Passover, to being educated in the Word at Shavuot, to receiving the Word on our hearts at the time of the fall mo'edim, to putting flesh and bones on our salvation in the winter. We find ourselves now in

the Counting of the Omer, the seven weeks that connect Passover to Shavuot. Groundwork is being laid now for a new work in us to come on that 50<sup>th</sup> day of the Omer.

## **Review**

Before we jump into parsha Emor, let's quickly review the recent portions through the portion titles. In the week of Unleavened Bread, we read parsha Shemini. "Shemini" means "eight," and we talked at that time about rising above the natural cycle. The natural cycle is defined by the number seven, and eight is one beyond the natural. Passover is a time when God is inspiring us and lifting us to a new level, a new stage of transcending the natural order.

In the double portion of Tazria-Metzora, we looked at how the beginning of healing and new growth is first seeing our inner impurity. By the NEW LIGHT of a higher level, we experience life a bit differently; suddenly what seemed normal and acceptable now reveals a taint of darkness we didn't see before. Tazria means "when she sows," or "when she sows seed," which is the idea of the beginning of growth, and "Metzora" means a person who is afflicted with "tzara'at," a disease in which an inner impurity is reflected onto the skin. Again, the beginning of growth (Tazria) is seeing our inner impurity (Metzora).

In the next portion, another double portion, we looked at the true answer to the plight of the metzora. "Acharei Mot" means "after the death," and we can think of the dead person as the metzora, separated from the community; the metzora is really all of us to some degree. In Acharei Mot, we found the answer for our inner impurity rests in the work of Yeshua reflected in the Yom Kippur service, the presentation of His blood. Kedoshim means "holy ones." In Kedoshim, we began to see a picture of the normal life that God is putting before us like a mirror, the holy life of love for God and our neighbor for which we are designed.

## **Emor Summary**

This review leads us now to parsha Emor. "Emor" means "say," and is taken from the first verse: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people...' (Leviticus 21:1). This construction using "say" twice is unusual. We'll talk more about that later.

Emor has two big topics and a few smaller topics. The two main ideas are 1) the laws of holiness for the priests and 2) the mo'edim, God's appointed times. Regarding the holy status of priests, they are not to come into contact with a dead body except for a member of their immediate family; they must not degrade their bodies in common ways; there are rules for who they may marry; and only priests without a major blemish or disfigurement can bring sacrifices. The priests are also instructed here regarding animals they can and can't accept as offerings to God. Chapter 23 is a listing of God's appointed times, or we might say "holidays." God calls them "My mo'edim." He begins by reiterating the Shabbat, which is a weekly appointed time. God then describes seven annual appointed times. The text includes some of the sacrifices that are part of sanctifying these days, setting them apart and making them holy. In the last chapter, we have commandments regarding the oil for the menorah and the 12 loaves of bread that are to



be replaced weekly on the Shabbat. At the end of the chapter, we read the tragic story of the man who blasphemes God's Name and is put to death.

### **Climbing the Holiness Mountain**

Before we work Emor into the flow of the calendar, let's notice something about this whole second half of Leviticus, Vayikra: it's particularly focused on a single word – "holiness." What we're seeing in the book of Vayikra is the climbing of a mountain, a holiness mountain. In one sense, the whole of the Torah is a spiraling upward. But Vayikra in particular means "and He called." It's like God is calling us upward from the top of the mountain. He's saying, "Climb up here; I'll help you." This word "holy," "kadosh," starts to be mentioned so frequently in Vayikra that a whole section of the second half has come to be known as "the Holiness Code." The last chapter of the book, in particular, has the word "kadosh" 12 times. And near the middle of these holiness code chapters we have a whole portion named "Kedoshim," which means "holy ones."

*Note: the first half of this focus on holiness has an emphasis on separating, which is dying: Shemini (Nadav/Avihu), Tazria-Metzora, Acharei Mot. The second half has an emphasis on union – the union of speech and teaching and the holy convocations (Emor), the union of heaven and earth we experience on the top of a mountain but fully grounded there in the commandments (Behar-Bechukotai, "on the mount" and "in the chok"), meaning that by means of the commandments (Bechukotai) we soar, transcendence (Behar).*

Why are we climbing this mountain through the Torah portions before we get to Sinai in the calendar, before we get to Shavuot? In the end, this is God saying, "This is who you are! Do you believe it? This is who you are! Are you living up to it fully? This is who you are! Do you believe that I can help you to get there? This is who you are! Do you want it?" God is holding up a mirror to us before we get to Mt. Sinai, and He's saying, "Get ready. Search through these portions and see where you fall short. Don't look at only the letter of these laws, but look at the spirit of them too, like Yeshua did. And prepare. Lean in. Let your expectations grow. Let your desire for holiness grow, My level of holiness that you can see a picture of in the Yom Kippur service when you approach Me. Do the work of anticipation for what I'm about to do!"

Seeing this pages-long description of holiness both helps us to see better where we're falling short and helps us to see the goal, inspiring us. It's a chance for us to say, "I can do better in this area. Lord, I'm trusting You for salvation in this area."

And so along with this work of seeing ourselves, seeing the darkness that remains, we can also be doing the work now of allowing our anticipation to grow as Shavuot approaches. Counting the Omer obviously helps us in this work of anticipation. How much more pleasing must it be to God when we are eagerly awaiting the next step in faith rather than just stumbling through a mo'ed with little preparation, inwardly or outwardly. We don't come to a meeting with God unprepared. Part of being prepared is that we do the faith work and the inner vision work and the anticipation work that helps to prepare our hearts and minds for the meeting to come.

Let me suggest that we add to our daily prayers just a minute or two to express our desire to be holy, and a commitment to holiness, and also let God know that we are looking forward to the next mo'ed, even as we do whatever we can now to change.

### **Placing Emor in the Flow**

Let's turn back to parsha Emor now and think about how it fits into this larger picture of the overall flow of the calendar. The title "Emor," which, again, means "say," is focusing us on the idea of communication. God requires holy vessels to communicate His Word through. The idea of having a clean vessel for communicating the Word is not only an important part of the description of the holy life, it's central, near the middle.

And so if the title is pointing us toward clean vessels for communication, we need to think about how the two main topics of the portion fit into that idea. Again, those two main topics are 1) the holiness of the priesthood and 2) the mo'edim, God's appointed times.

Before we do that connecting of these topics to the title, let's talk about why we are coming to a portion focused on communication here, near the middle of this holiness code section of Scripture, right after the middle portion called "Kedoshim." Speech, talking, the word – this is a MIDDLE territory between the spiritual and physical, the invisible and the visible. We often find the Word at the center of a movement from spiritual to physical, the movement of bring heaven down to earth. Thought is invisible. You can't see a thought or hold one in your hand. Action and physical stuff are concrete – we can see them and feel them.

But what is speech? Speech is the temporary disturbance of the air. Speech starts as a thought, and by means of the voice box, the thought becomes waves in the air that hit your eardrum. The waves are fast, about 750 miles per hour. They last just a moment and then vanish as if they never existed. Speech exists in a middle place between thought and action, which is why we often hear the rabbis talk about the progression of thought, speech, and action. They place speech in the middle. First we have a thought, then we put that thought into words, then we act on those words.

This is why our speech begins in the neck, by the way, which is where our voice box is located. Why did God choose to place the origin of our speech in our neck? Because the neck is a middle zone between the upper world of the head and the lower world of the lower body.

Now, since the words come in the middle of this whole process, there's a lot of potential there for the process to be derailed or tainted by words that don't accurately represent the thoughts.

So what does the priesthood have to do with this middle ground and with speech, specifically? The priests also stand in the middle, between God and mankind. They take messages and gifts from God to man, and they take messages and gifts from man to God. They have the responsibility of keeping and guarding the Word and delivering and teaching the Word. This is why we're seeing such an emphasis on the holiness of the priests here. The priests have to accurately reflect the speaker behind them, particularly when it comes to how God is

represented to the people. The priesthood goes up and down the ladder that connects heaven and earth. Their principle domain is the Temple or Tabernacle, which is said to be the greatest connecting point of heaven and earth. The priests are the physical embodiment of the Word whose lives are to be one with the message they carry. And as messengers of the Word, they are held to a higher standard. We see here in our portion that they have a higher standard regarding such things as contact with the dead, their appearance, marriage, and physical perfection for the priests who bring sacrifices. (Malachi 2:4-7: "So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.")

And how do the mo'edim fit into this middle area of speech and communication and even teaching? We've just seen that the priests need to be holy because of their critical role as a mouthpiece transferring the Word. They must be clean. But why do we have the Torah's most comprehensive list of commandments tied to the calendar here in this portion?

The answer I'm going to give here is that the work of the priesthood is intimately tied to the mo'edim; we can almost say that other than the Torah, itself, God's special days are the greatest tools the priests have for doing the connecting work God has entrusted to them. So much of this connection between heaven and earth happens in the context of the mo'edim. "Mo'edim" can literally be translated "appointed meeting." It carries the idea of a meeting, a connecting. These are God's great connecting points in time and also, to some degree, in space. Since most of these are called holy convocations, we gather together physically for them, not to mention the fact that several are pilgrimage festivals. So, they connect in both time and space. And so these vessels of connection that are so important for the priesthood must also be holy. They must be sanctified, set apart, and they must be clean, purified. Special offerings must be made on these days at the Temple that work to sanctify the priesthood and the people and the days, themselves, and the elements of the Temple service. All must be put in order and prepared and cleansed as the people prepare to meet their God.

And so these appointed times become occasions for great teaching as well, the public reading forth of the Torah so that the people can hear it. And the people can discuss with the teachers at these times, too. Our only story of Yeshua as a young man is the story of how He was found at the Temple at Passover sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and apparently doing some teaching of His own, seeing that the teachers were amazed at Yeshua's understanding and answers. Let's remember, too, that the hill upon which God chose to build the Temple is called "Moriah," and one translation of "Moriah" is "the Lord is my Teacher." God's house is to be a place of learning, a school, and the priests who run it are to be teachers.

We find this connection between this teaching function of the priests and the mo'edim in the haftarah reading for this portion from Ezekiel 44. Ezekiel is speaking about the priests in a future Temple, probably the third Temple, and the text says this: "They shall TEACH my people the difference between the holy and the common, and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean. In a dispute, they shall act as judges, and they shall judge it according to my judgments. They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all my appointed times, and they shall keep my Sabbaths holy" (Ezekiel 44:23-24). So, again, here we have the priests portrayed as teachers, and in the very next verse, the priests are presented as those who keep God's appointed times.

### **On Teaching**

Let's go a little further into the idea of education now. The Rabbis often connect the idea of education to this portion, not only because of the emphasis on the priesthood, but also because of the title of the portion. The typical formula God uses when communicating His commandments is, "Speak to the Israelites, and say to them..." "Speak," the verb "daber," comes first, then "amar," "say." Here though, we have "amar" twice, "Say to the Israelites, and say to them..." This is not only unusual, but the title of the portion comes from one of these words for "to say."

The Kehot Chumash explains that the two Hebrew words translated "speak" and "say" carry different nuances. In English, they're almost identical, but not so in Hebrew. "Speak" connotes "hard speech," which is straightforward and emphasizes accuracy and precision. "Say," on the other hand, is "soft speech," which is speech that tailors the message for the specific listener to make sure the communication is happening effectively. With "amar," "say," you take more time to consider who your listener is, and you adapt the message a bit to fit that audience.

So you can see why this topic of education comes up here in this portion. God is emphasizing with His own speech to the priesthood this idea of soft speech. In our day, teachers are more and more understanding the great value in adapting the message for a particular class. Some master teachers will even give their students personality tests and adjust based on the results if a particular class leans pretty far in one direction. Now, to some degree, teachers in most schools are in a really tough position because we are putting 20 or 30 students together in one class, and there's only so much you can do in such a situation. But that's a topic for another time.

But I want to share a few practical ideas from the Kehot Chumash, which is a free downloadable commentary drawn from R'Schneerson's teachings available on the Chabad website (I'll include a [link](#) below). First, the commentary says that we are to be a kingdom of priests, so we all have a responsibility to each other to educate each other. It goes so far as to say that whenever we see in someone else a behavior or attitude that is in need of edification or correction, we are by Divine providence being placed in the position of teacher. We have to be really careful with this, of course. We aren't to be generally going around correcting everybody. But if we keep this idea in mind that we are to be teachers for each other, we might have enough presence of mind to nudge this way or that way even just a bit, maybe even without words. And there are

those situations where we might be able to actually bring a direct word that helps to guide someone toward a more balanced view. But on the receiving side, we also need to develop the kind of humility that can enable us to receive loving criticism.

Beyond this application to Israel as a kingdom of priests, R'Schneerson says that education in every context must be carried out primarily with soft speech. He says that we must be able to empathize fully with our charges and tailor our style accordingly.

And I find this interesting: R'Schneerson says that the “essential ingredient of effective education through ‘soft speech’ is PRAISING the student.” The commentary continues, “All our potential ‘students’ possess infinite, latent good; by praising the good, we draw these positive qualities out of them, thus allowing them to actualize their potential to a far greater extent than they could have done by themselves. To be sure, when we assume the role of educator, we must be fully aware of the spiritual state of those whom Divine providence has placed in our care, assessing their failings and shortcomings honestly and objectively. However, we must at the same time give them the benefit of the doubt, attributing their misdeeds to the circumstances of their lives. Judging them in this way does not absolve them from the guilt of having succumbed to temptation, because God only places people in difficult situations if He has given them in advance the necessary strength of character to overcome such situations. If they fail to do so, it is because this God-given inner strength has not been allowed to manifest itself as it should have—and the reason for that is because we, who are responsible for educating our charges, HAVE NOT PRAISED THEM ENOUGH! Had we used our “soft speech” as much as we should have, we would have elicited our charges’ latent potential and inner strength. All educators should thus assume personal responsibility for the moral failures of their charges.”

What R'Schneerson is saying here is quite something. For one thing, he's saying that a teacher needs to know his charges well enough to be able to see past the flesh into the infinite spirit in the student. And when the teacher sees that, he or she is to PRAISE the student for the good that is there and the skill potential there. This is probably the teacher's greatest mission, this uncovering of the child's unique potential. Children need to be praised a lot for the good that God has put in them. The student can't really see this himself or herself. So this perceptive ability of the teacher and the teacher speaking forth what he or she sees is critical for the student to be able to bring those qualities forth. To some degree, the teacher needs to look past the moral failures by giving the students the benefit of the doubt. Instead of focusing on those failures, focus on uncovering what God made them to be. Praise them.

I think this is profound advice not only for the teacher-student relationship, but for all of us in all of our relationships. We'd have a much better world if we operated this way. It's not that failures should go unpunished. It's just that we don't connect those failures to a person's core identity; we don't give them more weight than they deserve. And even if we need to punish, at the same time we reach in to pull out the good locked up in a person. If a person thinks they're only a mess up, they are going to behave that way.

Let me just tack on here that the mo'edim are a great opportunity for parents to teach their children. The holidays are very memorable and impressionable times for kids, especially. They are special days set aside for not only interaction with God but also interaction with the family. And this education at the mo'edim is a particularly male role, an opportunity especially given to men and fathers, who stand in the position of priest for the whole family. Fathers need to do the work of having the communication channels to God open, and they need to do the work of transmitting to their wives and children what they receive from God.

### **On the Mo'edim**

Let's turn now to the second big topic in this portion, God's appointed times, or "mo'edim." Obviously the mo'edim are a key component of this whole Spiritual Seasons teaching series. And that's because God's appointed times, this yearly progression, are one of the most important keys for unlocking all kinds of deeper insights into how God saves and how we grow in Him. Truly, the calendar is a Rosetta Stone of sorts. Anciently, the tribe of Issachar was known to have many of Israel's greatest Torah scholars. We are not told much about their specific knowledge except this one reference in 1 Chronicles, where it's naming numbers of men sent to David in Hebron. It says this: "Of Issachar, men who had UNDERSTANDING OF THE TIMES, to know what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command" (1 Chronicles 12:32). So, here we're told that this tribe known for their Torah scholarship had understanding of the times, and this is understood to mean the calendar.

So there's a lot of power here in the progression of the mo'edim for understanding, and these days are not just for the Jewish people. These aren't called "Jewish holidays." The text calls them GOD'S appointed times, the mo'edim of Y-H-V-H.

Another foundation stone for approaching the mo'edim is the understanding that these are not just days on which we are to remember historical events, and they're not just agriculturally-related either, though they do include elements of both of these purposes. The mo'edim are appointments with God in the calendar. They are times to meet with Him, times to both give to Him and receive from Him. Each of us prepares to meet God personally on these days. God not only wants to spend some time with us on the mo'edim, but He also continues His work of salvation in us on these days, a deeper and deeper work. But it's our choice as to whether or not we want to show up for these meetings with Him.

In practical terms, how do we come to the meeting? How do we show up? We mentioned earlier that there are ways we can prepare, both mentally and practically so that we can be ready. We can do the work of believing and anticipating God's work in us on these days, for one thing. One way we show up is to not work if the Torah says to not work on that day. Another is to do what we can to observe the commandments related to these days, even if we don't have a Temple. Many of these days are focused on the Temple, but lacking a Temple for thousands of years, those who follow God have developed ways to honor and guard the commandments. Prayer replaces sacrifices, for example. We guard the commandments by doing what we can now. Another way we show up is by taking at least a little time on these days to be quiet and listen, some time to pray on our own, some time to maybe think about our priorities and

reassess and re-center ourselves in God. And we also make the days special, holy, through special food, our best clothes, and public prayer. Regarding the food and clothing, we don't bring to God our second best. We read in this very portion about bringing God only our best. These days should not be like every other day. We make them special.

If at all possible, take these days off of work. Maybe you have some vacation time saved up, if you are blessed to have that kind of job. What better way is there to use vacation time than for the mo'edim! Like with the weekly Sabbath, one of the things we say to God through keeping these days holy is that we trust Him above everything else for our provision. He is our Provider, not our own hands, our own mind, our own ability to make money. In 1 Cor. 3 (21-22), Paul tells the Corinthians that they have everything. I think what he means is that as followers of God through the Messiah, we have everything that matters, everything that will survive the test of fire; so don't worry if you're not accumulating stuff as quickly as some others; if at all possible, take these days off and honor them according to the commandment.

When we just blow through these days as if they don't exist, we're missing something foundational for life. In a sort of selfish sense, these days are a foundation stone for our spiritual well-being, and it is from our spiritual well-being that most of our physical well-being springs.

But it's deeper than that. R'Joseph Soloveitchik says that God actually infuses different times with certain characteristics, different personalities, almost. And he says, "When we refer to a holy day, we do not merely mean to signify that it is a day in which man somehow experiences holiness. The DAY ITSELF HAS AN INNER ENDOWMENT; A CHARISMA hidden in its very substance" (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Vayikra)

(<https://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/understanding-mikraei-kodesh,19136>). And so we can spend that day doing what we normally do, or we can enter into the special charisma of that day, the unique personality of it, each day being sanctified and imbued with a unique power.

This idea that God has specially imbued each day with its own character also includes the days that have been added to the list of revealed mo'edim over time, including Hanukkah and Purim. It's God Who originally created the uniqueness of these days. Fascinatingly, the Rabbis have seen veiled references to both Hanukkah and Purim in the text of Emor in the two topics that come after the seven annual mo'edim in Leviticus 23. Chapter 24 starts with commandments regarding the menorah, and specifically the oil for the menorah. This is an allusion to Hanukkah, which is partly the story of how one day's worth of oil for the Temple menorah burned for eight days. The next topic is the 12 loaves of bread that are to be replaced in the Holy Place every Shabbat. The Rabbis say this bread, which is elsewhere called "lechem panim," is a kind of backwards reference to the idea of God's hiddenness at Purim, which is called "hester panim." My general approach to Hanukkah and Purim is that God hid these special times in history for us to find. It is God Who chose these days for special events to happen in the history of Israel, not the people. And He delights that the Bride recognized what He had hidden and chose on her own to put in place for all generations the freewill offerings of these additional mo'edim. In

the end, these hidden mo'edim are very much a part of the overall plan of salvation that God has built into the whole creation.

Lastly on this topic today, let's note that we find here in this portion the actual commandment regarding the counting of the Omer. Of course we are now in the midst of doing this, counting seven sets of seven after Passover, seven weeks to Shavuot, which is the 50<sup>th</sup> day. "Emor," the name of our Torah portion, sounds a lot like "omer," the two differing in the exchange of an aleph and ayin; and at least this year, we are now crossing through the middle of the Counting of the Omer as we are reading Emor. The Omer and Emor have some kind of essential connection. This portion about communicating the Word is at the center of the Omer. I think one deep connection is that God is communicating to us now during the Omer.

There's much to say here, but we'll have to save it for another time. For now, I'd like to repeat a story that I heard R'Raskin tell in connection to the Omer, a true story. R'Raskin says that during the Omer, we are being enabled to rise from a low place to a higher place. And he connects to this idea a story from the time of the Alter Rebbe, one of the Lubavitcher rebbes who lived in the 1800's in Lithuania and Russia. The Alter Rebbe was trying to buy a Jewish man out of prison, which was something you could do back then. You can imagine that many would have been falsely imprisoned as a form of extortion. And one of the people the Alter Rebbe asked for money was Rav Gavriel. Rav Gavriel had been married for 25 years but had no children. He had done well in business but had recently lost his wealth. The Rebbe didn't know about the recent events that had befallen Rav Gavriel when he asked him for the money. And so Rav Gavriel felt very bad, but he couldn't do it. But when his wife, Chana Rivkah, heard that the Alter Rebbe requested this big amount for charity, she pawned her pearls and her diamonds. And she took the coins she got and sat down at the table and polished each one with sand. And as she was shining each one, she was praying that God would change their mazal, and that her husband should start to make money, and God should bless them with children. She took all the shiny coins and wrapped them up in a beautiful bag. When the Alter Rebbe saw these sparkling coins, he asked Rav Gavriel where he had gotten such coins. And Rav Gavriel explained his situation and how his wife had pawned her jewelry. The Alter Rebbe put his head in his hands for some time. Then he said to Rav Gavriel that HaShem was going to bless him with long years, with children, and with great wealth, and he even blessed him that people would simply like him as a person. Soon afterwards, the Alter Rebbe asked him to move to another city where they became very wealthy, had sons and daughters, and lived until the age of 110, his wife living two years beyond him. And he was known as Rav Gavriel Nossai Chen, Rav Gavriel the one who had tremendous grace.

Here was a woman, a couple, who had great compassion on a fellow Jew in jail and secondly had great respect for their rabbi who requested a sum of money and third had the faith to see in this tragedy of imprisonment an opportunity for a great salvation, the faith that God would flip the evil and take them from a low place to a higher place. So they turned away from the stuff of this world and faced directly toward God. They risked their lives, their ability to buy food. To them, the blessing of God through the rabbi was more real than the coins, themselves. We can't trust in those coins. We can only trust in the blessing and the promises He gives us,



that He is, indeed, lifting us up, and He will not stop until the job is done. And this woman not only believed, but she had the chutzpah to ask for A LOT, then literally put their money where their mouth was, what was left of their wealth, what they had to live on. And indeed, God raised them up. It's a beautiful story.

### **Yeshua and the Omer**

Speaking of the Omer, let's turn now to a specific focus on Yeshua in this discussion. I want us to think a bit about what Yeshua was doing after His resurrection. Everything He did after rising from the dead until His ascension happened during the Counting of the Omer. And even after His ascension, the sending of the Spirit upon the disciples at Shavuot is also the fulfillment of a promise Yeshua gave to His disciples.

The Omer is a time for building step-by-step on a foundation that has just been elevated and, in a way, re-set. There's a kind of passing away of one life and the beginning of another happening. Passover, especially, is a time of rebirth to a new situation, a new phase of our journey, a new year. Passover is a time of death and resurrection, as it was for Yeshua. It's that way for us, too. For the small group of Believers, that Passover was a dying time. As their Rabbi hung on the tree, they doubted their understanding of God's plan, and they would have naturally doubted their experience of walking with Yeshua. They said that they had hoped He was the Messiah, but He was put to death. How could they not be devastated? How could they not doubt? And so the hope and the cords that had bound them together had come unraveled, and there was a kind of scattering of the flock, a separation, and separation is death.

What happens afterwards is a study in starting again at a higher level. During the Omer, Yeshua 1) puts the flock back together, 2) opens their minds to a deeper truth, 3) gives them their mission in this world, and 4) He empowers them to do it. It's a remarkable sequence of events. This is what it looks like to ascend to a higher level with God.

First, Yeshua appears to His followers. They doubt that it is Him. He sees their need for tangible proof, and He gives them what they need in that moment. He gently reproves them, but He says, "Here, look at my scars." And they believe. In the case of Thomas, Yeshua even allows him to touch His scars. So doubting Thomas is the only one Yeshua invites to come that close to Him. Yeshua knows that they are like newborn babes in a new world, a different reality. When He rose from the grave, the old world passed away. And so He doesn't deny them the tangible evidence they need. He gives it to them, though He also says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Yeshua would go on to empower them by opening up the Scriptures to them, as it says at the end of Luke that Yeshua not only opened the minds of the two on the road to Emmaus but He did the same for all of them. He also give them a mission, the gift of knowing why you're here in this world, to go out and take the good news to the whole world. And He has a special commission for one of them who also needed a little healing, Peter, who had denied Him three times. Yeshua graciously and wisely allows Peter to profess his love for Him three times, each time undoing one of those denials. And each time, Yeshua gives Peter a special three-step

mission: feed My little lambs; tend My sheep; and feed My sheep. I think in that moment He's taking Peter from this low place of shame and the guilt that separates, and He's removing that guilt but also raising Peter up to be the first leader of the Believing community, making him the shepherd who will lead while the flock is young like lambs, and the leader who will continue to shepherd through persecutions, and the leader who will feed the sheep as they begin to require adult food. So Yeshua is providing a LEADER here for the flock. He's making a THOROUGH PROVISION for the young body as they begin a new life – everything they will need.

And this provision includes the sending of the Holy Spirit, which involves Him first breathing on them before He ascends and then later the sending of the Spirit at Shavuot. The first apparently seems to transmit a kind of authority onto them, and the second comes with the power they will need to speak forth the Word effectively and with miraculous signs to help people believe their message.

My main point here in looking at what Yeshua did during the Omer period is that GOD WILL PROVIDE WHAT WE NEED TO WALK AT A HIGHER LEVEL. He does so through Yeshua. We will lack nothing that we need. Trust Him in this as we step off onto a new path together.

Well, that's all for today. Thank you for listening. There is a link to an outline of this teaching posted below. May God bless us to be people who long for and who attain holiness. May we grab hold of our charge to be a kingdom of priests. May we find life in the mo'edim. May He bless us in this period of the Counting of the Omer with faith that He has fully prepared us for a new level of service. And may we rise up to be the people He has made us to be. Shalom.