

Parashat Emor

D'var Torah by Yonatan Koch

In the first part of Emor we read about the laws concerning the priests who served in the holy temple. In the second part we are given laws concerning the festivals and all the sacrifices. Each festival is called Mikra Kodesh, a sanctified time. At each of these times, it is our duty to respect G-d, our creator.

According to the Torah, we are supposed to honor G-d, for G-d is the supreme ruler. S/he took six days to create the world and on the seventh day G-d rested. G-d understood what it means to make time sanctified. As a result, when we make time sanctified we are honoring G-d. Holidays and Shabbat are sanctified times. By our observing them we are honoring G-d. However, the question arises: what does it mean for time to be sanctified? To me this concept is difficult. Does this mean that time is sanctified any time we have a holiday? We just celebrated Pesach. When we came together for each Seder, was this time considered sanctified? How about time that we spend with our family and our loved ones every Shabbat? Is this time automatically sanctified? If the answer to these questions is yes, then we are honoring G-d by respecting the time G-d made for us to be sanctified.

However, the real question is: what does it mean to sanctify time? To me, it means to separate this period of time from another. It also means to make the time holy. For instance, the 25 hours of Shabbat are a sanctified time. They are a holy time. On Shabbat I do not watch TV, use the computer, or use the phone as I would during the week. We do not perform the duties that life requires from us six days a week during sanctified times. By making this time sacred, we are able to show honor to G-d

If this is so, the real question is why? Why do we sanctify time? What is so important about time that we call it sacred? Perhaps we sanctify time because it is a way of showing respect to G-d, our creator. If we sanctify time, or observe an amount of time that we know to be holy, we are showing honor to G-d.

One way to show respect to G-d is by observing these holidays and Shabbat. Yet it is not enough to just celebrate each holiday. In order to respect G-d, we must also respect one another. When we respect one another we are respecting G-d. This is because we as humans are created — B'Tzelem Elokim — in the image of G-d.

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By sanctifying time we are able to show respect to G-d. One way of sanctifying time is by observing Shabbat. There are many ways to observe Shabbat. Perhaps you want to observe Shabbat by not using the phone, or perhaps you want to observe Shabbat by taking a walk in Riverside or Central Park. Any way you choose to observe Shabbat is a demonstration of your sanctifying time, and is therefore honoring G-d. If not by honoring Shabbat, then perhaps you want to show respect to G-d by honoring a friend or relative. The way you choose to show respect is up to you; the most important part is that we respect G-d.

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The opinions expressed in this d'var Torah are the author's alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun or of its rabbis.