



Torah Reflections: Conversations on the Weekly Parsha  
Parshat Emor 5784: Practical Sanctity

Integrating Torah into one's life through reflection and conversation can be an incredibly fun and engaging experience. It's a journey of discovery, where ancient wisdom and timeless teachings come to life in our daily experiences. Through reflection, we have the opportunity to dive deep into the rich tapestry of Torah, extracting profound insights and lessons that resonate with our modern lives. The joy lies in the 'aha' moments, those instances when a Torah verse or story suddenly connects with our personal challenges, aspirations, and values. And when we engage in conversations about Torah with others, it becomes an interactive exploration, where diverse perspectives and interpretations enhance our understanding. These dialogues often spark excitement and intellectual curiosity, making the learning process both enjoyable and fulfilling. Torah becomes a vibrant and dynamic part of our lives, offering not just guidance but also a source of endless fascination, connection, and growth.

NOTE: Don't feel obligated to go through every source or answer all the questions—unless you want to. Even one source, or one question will give you plenty of material for discussion and meditation. Enjoy this!

Some thoughts from the parsha

Ben Zoma says, “who is wise? He who learns from each person, as it says, ‘from all of my teachers, I have learned’ (Psalms 119:99). Who is mighty? He who subdues his urge, as it says, “better is one who is slow to anger than a man of physical strength.’ (Proverbs 16:32) Who is wealthy? He who rejoices in his portion, as it says, ‘when you consume the fruit of your own labor, you will rejoice and it will be good for you’ (Psalms 128:2). ‘Rejoice’--in this world; ‘it will be good for you’--in the world to come. Who is honored? He who honors the creations, as it is says, ‘all those who honor Me shall be honored’ (I Samuel 2:30). (Avot 4:1)

Ben Zoma's teachings provide valuable insights for Noahides seeking moral guidance from Jewish wisdom. He defines wisdom as an ongoing process of learning from everyone, not just the elite. It's not about achieving a certain status but embracing a mindset of constant learning and growth. Similarly, true might, or *gevurah*, is found in restraining one's impulses, particularly the urge to anger. This requires self-discipline and the ability to delay gratification, essential qualities for personal development.

When it comes to wealth, Ben Zoma suggests a shift in perspective. Rather than focusing on material accumulation, one should find joy in what they have. This approach cultivates gratitude and contentment, leading to true wealth regardless of external possessions. Likewise, seeking honor involves honoring others. By treating all creations with respect and reverence, we honor the Creator Himself. This mindset fosters a cycle of mutual respect and recognition, fulfilling the directive to love one's neighbor as oneself.

In Parshat Emor, there's a focus on the sanctity of time and the importance of maintaining spiritual purity, particularly among the priests and the nation as a whole. The portion also includes various laws concerning festivals, sacrifices, and the obligations of the *kohanim*. Just as Parshat Emor emphasizes the need for sanctity and ethical behavior in the context of religious rituals and communal life, Ben Zoma's teachings offer practical wisdom for individuals seeking moral guidance in their everyday lives.

These teachings emphasize the importance of self-improvement and ethical behavior, principles that resonate with the universal moral code of the Seven Noahide Laws. By embodying these values,



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Noahides can lead fulfilling lives and contribute positively to their communities, echoing the spirit of love, caring, and compassion emphasized in Jewish teachings.

Now, consider these questions for deep personal reflection and discussion:

1. What does it truly mean to be wise, according to Ben Zoma's teachings? How can we embody wisdom in our daily lives, and what practices can help us cultivate a mindset of continuous learning and growth?
2. Reflecting on Ben Zoma's definition of might as restraint, how do we navigate the impulse to act impulsively or reactively, especially in moments of anger or frustration? Can you share an experience where you exercised restraint, and what was the outcome?
3. Considering the concept of finding joy in one's portion, how can we shift our mindset from focusing on what we lack to appreciating what we already have? What practices or perspectives help us cultivate gratitude and contentment in our lives?
4. In what ways can we honor others in our daily interactions, as suggested by Ben Zoma? How does honoring others contribute to a sense of community and interconnectedness, and what challenges do we face in embodying this principle?
5. Reflecting on the idea that honoring creations is akin to honoring the Creator, how can we deepen our reverence for the world around us and its inhabitants? How does this perspective influence our attitudes and behaviors towards nature, animals, and fellow human beings?