



Torah Reflections: Conversations on the Weekly Parsha
Parshat Emor 5785 - Real

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 about Parshat Ki Tisa

Real Strength, Real Wealth, and Real Honor

Ben Zoma, one of the great early sages, offers a timeless and practical guide to four things that nearly everyone seeks: wisdom, strength, wealth, and honor. But instead of defining these in terms of status or possessions, he gives inner, character-based definitions:

- Who is wise? One who learns from every person.
- Who is strong? One who controls their impulses.
- Who is wealthy? One who rejoices in what they have.
- Who is honored? One who honors others.

These aren't just poetic ideas—they're a blueprint for how to live with dignity, peace, and purpose.

Wisdom, Ben Zoma teaches, is not about how many books you've read or degrees you hold. It's about maintaining a posture of humility and openness. True wisdom means realizing that every person has something to teach us, even if they aren't formally educated. It's a present-tense act: the wise person *is always learning*.

Strength isn't about domination or muscle—it's about self-mastery. Can you control your temper? Delay gratification? Choose what's right even when it's hard? That's real might.

Wealth, in this view, is not measured in dollars, properties, or bank accounts. It's found in gratitude. When you truly appreciate what you have, even a little feels like a lot. Joy in your portion transforms your life from scarcity to abundance.

Honor doesn't come from demanding respect—it comes from giving it. When you honor others, you reflect the dignity of the One who created them. That's why the Mishnah says honoring others is a way of honoring G-d. In turn, you yourself become truly honorable.



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This teaching ties beautifully into the upcoming celebration of Lag BaOmer, which commemorates the life and teachings of Rabbi Akiva, who famously taught:

“Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)—this is the great principle of the Torah.” (Sifra, Kedoshim 45)

Even for Noahides—those who follow the Seven Universal Laws—the principle of loving others, showing respect, and becoming people of character is foundational. These values form the ethical fabric of life in relationship with G-d.

Now, reflect on the following questions:

1. Have you ever learned something valuable from someone you didn't expect to? What made you open to hearing it?
2. What does self-control look like in your daily life? Are there areas where you're gaining strength by holding back?
3. How do you cultivate gratitude for what you have, especially in a world that encourages always wanting more?
4. Think of someone you admire. What kinds of honor do they show others? How does that affect the way people treat them?
5. Which of these four qualities—wisdom, strength, wealth, or honor—do you most want to grow in? What would it look like to begin today?

May we each become wiser, stronger, wealthier in spirit, and more honorable by cultivating these inner qualities and sharing them generously with the world.

Shabbat Shalom!