

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Emor	5 May 2018	20 Iyar 5778	Lev. 21:1-24:23	Ezek. 44:15-31	Matt. 26:59-66

This week's parashat is Emor (אֶמֹר) which means 'say.' In Hebrew, the words "speaking" and "saying" carry different nuances of meaning. "Speaking" (שֵׁמַע) is "hard speech," (강한 연설) an expression of no nonsense, straightforward for the message to be conveyed, emphasizing the accuracy and precision of the message. Whereas, "saying" (יִשָּׁר) is "soft speech," (부드러운 연설) tailored to facilitate effective communication to deliver message for the recipient to understand its message in full consciousness. Therefore, Hashem is commanding Moses to "speak" to the children of Israel by "saying" in a language they can understand Hashem's commandments.¹

The sages teach the double expression of "Speak to the priests... and say to them" that Moses is not only to deliver messages but to educate younger priests along with the elder priests. The implication is that education has to be done through "soft speech" to be effective and deliver the message in a way student can understand.

The Torah does not mandate to educate the young until this parashat. But even here, it mentions only the priests' duty to educate their young, and leaving us to infer that this duty falls upon us.² And you just thought that you are not a priest and therefore you do not have to teach? In Revelation 1:6 says, "And [He] has made us *melechim* (King) and *Kohanim* (Priests) to His ELOHA and Abba; to Him be *tifereth* (glory) and dominion *le-olam-va-ed* (forever). Amen."

This week's parasha discusses the laws of impurity and purity. We are talking about spiritual purity. It has nothing to do with the body for the body can be clean and unclean. The body can be clean but it can be impure and the body can be dirty but it can be pure. There are different kinds of impurity. One of them is touching the dead body, or a person stepping within 6 feet of the dead body can be impure. If a person steps into a building or a room of dead body, the entire building becomes impure, that is spiritually. Even flying over a cemetery becomes impure. So, today, everybody is impure. When the time comes and the Third Temple is established, the *kohen* (priest) that wants to go inside the Temple has to be sanctified with purification by the Kohen HaGadol that has been mixed with water and red heifer. And that will happen when the Messiah returns.

The scripture continues that even a lay *kohen* or a normal person is not allowed to become impure. But for *kohen* it is critical, because the impurity is preventing him to perform his duty. But there are exceptions to the rules, such as the death of mother, father, son, daughter, brother, his unmarried sister (Lev. 21:2-3), and the dead body with no one to bury it. (Num. 19:16) The scripture also describes whom they can marry (Lev. 21:7). As for the *kohen gadol* (high priest) has stricter rules which applies to them.

In Yochanan (John) 20:3-5, Miryam from Magdala told Shimon Kepha (Peter) and other disciples about the empty grave. John and Peter ran together to the tomb. But, John outran Peter, and he did not enter the tomb. When Peter arrived, he entered the tomb first rather than John. John, being a priest was forbidden to defile himself by entering the tomb as his impurity would forbid him from the duties of the Temple. In John 18:16, the verse states, "But Kepha stood at the door outside. Then went out that other talmid (John), who was known to the Kohen HaGadol, and spoke to her that guarded the door, and brought in Kepha."

¹ Leviticus 21:1

² Ezekiel 44:23

In Leviticus 24:10-16 records a death of a son whose mother is an Israelite and the father an Egyptian. The son blasphemed the Name of Hashem. It reads, “Now, the son of an Israelite woman... [and] an Egyptian man... quarreled... with an Israelite man..., pronounced the [Divine] Name and cursed. So they brought him to Moses [and]... placed him in the guardhouse, [until] the word of Elohim specified his sentence. Then Elohim spoke to Moses, saying: “Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and all who heard [his blasphemy] shall lean their hands on his head. And the entire community shall stone him. And to the children of Israel, you shall speak, saying: Any man who blasphemes his God shall bear his sin. And he who blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him; both the stranger and he who is born in the land, when he blasphemes the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.” (Lev. 24:10-16)

Why is blasphemy (신성 모독) such a major infraction? The Third Commandment is “You shall not bring the Name of YHVH your Elohim to vain emptiness; for YHVH will not hold him guiltless that brings His Name to vain emptiness.” (Exod. 20:7) The blasphemy is defined as disrespectful or irreverent use of God’s name, with or without intention to pray or speak of holy matters.

The Torah says that the punishment for blasphemy is death by stoning, but later commentators have considerably softened the penalty. First, the Mishna says that the death penalty applies only if one specific name of God is used, namely “HaShem”, that is, the Tetragrammaton, and not another.

Also, there must be at least two witnesses: The blasphemer is punished only if he utters the divine name, HaShem. Rabbi Yehoshua bar said: The whole day [of the trial] the witnesses are examined by means of a substitute for HaShem, [for example] Yosei.

When the trial is finished, the accused is not executed on this evidence, but all persons are removed [from the court], and the chief witness is told, “State literally what you heard.” When he does so, [using HaShem], the judges then arise and rend their garments, which are not to be resewn. The second witness states “I too have heard as he said” [but not uttering HaShem], and the third says: “I too heard as he said.”

In the gospel of Matthew, it also records blasphemy being used against Yeshua. In Matthew 26:61, two false witness comes forward and says, “This Fellow said, I am able to destroy the Beit HaMikdash of Eloha, and to build it in three days.” “But Yahushua kept His silence. And the Kohen HaGadol answered and said to Him, I put You under oath before the living Eloha, that You tell us whether You are The Moshiach, the Son of the Almighty. Yahushua said to him, You have said it: nevertheless I say to you, After this you shall see the Ben Ahdahm sitting as the right hand of YHVH, and coming in the clouds of the shamayim. Then the Kohen HaGadol tore his clothes, saying, He has spoken blasphemy; what further need do we have for witnesses? See, now you have heard His blasphemy. What do you think? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then they did spit in His face, and beat Him; and others slapped Him with the palms of their hands.” (Matt. 26:63-67)

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The trial lasts a whole day and the witnesses are examined. Then came two false witnesses who testified against Yahushua. When the trial is finished, the accused is not executed on this evidence, but all persons are removed from the court, and the chief witness is told, "State literally what you heard".

The second witness states "I too have heard as he said," but not uttering Hashem, and the third says: "I too heard as he said." When he does so, using Hashem, the judges then arise and rend their garments, which are not to be resewn.

As a matter of fact, the correct pronunciation of Hashem's name Hashem has been lost for over two millennia, so no one can technically blaspheme today. There is no record of trials for blasphemy since that time.

The important thing for us as the follower of Yahushua, the blasphemy is not allowed because: First, it demeans the authority of Hashem. By refraining from mocking the ultimate authority is one way to preserve respect for the Torah, even if one is lax in following its commandments. Second, even though blasphemy does not harm Hashem Himself, it hurts believers who are nearby, and their feelings must be taken into account. Third, their feelings may be so strong that offensive words may spur them to commit acts of violence, and that is very much to be avoided. Fourth, it burns our bridges to believers.