

Torah Portion Preview for Emor

Sabbath beginning May 5, 2023

Emor (speak) contains four types of instruction. First, Aaron and his sons were told how to regulate their lives as priests. Next, the Israelite people were given times to celebrate the Sabbath, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot. Near the end, the Israelites were given the retributive laws known as “eye for eye, tooth for tooth.” Finally, Moses was instructed how to punish a blasphemer.

The study system called “Pardes” reveals how to inspire with these passages. In Maria Subtelny’s elegant *The Tale of the Four Sages who Entered the Pardes*, it is an acronym meaning royal garden. It stands for four Hebrew words: *Peshat* (plain), *Remez* (hints), *Derash* (inquire), and *Sod* (secret)—four ways to seek God. With Emor, Peshat reminds us to achieve and maintain a purity of purpose to understand the text as paramount, serving neither health, power, wealth, nor the satisfaction of other human goals. Remez reminds us to reserve special times for study in a spirit of peace and joy, open to the ideas of our communities. Derash requires a deep reverence for creation, especially other humans. Sod helps us maintain awe for God in our words and actions.