

Shabbat Parashat Emor When Game 7 Falls on Shabbat!

One of my best friends is a Rabbi currently living in suburban Baltimore, Maryland on the East coast of the United States. We met in Rabbinical School and, as a result of our many commonalities, almost immediately hit it off as friends. One of the things we share is a love of sports and a passion for our hometown teams. Like me, he has also returned to the city where he grew up and has rejoined his fellow citizens in rooting for the Washington Capitals of the NHL, Washington Redskins of the NFL...etc. When I was on the phone with him earlier this week, I wished his beloved Caps good luck in Game 7 against the New York Rangers, for which the puck would drop at 7:30pm EST on Saturday. We talked about how Shabbat was in conflict with the start of the hockey game that he really wanted to watch and expressed our gratitude for PVR systems which now make these kinds of conflicts much less of an inconvenience. He would merely have to a couple of hours to start watching the game and then fast-forward commercials and intermissions to catch up in real time. Where was PVR in 1993 when the Toronto Blue Jays won the World Series on a walk-off homerun by Joe Carter, a game which took place on Shabbat? But...I digress...The obligation to observe Shabbat and other holy times in Jewish life, to take a break from the mundane of the every day (even if that includes the Stanley Cup Playoffs or the World Series), is an essential ingredient to the full experience of the spirit and meaning of Judaism. It is for this reason that particular commandments to observe these times are repeated in the Torah from time to time. One of those times is in this week's *parasha*, *parashat* Emor.

In this week's *parasha*, the calendar of holy times is laid out in the Torah. Of the many festivals that are now part of the rhythm of Jewish life, the Torah specifies **Shabbat** (the 7th day of each week), **Pesah** (the first and last day of the seven day festival), **Shavu'ot** (the fiftieth day from the beginning of Passover), **Rosh Hashanah** (the first day of the seventh biblical month), **Yom Kippur** (the tenth day of the seventh month), **Sukkot** (the first and seventh days of the festival of booths beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month), and **Sh'mini Atzeret** (the day immediately following the end of Sukkot) as the sacred days, to be observed as days of rest, of the Jewish year. In ancient Israel, holiness was embedded both within times on the calendar and in structured space: the desert Tabernacle which traveled with the people through the desert and into the Promised Land and, later, the Holy Temples in Jerusalem. Now, one may ask, "Was it space or time that carried greater holiness back then?" Without question, it was place, for the Tabernacle and the Temples served as God's dwellings on earth and the only addresses for direct communication with God. However, as history moved forward and our relationship with the Land of Israel changed upon our exile from it, the centrality of the holiness of time acquired the greater emphasis. An exiled people, constantly in motion, and with a destroyed Temple could not have its "holiness" or emphasis wrapped up in a space to which it no longer had access. The observance and celebration of holy time became the way to reach out to and to connect with God. Had this evolution and change not occurred, Jewish observance would have become impossible and Judaism likely would not have survived.

Judaism's focus on observing and celebrating sacred time is a unifying force for Jews around the world. To know that in villages, towns, and cities in countries all across the globe Jews are marking holy time together is a powerful reality. As we count down the hours and minutes to candle lighting for any of our sacred days and rush to make sure that we are ready for it to begin, then finally STOP all the "madness" when the minute finally arrives is an authentic experience of the holiness that Judaism injects into our ticking clock of time.

No matter what choices your family makes for the observances of the holy times of Jewish life, take the opportunity this Shabbat to find a way to be deliberate about marking its holiness and separateness from the other days of the week this week by letting go of those things in life which drain our energy, attention, and time with family and friends. As we move closer and closer to the festival of Shavu'ot (May 26th in the evening to May 28th), which celebrates Israel's receiving of the gift of the Torah, make plans for how you will celebrate this Torah-decreed holy festival. The opportunity to experience holiness and find spirituality is worth the adjustments you may need to make to make this possible. If that means setting your PVR...don't forget to do that!

Shabbat Kodesh Shalom!

May you and your family have a peaceful and holy Shabbat!

And in honor of my friend Rabbi Sunshine in Maryland...GO CAPS!!!