



Parsha Emor
Ezekiel 44:15-31
May 3, 2014 / 3 Iyyar 5774

In reading Parashat Emor not long after Pesach, as is the case every year, it is impossible to hear many of its verses and not immediately think “didn’t I just hear this?” And the answer would of course be yes, since a portion of Parashat Emor is used as the Torah reading for the second day of Pesach (and for the first and second days of Sukkot). What is created is the feeling of repetition. Whether Emor is the repetition or if it is the second day of Pesach is inconsequential – what matters is that we read from the Torah the same verses four different times during the year and equally important is the fact that the verses are always the same. The list of sacred occasions never changes, neither does the requirement to leave the corners of the fields untouched so that the poor and the stranger can come and reap from the harvest.

The haftarah for Parshat Emor, Ezekiel 44:15-31, follows in the model of repeating instructions that we have heard before but with one important difference: Ezekiel changes some priestly laws detailed in earlier chapters of Parashat Emor. Ezekiel changes the rules regarding women that a priest can marry, adjusts rules regarding how priests are required to cut their hair, expands the duties of priests regarding judicial responsibilities not mentioned in Parshat Emor, limits the application of the prohibition against priests consuming alcohol while performing priestly duties, and most significantly, limits who may serve as priests to those from the Zadokite line.

To be sure, it was a shock to the system of the commentators to see what Ezekiel had done. Rashi and other spend much time trying to reconcile Ezekiel with Parashat Emor and by most accounts, it was due to what the “JPS Bible Commentary; Haftarot” called a “heroic act of exegesis by one Hananiah ben Hizkkiyah that the difficulties were reconciled” (page 192) and Ezekiel continued to be read in the first place.

But for those of us living in modern times, it seems that the correct approach for this haftarah is the one put forth by Chumash Etz Hayim which encourages us to recognize the similarities between what Ezekiel does and what we all do in our quest to blend tradition and change. Both as a movement and as individuals, we have found ourselves changing, adjusting, and limiting applications. And if we’re honest with ourselves we can admit from time to time we also limit who may serve. It is not to say that Ezekiel was right or wrong in his conclusions, but at least we can understand his methods and hopefully better appreciate his words in this haftarah.

This week's Unraveller was written by Rabbi Hillel Skolnik of the Southwest Orlando Jewish Congregation (SOJC). Rabbi Skolnik joined SOJC after ordination from JTS in May, 2011. He is a member of the Orange County Public School Faith-Based Advisory Committee and the Interfaith Council Advisory Board of Central Florida. Rabbi Skolnik also currently serves as the president of the Greater Orlando Board of Rabbis. Rabbi Skolnik lives in Orlando with his wife Rabbi Sharon Barr Skolnik and their 2 children.