

Torah Weekly

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PARSHAT EMOR

13 - 19 Iyar 5785
11 - 17 May 2025

Torah: Leviticus 21:1 - 24:23
Haftorah: Ezekiel 44:15-31

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 212

Reproduction

We are commanded to reproduce in order to perpetuate the human species.

Positive Mitzvah 222

Divorce

In the event that a couple decides to divorce, it is a Mitzvah for the husband to effectuate the divorce through a bill of divorce, known as a Get.

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SECOND PASSOVER

Pesach Sheni, "the Second Passover," is observed on the fourteenth of Iyar. The origin of this semi-holiday is quite fascinating. On the first anniversary of the Exodus, while all the Jews were occupied with preparing their lambs for the annual Paschal offering, Moses was approached by a small group of Jews who were ritually impure and thus excluded from offering, or partaking of, the Paschal lamb. They weren't satisfied with their "exemption" from this Passover Mitzvah. "Why should we be deprived?" they exclaimed. "We, too, want to experience the spiritual freedom gained by participating in the Paschal service!" Moses agreed to convey their grievance to the Almighty, and incredibly, the heartfelt wishes of this small group caused G-d to add a Mitzvah to the Torah. G-d instructed that from that year and onwards, all those who couldn't offer the Paschal Lamb in its proper time on the fourteenth of Nissan, due to impurity or distance from the Temple, should offer the Paschal lamb exactly one month later, on the fourteenth of Iyar.

Jewish holidays are not commemorations of historical events; rather, they are spiritual reenactments. No two holidays are alike - every holiday features a distinct spiritual energy, offering us the opportunity to gain inspiration and the necessary spiritual powers in a specific area of our service of G-d. On Passover we receive the strength to liberate ourselves from our natural enslavement to our impulses and destructive habits; on Shavuot we tap into the core of the Torah, recommitting ourselves to connecting with G-d through its study; and on Sukkot we fill the reservoirs of our hearts with true joy. We stock up on these unique spiritual powers, enough to last us for an entire year, until the holiday returns once again. The Mitzvot unique to each holiday are tools which enable us to tap into the spiritual energies present at that time.

Passover is the first holiday of the year, as the "holiday calendar" commences on the first of Nissan. Immediately after this holiday we are taught an important lesson, a lesson which applies to all the following holidays too. Indeed, there is a biblically mandated designated time for Passover, but a person who for one reason or another has missed out and did not take advantage of the benefits which the holiday has to offer can have a personal Passover whenever he sincerely yearns for divine assistance in gaining personal redemption.

According to Kabbalah, the months of Nissan and Iyar are diametrical opposites. Nissan is a month pervaded by divine kindness; the month when G-d redeemed - and redeems - even those who are unworthy of redemption. Iyar, on the other hand, is a month of discipline and self-improvement: the month when we count the Omer and are involved in personal refinement in order to earn the right to receive the Torah in the following month. Yet, the penitent Jew has the ability to experience a Nissan redemptive holiday even during the month of Iyar!

The lesson of Pesach Sheni is that it is never too late. Never think, "Everyone else has already left Egypt weeks ago, and is well on their way toward receiving the Torah - and I haven't even begun my spiritual journey! I'm impure!" Don't despair; you too can make the Passover leap and join everyone else in their state of Redemption, worthy of receiving the Torah on the holiday of Shavuot. It's no use crying over spilled milk, because G-d has an infinite supply of milk which can be accessed anytime - provided that we have a sincere thirst, and express to Him this feeling.

May we soon merit to see the coming of Moshiach, when we - who in our current exiled condition are "impure" due to our "distance" from G-d - will all bring the Paschal lamb in the Third Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Amen!

*By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg
Editor, Jewish Learning Institute*

THE KOHEN GENE

Ever looked around a synagogue and noticed the incredible array of people from different races wandering the aisles? Hard to believe we've got anything in common, let alone common ancestry and religion.

In the late '90s, a study came out attempting to prove that Kohanim (priests), no matter their facial or racial makeup, all descend from a common paternal ancestor. The geneticists involved collected DNA samples from hundreds of Kohanim and searched for common markers on the Y-chromosome. Incredibly, they found that over 98% of men with a family tradition of priesthood showed evidence of descent from the same great-great-great grandfather.

I find it fascinating that Moses' older brother, the biblical High Priest Aaron the kohen, lived some 3,300 years ago but bequeathed his genetic signature to these men. Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Yemenite and Italian Kohanim can actually trace their backgrounds back to the Jews of the Exodus. And if modern science has given us the tools to prove common ancestry, isn't the next obvious step to dedicate ourselves to our common purpose - G-d's Torah and mitzvot?

The Fidelity Gene

Recently, I came across a statistic that absolutely floored me. According to one Australian laboratory, nearly one-quarter of the DNA tests performed demonstrate the assumed father not to be the real biological parent. One quarter!

Contrast this sorry record with that of Jews throughout history. What would happen if a Kohen's wife committed adultery? The resulting illegitimate child would be an assumed Kohen. He'd join his "father" on the dais and recite the Priestly Blessing; he'd get dibs on the first Aliyah. He'd hand down a tradition of priesthood to his own sons... But in reality, he's no Kohen, and his DNA and that of his future male descendants would not bear those crucial markers.

But almost 100% of all men with family tradition of priesthood do descend from Kohanim. Generation after generation of Jewish women were faithful to their husbands and their tradition. What a proud record of fidelity. Geneticists describe these results as "the highest record of paternity-certainty ever recorded," and there is no reason to assume that their sisters married to Levites and Israelites were any less faithful to their spouses and religion.

This devotion to our spouses and our G-d has always been the way of the Jew. Even during our slavery in Egypt, subject to the capricious demands of an evil nation, our women distinguished themselves. The Book of Leviticus records the only example of illegitimacy, the product of the rape of a Jewess by an Egyptian overseer. The Torah hints that this woman's flirtatious manner may have precipitated the dreadful occurrence, but the crime was committed by the Egyptian.

This sad exception only demonstrates how refreshingly modest and chaste were all other Jews. The very worst and most unfortunate incident of all the time they were in slavery was not a case of adultery, G-d forbid, but abuse. It is to the credit of our ancestors that, no matter the temptations, irrespective of the dangers, they fought to stay faithful, and almost without exception they succeeded. This proud heritage they vouchsafed to us.

Jewish marriages throughout history are a model for all humanity, and the oaths and bonds that unite us with our partners and Creator will remain firm and unwavering for now and eternity.

*By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum
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EMOR IN A NUTSHELL



ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

The name of the Parshah, "Emor," means "speak" and it is found in Leviticus 21:1. The Torah section of Emor ("Speak") begins with the special laws pertaining to the Kohanim ("priests"), the Kohen Gadol ("high priest"), and the Temple service: A Kohen may not become ritually impure through contact with a dead body, save on the occasion of the death of a close relative. A Kohen may not marry a divorcee, or a woman with a promiscuous past; a Kohen Gadol can marry only a virgin. A Kohen with a physical deformity cannot serve in the Holy Temple, nor can a deformed animal be brought as an offering.

A newborn calf, lamb or kid must be left with its mother for seven days before being eligible for an offering; one may not slaughter an animal and its offspring on the same day. The second part of Emor lists the annual Callings of Holiness - the festivals of the Jewish calendar: the weekly Shabbat; the bringing of the Passover offering on 14 Nissan; the seven-day Passover festival beginning on 15 Nissan; the bringing of the Omer offering from the first barley harvest on the second day of Passover, and the commencement, on that day, of the 49-day Counting of the Omer, culminating in the festival of Shavuot on the fiftieth day; a "remembrance of shofar blowing" on 1 Tishrei; a

solemn fast day on 10 Tishrei; the Sukkot festival - during which we are to dwell in huts for seven days and take the "Four Kinds" - beginning on 15 Tishrei; and the immediately following holiday of the "eighth day" of Sukkot (Shemini Atzeret).

Next the Torah discusses the lighting of the menorah in the Temple, and the showbread; (Lechem Hapanim) placed weekly on the table there.

Emor concludes with the incident of a man executed for blasphemy, and the penalties for murder (death) and for injuring one's fellow or destroying his property (monetary compensation).

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 13 Iyar 5785 - 11 May 2025

Jews Expelled from Berne (1427)

The Jews of Berne, Switzerland were expelled on this date in 5187 (1427). Berne had a long history of expulsions and anti-Jewish riots (pogroms).

Monday, 14 Iyar 5785 - 12 May 2025

"Second Passover" (1312 BCE)

A year after the Exodus, G-d instructed the people of Israel to bring the Passover offering on the afternoon of the 14th of Nissan, and to eat it that evening, roasted over the fire, together with Matzah and bitter herbs, as they had done on the previous year just before they left Egypt.

"There were, however, certain persons who had become ritually impure through contact with a dead body, and could not, therefore, prepare the Passover offering on that day. They approached Moses and Aaron ... and they said: '...Why should we be deprived, and not be able to present G-d's offering in its time, amongst the children of Israel?'" - Numbers 9

In response to their plea, G-d established the 14th of Iyar as a "second Passover" (Pesach Sheini) for anyone who was unable to bring the offering on its appointed time in the previous month. The day thus represents the "second chance" achieved by Teshuvah, the power of repentance and "return." In the words of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, "The Second Passover means that it's never a 'lost case.'"

Rabbi Meir (2nd Century CE)

Rabbi Meir, a second century scholar and scribe, was among the foremost disciples of Rabbi Akiva. His colleagues called him Meir because he "enlightened the eyes of the sages" with his genius and scholarship ("Meir" comes from the Hebrew word "Or," light).

Rabbi Meir's long life was rife with personal tragedy. Aside for his personal travails, he lived in the troubled times following the destruction of the second Holy Temple. After his beloved teacher, Rabbi Akiva, was executed by the Romans, he fled to Babylon until the persecutions eased up.

His wisdom and teachings are so often quoted in the Mishnah and Talmud that every anonymous teaching in the Mishnah is attributed to him.

His wife, Beruria, was also famous for her Torah knowledge, piety, and wisdom.

He is buried in the holy city of Tiberias, Israel.

Jews of Bisenz Massacred (1605)

The Jews of Bisenz, Austria were massacred on the 14th of Iyar, 5365 (1605).

Germans Burn Jewish Books (1933)

Following the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany in the year 5693 (1933), the Nazis burned thousands

of books written by Jews - and others deemed "Un-German" - on the 14th of Iyar of that year.

Tuesday, 15 Iyar 5785 - 13 May 2025

Riots in Rostov-on-Don (1883)

Rostov-on-Don, Russia, was home to 14 Synagogues and many communal institutions. With the encouragement of local Russian officials, a wave of anti-Jewish riots (pogroms) swept the city on the 15th of Iyar 5643 (1883).

Wednesday, 16 Iyar 5785 - 14 May 2025

The Manna (1313 BCE)

Manna, the "bread from heaven" which sustained the Children of Israel during their 40 years of wandering through the desert, began to fall on the 16th of Iyar 2448 (1313 BCE) - one month after the Exodus.

Romans Razed Jerusalem Wall (70)

In the year 3830 (70 CE), Titus and the Roman army laid siege upon Jerusalem, greatly weakening its defenders. On the 16th of Iyar, the Romans razed the middle wall of Jerusalem. The city was later burned, its inhabitants massacred, and the Temple destroyed on the 9th of Av of that year.

"Nuremberg Laws" Passed in Hungary (1939)

The Nazi Nuremberg Laws, depriving Jews the rights citizenship, were passed by the government of Nazi Germany in 5695 (1935). In 5699 (1939), on the 16th of Iyar, the laws went into effect in Nazi-allied Hungary.

Thursday, 17 Iyar 5785 - 15 May 2025

Roman Garrison Defeated (66)

Following the theft of silver from the Holy Temple in Jerusalem on the 17th of Iyar 3826 (66 CE), Jewish force attacked and defeated the Roman garrison stationed in Jerusalem. This marked the first fighting of the First Roman-Jewish War, which would climax in the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans.

Passing of "Noda B'Yehudah" (1793)

The 17th of Iyar marks the passing of Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (5473-5553, or 1713-1793), author of the Talmudic-Halachic work Noda B'Yehuda and Chief Rabbi of Prague. His famous "Letter of Peace" helped to heal the rift between the great sages Rabbi Yaakov Emden and Rabbi Yonasan Eibeshutz, which threatened to irreparably divide the Jewish people.

Friday, 18 Iyar 5785 - 16 May 2025

End of Plague (circa 120 CE)

In the weeks between Passover and Shavuot, a plague decimated 24,000 students of the great sage Rabbi Akiva - a result, says the Talmud, of the fact that they "did not respect one another." The plague's cessation on Iyar 18 - the 33rd day of the Omer Count or "Lag BaOmer" - is one of the

reasons that the day is celebrated each year (see "Laws and Customs" below).

Passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (2nd century CE)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai ("Rashbi"), was a leading disciple of Rabbi Akiva and one of the most important Tana'im whose teachings of Torah law are collected in the Mishnah. He was also the first to publicly teach the mystical dimension of the Torah known as the "Kabbalah" and is the author of the basic work of Kabbalah, the Zohar. For 13 years Rabbi Shimon hid in a cave to escape the wrath of the Romans whose government he criticized. On the day of his passing - Iyar 18, the 33rd day of the Omer Count - Rabbi Shimon gathered his disciples and revealed many of the deepest secrets of the divine wisdom and instructed them to mark the date as "the day of my joy."

Passing of Rama (1573)

Rabbi Moshe Iserles ("Rama") of Cracow (5285-5332, or 1525-1573?) authored the glosses ("Hagga'ot") on Rabbi Yosef Caro's Code of Jewish Law, and is regarded as the definitive Halachic authority for Ashkenazic Jews.

Hurva Synagogue Destroyed (1948)

The Hurva synagogue, located in the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, was captured and dynamited by the Arab Legion of Jordan during the battle for Old Jerusalem in 5708 (1948). The synagogue was built by the group of disciples of Rabbi Elijah (the "Vilna Gaon") who immigrated from Lithuania in 5624 (1864). The synagogue was built on the ruins of the synagogue built by Rabbi Judah Chassid (Segal) and his disciples in 5460 (1700), which was destroyed by Arab mobs in 541721. It was therefore named the "Hurvat Rabbi Judah HaChassid"—the ruins of Rabbi Judah the Chassid, or simply "The Hurva"—The Ruin.

In 2010, following several years of construction, the synagogue—built to resemble its Ottoman era form—was once again opened amid great fanfare. **Shabbat, 19 Iyar 5785 - 17 May 2025**

Passing of Maharam of Rothenburg (1293)

Renowned Talmudist Rabbi Meir ("Maharam") of Rothenburg (4975-5053, or 1215-1293) passed away on this day in his cell in the Ensisheim fortress, where he had been imprisoned for ten years in an attempt to exact a huge ransom from the Jewish community. The ransom money had been raised, but Rabbi Meir refused to have himself redeemed, lest it encourage the hostage taking of other Jewish leaders. He authored many works, including commentaries on the Talmud and responsa.