

PARSHAT EMOR

26 April – 2 May 2026
9 – 15 Iyar

Torah Reading:
Emor: Leviticus 21:1 - 24:23
Haftarah: Ezekiel 44:15-31

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

WHY SAYING A BLESSING MAKES A DIFFERENCE

I was recently away from home and, for the first time in a long while, did not have immediate access to a set of wheels. After a few days of being at the whim of other people's kindness to lend me their keys, I found myself at the car rental counter, eagerly signing on the dotted line for the overpriced vehicle I was about to call my own for the next few days.

For anyone who has experienced it, that feeling of pulling out of the lot, newly liberated and free to go wherever you want, whenever you want, is nothing short of exhilarating. There's a rush, a sense of, "I can do whatever I please now!" that comes with a vehicle. Indeed, private car ownership is considered one of the things that have radically transformed our modern world.

But there I was, a few days later, returning the vehicle and back to . . . nothing.

It just goes to show: You don't really own anything.

And you know what? That's a really, really good thing.

Blessings Over Food

Jews make blessings over food prior to eating. The Talmud provides the reasoning:

When one takes pleasure from this world without a blessing, it is as if he benefited from G-d's consecrated property, as it is stated: "The earth and all it contains is the L-rd's" . . . This is before a blessing is recited . . . after a blessing is recited, it belongs to humankind.¹

Understood simply, the Talmud seems to suggest that a blessing is a sort of request for permission. The earth and all its contents belong to G-d, so in theory, we regular people would not be allowed to enjoy the food of this world. By making a blessing, however, we secure G-d's "permission" and yippee—dig in!

But here's the question: Even after the blessing is recited, the fact remains that the world belongs to G-d and retains its sacred status. So how are we allowed to partake of it? True, we may have requested permission from G-d, but what, exactly, does the blessing accomplish? It's not as if the blessing revokes G-d's ownership, so who are we fooling?

The Kohen and His Property

The answer lies in a law found in this week's parshah, Emor.

Our discussion about laws that limit who can partake of consecrated items is found (among other places) in the context of the priestly laws. Many sacrifices were offered

in the Temple, which produced a fair amount of meat. This meat was considered sacred, "kodshim," and the Torah tells us that only a Kohen is allowed to eat it, declaring a sharp prohibition for any non-Kohen to partake.

Expanding the circle of who's allowed to eat kodshim, the Torah continues:

If a kohen acquires a person, an acquisition through his money, he may eat of it, and those born in his house may eat of his food.

In other words, while in the service of the Kohen, the non-Kohen assumes priestly status in the sense that he's allowed to eat from something that is otherwise only permitted to a Kohen.

The same is true with a blessing. It's not that the blessing allows us to take something away from G-d, rather, by making a blessing, we're recognizing that we are G-d's property, and as such, we're allowed to partake of His world. In the same way that a Kohen's servant can benefit from the holy items belonging to his master, reciting a blessing reminds us that we are G-d's servants and can thus enjoy His world.

A blessing is much more than just "asking permission" — it's a declaration that there really isn't anything that does not belong to Him, that is not part of Him—me, you, and everyone else included.

It's All His—and Yours

This is a remarkably healing realization. Think about the "stuff" you've lost that got you so upset. Think about the luxuries and resources to which you'd become accustomed and that were one day taken away, causing you much distress.

Remember that time your car broke down? How about when you lost your credit card and were stuck in the store without any means of payment? Or that time you jogged over to your local coffee shop like you do every morning only to discover that they had closed the day before.

And that's just the small stuff. We all experience far greater losses in life that cause true anguish. It's not fun, and it really does hurt.

But remember this: You, your stuff, and all those resources and services never really belonged to you in the first place. They are all part of a large, grand, and majestic bank account whose signing officer is G-d Himself. This isn't to put you down or belittle your sense of ownership; on the contrary—you and everything else belong to something far greater than yourself, something that encompasses the entire universe and beyond.

The moment you can peacefully and honestly surrender to that realization, you will find liberty and freedom. After all, nothing is yours and everything is yours at the same time, so there's really nothing to be concerned about at all. The same Being that willed your café into existence apparently has something else in store for you, and that car apparently was no longer meant to be. Don't sweat it. There's something else around the corner; if you open yourself up to it, it'll come.

After all, we are G-d's belongings, so we'll partake of His world to our hearts' content.

By Aharon Loschak

Sacred material – do not desecrate
Aleph Institute
Hyman & Martha Rogal Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org



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EMOR IN A NUTSHELL

Leviticus 21:1–24:23

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).

EMOR HAFTORAH IN A NUTSHELL

Ezekiel 44:15-31.

This week’s haftorah discusses various laws that pertain to the kohanim, the priests, a topic also discussed at length in the first part of the week’s Torah portion.

Ezekiel prophesies about the service of the kohanim in the third Holy Temple which will be rebuilt after the Final Redemption. The prophet describes their priestly vestments, their personal care, whom they may and may not marry, and their special purity requirements which preclude them from coming in contact with a corpse, unless it’s for a next of kin. He also discusses their calling as teachers and spiritual leaders.

The prophet conveys G-d’s word: “You shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession.” The kohanim do not receive a portion in the Land of Israel, instead they partake of the sacrifices as well as various tithes.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, 10 Iyar 5786 – 27 April 2026

Passing of Eli (891 BCE)

Eli the High Priest died upon learning that the Holy Ark containing the Tablets was captured by the Philistines, and that his two sons were killed in battle. Eli was the 13th in the line of the "Shoftim" ("judges") who led the People of Israel during the four centuries between the passing of Joshua in 1245 BCE and the crowning of King Saul in 879 BCE.

Passing of Rif (1103)

Rabbi Isaac Al-Fasi (1013-1103), known by the acronym "Rif," was one of the earliest codifiers of the Talmud. In 1088 he was forced to flee his hometown of Fez, Morocco, to Spain, where he assumed the position of rabbi in Alusina (Lucene).

Tuesday, 11 Iyar 5786 – 28 April 2026

Jewish Books Confiscated (1510)

1,500 Jewish books were confiscated in Frankfurt am Main, Germany at the instigation of an apostate (Meshumad) on the 11th of Iyar.

The Battle at Deganya (1948)

The Israeli Army defeated the advancing Syrian Army, following the shelling at the entrance of Deganya, which began at sunrise and lasted nine hours. It is considered the first Israeli victory following the start of the War of Independence.

Passing of R. Naftali of Ropshitz (1827)

R. Naftali of Ropshitz, a leading disciple of R. Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, the “Seer of Lublin,” was one of the prominent Rebbes in Galicia during the early nineteenth century. He passed away on 11 Iyar 5587 (1827).

Wednesday, 12 Iyar 5786 – 29 April 29 2026

Roman Jews Granted Privileges (1402)

On the 12th of Iyar, 1402, the Jews of Rome were granted "privileges" by Pope Boniface IX. They were given legal right to observe their Shabbat, protection from local oppressive officials, their taxes were reduced and orders were given to treat Jews as full-fledged Roman citizens.

Friday, 14 Iyar 5786 – 1 May 2026

"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 Nissan 14, 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.'"