

Torah Weekly

ד'תש"פ

Praying for Rain

Shmini Atzeret Torah Reading
October 3, 2026
Tishrei 22, 5787
Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17
Numbers 29:35-30:1
I Kings 8:54 - 66

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).

Sacred material please 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



ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Rain and Dew

According to our sages, there are many differences between rain and dew. Dew is constant, rain falls only when there is a condensation of water in the air. Dew has no season, rain has a season. And while rain interferes with wayfarers, dew makes everyone happy. In fact, the Talmud says that when we ask G-d for rain, G-d replies that He will give us even more than we ask for. He will give dew, which can be found year-round and makes everyone happy. Understanding the difference between rain and dew prompts us to ask why we pray for rain at the end of Sukkot, on Shmini Atzeret, and for dew on the first day of Passover. Granted, we pray for each in its proper time. We pray for rain in the beginning of the (Israeli) rainy season and for dew when the (Israeli) rain season is over. But this is only the practical angle. Surely there is a more substantive link between our prayers and the time that we offer them. Indeed, why did G-d make the rainy season start at Sukkos and end at Pesach?

The Spiritual Nature

The sporadic nature of rainfall represents the Divine attribute of Justice, which responds to us according to what we deserve. The mystical reason that rain is more plentiful at certain times is that the world goes through periods of being more and less deserving. Dew represents the Divine attributes of Kindness and Generosity, giving with no consideration of worthiness. From G-d's perspective the worthy and the unworthy are equally valued. Thus, He gives at all times to all people, deserving or not.

A Time for Each

At times G-d assumes a posture of justice, and at times He assumes a only posture of kindness. When the world is terribly undeserving, it can be approached only with kindness. He knows at such times that if He were to assume a stance of justice, He might need to destroy the world. So He doesn't go there. He opts for kindness instead. However, when the world is in a state of worthiness, G-d assumes a posture of justice. At such times He knows that He can afford to be just because there is plenty of opportunity to provide justly. People will be eminently deserving, and thus G-d will not need to deprive them. Even the guilty can be provided for, because if they don't deserve in their own right, they can lean on the merit of the righteous.

The Cycle of the Year

We now understand why the end of Sukkot is the right time to pray for rain, and Passover is the right time to pray for dew. Historically, Passover was the time of our national infancy. At that time we were new to Judaism and had no merit of our own. We could not ask for anything on the basis of

our worthiness, so we threw ourselves on G-d's mercy.

Sukkot, which comes after the Days of Awe, and specifically Yom Kippur, when all our sins were atoned, is a perfect time to pray for rain. At this time, when we are busy preparing for and celebrating the holidays, we are free of sin and carry lots of merit. And so, this is the right time to ask for rain, the blessing given on the basis of worthiness.

Of course, the rain will fall sporadically throughout the year, even when we are not entirely worthy. But that is because we were wise enough to strike while the iron was hot and ask for it when we were full of merit.

The Cycle of the Season

We mentioned earlier that G-d assumes postures of kindness or justice as necessary. Indeed, we see this in the cycle of seasons, which follow the needs of the people.

When the people are spiritually robust just after the High Holidays, the rainy season starts in Israel. As we explained, rain represents G-d's attribute of justice, when He gives only to those who are worthy. Since we are all worthy Yom Kippur and can justly afford to ask for blessing, G-d affixed the rain season in this time and instructed us to pray for rain. Around the time of Passover, the time symbolic of spiritual infancy, six or seven months after Yom Kippur, G-d assumes the posture of kindness, and this too reflected in the season. In Israel, Passover represents the end of the rain season. Accordingly, we stop praying for rain and ask instead for dew, the gift that is given freely.

Lazer Gurkow

Getting Real

Here's another area where Jewish and secular values greatly differ: holidays. Jewish life and "secular" life both consist of workdays and holidays. But beyond the semantic relationship, Jewish holidays and secular holidays have very little in common.

On the secular calendar, vacation days are dispersed throughout the year to provide a respite from the drudgery of the daily work routine. In fact, most people work for their vacations: their job is merely a means towards an end, the end being the relaxation and enjoyment on the day when one is not in the office. Granted, the primary reason for working is to generate income to pay the basic bills and make ends meet, but it's the holiday vacation plans which provide the added incentive to volunteer for the overtime shift. And unless you are a certified workaholic, the office will not be on your mind when you are enjoying your family barbeque, sunset over the Pacific, or the slopes in Aspen. The office has served its purpose; now it's time to enjoy the reward!

Jewish holidays, on the other hand, do not populate the Jewish calendar to provide for relaxation and vacation from Jewish everyday life. In fact, Jewish holidays are characterized by intensification in religious activity, added hours spent in the Jewish office (aka: synagogue), and multitudes of seasonal rituals and traditions. Rather, the holidays are beacons of light interspersed through the year, each one intended to illuminate the rest of the Jewish "work year" with its unique shade of spiritual light and inspiration.

In short: in the business world people work in order to be able to holiday; in the Jewish world, we holiday in order to be able to work! G-d is more interested in our mundane workdays than our extra-curricular holiday antics. We can be portraits of piety when clad in a kittel (long white robe) swaying to the High Holiday prayers, braving the elements to eat in the sukkah, or ecstatically dancing on Simchat Torah — but is this the real you? It is our daily routine which truly reflects who we are, not our occasional inspired outbursts of holiday holiness.

And G-d so desperately wants to be part of our real life — not just part of our holiday plans. So He gives us holidays, hoping that during these moments of inspiration we will allow Him to enter our hearts - and hoping that we won't evict Him during the *havdallah* ceremony which follows the holiday.

Will we?

Naftali Silberberg

Getting Real

Henryk was very young in 1945, when the War ended and solitary survivors tried frantically to trace their relatives. He had spent what seemed to be most of his life with his nanny, who had hidden him away from the Nazis at his father's request. There was great personal risk involved, but the woman had readily taken it, as she loved the boy. All the Jews were being killed, and Henryk's nanny did not think for a moment that the father, Joseph Foxman, would survive the infamous destruction of the Vilna Ghetto. He would surely have been transferred to Auschwitz — and everyone knew that nobody ever came back from Auschwitz. She therefore had no scruples about adopting the boy, having him baptized into the Catholic Church and taught catechism by the local priest.

It was Simchat Torah when his father came to take him. The heartbroken nanny had packed all his clothing and his small catechism book, stressing to the father that the boy had become a good Catholic. Joseph Foxman took his son by the hand and led him directly to the Great Synagogue of Vilna. On the way, he told his son that he was a Jew and that his name was Avraham.

Not far from the house, they passed the church and the boy reverently crossed himself, causing his father great anguish. Just then, a priest emerged who knew the boy, and when Henryk rushed over to kiss his hand, the priest spoke to him, reminding him of his Catholic faith. Everything inside of Joseph wanted to drag his son away from the priest and from the church. But he knew that this was not the way to do things. He nodded to the priest, holding his son more closely. After all, these people had harbored his child and saved the child's life. He had to show his son Judaism, living Judaism, and in this way all these foreign beliefs would be naturally abandoned and forgotten.

They entered the Great Synagogue of Vilna, now a remnant of a past, vibrant Jewish era. There they found some Jewish survivors from Auschwitz who had made their way back to Vilna and were now rebuilding their lives and their Jewish spirits. Amid the stark reality of their suffering and terrible loss, in much diminished numbers, they were singing and dancing with real joy while celebrating Simchat Torah. Avraham stared wide-eyed around him and picked up a tattered prayer book with a touch of affection. Something deep inside of him responded to the atmosphere, and he was happy to be there with the father he barely knew. He held back, though, from joining the dancing.

A Jewish man wearing a Soviet Army uniform could not take his eyes off the boy, and he came over to Joseph. "Is this child... Jewish?" he asked, a touch of awe in his voice.

The father answered that the boy was Jewish and introduced his son. As the soldier stared at Henryk-Avraham, he fought to hold back tears. "Over these four terrible years, I have traveled thousands of miles, and this is the first live Jewish child I have come across in all this time. Would you like to dance with me on my shoulders?" he asked the boy, who was staring back at him, fascinated.

The father nodded permission, and the soldier hoisted the boy high onto his shoulders. With tears now coursing down his cheeks and a heart full of real joy, the soldier joined in the dancing.

"This is my Torah scroll," he cried.

Abe Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League — the Avraham in our story — remembers this as his first conscious feeling of a connection with Judaism and of being a Jew.

Ruth Benjamin

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, September 27, 2026
16 Tishrei, 5787

Passing of R. Moshe Zacuto (1697)

R. Moshe, known by the acronym *Ramaz*, was an Italian rabbi and Kabbalist, well-known for his erudition and piety. A scion of Portuguese hidden Jews, he authored numerous works, many of them on Kabbala, as well as a number of liturgical hymns.

Monday, September 28, 2026
17 Tishrei, 5787

Chol Hamoed

The seven days of the festival of Sukkot consist of two days of "Yom Tov", followed by five days of "Chol Hamoed" ("weekdays of the festival"; also called "the intermediate days"). In the Land of Israel, there is only one day of Yom Tov, followed by six days of Chol Hamoed.

Tuesday, September 29, 2026
18 Tishrei, 5787

Passing of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1810)

Passing of the famed Chassidic rebbe, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Ukraine (1772-1810). A great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, he championed a unique path of divine service that entails simplicity, joy, and solitude. He left no successor, but his teachings remain influential more than 200 years after his passing.

Wednesday, September 30, 2026
19 Tishrei, 5787

Passing of Vilna Gaon (1797)

Passing of the famed Talmudist and Kabbalist, Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna (now Vilnius), Lithuania (1720-1797), known as the "Vilna Gaon." Rabbi Eliyahu was the leading figure in the opposition to the Chassidic Movement in its early years.

Thursday, October 1, 2026
20 Tishrei, 5787

Passing of R. Heshel of Cracow (1663)

R. Heshel was a Polish scholar known for his sharpness and depth of knowledge. Although most of his writings are not extant, his influence is greatly felt until today, as many of the classic Halachists of his day were his students were his students, such as R. Shabtai Katz (the Shach) and R. David HaLevi (the Taz). Many stories are told about his quick wittedness even as a young child.

Friday, October 2, 2026
21 Tishrei, 5787

Prophecy of Haggai Encouraging the Building of the Second Temple (353 BCE)

On this day, the prophet Haggai received a divine message to pass on to "Zerubavel son of Shealtiel ruler of Judah, Joshua son of Jehozadak the High Priest, and the remnants of the nation" (Haggai 2:1). He was instructed to encourage them to continue their efforts to build the Second Temple, whose construction had been halted some seven years prior.

Who among you is left, who saw this house [the First Temple] in its former glory? As you see it now, is it not as nothing in your eyes? Now, be strong, Zerubavel, says the L-rd; and be strong, Joshua the son of Jehozadak the High Priest; and be strong, all the people of the land....I will fill this House with glory, said the L-rd of Hosts...The glory of this last House shall be greater than the first one, said the L-rd of Hosts; and in this place I will grant peace (Haggai 2: 3-9).