

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Emor
May 6, 2023 *** 15 Iyar, 5783

Emor in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2020/jewish/Emor-in-a-Nutshell.htm

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).

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Ezekiel 44:15-31

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/671841/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's *haftarah* 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.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Holy Times; Emor by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z'l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/emor/holy-times/>

The parsha of Emor contains a chapter dedicated to the festivals of the Jewish year. There are five such passages in the Torah. Two, both in the book of Exodus (Ex. 23:14-17; Ex. 34:18, 22-23), are very brief. They refer only to the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot. They do not specify their dates, merely their rough position in the agricultural year. Nor do they mention the specific commands related to the festivals.

This leaves three other festival accounts, the one in our parsha, a second one in Numbers 28-29, and the third in Deuteronomy 16. What is striking is how different they are. This is not, as critics maintain, because the Torah is a composite document, but rather because it comes at its subject-matter from multiple perspectives – a characteristic of the Torah mindset as a whole.

The long section on the festivals in Numbers is wholly dedicated to the special additional sacrifices [the musaf] brought on holy days including Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. A memory of this is preserved in the Musaf prayers for these days. These are holy times from the perspective of the Tabernacle, the Temple, and later the synagogue.

The account in Deuteronomy is about society. Moses at the end of his life told the next generation where they had come from, where they were going to, and the kind of society they were to construct. It was to be the opposite of Egypt. It would strive for justice, freedom, and human dignity.

One of Deuteronomy's most important themes is its insistence that worship be centralised "in the place that God will choose," which turned out to be Jerusalem. The unity of God was to be mirrored in the unity of the nation, something that could not be achieved if every tribe had its own temple, sanctuary, or shrine. That is why, when it comes to the festivals, Deuteronomy speaks only of Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot, and not Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, because only on

those three was there a duty of Aliyah le-regel, pilgrimage to the Temple. Equally significant is Deuteronomy's focus – not found elsewhere – on social inclusion: “you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites within your gates, and the stranger, the orphan, and the widow living among you.” Deuteronomy is less about individual spirituality than about the kind of society that honours the presence of God by honouring our fellow humans, especially those at the margins of society. The idea that we can serve God while being indifferent to, or dismissive of, our fellow human beings is utterly alien to the vision of Deuteronomy.

Which leaves Emor, the account in this week's parsha. It too is distinctive. Unlike the Exodus and Deuteronomy passages it includes Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It also tells us about the specific mitzvot of the festivals, most notably Succot: it is the only place where the Torah mentions the arba minim, the “four kinds”, and the command to live in a succah.

It has, though, various structural oddities. The most striking one is the fact that it includes Shabbat in the list of the festivals. This would not be strange in itself. After all, Shabbat is one of the holy days. What is strange is the way it speaks about Shabbat:

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: The appointed times [moadei] of the Lord, which you are to proclaim [tikre'u] as sacred assemblies [mikra'ei kodesh]. These are My appointed festivals [mo'adai]. Six days shall you work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of sabbaths, a day of sacred assembly [mikra kodesh]. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the Lord.” Lev. 23:1-3

There is then a paragraph break, after which the whole passage seems to begin again:

These are the Lord's appointed times [mo'adei] festivals, the sacred assemblies [mikra'ei kodesh] you are to proclaim [tikre'u] at their appointed times [be-mo'adam]. Lev. 23:4

This structure, with its two beginnings, puzzled the commentators. Even more puzzling was the fact that the Torah here seems to be calling Shabbat a mo'ed, an appointed time, and a mikra kodesh, a sacred assembly, which it does nowhere else. As Rashi puts it: “What has Shabbat to do with the festivals?” The festivals are annual occurrences, Shabbat is a weekly one. The festivals depend on the calendar fixed by the Bet Din. That is the meaning of the phrase, “the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times.” Shabbat, however, does not depend on any act by the Bet Din and is independent of both the solar and lunar calendar. Its holiness comes directly from God and from the dawn of Creation. Bringing the two together under a single heading seems to make no sense. Shabbat is one thing, mo'adim and mikra'ei kodesh are something else. So

what connects the two?

Rashi tells us this text seeks to emphasise the holiness of the festivals. “Whoever desecrates the festivals, it is as if he had desecrated the Sabbath, and whoever observes the festivals it is as if he had observed the Sabbath.” The point Rashi is making is that we can imagine someone saying that he respects the Sabbath because it is God-given, but the festivals are of an altogether lesser sanctity, first because we are permitted certain kinds of work, such as cooking and carrying, and second because they depend on a human act of fixing the calendar. The inclusion of Shabbat among the festivals is to negate this kind of reasoning.

Ramban offers a very different explanation. Shabbat is stated before the festivals just as it is stated before Moses’ instructions to the people to begin work on the construction of the Sanctuary, to tell us that just as the command to build the Sanctuary does not override Shabbat, so too the command to celebrate the festivals does not override Shabbat. So, although we may cook and carry on festivals, we may not do so if a festival falls on Shabbat.

By far the most radical explanation was given by the Vilna Gaon. According to him, the words “Six days shall you work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of sabbaths,” do not apply to the days of the week but to the days of the year. There are seven holy days specified in our parsha: the first and seventh day of Pesach, one day of Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the first day of Succot, and Shemini Atzeret. On six of them we are allowed to do some work, such as cooking and carrying, but on the seventh, Yom Kippur, we are not, because it is a “Sabbath of Sabbaths” (see verse 32). The Torah uses two different expressions for the prohibition of work on festivals in general and on the “seventh day.” On the festivals what is forbidden is melechet avodah (“burdensome or servile work”), whereas on the seventh day what is forbidden is melachah, “any work” even if not burdensome. So Yom Kippur is to the year what Shabbat is to the week.

The Vilna Gaon’s reading allows us to see something else: that holy time is patterned on what I have called (in the Introduction to the Siddur) fractals: the same pattern at different levels of magnitude. So the structure of the week – six days of work followed by a seventh that is holy – is mirrored in the structure of the year – six days of lesser holiness plus a seventh, Yom Kippur, of supreme holiness. As we will see in two chapters’ time (Lev. 25), the same pattern appears on an even larger scale: six ordinary years followed by the year of Shemittah, “release.”

Wherever the Torah wishes to emphasise the dimension of holiness (the word kodesh appears no less than twelve times in Lev. 23), it makes systematic use of the number and concept of seven. So there are not only seven holy days in the annual calendar. There are also seven paragraphs in the chapter. The word “seven” or “seventh” occurs repeatedly (eighteen times) as does the word for the

seventh day, Shabbat in one or other of its forms (fifteen times). The word “harvest” appears seven times.

However, it seems to me that Leviticus 23 is telling another story as well – a deeply spiritual one. Recall our argument (made by Judah Halevi and Ibn Ezra) that almost the entire forty chapters between Exodus 24 and Leviticus 25 are a digression, brought about because Moses argued that the people needed God to be close. They wanted to encounter Him not only at the top of the mountain but also in the midst of the camp; not only as a terrifying power overturning empires and dividing the sea but also as a constant presence in their lives. That was why God gave the Israelites the Sanctuary (Exodus 25-40) and its service (i.e. the book of Leviticus as a whole).

That is why the list of the festivals in Leviticus emphasises not the social dimension we find in Deuteronomy, or the sacrificial dimension we find in Numbers, but rather the spiritual dimension of encounter, closeness, the meeting of the human and the Divine. This explains why we find in this chapter, more than in any other, two key words. One is mo’ed, the other is mikra kodesh, and both are deeper than they seem.

The word mo’ed does not just mean “appointed time”. We find the same word in the phrase ohel mo’ed meaning “tent of meeting”. If the ohel mo’ed was the place where man and God met, then the mo’adim in our chapter are the times when we and God meet. This idea is given beautiful expression in the last line of the mystical song we sing on Shabbat, Yedid Nefesh, “Hurry, beloved, for the appointed time [mo’ed] has come.” Mo’ed here means a tryst – an appointment made between lovers to meet at a certain time and place.

As for the phrase mikra kodesh, it comes from the same root as the word that gives the entire book its name: Vayikra, meaning “to be summoned in love.”

A mikra kodesh is not just a holy day. It is a meeting to which we have been called in affection by One who holds us close.

Much of the book of Vayikra is about the holiness of place, the Sanctuary. Some of it is about the holiness of people, the Kohanim, the Priests, and Israel as a whole, as “a kingdom of priests.” In chapter 23, the Torah turns to the holiness of time and the times of holiness.

We are spiritual beings but we are also physical beings. We cannot be spiritual, close to God, all the time. That is why there is secular time as well as holy time. But one day in seven, we stop working and enter the presence of the God of creation. On certain days of the year, the festivals, we celebrate the God of history. The holiness of Shabbat is determined by God alone because He alone created the universe. The holiness of the festivals is partially determined by us (i.e., by the fixing of the calendar), because history is a partnership between us and God. But in two respects they are the same. They are both times of meeting

(mo'ed), and they are both times when we feel ourselves called, summoned, invited as God's guests (mikra kodesh).

We can't always be spiritual. God has given us a material world with which to engage. But on the seventh day of the week, and (originally) seven days in the year, God gives us dedicated time in which we feel the closeness of the Shechinah and are bathed in the radiance of God's love.

[Emor: Sacred Times: A Moment to Reflect on AAPI Allyship by Rabbi Sasha Baken
https://truah.org/resources/sasha-baken-parshat-emor-moraltorah2023/](https://truah.org/resources/sasha-baken-parshat-emor-moraltorah2023/)

In last week's parshah, Kedoshim, we read arguably the most demanding commandment of all: "You shall be holy." You, meaning: "*kol adat b'nei Yisrael*" — the entire Israelite community. The remaining Holiness Code, including this week's Parshat Emor, attempts to define when and how to fulfill this consequential charge.

Though the beginning of Emor focuses on the duties of the priests, **Leviticus 23** returns to addressing the entire Israelite community. Moses tells the people about the when — the fixed times that shall be considered sacred occasions.

These include but are not limited to Shabbat, Passover, the period of counting the Omer, and Shavuot. Once Moses names these holidays, he proceeds by stating the how, as in, how to observe such celebrations. In Hebrew, time (*z'man*) shares the same root as the infinitive to invite (*l'hazmin*). In other words, time is an invitation for action. Time is only as holy as what we do during these moments.

This month, we have overlapping "sacred times": the counting of the Omer and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month. This combination of events calls out to white Jews like me, and to all non-Asian Jews, to reflect upon our allyship, on what it means to include and celebrate our fellow AAPI members of the people of Israel. During the ancient period, the people of Israel brought offerings of grain to count the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot, between physical freedom and revelation of the Torah. Without the Temple in Jerusalem today, we are commanded to give a different type of offering: not just counting, but an *ac-counting* of the soul.

According to **Stop AAPI Hate**, between March 2020 and March 2022, 11,500 hate incidents against Asian Americans were reported in the U.S. Those are just the events *reported*. Couple that with the increasing levels of antisemitism. Imagine the ways in which this harm is compounding for our fellow Asian Jewish Americans. And don't just imagine, listen. They are crying out in pain, begging us to recognize the discrimination they face both outside *and inside* our Jewish communities. In addition to fearing for their safety, they have written about feeling invisible in conversations about racism and having their Jewish identity and life experiences altogether questioned. Their stories are out there. Go and learn.

Let the counting of the Omer inspire you to examine your biases. Ask yourself if you committed a microaggression today or if you failed to challenge someone when they made an inappropriate joke. Have you relied upon members of the AAPI community to teach you about racism? Have you checked in on your AAPI neighbors after moments of hate? Are AAPI members represented in the narratives of your community? Is your leadership diverse? Have you found yourself challenging the experiences of a member of the AAPI community when you're meant to be listening to them (and grateful they trust you enough to share with you their feelings)? Have you offered some of your material resources? Have you owned your privilege? Have you accepted feedback? If you have the inclination to answer "no" to any of these questions, I beseech you to keep thinking and reflecting because every single one of us has, at least once, made one of these mistakes. As hard as it may be, being able to name these errors is a crucial part of the process of healing and moving forward.

In last week's parshah, Kedoshim, we were commanded: *You shall be holy*. You, plural. Shall, future. This is an ongoing request. After Moses finishes describing God's fixed times, God instructs him to command the Israelites to bring oil for lighting the "*ner tamid*," eternal light, regularly. In order for the Jewish people to keep the flame lit, to fulfill God's abiding charge to be holy, we must work together — clergy and lay people alike. It cannot be upon any one of us, any one kind of us, to keep stoking the flame. God set aside fixed times for the long game, for the recognition that constantly working is a recipe for burnout. Allyship is an eternal flame. But this month offers us a special opportunity to work a bit harder, to *account* for our souls, so that we may be worthy of being God's holy people.

(Rabbi Sasha Baken received her bachelor's degree in Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a recently ordained rabbi (class of '22) from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Since ordination, Sasha has been serving as the Assistant Rabbi at Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, NY, the town in which she was raised. Sasha is a lover of all things mussar.)

[Parshat Emor: Our Relationship With Other Creatures by Ora Sheinson](https://www.growtorah.org/vayikra/2022/05/11-emor-our-relationship-with-other-creatures)

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Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Everything that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created in His world, He did not create a single thing in vain.[1]

In Bereisheit, Hashem looked at all that He created and saw that it was very good.

[2] Since then, the vast diversity of life on the planet has not gone unnoticed by the Jewish sages. They were moved to derive a deep lesson from the species of earth, specifically because the Torah conveys Hashem's intention for, as well as His satisfaction from the existence of every life form. The Midrash on Shemot Rabbah 10:1 (2nd Century) notes in the name of Rabbi Acha bar Rabbi Chanina:

“everything you see as superfluous in this world—like snakes and scorpions—they are part of the greater scheme of the creation of the world.” Though most of us are used to a halachic dialog that calls certain animals “not kosher” or “impure,” here the Torah outlook is actually one of respect for all creatures. This outlook has important ramifications for biodiversity issues today.

The biodiversity of planet earth is severely endangered. Edward O. Wilson, a Harvard University zoologist, estimates that “If we continue at the current rate of deforestation and destruction of major ecosystems like rainforests and coral reefs, where most of the biodiversity is concentrated, we will surely lose more than half of all the species of plants and animals on earth by the end of the 21st century.”[3]

Humans benefit from biodiversity in immeasurable ways. For example, many of our most potent medicines come from the plants and animals that Hashem put on this earth. Aspirin from the willow tree; digitalin from the foxglove plant; vincristine, taken from the rosy periwinkle of Madagascar and used to treat childhood leukemia;[4] painkillers from cone snails, snake venom, and frog skin poison. What if the willow tree had gone extinct? What if the rosy periwinkle had disappeared? In addition, the wide variety of plant and animal life allows humans to globally nourish and sustain themselves in several different climates. No less important, the splendid sight of differing flora and fauna enhances the human experience by expanding the mind and delighting the senses. Billions of dollars are spent each year on tourism to enjoy breathtaking views and “exotic” wildlife such as safaris, coral reefs, and rain forests.[5]

Hashem saw the good in all that He created. And He gave a series of commandments to the Jewish people intended to ensure that man was a proper steward of that which Hashem had created. In this week’s parsha, Parshat Emor, Hashem gives the Jewish people a mitzvah that is instructive to all of us enduring today’s challenge. The Torah prohibits the slaughter of a mother and its calf on the same day – a prohibition often referred to as “oto v’et beno”[6]. The Ramban, in his commentary on this prohibition, indicates that its reason is to prevent us from eliminating a species. He offers the same comment on the Biblical commandment to send away the mother bird before taking her eggs, known as “shilu’ach haken.” [7] The Ramban says that even though Hashem has clearly given us the right to benefit from an individual member of a species, he has prohibited us from the destruction of an entire species. Both of these prohibitions revolve around the killing of two generations at once, an act that is symbolic of the destruction of the ability of a species to persist.

Other Torah commandments also imply limits to humankind’s effect on the natural world. For example, Hashem prohibits us from breeding two species of

animals together, and from grafting plant species together. "You will keep my laws; you will not breed your animals as kilayim, you shall not seed your fields as kilayim." [8] Here too is the message that though we are expected to cultivate Hashem's creations for our benefit and sustenance, we are not to permanently affect those species' essential identities.

To underscore the importance of all things that Hashem created, the Midrash tells the story of David Hamelech, who, as a young boy, once asked for what purpose Hashem created spiders on this earth. Hashem answered that there would come a day when David would need a spider and then he would thank Hashem for creating it. Many years later, when David incurred the wrath of Sha'ul, and was on the run from his soldiers, David escaped into a cave to hide. He heard the soldiers near the cave and knew they would find him. Suddenly a big spider appeared in front of the cave, and spun a web across the opening. When the soldiers came they did not look in David's cave, because they assumed that he would have torn the web when he entered. David's life was saved by a spider, and on that day, he understood that Hashem was wise, and thanked Hashem for creating all creatures. [9]

David's realization, no doubt, was that if the actions of one spider in a few seconds can determine the life and death of one person, then hundreds of spider species worldwide must surely have a tremendous impact on everything. Today scientists have begun to discuss biodiversity in terms of "webs." [10] What used to be called the "food chain" is now called the "food web" because of the amount of cross-links between species. As we begin to understand how much more complicated and involved relationships on this earth are, cause and effect are no longer unidirectional or even bi-directional, but a multi-faceted web of relationships.

The more we learn about biodiversity, the more we begin to see its overall importance in strengthening every kind of ecosystem against disturbances. Diversity brings stability to an ecosystem because the more species-diversity that exist, the more possible adaptations there will be, and therefore, there will be a higher chance that more variations will persist as time goes on. [11] David began to understand this lesson when he saw the spider weaving a protective web across the cave, sheltering him from damaging intrusions. So too, in every ecosystem each species is responsible for its own part of the "web" that can support boundaries in the system against intrusions.

We have a far greater understanding of the importance of every living thing in the modern era. This knowledge bears a responsibility on each of us, on both a personal and religious level, to take actions that reduce our impact on our ecosystems. The two Torah commandments that directly apply to species-

diversity might be rare to come by. After all, how often do we see a bird hovering over eggs in its nest and how often are we in charge of which cows get ritually slaughtered? While most of us do not have the opportunity to perform many of the mitzvot related to species preservation, we cannot fool ourselves into thinking that species-diversity preservation is far beyond our reach. We can each take actions in our everyday lives to protect the earth's biodiversity, and adhere to Hashem's general commandment to honor the importance of all that He has created. *(Ora Sheinson is a founding board member of Canfei Nesharim, an environmental litigation associate at Patton Boggs, LLP, an international law firm, and the mother of four children. Ora has pursued the intersection of environmental activism and Halacha from her days in University at Stern College, where she actively lectured on the relationship between Halacha and the Environment.)*

[1] (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 77b) [2] Bereisheit 1:31 [3] Read more here. [4] YPTE website [5] People and Planet website [6] Vayikra 22:28 [7] Devarim 22:6, commentary of Ramban. [8] Vayikra 19:19 [9] From the sayings of Ben Sira 23B, Otzar Midrashim 47 [10] For example, see "Animal Diversity Web" of University of Michigan: [11] For example: "Biodiversity and ecosystem stability in a decade-long grassland experiment." David Tilman, Peter B. Reich and Johannes M. H. Knops, Nature 441, 629-632 (1 June 2006) [12] Taken from Ten Things YOU Can Do to Help Preserve Species Biodiversity, By David Hooper, an Associate Professor of Biology at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, specializing in the study of the effects of plant diversity on ecosystem processes and ecological services.

Yahrtzeits

Ronnie Klein remembers her father Walter Leibowitz on Tuesday May 9th.

Blossom Primer remembers Irwin's sister Anne Levinson on Wednesday May 10th

Burt Solomon remembers his sister Judi Solomon Rosenberg on Friday May 12th.