

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 15 Iyar 5786, the 30th day of the Omer, corresponding to May 2, 2026

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 513 Hz) (p. 740 S) (p. 468 Hi) (p. 672 AS)

EMOR אֶמֹר Leviticus 21:1

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED) Rabbi Emeritus
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1. "Speak to the Kohanim and say to them..." (21:2). Why do we need the double verb, to speak and to say? Rashi states that the Torah is warning the Kohanim that they need to guard their children from contaminating their Kohanic status in the nation. The Chattam Sofer (early 19th century, Pressburg) added a novel approach, admitting, though, that it is not the literal meaning of the text. He stated that the Torah instructs the adults who are to wash the body of the deceased, preparing him for burial, to concern themselves with the minors, the children who are now orphans. This is novel and worthy of our attention, but it is not the literal interpretation of the text. The better meaning is to educate the children in the ways of Torah. If they are Kohanim, prepare them early on what their responsibilities will be as they get older. The same lesson is directed to the rest of the nation. Don't allow your children to become the "Shabbos Goy" in the family just because they are little!

2. In the middle of the Parshah is the section describing the Biblical holidays as they appear during the year. But why does the Torah start the section with a reminder about Shabbat? Yes, Shabbat is a form of a Moed, but Shabbat is different than a Yom Tov. A further big difference between the two is that Shabbat is a definite; it is not determined by us. It is determined by Hashem. Yom Tov is determined by us. The Torah identifies the date of each holiday, and we determine that date by establishing when Rosh Chodesh will be. The Vilna Gaon (18th century Vilna) presents a novel interpretation: the Torah is talking about the holidays. There are 7 days of Yom Tov in the year: one day of Rosh HaShanah, one day of Yom Kippur, one day of Sukkot, one day of Shemini Atzeret, two days of Pesach, and one day of Shavuot. Six of these days are a legal day of Yom Tov, and the seventh day (Yom Kippur) is a Shabbat, where there are more restrictions than a Yom Tov. This adequately explains the opening paragraph of the section of the holidays.

3. "These are my Holy Convocations" (23:2). You have to obey the prohibitions of the day in order to be considered Hashem's holidays. If you don't, then they are not religious holidays. When I was growing up in Washington, D.C. I met a girl whose parents used to celebrate Rosh HaShanah by taking the family to a very nice picnic in the park. They did not go to any synagogue or temple, so the celebration was quite secular, even though the parents told their children that they were celebrating Rosh HaShanah. As we see in this text, to be considered a religious holiday, there has to be religious components to the celebration. The holiday prohibitions and the positive rituals of each holiday give it a true Torah definition. And each holiday has part of the menu devoted to the particular Chag, be it an ordained item on the

menu, like Matzah, or be it a custom, like blintzes, or kreplach. Each holiday has a component that is reserved for Hashem, plus a component reserved for us. Enjoy. (RED)

4. Why is there no Berachah of Shehecheyanu for the Mitzvah of counting the Sefirah? The Rashba (13th century, Spain) wrote that the ultimate task for Sefirah is bringing a sacrifice on Shavuot, and we are not attaining that goal. Therefore, there is no Shehecheyanu because Sefirah reminds us that there is no Holy Temple. And that is why we add a statement after each night's count asking Hashem to restore the Holy Temple. During the times of the Temple, counting the Sefirah was a Torah Mitzvah. Today counting the Sefirah is a Rabbinical law.

5. When we count the Sefirah the first day is "one day" and not the first day. Some commentators claim that this was specifically mentioned to refute the position of the Sadducees who were of the opinion that the first day of the Sefirah count was on Sunday. The Torah states that the count starts on "the day after Shabbat" (23:15) (Menachot 65a). The word Shabbat normally means a Saturday, but it can apply to a holiday (Yom Kippur for example), since both days have restrictions placed upon us. The Rabbis claim that here the text must be referring to the first day of Pesach, deriving that from the text where we are talking about Pesach. And furthermore, the Torah doesn't define which Shabbat we would be talking about. This became a contentious issue between the Pharisees and the Sadducees in ancient times. (I find it very interesting that in the Christian religion, Easter is determined to be the first Sunday after the full moon. Hence it is always the Sunday that the Sadducees say we are to begin counting the Omer.) (RED)

6. On Yom Kippur the Torah commands us to afflict our souls. The Rabbis identify five afflictions: eating and drinking, washing the body, anointing with oil, wearing leather shoes, and intimate relations. These are all means to an end, and not the end itself. We should obligate ourselves to Fast, Give Tzedakah, and to Repent. Unfortunately we often think that the goal of Yom Kippur is the fasting, without seeing the ultimate goal of total penitence. Still we need to remind ourselves that Yom Kippur is a holiday. The joy of the day is experiencing the atonement that the day affords us. Each year we need to concentrate and re-make ourselves into better people. It is like my GPS system tells me when I make a wrong move: Re-calculating. We need to re-calculate ourselves and upgrade our commitment to Hashem and to ourselves as well. (In the Mussaf of Yom Kippur, after the Kohen Gadol finishes the rituals of the day, he made a joyous occasion out of the day. This was because he felt the exhilaration of his difficult tasks of the day. The Machzor relates to us his celebration.)

7. On Sukkot we are required to take the four species of vegetation to celebrate the harvests. I would ask where did they get these agricultural items in the desert, but that would not be completely fair. The upshot of this Parshah is not their

experience in the desert; it is how Jewish life would be celebrated when the people would be living in the promised land. But we cannot take anything for granted. Today supplying the Jewish world with the four species has become a major industry. But that wasn't always so. There were times in Europe that Jewish communities could not get these agricultural gems. Or when we heard stories how an entire community would be elated if they got one Lulav for all. How sad. Or stories in the Talmud when a person had to choose between praying with a community that had a minyan with no shofar or to pray with a Minyan-less community that had a shofar. We live in amazing times where we do take things for granted. We should constantly be aware of our circumstances and rejoice and count our blessings.

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT EMOR 5786

I. From the Text

1. May a Kohen be defiled for his unmarried sister who died? (21:3)
2. How many days of Yom Tov are there in the Torah? (23:7-36)
3. When on the calendar are Pesach and Shavuot?
4. How many loaves of bread were on the Shulchan in the Mishkan/Holy Temple? (24:5)
5. What punishment was given to the Jew who blasphemed the name of Hashem? (24:14)

II. From Rashi

6. Which Kohanim were exempt from the prohibition against being in contact with a dead body? (21:1)
7. How do we honor a Kohen? (21:8)
8. If a daughter of a Kohen marries a "zar," she may not eat Terumah. What's a "zar"? (23:12)
9. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
10. How is the Etrog unique in being a beautiful tree? (23:40)

III. From the Rabbis

11. The Torah restricts the Kohen Gadol from leaving the Holy Temple. (21:12). Where does he spend his day? (Rambam)
12. What is the message of the Shofar? (Rambam. Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4)
13. Why does the Torah mention the lighting of the Menorah right after the section on the holidays? (RED)

IV. Midrash.

14. The son of a Jewish woman and an Egyptian man fought with another Jew. What was the fight about?

V. Haftorah. Ezekiel

15. Name a law for the Kohanim in the days of the Mashiach that is different from the Torah law.

VI. Relationships

16.
 - a) Aharon - Elisheva
 - b) Aharon - Aminadav

- c) Aminadav - Nadav
- d) Aharon - Pinchas
- e) Moshe - Elazar

ANSWERS FOR EMOR 5786

1. Yes, he is required to do so.
2. Seven.
3. Pesach: the 15th of Nissan
Shavuot: 7 weeks after the 2nd day of Pesach (6th day of Sivan)
4. Twelve.
5. Death by Stoning
6. Challalim: Kohanim who are descended from a forbidden relationship between a Kohen and a woman he is not permitted to marry.
7. By giving him the first Aliyah to the Torah and allowing him to lead the Benching.
8. A non-Kohen (a Levi or Yisrael)
9. Yes. The Torah prohibits only the mother and its offspring.
10. The taste of the tree is similar to the taste of the fruit.
11. There was a special room at the Holy Temple, called the Lishkat HaKohen HaGadol, reserved for him.
12. "Awake, you sleepers....remember your Creator."
13. What is necessary is not only these five holidays, but the need to serve Hashem every day.
14. The son of the Egyptian man complained about the stale bread on the Shulchan, and the other Jew defended the Torah.
15. No Kohen may marry a widow (except a widow who was previously married to a Kohen.)
16.
 - a) Husband-Wife
 - b) Father-in-Law Aminadav
 - c) Grandfather Aminadav
 - d) Grandfather Aharon
 - e) Uncle Moshe