

PARSHAT EMOR
LEVITICUS 21:1-24:23
HAFTARAH EZEKIEL 44:15-31
13 IYYAR 5786/30 APRIL 2026



Untitled Triptych from the Rothko Chapel
Mark Rothko

WHISPERS OF LIFE

1. I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we are reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for?...We need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide, A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. (Franz Kafka, in a letter to Oskar Pollak)
2. Whom is this story at Leviticus 24:10-14 about?
3. "Whose father was an Egyptian."
He came to pitch his tent in the midst of the camp of Dan. They said to him, "What is your connection here?" He said, "I am of the descendants of Dan." He was told, "It is written, 'Each man camps by his flag, by the insignia of his father's house.'" He went to the court of Moses, who ruled against him. He got up and blasphemed/reviled/expressed ingratitude. (Rashi to Lev. 24:10, Vayikra Rabbah 32:3)

One taskmaster was in charge of ten officers and one officer was in charge of ten men. On one occasion a task master paid an early visit to an officer and said to him, "Go assemble your group." When he came in the other's wife, Shulamit, smiled at him. He thought,

“She is mine!” No sooner had her husband gone out then he entered and had intimate relations with her. The husband saw the taskmaster coming out of his house. When the taskmaster realize he had been seen, he beat the husband, shouting “Work harder, work harder!” (Vayikra Rabbah 32:4)

The Israelite man called the man’s mother a harlot, provoking the blasphemer and exposing a scandalous story from the past. (Zohar)

Moses saw how the taskmaster beat the husband. And the Holy Spirit began to stir in Moses, so he slew the taskmaster. (Vayikra Rabbah 32:4)

He was brought to Moses and placed in custody until the decision of God should be made clear. (Leviticus 24:11-12)

The Israelite man was the son of Shulamit’s husband, who had him in a second marriage. (Zohar)

4. “And it will be when they suffer hunger, they torment themselves and curse their king and their god.” (Isaiah 8:21). This refers to the chronic anger of the poor who are angered by everything that happens to them. (Seforno)
5. The main reason for angry complaints in the world are as a response to the attribute of stern judgment, which creates experiences of loss and absence in the world. Therefore, God commanded “*emor* [say] to the priests (for the particular meaning of “say” means “in a whisper,” as written in Zohar). This means to whisper in the ears of the servants of God that they should not have angry complaints against the attribute of stern judgment, for there is also the dimension of divine love and goodness. Mei HaShiloach, Parshat Emor)
6. Elijah went into a cave. A voice came to him, “Why are you here, Elijah?” I am moved by zeal for God. I alone am left.” There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks; after the wind, an earthquake. After the earthquake, fire. After the fire, a still, small voice. “Why are you here, Elijah?” “I am moved by zeal for God; and I alone am left.” God said to him, “Go back by the way you came, on to the *midbar* of Damascus.” (I Kings 19:9-15)