



## Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

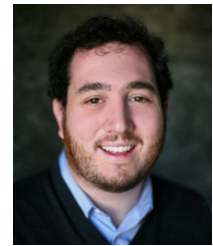
# Today's Torah

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*Jews have always been a community drawn together by virtue of Torah. No matter where you may be, we welcome you to the Ziegler community through Today's Torah e-mail.*

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**Shabbat Parashat Aharei Mot/Yom HaShoah**  
**May 4, 2019 - 29 Nisan 5779**



**By: Rabbi Adam Greenwald**  
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### We Will Outlive Them

Torah Reading: Leviticus 16:1-18:30

Haftarah Reading: 1 Samuel 20:18-42

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In 1939, a group of Hasidic Jews in Lublin, Poland were lined up against a barbed wire fence by SS soldiers. The sadistic commandant then ordered them to sing themselves to their own deaths. One of the men began to improvise a tune: "Mir veln zey iberlebn, iberlebn, iberlebn" – "We will outlive them" he sang over and over. Witness reports say that the song spread quickly through the group, who died dancing and singing those words.

For many of us, this week began with turning back on our phones and computers after Shabbat, only to be confronted by the terrible news that once again a hate-filled gunman struck a synagogue in the midst of prayer. Exactly six months after eleven worshipers were killed, and seven more wounded, at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, we once again found ourselves in the dark abyss of fear, anger, and grief. Over the past several days stories of heartbreak and heroism have filtered out: Of Lori Gilbert Kaye z"l who was killed as she rose to say Yizkor for her mother. Of Rabbi Yisroel Goldstein who continued to try to talk down the killer and reassure the congregation even after being shot. Of Orthodox Jews taking shelter in the Russian Church next door during their Easter

celebration.

At the end of this week, we'll mark Yom HaShoah – the annual commemoration of the lives and deaths of those who went through the Holocaust. In Israel, air raid sirens will blast at precisely 10 am, and the entire country will come to a halt. For two minutes, shoppers will cease filling their carts, schoolchildren will pause in their lessons, drivers will pull to the side of the highway and get out of their cars. For two minutes, the Jewish State will fall silent in the face of the unimaginable tragedy that befell our People in the last century – an echo of the stunned silence that most of us fell into when we learned of the news from Poway.

The next day, in synagogue, we will read the parashah entitled Acharei Mot, "After Death." The opening lines of the reading recount the moments just after the death of Aaron's two sons. We will ask the haunting question of this week – what do we do after we are visited by tragic death, whether it be the death of a single, precious individual in a synagogue or the death of six million at the hands of the Nazis. After death – what do we do next?

Several months ago, I invited a Holocaust survivor, Mrs. Renee Firestone, to speak to my Intro to Judaism class. For two hours she shared with the students the story of her life, of the imprisonment and the loss of much of her family, and also of her miraculous survival, her journey to the United States, and her richly lived life full of personal and professional achievement. At the conclusion of her talk, as I was walking her up to the elevator, we were intercepted by a woman in her mid-20s, a student in the class. She walked up to Mrs. Firestone with tears in her eyes: "I just concluded chemotherapy for breast cancer," she said, "And I don't know how to go on living under this shadow." The elderly survivor turned and embraced the young survivor and said, with warmth but also a certain stern grace: "You just keep putting one foot in front of the other. That's what life is all about. There is no other choice."

As I listened to this exchange, I thought of that Yom HaShoah siren – when it rings we fall as still as death, but when it ends, the cacophony of life comes rushing back in. Within seconds the cabs are back to honking, the students turn back to their books, the shoppers jostle through the narrow aisles of a Tel Aviv supermarket. It is the lived embodiment of one my favorite line from Psalms: "Tears may linger for a night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalms 30:5).

When I feel lost, and the pain of living in this brutal world is too much to bear – I think of those Hasidim singing the words "We will outlive them," despite the machine guns pointed at their hearts. I think of Mrs. Firestone sharing her story of survival, and giving strength to the next generation to keep putting one foot in front of the other. I think of the siren, which demands that we pause and feel grief, but then ends and invites us back to the world. What comes acharei mot? More life, always more life. For we have outlived all those who sought our destruction before, and we surely will again.

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**Rabbi Adam Greenwald**, is the Executive Director of the Louis & Judith Miller Introduction to Judaism Program at American Jewish University. Before coming to AJU, he served as Revson Rabbinic Fellow at IKAR, a Los Angeles congregation often recognized as one of the nation's most creative and fastest-growing spiritual communities. Prior to ordination, he served two years as Rabbinic Intern at Congregation B'nai

Israel in Tustin, CA and as Director of Education of the PANIM Institute's IMPACT: DC program. Rabbi Greenwald was ordained at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in 2011.

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