

Holidays Karaite should not do, Part 3.

By Yochanan Zaquantov

This week we continue our series on the next set of holidays that we should examine. As we look at these days what we are trying to see is what would make these days acceptable or not for Karaites.

Valentines Day

In the History Channel website we find that this day had a link to pre-Christian practices which were later absorbed into their practices.

“St. Valentine's Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. So, who was Saint Valentine and how did he become associated with this ancient rite? Today, the Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred.

One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men -- his crop of potential soldiers. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons where they were often beaten and tortured.

According to one legend, Valentine actually sent the first 'valentine' greeting himself. While in prison, it is believed that Valentine fell in love with a young girl -- who may have been his jailor's daughter -- who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter, which he signed 'From your Valentine,' an expression that is still in use today. Although the truth behind the Valentine legends is murky, the stories certainly emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic, and, most importantly, romantic figure. It's no surprise that by the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France.

While some believe that Valentine's Day is celebrated in the middle of February to commemorate the anniversary of Valentine's death or burial -- which probably occurred around 270 A.D -- others claim that the Christian church may have decided to celebrate Valentine's feast day in the middle of February in an effort to 'christianize' celebrations of the pagan Lupercalia

festival. In ancient Rome, February was the official beginning of spring and was considered a time for purification. Houses were ritually cleansed by sweeping them out and then sprinkling salt and a type of wheat called spelt throughout their interiors. Lupercalia, which began at the ides of February, February 15, was a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus.

To begin the festival, members of the Luperci, an order of Roman priests, would gather at the sacred cave where the infants Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were believed to have been cared for by a she-wolf or lupa. The priests would then sacrifice a goat, for fertility, and a dog, for purification.

The boys then sliced the goat's hide into strips, dipped them in the sacrificial blood and took to the streets, gently slapping both women and fields of crops with the goathide strips. Far from being fearful, Roman women welcomed being touched with the hides because it was believed the strips would make them more fertile in the coming year. Later in the day, according to legend, all the young women in the city would place their names in a big urn. The city's bachelors would then each choose a name out of the urn and become paired for the year with his chosen woman. These matches often ended in marriage. Pope Gelasius declared February 14 St. Valentine's Day around 498 A.D. The Roman 'lottery' system for romantic pairing was deemed un-Christian and outlawed. Later, during the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in France and England that February 14 was the beginning of birds' mating season, which added to the idea that the middle of February -- Valentine's Day -- should be a day for romance. “

http://www.history.com/minisite.do?content_type=Minisite_Generic&content_type_id=882&display_order=1&mini_id=1084

There are some things from this article, which we can dig a little further to confirm. In the catholic encyclopedia, it alludes to former practices without really telling us why this month was associated with birds finding its mate and the therefore people attaching to their mates.

“The popular customs associated with Saint Valentine's Day undoubtedly had their origin in a conventional [belief](#) generally received in [England](#) and [France](#) during the [Middle Ages](#), that on 14 February, i.e. half way through the second month of the year, the [birds](#) began to pair. Thus in [Chaucer's](#) *Parliament of Foules* we read:

For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day
Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.

For this reason the day was looked upon as specially [consecrated](#) to lovers and as a proper occasion for writing [love](#) letters and sending lovers' tokens. Both the [French](#) and [English literatures](#) of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contain

allusions to the practice. Perhaps the earliest to be found is in the 34th and 35th *Ballades* of the bilingual poet, [John Gower](#), written in French; but Lydgate and Clauvowe supply other examples. Those who chose each other under these circumstances seem to have been called by each other their Valentines. In the *Paston Letters*, Dame Elizabeth Brews writes thus about a match she [hopes](#) to make for her daughter (we modernize the spelling), addressing the favoured suitor:

And, cousin mine, upon Monday is Saint Valentine's Day and every [bird](#) chooses himself a mate, and if it like you to come on Thursday night, and make provision that you may abide till then, I [trust](#) to [God](#) that ye shall speak to my husband and I shall [pray](#) that we may bring the matter to a conclusion.

Shortly after the young lady herself wrote a letter to the same [man](#) addressing it "Unto my rightwell beloved Valentine, John Paston Esquire". The [custom](#) of choosing and sending valentines has of late years fallen into comparative desuetude. ("<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15254a.htm>)

So where did this practice come from?

"Spring was thought to begin on February 5, which was the time for the seed to be sown. It was a time, too, for purification and the expiation of any unintentional offense that might have been given to the gods. The month of February takes its name, in fact, from the instruments of purification (*februa*) used in such rites, the best known of which is the *Lupercalia*.

On February 15, the Luperci, young men who were naked except for the skins of goats that had been sacrificed this day, ran from the Lupercal around the bounds of the Palatine, both to purify that ancient site in a ceremony of lustration (*lustratio*) and, striking the women they met with strips of goat skin, to promote fertility. "Neither potent herbs, nor prayers, nor magic spells shall make of thee a mother," writes Ovid, "submit with patience to the blows dealt by a fruitful hand."

The Sabine women seized by Romulus were barren, as well, says the poet, until struck by the *februa*. At the foot of the Palatine hill, the Lupercal traditionally was thought to be the cave where Romulus and Remus had been suckled by the [she-wolf](#). The twins, born of Mars and the Vestal daughter of the king, eventually restored their grandfather to the throne and, at the site where they had been left to die, founded Rome"

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/calendar/lupercalia.html)

So when was this celebrated?

“The **Lupercalia** was a very ancient, possibly pre-Roman pastoral festival, observed on [February 13](#) through [February 15](#) to avert evil spirits and purify the city, releasing health and fertility. The Lupercalia was believed in antiquity to have some connection with the [Ancient Greek](#) festival of the [Arcadian Lycaea](#) (from [Ancient Greek](#): λύκος – lykos, "wolf", [Latin](#) *lupus*) and the worship of [Lycaean Pan](#), the Greek equivalent to [Faunus](#), as instituted by [Evander](#).”

Continuing in the same article...

“The festival began with the [sacrifice](#) by the Luperci (or the [flamen dialis](#)) of two male goats and a dog. Next two [patrician](#) young Luperci were led to the altar, to be anointed on their foreheads with the sacrificial blood, which was wiped off the bloody knife with [wool](#) soaked in [milk](#), after which they were expected to smile and laugh; the smearing of the forehead with blood probably refers to human sacrifice originally practised at the festival.

The sacrificial feast followed, after which the Luperci cut thongs from the skins of the victims, which were called **Februa**, dressed themselves in the skins of the sacrificed goats, in imitation of Lupercus, and ran round the walls of the old Palatine city, the line of which was marked with stones, with the thongs in their hands in two bands, striking the people who crowded near. Girls and young women would line up on their route to receive lashes from these whips. This was supposed to ensure fertility, prevent sterility in women and ease the pains of childbirth. This tradition itself may survive (Christianised, and shifted to Spring) in certain ritual [Easter Monday](#) whippings.

The Lupercalia in the fifth century

By the fifth century, when the public performance of pagan rites had been outlawed, a nominally Christian Roman populace still clung to the Lupercalia in the time of Gelasius (494-96). It had been literally degraded since the first century, when in 44 BC the consul [Mark Antony](#) did not scruple to run with the Luperci;^[2] now the upper classes left the festivities to the rabble,^[3] prompting [Pope Gelasius I](#)'s taunt to the senators who would preserve it: "If you assert that this rite has salutary force, celebrate it yourselves in the ancestral fashion; run nude yourselves that you may properly carry out the mockery."^[4] The remark was addressed to the senator Andromachus by Gelasius in an extended literary epistle that was virtually a thesis against Lupercalia. Gelasius finally abolished the Lupercalia after a long contest.”

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lupercalia>)

What about the other cards and cupid?

“Rome was Christian by the 4th Century CE, and the church banned the old pagan festivals. Even so, the church was only partly successful. People stubbornly resisted the end of Lupercalia, and it was the last to go. A substitute became necessary and St. Valentine’s Day emerged to celebrate a more innocent love. Traces of Lupercalia remain in our culture today. February, the month in which it is held, is named for the februa - a Latin term describing anything used "to purify", including a priest’s goatskin flogger. Gaul’s "love lotteries" evolved into the exchange of Valentine’s Cards. Finally, Cupid remains an enduring Valentine’s Day symbol, even though he was a Roman god. But take note, the Cupid we know bears little resemblance to the Cupid known to the ancients. Cupid had long been associated with love and Lupercalia, but in the 4th Century CE, churchmen deemed it necessary to revise his image and reputation. The Cupid of ancient Rome (also known as Eros to the Greeks) bears little resemblance to the cute winged baby with a bow and arrow we know. He was a virile, randy youth, answerable for impregnating many, many females - mortals and goddesses alike.”

<http://lupercalia-edmonton.com/history.htm>

So you can see that plainly Valentines is a day steeped in the practices of the pre-Christian era. Catholics just simply took it on and changed it so they could get the populous to stop keeping their pre-Christian ways. By deluding it and cleaning it up they hide the former ways.

St. Patrick’s day is a bit of a different origin in that while it is named for the Patron Saint of the Irish, it is also the day of his death on March 17th. There was some secular celebrations associated with this day but again what was the day to be celebrated for?

St. Patricks Day

Taken Prisoner By Irish Raiders

It is known that St. Patrick was born in Britain to wealthy parents near the end of the fourth century. He is believed to have died on March 17, around 460 A.D. Although his father was a Christian deacon, it has been suggested that he probably took on the role because of tax incentives and there is no evidence that Patrick came from a particularly religious family. At the age of sixteen, Patrick was taken prisoner by a group of Irish raiders who were attacking his family's estate. They transported him to Ireland where he spent six years in captivity. (There is some dispute over where this captivity took place. Although many believe he was taken to live in Mount Slemish in County Antrim, it is more likely that he was held in County Mayo near Killala.) During this time, he worked as a shepherd, outdoors and away from people. Lonely and afraid, he turned to his religion for solace, becoming a devout Christian. (It is also believed that Patrick first began to dream of converting the Irish people to Christianity during his captivity.)

Guided By Visions

After more than six years as a prisoner, Patrick escaped. According to his writing, a voice-which he believed to be God's-spoke to him in a dream, telling him it was time to leave Ireland.

To do so, Patrick walked nearly 200 miles from County Mayo, where it is believed he was held, to the Irish coast. After escaping to Britain, Patrick reported that he experienced a second revelation-an angel in a dream tells him to return to Ireland as a missionary. Soon after, Patrick began religious training, a course of study that lasted more than fifteen years. After his ordination as a priest, he was sent to Ireland with a dual mission-to minister to Christians already living in Ireland and to begin to convert the Irish. (Interestingly, this mission contradicts the widely held notion that Patrick introduced Christianity to Ireland.)

Bonfires and Crosses

Familiar with the Irish language and culture, Patrick chose to incorporate traditional ritual into his lessons of Christianity instead of attempting to eradicate native Irish beliefs. For instance, he used bonfires to celebrate Easter since the Irish were used to honoring their gods with fire. He also superimposed a sun, a powerful Irish symbol, onto the Christian cross to create what is now called a Celtic cross, so that veneration of the symbol would seem more natural to the Irish. (Although there were a small number of Christians on the island when Patrick arrived, most Irish practiced a nature-based pagan religion. The Irish culture centered around a rich tradition of oral legend and myth. When this is considered, it is no surprise that the story of Patrick's life became exaggerated over the centuries-spinning exciting tales to remember history has always been a part of the Irish way of life.)

http://www.history.com/minisite.do?content_type=Minisite_Genic&content_type_id=859&display_order=1&mini_id=1082

It was not an ancient holiday.

“Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated worldwide by [Irish people](#) and increasingly by many of non-Irish descent (usually in Australia, North America, and Ireland), hence the phrase, "Everyone wants to be Irish on St. Patrick's Day." Celebrations are generally themed around all things green and Irish; both [Christians](#) and non-Christians celebrate the secular version of the holiday by wearing [green](#) or orange, eating [Irish food](#) and/or green foods, imbibing Irish drink (usually [Guinness](#)), and attending parades.

The St. Patrick's Day parade in [Dublin, Ireland](#) is part of a five-day festival; over 500,000 people attended the 2006 parade. The largest St. Patrick's Day parade is

held in [New York City](#) and it is watched by over 2 million spectators. The St. Patrick's Day parade was first held in Boston in 1737, organized by the Charitable Irish Society. New York's celebration began on [17 March 1762](#) when Irish soldiers in the British army marched through the city”

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Patrick's_Day)

You can read the catholic encyclopedia to see many of the same information about this day. This day is dedicated to the honoring a Saint of the Catholic church. Thus it is a day that Karaites should not celebrate.

Now Good Friday and Easter are part of the last week of the time of Lent. The week is often called Holy week. But these days are celebrated by the secular too so we should look at these too.

Good Friday

“From the earliest times the [Christians](#) kept every Friday as a [feast day](#); and the obvious reasons for those usages explain why [Easter](#) is the [Sunday](#) *par excellence*, and why the Friday which marks the anniversary of [Christ's](#) death came to be called the Great or the Holy or the Good Friday. The origin of the term *Good* is not clear. Some say it is from "God's Friday" (*Gottes Freitag*); others maintain that it is from the German *Gute Freitag*, and not specially English. Sometimes, too, the day was called *Long Friday* by the Anglo-Saxons; so today in [Denmark](#).”

(<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06643a.htm>)

We see that this Friday before Easter has significance because Catholics and many other Christian groups observe it as the anniversary of Jesus' death. This is the Friday that falls during holy week. I could go into the practices here but they are pretty defined by the Catholic Church as the originator. If you read the article from the link above you will get a good flavor of the ceremonies.

Easter

“The modern English term *Easter* developed from the [Old English](#) word *Eastre*, which itself developed prior to 899. The name refers to the [goddess Eastre](#) in [Germanic paganism](#), who was celebrated at the Spring [equinox](#), and has cognates in [Old High German](#) *ōstarūn*, plural, Easter (modern [German language](#) *Ostern*). The Old English term *Eastre* ultimately derives from *ēast* - meaning the direction of [east](#). This indicates it originally referred to a goddess associated with [dawn](#). Corresponding [Indo-European](#) traditions occur with the Roman goddess [Aurora](#) and the Greek goddess [Eos](#).^[4]

In [England](#), the annual festive time in her honor was in the "Month of Easter" or [Ēostur-monath](#), equivalent to April/Aprilis^[5]. In his *De temporum ratione* the [Bede](#), an 8th Century [English Christian monk](#) wrote in Latin:

"Eostur-monath, qui nunc paschalis mensis interpretatur, quondam a dea illorum quae Eostre vocabatur et cui in illo festa celebrabant nomen habuit."

Which translates as:

"Eostur-month, which is now interpreted as the paschal month, was formerly named after the goddess Eostre, and has given its name to the festival.""

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter>)

Very early in the life of the Church, it was accepted that the [Eucharist](#) was a practice of the [disciples](#) and an undisputed tradition. A dispute arose concerned the date on which Pascha (Easter) should be celebrated. This dispute came to be known as the Easter/Paschal or [Quartodecimanism](#) controversy.

The term *Quartodeciman* (derived from the [Vulgate Latin](#), *quarta decima*,^[10] meaning fourteen) refers to the very early Christian practice of celebrating Easter on 14 [Nisan](#) of the [Hebrew Calendar](#).^{[11] [12]} Nisan 14 is the day of preparation for the [Jewish](#) celebration of [Passover](#). Much later, during the Middle Ages, Nisan 14 was called the [Paschal Full Moon](#).

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter>)

The original day they establish was to link it to the Jewish Pesach Festival. It is later they use the First Full moon after the Equinox established by the council of Nicaea.

“Ancient Spring Goddess

According to the [Venerable Bede](#), Easter derives its name from Eostre, an [Anglo-Saxon](#) goddess of spring. A month corresponding to April had been named "Eostremonat," or Eostre's month, leading to "Easter" becoming applied to the Christian holiday that usually took place within it. Prior to that, the holiday had been called [Pasch](#) (Passover), which remains its name in most non-English languages.

(Based on the similarity of their names, some connect Eostre with [Ishtar](#), the [Babylonian](#) and [Assyrian](#) goddess of love and fertility, but there is no solid evidence for this.)

It seems probable that around the second century A.D., Christian missionaries seeking to convert the tribes of northern Europe noticed that the Christian holiday

commemorating the resurrection of Jesus roughly coincided with the [Teutonic](#) springtime celebrations, which emphasized the triumph of life over death. Christian Easter gradually absorbed the traditional symbols.”

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter>)

There are sources which show the practices of the color eggs goes back to older worship rites. Some scholars feel these is essentially a specific goddess type and different people gave them different names much like the Greek and Romans had similar gods.

Easter Eggs

“In [Medieval Europe](#), eggs were forbidden during Lent. Eggs laid during that time were often boiled or otherwise preserved. Eggs were thus a mainstay of Easter meals, and a prized Easter gift for children and servants.

In addition, eggs have been viewed as symbols of new life and fertility through the ages. It is believed that for this reason many ancient cultures, including the [Ancient Egyptians](#), [Persians](#), and [Romans](#), used eggs during their spring festivals. Many traditions and practices have formed around Easter eggs. The coloring of eggs is a established art, and eggs are often dyed, painted, and otherwise decorated. Eggs were also used in various holiday games: parents would hide eggs for children to find, and children would roll eggs down hills. These practices live on in Easter egg hunts and egg rolls. The most famous egg roll takes place on the White House lawn every year.”

The Easter Bunny

“Hares and rabbits have long been symbols of fertility. The inclusion of the hare into Easter customs appears to have originated in Germany, where tales were told of an "Easter hare" who laid eggs for children to find. German immigrants to America -- particularly [Pennsylvania](#) -- brought the tradition with them and spread it to a wider public. They also baked cakes for Easter in the shape of hares, and may have pioneered the practice of making [chocolate](#) bunnies and eggs.”

(<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/easterintro1.html>)

The custom of associating a rabbit with Easter arose in Protestant areas in Europe in the 17th century but did not become common until the 19th century. The Easter rabbit was said to lay the eggs as well as decorate and hide them. In a way, this was a manifestation of the Protestant rejection of Catholic Easter customs. In some European countries, however, other animals—in Switzerland the cuckoo, in Westphalia the fox—brought the Easter eggs.

(<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-231528/Easter#792614.hook>)

A Brief History of Eggs

“Celebrated since the dawn of time, the egg is a symbol of fertility, creation and new life. Though long considered a springtime food, it has now become an essential ingredient in all our culinary traditions.

The ancient Persian and Celtic cultures celebrated the spring equinox with the gift of red-dyed eggs. The eggs were shared at a meal, and afterwards, the shells were carefully crushed, a ritual to drive away winter.

The ban of eating eggs during the 46 days of Lent established in the 9th century, is what made the egg so popular at Easter. The eggs were collected and saved and, once the fasting was over, were distributed to the servants and children, who generally enjoyed them in a huge Easter omelette. As the practice became more refined, the nobility got into the act, using the last days of winter to decorate eggs to give to their beloved, their master or the King. By the 16th century, these springtime eggs were all the rage at the court of France, with some being decorated by a few of the greatest artists of the day.

However, the popularity of the Easter egg reached untold heights at the court of the Czar of Russia. By the end of the 19th century, the court jeweller, Carl Fabergé, was making fabulous eggs of gold, crystal and porcelain. Today, hand-decorated eggs are exchanged as springtime gifts in many cultures and play a very important role in religious ceremonies on Easter morning. Some families carefully save their egg collection, passing them on from generation to generation.”

http://www.canadaegg.ca/bins/content_page.asp?cid=155-6-63

The Egg as a sign of fertility is found in many religious ceremonies. It does not by their presence link them all together however, the Eastern Orthodox Christians are said to use red color eggs today for Easter.

The Pagan origins of the Easter Bunny

Have you ever wondered where the celebration of the Christian holiday celebrating the resurrection of Christ acquired its unusual name and odd symbols of colored eggs and rabbits?

The answer lies in the ingenious way that the Christian church absorbed Pagan practices. After discovering that people were more reluctant to give up their holidays and festivals than their gods, they simply incorporated Pagan practices into Christian festivals. As recounted by the Venerable Bede, an early Christian writer, clever clerics copied Pagan practices and by doing so, made Christianity more palatable to pagan folk reluctant to give up their festivals for somber Christian practices.

In second century Europe, the predominate spring festival was a raucous Saxon fertility celebration in honor of the Saxon Goddess Eastre (Ostara), whose sacred animal was a hare.

The colored eggs associated with the bunny are of another, even more ancient origin. The eggs associated with this and other Vernal festivals have been symbols of rebirth and fertility for so long the precise roots of the tradition are unknown, and may date to the beginning of human civilization. Ancient Romans and Greeks used eggs as symbols of fertility, rebirth, and abundance- eggs were solar symbols, and figured in the festivals of numerous resurrected gods. Pagan fertility festivals at the time of the Spring equinox were common- it was believed that at this time, when day and night were of equal length, male and female energies were also in balance. The hare is often associated with moon goddesses; the egg and the hare together represent the god and the goddess, respectively.

Moving forward fifteen hundred years, we find ourselves in Germany, where children await the arrival of Oschter Haws, a rabbit who will lay colored eggs in nests to the delight of children who discover them Easter morning. It was this German tradition that popularized the 'Easter bunny' in America, when introduced into the American cultural fabric by German settlers in Pennsylvania.

<http://altreligion.about.com/cs/alchemy/a/mpreviss.htm>

Clearly many of the practices we associate with the secular are very religious in origins. Therefore should we be attaching ourselves to the practices of other Elohim?

Bamidbar/Numbers 25:1-3

1 While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women, 2 who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshiped that god. 3 Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor, and Yehovah was incensed with Israel.

When someone practices the ways of another Elohim they attach or join themselves to that Elohim.

We as Karaites need to be aware what we are doing that might be offensive to Yehovah. We are to serve him and him alone.