

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Pinchas
July 3, 2021 *** 23 Tamuz, 5781

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We welcome all to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Pinchas in a Nutshell

Aaron's grandson Pinchas is rewarded for his act of zealotry in killing the Simeonite prince Zimri and the Midianite princess who was his paramour: G-d grants him a covenant of peace and the priesthood.

A census of the people counts 601,730 men between the ages of twenty and sixty. Moses is instructed on how the Land is to be divided by lottery among the tribes and families of Israel. The five daughters of Tzelafchad petition Moses that they be granted the portion of the land belonging to their father, who died without sons; G-d accepts their claim and incorporates it into the Torah's laws of inheritance.

Moses empowers Joshua to succeed him and lead the people into the Land of Israel. The Parshah concludes with a detailed list of the daily offerings, and the additional offerings brought on Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh (first of the month), and the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret.

Haftarah in A Nutshell:Jeremiah 1:1-2:3.

This week's haftarah is the first of a series of three "haftorot of affliction." These three haftarot are read during the Three Weeks of mourning for Jerusalem, between the fasts of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av.

Jeremiah recounts how G-d appointed him as prophet — despite his initial reluctance to accept the task — and tells of the encouragement G-d gave him to fulfill his crucial mission.

He then describes two prophetic visions he was shown. The first featured an almond tree branch. G-d explained to Jeremiah that just like an almond tree is very quick to blossom, so too G-d will carry out his plan — to punish the Jews for their sins — in due haste.

The second vision was that of a boiling pot whose foam was directed northward. G-d explained that this was an allusion to the afflictions the Jewish people would suffer at the hands of the people from the north of the Holy Land, namely Babylon. G-d will cause the kingdoms of the north to lay siege on Jerusalem and Judea and He will

pass judgment on the Jewish people due to their abandonment of G-d's ways and their idol worship.

G-d then encouraged Jeremiah to deliver the prophecy and not to fear the Jewish populace who would certainly not take kindly to such harsh words.

The haftorah ends with a reassuring prophecy to the people: "Go and call out in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: so said G-d: 'I remember to you the loving-kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me in the desert, in a land not sown. Israel is holy to G-d, the first of His grain; all who eat him shall be guilty, evil shall befall them, says G-d.'"

[FOOD FOR THOUGHT](#)

[Lessons of a Leader - Pinchas 5781 by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l](#)

The parsha of Pinchas contains a masterclass on leadership, as Moses confronts his own mortality and asks God to appoint a successor. The great leaders care about succession. In parshat Chayei Sarah we saw Abraham instruct his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, so that the family of the covenant will continue. King David chose Solomon. Elijah, at God's bidding, appointed Elisha to carry on his work. In the case of Moses, the Sages sensed a certain sadness at his realisation that he would not be succeeded by either of his sons, Gershom or Eliezer.[1] Such is the case with Keter Torah, the invisible crown of Torah worn by the Prophets and the Sages. Unlike the crowns of priesthood and kingship, it does not pass dynastically from father to son. Charisma rarely does. What is instructive, though, is the language Moses uses in framing his request:

"May the Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh, choose a person over the congregation who will go out before them and come in before them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord will not be like sheep without a shepherd." (Num. 27:16)

There are three basic leadership lessons to be learned from this choice of words. The first, noted by Rashi, is implicit in the unusually long description of God as "the Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh." This means, Rashi explains, "Master of the universe, the character of each person is revealed to You, and no two are alike. Appoint over them a leader who will bear with each person according to their individual character." [2]

The Rambam says that this is a basic feature of the human condition. Homo sapiens is the most diverse of all life forms. Therefore co-operation is essential – because we are each different, others are strong where we are weak and vice versa – but cohesion is also difficult, because we each respond to challenges in different ways. That is what makes leadership necessary, but also demanding:

[This great variety, and the necessity of social life, are essential elements in human nature. But the well-being of society demands that there should be a leader able to regulate the actions of each person; they must complete every shortcoming, remove](#)

every excess, and prescribe for the conduct of all, so that the natural variety should be counterbalanced by the uniformity of legislation, and the order of society be well established.[3]

Leaders respect differences but, like the conductor of an orchestra, integrate them, ensuring that the many different instruments play their part in harmony with the rest. True leaders do not seek to impose uniformity. They honour diversity.

The second hint is contained in the word ish, “a person” over the congregation, to which God responds, “Take for yourself Joshua, a person [ish] of spirit (v. 18). The word ish here indicates something other than gender. This can be seen in the two places where the Torah uses the phrase ha-ish Moshe, “the man Moses”:

One is in Exodus:

The man Moses was highly respected [gadol me’od, literally “very great”] in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of Pharaoh’s servants and the people. (Ex. 11:3)

The second is in Numbers:

Now the man Moses was very humble [anav me’od], more so than anyone else on the face of the earth (Num. 12:3)

Note the two characteristics, seemingly opposed – great and humble – both of which Moses had in high degree (me’od, “very”). This is the combination of attributes Rabbi Yochanan attributed to God himself: “Wherever you find God’s greatness, there you find His humility.”[4] Here is one of his proof-texts: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the orphan and the widow, and loves the stranger residing among you, giving them food and clothing” (Deut. 10:17-18).

An ish in the context of leadership is not a male but rather, someone who is a mensch, a person whose greatness is lightly worn, who cares about the people others often ignore, “the orphan, the widow and the stranger,” who spends as much time with the people at the margins of society as with the elites, who is courteous to everyone equally and who receives respect because they give respect.

The real puzzlement, however, lies in the third clause: “Choose a person over the congregation who will go out before them and come in before them, who will lead them out and bring them in.” This sounds like saying the same thing twice, which the Torah tends not to do. What does it mean?

The Torah is hinting here at one of the most challenging aspects of leadership, namely timing and pace. The first phrase is simple: “who will go out before them and come in before them.” This means that a leader must lead from the front. They cannot be like the apocryphal remark of one British politician: “Of course I follow the party. After all, I am their leader.”[5]

It is the second phrase that is vital: “who will lead them out and bring them in.” This means: a leader must lead from the front, but he or she must not be so far out in front that when they turn around, they find that no one is following. Pace is of the essence. Sometimes a leader can go too fast. That is when tragedies occur.

To take two very different examples: when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister she knew she was going to have to confront the miners' union in a long and bitter struggle. In 1981 they went on strike for a pay rise. Mrs Thatcher immediately made enquiries about the size of coal stocks. She wanted to know how long the country could survive without new supplies of coal. As soon as she discovered that stocks were low, she in effect conceded victory to the miners. She then, very quietly, arranged for coal to be stockpiled. The result was that when the miners went on strike again in 1983, she resisted their demands. There was a prolonged strike, and this time it was the miners who conceded defeat. A battle she could not win in 1981 she was able to win in 1983.

The very different example was that of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The peace process he engaged with the Palestinians between 1993 and 1995 was deeply controversial, within Israel and beyond. There was some support but also much opposition. The tension mounted in 1995. In September of that year, I wrote an article in the press giving him my own personal support. At the same time, however, I wrote to him privately saying that I was deeply worried about internal opposition to the plan, and urging him to spend as much time negotiating with his fellow Israeli citizens – specifically the religious Zionists – as with the Palestinians. I did not receive a reply. On Motsei Shabbat, 4 November 1995, we heard the news that Prime Minister Rabin had been assassinated at a peace rally by a young religious Zionist. I attended the funeral in Jerusalem. Returning the next day, I went straight from the airport to the Israeli ambassador to sit with him and talk to him about the funeral, which he had not been able to attend, having had to stay in London to deal with the media.

As I entered his office, he handed me an envelope, saying, “This has just arrived for you in the diplomatic bag.” It was Yitzhak Rabin’s reply to my letter – one of the last letters he ever wrote. It was a moving re-affirmation of his faith, but tragically by the time it was delivered he was no longer alive. He had pursued peace, as we are commanded to do, but he had gone too fast for those who were not yet prepared to listen.

Moses knew this himself from the episode of the spies. As Maimonides says in *The Guide*,^[6] the task of fighting battles and conquering the land was just too much for a generation born into slavery. It could only be done by their children, those born in freedom. Sometimes a journey that seems small on the map takes forty years.

Respect for diversity, care for the lowly and powerless as well as the powerful and great, and a willingness to go no faster than people can bear – these are three essential attributes of a leader, as Moses knew from experience, and as Joshua learned through long apprenticeship to the great man himself.

[1] That is the implication of the statement that “Moses long to die as did Aaron,” *Sifrei*, Pinchas, 136, s.v. vayomer. [2] Rashi to Num. 27:16, based on Tanchuma, Pinchas, 11. [3] Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, book 2 chapter 40. [4] From the liturgy on Saturday night. The source is *Pesikta Zutreta*, Eikev. [5] This statement has been attributed to Benjamin Disraeli, Stanley Baldwin and Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin. [6] *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Book 3, chapter 32.

The Chain of Life : Pinchas 5781 by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

The story of Zelofhad's daughters in Parashat Pinchas is often referred to as a proto-feminist event. Zelofhad had five daughters, but no sons, before he died. In biblical society and culture, dying without a son was equivalent to dying intestate. Thus, Zelofhad's share of land (to be dispensed when the Israelites settled in Canaan)¹ would disappear. His daughters petitioned Moses to inherit the lands so that Zelofhad's estate—land bearing his name—would not pass from the scene. A divine oracle upheld that the daughters were correct in making their request and should be given their father's land inheritance. This ruling was then generalized: In all cases where a man died with no son to inherit him, the land would pass to his daughter.² If there was no daughter either, the man's brother would inherit. The land would be passed on in reverse order to relatives or marriage connected by degrees of separation, always staying within the family (Numbers 27:5-11).

This narrative may speak to the Torah's ultimate ideal of gender equality, but the incident appears to be more about family continuity. The overriding concern of the Torah here is that Zelofhad's inheritance stay in the family, that his name not be wiped out, and that the equal portion given to each family within each tribe not be lost.³ This is a recurring theme of the Torah, that no line of life be wiped out forever. For example, if a man dies with no children, his widow was to be taken in levirate marriage by his brother. The first child of this levirate marriage would be considered as carrying on the name of the brother—so that his line of life would not end with his death (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). This concept of not cutting off a chain of life is a deeper Torah value. It highlights one of the most important aspects of covenantal living: the unending chain of covenant-keepers.

Jewish tradition says that God has recruited human beings—because they have the consciousness and capacities required to repair the world—to fill Creation with life, to upgrade the planet so it will sustain the highest levels of quality of life and its fulfillment. This is the covenant partnership commitment to fill the world with life that God entered into with humanity, the Noahide covenant.⁴ This was followed up with a particular covenant partnership commitment with Abraham,⁵ and then the people of Israel at Sinai, to serve as teachers, pace-setters, and role-models for all humanity.⁶

Out of respect for human nature and community consensus—neither of which change overnight—the covenant itself operates by upgrading the world one step at a time. Thus, the world will not be repaired in one lifetime; we have been working at this covenant for about 4,000 years and have still not achieved the goals. Each person committed to the covenant must be concerned to achieve as much as possible in their lifetime, then create (or educate) the next generation to carry forward the mission.⁷ Otherwise, the activity of one's lifetime will be futile, the task unfinished, the goals unfulfilled. Therefore, a central part of individual covenantal consciousness is that: "I

am determined that the chain of life not end with me or with other agents and partners in this generation, and I feel responsible to create the next generation that will carry on after me. If I cannot have children, I can adopt or educate others' children to take up the task.”

This covenantal consciousness is what drives the Torah to see termination of anyone's chain of life as a serious setback for the cause of tikkun olam. Thus, the Torah created practices such as levirate marriage and the inheritance of daughters to allow the chain of life to go on as if unbroken. In this same spirit, the members of the covenant are asked to think not only of living their own lives properly. Rather, they are tasked to think of their lives as an important link in the chain of life. Only if the chain continues unbroken—with vision transmitted and generations carrying on—will the final tikkun olam be possibly achieved.

This extra effort is not just fulfillment of an ideal, and an act of taking responsibility for the future of the covenant. There are—at least!—three rewards in this task. First, I am the beneficiary of the efforts and achievements of the generations that preceded mine. I start at my level, inherited from past generations, which is higher than if I started from scratch. Our task, then, is to turn that higher starting point into a commitment to widening access and opportunity for other groups that lack this advantage.

Secondly, I am playing my part in the promulgation of the covenantal chain. I begin with the insights and experience of the past covenantal generation as part of my patrimony. I inherit the wisdom, the hard-earned experiences of life, the cumulative learning of those who have gone before. This way I start with major enrichment of my life, and of my capacity to live the good life and to focus my behaviors on maximizing life.

Finally, the third reward: My life does not really end with my death. Tasks and goals unfinished in my lifetime may well be completed by those who come after me in the chain of life, especially if I have communicated the vision of tikkun olam and the importance of living for ourselves, but also beyond ourselves, for the realization of this covenant. Assuring the chain of life goes on—and with it the vision and promise of the covenant—is the validation of starting programs and living for goals that transcend me. “It is not incumbent on you to complete the task” (Mishnah Avot 2:16). But if you grasp the larger purpose and ultimate goal of tikkun olam, then you will not feel free to desist from beginning the upgrade, the process of repair.

Each one of us can choose the areas to which we will contribute, be it enriching the world and overcoming poverty through business (such as conducting with fairness to workers and respect for the environment); be it in medicine, overcoming pandemics

or sickness, and drilling down to biological and genetic building blocks that can heal hitherto untreatable illnesses; be it law or politics where one can work for justice and fairness, and overcoming systemic deprivations or discrimination; be it in education, expanding people's capacities and/or communicating the covenantal vision; be it in having and raising families and developing the value and dignity of each child. I can do all of the above, and I can be assured that it all is not in vain by forging the next link in the chain of life, to carry on after me in the next generation.

I would like to add that ever since dealing with modernity became the dominant challenge in Jewish life, the covenant-keepers' chain has been weakened at both ends. On the one hand, many Jews interpreted the emancipation and access to full citizenship for all Jews as permission to live only for themselves—after all, the group's fate no longer determined their individual lives. Many Jews interpreted the surging individualism as license to look out for self only. In the face of individual autonomy, some “childless-by-choice” adults feel no connection to the value of ensuring there be a next generation and covenantal continuity.

At the other end, many Jews concluded that the chain of tikkun olam is best continued by joining the general society and its projects, rather than working through the Jewish covenant. Many people—having been exposed strongly to the general culture—turn secular, deciding to live exactly like the general culture. Secular culture is an attractive and rich one, and it promises to deliver much of Judaism's vision of tikkun olam. This means that even if Jews believe in tikkun olam, they may turn to secular culture to pursue that goal and to find meaning in life. In America, this is true of all Jewish movements that expose their children to modern life. The phenomenon is threatening the continuity of the Reform and Conservative denominations, and nearly 40% of Modern Orthodox youth become secular as well. In effect, a less developed Jewish culture loses in the competition for primary loyalty. I believe that the best way to recapture the centrality of the Jewish covenant is to roll out the full breadth of Judaism as the religion able and willing to be a major vehicle of world repair. Such a broadly understood version of Judaism is able to hold its own, and even to contribute spiritually, to the richest, most life-enhancing culture of all time. Shabbat Shalom.

¹ See Numbers 26:52-56. ² See Numbers 27:4 and the conclusion of this story in Numbers 36:1-12.

³ See my discussion on Parashat BeHar-BeHukkotai, “Judaism's Utopian Vision of Universal Equality,” available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/judaism's-utopian-vision-universal-equality>.

⁴ See Genesis 8:21-22, 9:1-7, 9:8-17. ⁵ See Genesis 12:1-3; chapters 15, 17. ⁶ See Exodus 19:7.

⁷ See also my thoughts on Parashat VaYehi, “The Covenant Between the Generations,” available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/covenant-between-generations>.

[In The Face of Violence, The Covenant of Peace by Marc Gary](#)

Karen Armstrong, the scholar of religion and popular author of such works as *The History of God*, relates that wherever she travels, she is often confronted by

someone—a taxi driver, an Oxford academic, an American psychiatrist—who confidently expresses the view that “religion has caused more violence and wars than anything else.” This is quite a remarkable statement given that in the last century alone, tens of millions of people have been killed in two world wars, the communist purges in the Soviet Union and its satellites, and the Cambodian killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, none of which were caused by religious motivations.

This is not to say, of course, that religion has failed to play a significant role throughout history in the instigation of wars or the perpetration of individual acts of violence. History is replete with such examples from the Crusades, to the massacre at Hebron by Baruch Goldstein, to the killing and maiming of abortion providers by fundamentalist Christians, to acts of terror committed in the name of Islam. Those of us who take religious life seriously and who see its fundamental values expressed in concepts of love, justice, and human dignity cannot help but feel both disgusted and defensive about this history of wars and violent acts undertaken in the name of religious conviction even if our secular friends and neighbors tend to impose disproportionate blame on religion for the world’s woes.

This week’s Torah portion, Pinehas, frames like no other parashah the problem of biblical religion’s relationship to violence, particularly zealotry and vigilantism. Last week we read the story of Pinehas, the grandson of Aaron, who saw an Israelite man and a Midianite woman publicly having sex in an alcove (kubah) near or in the Tabernacle. Without warning or any judicial proceedings, Pinehas grabbed a spear and thrust it through them both in a violent parody of the sexual act itself (the spear ended in the woman’s kubah, which may refer either to her belly or her sexual part). That parashah ended with a plague being lifted, but no definitive word about how God or Moses viewed this act of vigilantism (Num. 25:6–9).

That judgment is rendered at the beginning of this week’s parashah and to our modern sensibilities as well as our fundamental understanding of religious values, it is a stunner:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “Pinehas, son of Elazar son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My passion. Say, therefore, ‘I grant My pact of friendship (beriti shalom). It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time, because he took impassioned action for his God, thus making expiation for the Israelites.’”

This is not merely divine applause; it is a godly standing ovation. God credits Pinehas’s extrajudicial killing with saving the Israelite people from extermination by plague and bestows upon him and his posterity the religious leadership of the people through the office of the High Priest, an honor in parallel to God’s promise to David on the political side. All of this is wrapped within a pact of friendship between God and Pinehas.

How are we to understand this apparent divine approval of an act of extreme violence and religious zealotry? Perhaps the answer lies with the nature of the sin perpetrated in the alcove.

The modern biblical scholar Richard Elliot Friedman asserts that the essence of the crime was not immoral sexual relations but rather a violation of the sanctity of the Tabernacle (Commentary on the Torah, 514 [on Num. 25:8]). As non-Levites, the perpetrators were not even allowed to enter that sacred space, much less have intimate relations there. Since the commission of the ritual crime is clear and there can be no defense, Pinehas as a priest was justified in entering the Tabernacle and inflicting the prescribed punishment. While to our modern eyes the result may still seem shocking, this interpretation has the benefit of precluding the Pinehas story from being used as a justification for violent acts of contemporary religious zealotry. Since the unique holiness of the Tabernacle no longer exists, so too is extinguished any justification for future religious killings based on the rationale that motivated Pinehas.

Other biblical commentators reject the view that the crime at issue was a ritual crime and argue instead that it was really a political transgression (See Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 819–20, and n. 8, 14–15; Rabbi Sholom Riskin, *Torah Lights: A Biblical Commentary*, 207–211). This position is supported by the identification of the perpetrators, who are revealed in our parashah to be Zimri, son of Salu, a chieftain of the tribe of Simeon, and Cozbi daughter of Zur, a Midianite princess (Num. 25:14–15). The tribe of Simeon was second in terms of seniority behind the tribe of Reuben and ahead of the tribe of Levi, from whom Moses descended. The Midianites were worshippers of Baal Peor, a particularly noxious religious cult in the eyes of God. Thus the public cohabitation between a Simeonite chieftain and a Midianite princess could be viewed as an existential challenge to the established (and God-ordained) religious and political order of the Israelite nation. Pinehas's decisive act was intended to preserve that order. As JTS professor Alan Mittleman writes in his insightful analysis of violence in the Jewish tradition, "Zimri puts the authority of Moses and ultimately the authority of God in jeopardy. Thus, Pinehas might be taken to have acted outside the normative constraints of the system of Mosaic law in order to save the system" (*Does Judaism Condone Violence?* 167).

The political, rather than cultic, interpretation of Pinehas's act, even if limited to an existential threat to the polity itself, creates the danger that the Pinehas episode will be misused as a precedent and even a justification for violent political action. One only has to reflect on the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by Yigal Amir, which mixed political and religious motivations, to see the potency of this danger. Undoubtedly, this is why the Rabbis of the Talmud placed so many limitations on the precedential value of this biblical episode as to render it a virtual nullity for purposes of modeling religious behavior (BT Sanhedrin 82a).

Nevertheless, the question remains: why the divine blessing of a *berit shalom* for Pinehas? Here I choose to rely not on modern biblical scholarship but rather on

homiletics. The Netziv (Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin) offers this explanation for the berit shalom: “In reward for turning away the wrath of the Holy Blessed One, God blessed him [Pinehas] with the attribute of peace, that he should not be quick-tempered or angry.” Just as God was turned back from the way of violence and death when God terminated the plague, God bestows upon Pinehas and all of us the berit shalom so that we too will be turned away from the path of anger and violence and returned to the path of peace. Like Pinehas’s grandfather, Aaron, we should become once again lovers of shalom and pursuers of shalom.

This commentary was published originally in 2019. (Marc Gary is Executive Vice-Chancellor Emeritus at JTS)

Reckoning With The Harm We’ve Caused by Rabbi Aaron Portman

Last week’s Parshat Balak ends on a dark cliffhanger. If the narrative were a TV show, the end of last week’s episode would be particularly climactic and gruesome. Pinchas, a priestly descendent of Aaron, commits an act of double homicide in an attempt to curb idolatry brought on by cohabitation between Israelites and Midianites. His act of zealotry ends a divine plague, which killed twenty-four thousand Israelites. Fade to black.

This week, we find Pinchas seemingly blessed for his act of violence:

God spoke to Moses, saying, “Pinchas, son of Elazar son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My passion. Say, therefore, ‘I grant him my brit shalom.’” (Numbers 25:10-12)

One might choose to read Pinchas’ act in its context, recognizing the jealous nature of God when it comes to disobedience, especially when idolatry is involved. One could even say Pinchas was acting justly for his time, responding to an immediate need of his tribe by setting a strong and forceful standard through a display of violence. Despite these apologetic readings, it seems out of place for God to cosign a brit shalom – translated as “covenant of peace” – with Pinchas, who essentially conducts an act of war and aggression. Why would God choose this kind of covenant at this moment? What is accomplished by invoking peace in light of such violence?

The paradox is striking.

When I spent a year studying in the Old City of Jerusalem after high school, my yeshiva participated in a number of marches. Many of the marches were harmless displays of pre-Shabbat revelry, but some took on a more provocative tone. During holidays, we would occasionally march through the Muslim quarter of the city, where some students would shout and bang on storefronts. One holiday, we marched through Silwan, a Palestinian village adjacent to the Old City, guarded by scores of IDF soldiers as Palestinians looked on from a distance. As an 18-year-old yeshiva student, I didn’t fully understand what we were doing there. All I knew was that I felt uncomfortable and ashamed by what seemed like an unnecessary and provocative display of power. To this day, I feel deeply impacted by my participation in those marches.

Watching the news these past few weeks, I've been reminded of those days in Jerusalem. This year's postponed Jerusalem Day Flag March, which consistently provokes tension and violence in and around the Old City, was defiantly rescheduled and attended by thousands of participants just over two weeks ago, including by members of Parliament. In many of the photos, I observed 18-year-old yeshiva students, who look just like I did, in front of a backdrop of Israeli flags and Lehava flags. In video clips, I hear some chanting "Death to Arabs." I feel the painful reminder of my past reignited.

In attempting to understand why God grants Pinchas a covenant of peace after he commits acts of violence, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the 19th century Polish/Lithuanian rabbi known by his acronym as the Netziv, provides a powerful interpretation:

"Pinchas was promised he would not become an agitated and angry person, for the nature of the act he did — killing a person with his hands — leaves a strong impression." (Haamek Davar on Numbers 25:12)

The Netziv is pointing to the notion of moral injury, that one may be deeply and emotionally impacted by acts carried out, especially acts that have harmed others. Pinchas, reflecting on his own destructive past, would likely face a plethora of feelings: guilt, shame, anger, hopelessness. Many veterans experience severe PTSD due to the lingering effects of moral injury, as they consciously and subconsciously recognize the harm and damage they may have committed during their service. In addition to the immense and ongoing pain experienced by victims of violence, it is evident that acts of harm leave a wide trail of suffering behind them. According to the Netziv, the brit is meant as a healing salve. God knows the ways committing acts of violence may leave a permanent scar on those who commit them. Perhaps God is speaking from experience.

When I see the violence of these past few weeks, I cannot help but reflect on the harm I may have caused. Whom have I harmed, whether by marching or staying silent? What acts of violence have I committed, whether actively or passively? In reckoning with our own complicity in causing harm, I hope we can all draw on Pinchas' brit shalom, a covenant of peace in our souls, so that we may do no more harm and pursue peace and justice instead.

(Rabbi Aaron Portman is a recent graduate of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in NYC, where he had the opportunity to work as a multifaith educator, prison chaplain, youth director, and university professor. Prior to rabbinical school, Aaron studied at Yeshiva University and the University of St Andrews in Scotland, after which he worked at Footsteps, an organization that provides economic and social support to formerly ultra-Orthodox Jews)

Yahrtziets

Burt Solomon remembers his sister Ann Solomon Wallace on Sunday July 4th (Tamuz 24).

Bobbi Ostrowsky remembers her mother Sylvia Edelman on Tuesday July 6th (Tamuz 26).

Steve Sklar remembers his brother Joseph Sklar on Thursday July 8th (Tamuz 28).
We remember Susan Marx's father Arthur Marx (Avraham Ben Shimshon Halevi ve
Gitel) on Friday July 9th (Tamuz 29).