

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Pinchas  
July 23, 2022 \*\*\* Tamuz, 24, 5782

Pinchas in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/2236/jewish/Pinchas-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2236/jewish/Pinchas-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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 during the Three Week Period : Jeremiah 1:1–2:3

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3716002/jewish/Pinchas-Three-Weeks-Period-Haftarah-Companion.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3716002/jewish/Pinchas-Three-Weeks-Period-Haftarah-Companion.htm)

**Introduction**

This week's haftarah begins a series of three haftarot known in halachic literature as telata depur'anuta, "the three (haftarot) of retribution." We read these haftarot during the three-week period between the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av—the time when we mourn the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people. These readings are taken from three passages where the prophets warn the Jews of the looming destruction and the terrible suffering that will follow, and implore the people to mend their ways and avoid this tragedy.

The first of these haftarot is taken from the opening chapter of Jeremiah. Jeremiah lived through the destruction, and was its primary prophet.

**Meet Jeremiah**

The opening verses of the reading give us some background about its major figure. Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) the son of Chilkiah was a kohen who lived in the territory of Benjamin. On his father's side he descended from Evyatar, the high priest who served in the days of King David. King Solomon, the son of David, had banished Evyatar to the territory of Benjamin due to his disloyalty in supporting

Solomon's brother Adoniyahu (Adonijah) in his attempt at the throne.<sup>1</sup> The family had lived there for over three centuries since then.

In addition to this, Jeremiah also descended from Rahab. Rahab was the woman who hosted and saved the spies sent by Joshua to scout the city of Jericho just before its miraculous fall into Israelite hands. Our sages tell us that Rahab later converted and became the wife of none other than Joshua himself. Before the spies visited her, the verse describes Rahab as a zonah—literally translated as “a prostitute.”<sup>2</sup> In their quest to belittle Jeremiah, the people would use this ancestor of his as a pretext for ridicule. Rashi in his commentary to this verse quotes the words of our sages, who said about this: “Jeremiah was a descendant of one who had a rotten past but later mended her ways. It was fitting for him to come and rebuke the Jews, who came from good descent but who had now gone in rotten ways.”

### **The hesitation**

The first live encounter we have with Jeremiah is his great reluctance to assume the position he was destined to take on. The narrative begins with the Almighty letting Jeremiah in on the fact that he had been designated and sanctified for this role even before his mother conceived him.

Rashi takes this to refer to the teaching of the sages that G-d showed Adam, the first man, all the leaders who were to lead each generation of the Jewish people. Why is this stressed especially with regard to Jeremiah? Radak, in his commentary, suggests that not only was Jeremiah destined for greatness by his creator, but that his parents also had an active role in his “sanctity before conception”: “This comes to teach us that his father and mother took care to be in a state of holiness and purity at the time of conception, so that the prophet would be sanctified.”<sup>3</sup>

Jeremiah, however, knowing well the difficulty that lay ahead of him, was extremely hesitant: “Alas . . . Behold, I know not to speak, for I am a youth.” In addition to literally being young, Jeremiah was indicating that he was still “young” in his experience with the people. He used the example of Moses, who had also rebuked the people, but had done so only at the end of his life. After doing so much for them and performing so many miracles, he was indeed in a position to rebuke his people. But here Jeremiah was called to do this right at the outset.<sup>4</sup>

G-d reassures Jeremiah that he had nothing to fear. The places where he would need to go and the words he would speak there were not going to be of his own after all. His mission would be tough, and sometimes dangerous, but he was not acting alone: he was an agent of G-d. His mission would not be easy, but G-d would give him fortress-like resilience, and no harm would befall him.

### **Almond branch and boiling pot**

The next part of the reading records two scenes that seem to be the beginning of Jeremiah's visions. The first was of an almond branch. The Hebrew word for an

almond is shaken. The same word in Hebrew (אֲמֹנָה) also serves as the root for “diligence” or “haste,” and this name is given to the almond and its tree due to its “haste” in the process of producing fruit. G-d was conveying Jeremiah that what He was soon to tell him was going to take place imminently.

Rashi, quoting a midrashic source, explains that the almond actually served as a precise point of reference. It takes three weeks from the time the almond tree buds till the almond ripens. In a similar way, it would take three weeks from the time Jerusalem succumbed to the siege (on the 17th of Tammuz) to when the Temple would be set on fire (the 9th of Av)—hence the observance of the “Three Weeks.”

The second vision was of a boiling pot whose froth was mainly on its northern side. The message was that the evil would come upon Israel from a country to its north—namely Babylon.

Abarbanel makes note of the wording in this verse, “The evil will open up from the north.” He understands this to imply that the evil will both “open” from the north and also culminate from there. Babylon is to the northeast of Israel, and Rome is northwest of it. It was Babylon who began the Jewish exile with the destruction of the first Temple, and Rome who, five hundred years later, brought the exile full circle with the destruction of the second Temple.

### **Final words of love**

Although the haftarot of the Three Weeks can read as rather harsh and gloomy, they each finish with magnificent words of hope, strength and love to the Jewish people.

In a verse that we use in the prayers of Rosh Hashanah, the Almighty invokes the memory of the “early youth” of the Jewish people. At the time of the exodus from Egypt they were like a young bride, filled to the brim and overflowing with love and passion for G-d. They displayed this with their unbounded faith as they ventured out into the barren desert with nothing other than their faith as a provision.

Traveling into such a place with no knowledge of how they would survive defied any rational calculation. But this was no deterrent. They plunged in with hearts filled with love and joy, casting their lot entirely with their creator.

This is the true and pure nature of the Jew. For this they are a truly holy nation. The verse compares the status of the Jew to the status of terumah, the part of the crop that was given to the kohen. This portion was to be eaten exclusively by the kohen and his family, and had to be consumed in a state of purity. It is forbidden for a non-kohen to partake of terumah, and the Torah provides strong consequences for this transgression. The Jewish people are thus compared to terumah in the sense that any foreign people who would “consume” them will ultimately pay dearly for this misdeed.

### **Food For Thought**

**Elijah and the Still, Small Voice by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l**

Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'Why are you here, Elijah?' He replied, I am moved by the zeal for the Lord, God of Hosts..." The Lord said to him, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire – a still, small voice.

I Kings 19:9-12

In 1165, an agonising question confronted Moroccan Jewry. A fanatical Muslim sect, the Almohads, had seized power in Morocco and was embarking on a policy of forced conversion to Islam. The Jewish community was faced with a choice: to affirm Islamic faith or die. Some chose martyrdom. Others chose exile. But some acceded to terror and embraced another faith. Inwardly, though, many of the 'converted' continued practising Judaism in secret. They were the anusim, conversos, Crypto-Jews, or as the Spanish were later to call them, the marranos. To other Jews, they posed a formidable moral problem. How were they to be viewed? Outwardly, they had betrayed their community and their religious heritage. Besides, their example was demoralising. It weakened the resolve of Jews who were determined to resist, come what may. Yet many of the Crypto-Jews still wished to remain Jewish, secretly fulfilling the commandments and, when they could, attending the synagogue and praying.

One of the converted addressed this question to a Rabbi. He had, he said, converted under coercion, but he remained at heart a faithful Jew. Could he obtain merit by observing in private as many of the Torah's precepts as possible? Was there, in other words, hope left for him as a Jew? The Rabbi's reply was emphatic. A Jew who had embraced Islam had forfeited membership in the Jewish community. He was no longer part of the house of Israel. For such a person to fulfil the commandments was meaningless. Worse, it was a sin. The choice was stark and absolute: to be or not to be a Jew. If you choose to be a Jew, you should be prepared to suffer death rather than compromise. If you choose not to be a Jew, then you must not seek to re-enter the house you deserted.

We can respect the firmness of the Rabbi's stance. He set out, without equivocation, the moral choice. There are times when heroism is, for faith, a categorical imperative. Nothing less will do. His reply, though harsh, is not without courage. But another Rabbi disagreed.

The name of the first Rabbi is lost to us, but that of the second is not. He was Moses Maimonides, the greatest Rabbi of the Middle Ages. Maimonides was no stranger to religious persecution. Born in Cordova in 1135, he had been forced to

leave, along with his family, some thirteen years later when the city fell to the Almohads. Twelve years were spent in wandering. In 1160, a temporary liberalisation of Almohad rule allowed the family to settle in Morocco. Within five years he was forced to move again, settling first in the land of Israel and ultimately in Egypt.

Maimonides was so incensed by the Rabbi's reply to the forced convert that he wrote a response of his own. In it, he frankly disassociates himself from the earlier ruling and castigates its author whom he describes as a 'self-styled sage who has never experienced what so many Jewish communities had to endure in the way of persecution'.

Maimonides' reply, the Iggeret ha-Shemad ('Epistle on Forced Conversion'), is a substantial treatise in its own right.[1] What is striking, given the vehemence with which it begins, is that its conclusions are hardly less demanding than those of the earlier response. If you are faced with religious persecution, says Maimonides, you must leave and settle elsewhere. 'If he is compelled to violate even one precept it is forbidden to stay there. He must leave everything he has and travel day and night until he finds a spot where he can practise his religion.' [2] This is preferable to martyrdom.

Nonetheless, one who chooses to go to their death rather than renounce their faith 'has done what is good and proper'[3] for they have given their life for the sanctity of God. What is unacceptable is to stay and excuse oneself on the grounds that if one sins, one does so only under pressure. To do this is to profane God's name, 'not exactly willingly, but almost so'.

These are Maimonides' conclusions. But surrounding them and constituting the main thrust of his argument is a sustained defence of those who have done precisely what Maimonides has ruled they should not do. The letter gives Crypto-Jews hope. They have done wrong. But it is a forgivable wrong. They acted under coercion and the fear of death. They remain Jews. The acts they do as Jews still win favour in the eyes of God. Indeed doubly so, for when they fulfil a commandment it cannot be to win favour of the eyes of others. They know that when they act as Jews they risk discovery and death. Their secret adherence has a heroism of its own.

What was wrong in the first Rabbi's ruling was his insistence that a Jew who yields to terror has forsaken their faith and is to be excluded from the community.

Maimonides insists that it is not so. 'It is not right to alienate, scorn and hate people who desecrate the Sabbath. It is our duty to befriend them and encourage them to fulfil the commandments.' [4] In a daring stroke of interpretation, he quotes the verse, 'Do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving.' (Proverbs 6:30) The Crypto-Jews who come to the synagogue are hungry for Jewish prayer. They 'steal' moments of belonging. They should not be despised but welcomed.

This epistle is a masterly example of that most difficult of moral challenges: to combine prescription and compassion. Maimonides leaves us in no doubt as to what he believes Jews should do. But at the same time he is uncompromising in his defence of those who fail to do it. He does not endorse what they have done. But he defends who they are. He asks us to understand their situation. He gives them grounds for self-respect. He holds the doors of the community open.

The argument reaches a climax as Maimonides quotes a remarkable sequence of midrashic passages whose theme is that prophets must not condemn their people, but rather defend them before God. When Moses, charged with leading the people out of Egypt, replied, 'But they will not believe me' ([Exodus 4:1](#)) ostensibly he was justified. The subsequent biblical narrative suggests that Moses' doubts were well founded. The Israelites were a difficult people to lead. But the Midrash says that God replied to Moses, 'They are believers and the children of believers, but you [Moses] will ultimately not believe.' ([Shabbat 97a](#))

Maimonides cites a series of similar passages and then says: If this is the punishment meted out to the pillars of the universe, the greatest of the prophets, because they briefly criticised the people – even though they were guilty of the sins of which they were accused – can we envisage the punishment awaiting those who criticise the conversos, who under threat of death and without abandoning their faith, confessed to another religion in which they did not believe?

In the course of his analysis, Maimonides turns to the Prophet Elijah and the text that usually forms this week's haftarah. Under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, Baal worship had become the official cult. God's prophets were being killed. Those who survived were in hiding. Elijah responded by issuing a public challenge at Mount Carmel. Facing four hundred of Baal's representatives, he was determined to settle the question of religious truth once and for all.

He told the assembled people to choose one way or another: for God or for Baal. They must no longer 'halt between two opinions.' Truth was about to be decided by a test. If it lay with Baal, fire would consume the offering prepared by its priests. If it lay with God, fire would descend to Elijah's offering.

Elijah won the confrontation. The people cried out, 'The Lord, He is God.' The priests of Baal were routed. But the story does not end there. Jezebel issues a warrant for his death. Elijah escapes to Mount Horeb. There he receives a strange vision, as seen at the beginning of this week's essay. He is led to understand that God speaks only in the 'still, small voice'.

The episode is enigmatic. It is made all the more so by a strange feature of the text. Immediately before the vision, God asks, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' and Elijah replies, 'I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts....' ([I Kings 19:9-10](#)). Immediately after the vision, God asks the same question, and Elijah gives the same answer ([I Kings 19:13-14](#)). The Midrash turns the text into a dialogue:

Elijah: The Israelites have broken God's covenant.

God: Is it then your covenant?

Elijah: They have torn down Your altars.

God: But were they your altars?

Elijah: They have put Your prophets to the sword.

God: But you are alive.

Elijah: I alone am left.

God: Instead of hurling accusations against Israel, should you not have pleaded their cause?[5]

The meaning of the Midrash is clear. The zealot takes the part of God. But God expects His prophets to be defenders, not accusers. The repeated question and answer is now to be understood in its tragic depth. Elijah declares himself to be zealous for God. He is shown that God is not disclosed in dramatic confrontation: not in the whirlwind or the earthquake or the fire. God now asks him again, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' Elijah repeats that he is zealous for God. He has not understood that religious leadership calls for another kind of virtue, the way of the still, small voice. God now indicates that someone else must lead. Elijah must hand his mantle on to Elisha.

In turbulent times, there is an almost overwhelming temptation for religious leaders to be confrontational. Not only must truth be proclaimed but falsehood must be denounced. Choices must be set out as stark divisions. Not to condemn is to condone. The Rabbi who condemned the conversos had faith in his heart, logic on his side and Elijah as his precedent.

But the Midrash and Maimonides set before us another model. A prophet hears not one imperative but two: guidance and compassion, a love of truth and an abiding solidarity with those for whom that truth has become eclipsed. To preserve tradition and at the same time defend those others condemn is the difficult, necessary task of religious leadership in an unreligious age.

[1] An English translation and commentary is contained in Abraham S. Halkin, and David Hartman. *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985) pp. 15-35. [2] *Ibid.*, 32. [3] *Ibid.*, 30. [4] *Ibid.*, 33. [5] *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1:6.

### [The Liberator and the Zealot: Pinchas by Eliezer B. Diamond](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-liberator-and-the-zealot/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-liberator-and-the-zealot/>

In his recently published book, *The Zealot and the Emancipator: John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, and the Struggle for American Freedom*, H.W. Brands contrasts the attitudes of Brown and Lincoln toward slavery, and the methods used by each to end it. In doing so, he makes the case that the terms "liberator" and "zealot" accurately encapsulate the role of each in abolishing slavery.

Lincoln was a statesman and a politician who felt bound by the substance and procedures of constitutional law. As much as he detested slavery and hoped for its

demise, he did not believe that the federal government had the right to abolish slavery in individual states. This would violate their sovereignty, which he understood the Constitution to forbid. When Lincoln finally freed the slaves in 1863 by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, he framed it not as a principled abolition of slavery but rather as “a fit and necessary war measure” needed to cripple the logistical capabilities of the Confederate army. For this reason, he somewhat paradoxically freed only the slaves residing in the states that had seceded. Nonetheless, this was a first step toward eliminating slavery altogether, and Lincoln himself saw the proclamation not simply as a war time measure but as a clarion call for freedom for all.

By contrast, John Brown, using religious terminology, described slavery as wickedness and an offense against God, and consequently the effort to eradicate it a divinely ordained mission. As an institution that used violence to achieve its ends, slavery could, if necessary, be countered with violence in order to eradicate it immediately and decisively. Brown never wavered in the belief that his cause and the methods used to achieve them were justified. In his final speech, delivered on November 2, 1859, at his trial for his role in the insurrection at Harper’s Ferry, he proclaimed, “I believe that to have interfered as I have done—as I have always freely admitted I have done—in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right.” Though in his lifetime Brown emancipated a handful of slaves at most, many see his actions at Harper’s Ferry as the match that sparked the conflagration that was the Civil War and therefore, ultimately, a catalyst for the abolition of slavery. The contrast between Lincoln and Brown can be useful in understanding the Pinehas narrative in general and his character and actions in particular. Numbers Chapter 25 opens with the Israelites consorting with Midianite women and consequently worshipping the Midianite god Baal Peor. They are described as being joined or coupled with (vayitzamed) Baal Peor (25:3); the connection to Baal Peor mirrors the sexual connection with the women, as Ibn Ezra points out. This angers God, who commands Moses, “Take the chieftains of the people and expose them in broad daylight before God, so that God’s anger will be turned back” (25:4). Moses commands Israel’s judges to carry out this divine command. This means that before Pinehas arrives on the scene a divine response to Israel’s sinfulness is being acted upon. Divine law is prevailing. Moses and his lieutenants are operating in the “Lincoln mode.”

This fact is emphasized by the Aramaic Targum Onkelos and others who understand “them” in verse 4 as referring not to the chieftains—who might have been held responsible for not preventing the idolatrous orgy—but to those who had sinned. The chieftains were tasked with judging and executing those found guilty. This reading foregrounds the legal nature of the proceedings.

Suddenly, the scene shifts. Zimri ben Salu, the chieftain of the tribe of Simeon, brings a Midianite woman, Cozbi daughter of Zur, into the Israelite camp before

Moses and the people (25:6). It is clear from verse 8 that this “bringing” involved intercourse with this woman in a tent that was within plain sight. The reaction of the people is to weep (loc. cit). It would seem that the congregation—and Moses—are at a loss as to how to respond to this breathtaking act of sexual provocation and rebellion.

Pinehas now enters the scene, but he does not act immediately. First, he takes in the outrageous behavior of Zimri and the failure of the people to respond. He decides that if no one else will act he will; he therefore arises from the midst of the assembly (25: 7). This is both an indication of intent to act and a declaration that he is separating himself from the passivity of the assembly. How he will act is not yet clear. And then he takes a spear into his hand (loc. cit.), and we know that he has decided to inflict violence upon Zimri and his consort. He enters the tent and runs them both through with the spear, making sure to pierce Cozbi’s womb, a horribly punitive reenactment of Zimri’s act of penetration (25:8).

Pinehas operates in the “Brown mode.” He sees Zimri’s act as an outrage and concludes that immediate and dramatic action is needed. There is no divine imperative forthcoming, but Pinehas is confident that it is God’s will that Pinehas avenge His honor.

It is striking that Pinehas does not consider the possibility that in acting without consulting Moses, he, like Zimri, is undermining Moses’s authority. It is to address this problem that the Talmudic sage Shmuel says in Sanhedrin 82a that what Pinehas “saw” before him was the verse, “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord” (Proverbs 21, 30). Shmuel is alluding to a teaching elsewhere that in some situations God’s honor takes precedence over the dignity of even the greatest sage (Berakhot 19b). Like John Brown, Pinehas sees the moment as one in which acting on behalf of God takes precedence over conventional norms of law and authority.

It is perhaps for this reason that the Torah feels it necessary to include God’s approval of Pinehas’s actions after the fact (Numbers 25: 10–13). No person, not even Moses, was empowered to place his seal of approval on Pinehas’s extrajudicial act; only God Himself could do this.

We are not Pinehas; we do not hear God’s voice expressing approval of taking the law into our own hands. The very fact that divine assent was required in Pinehas’s case suggests that we should think twice and then twice more before acting outside the law. Reflecting upon the consequences, and the unethical nature, of extrajudicial actions such as John Brown’s—not to mention those taken by individuals in our own time who are acting on the basis of patent lies—should make us wary of acting outside the law, especially when the action will involve violence. The Talmudic sages themselves were uncomfortable with Pinehas’s actions and explained them away. Yet Pinehas is part of our tradition, and his

actions highlight tensions with which we continue to grapple. (*Eliezer Diamond is the Rabbi Judah Nadich Associate Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS*)

## What “Women's Rights” Should Mean by Rabbi Simone Schicker

<https://truah.org/resources/parshat-pinchas-simone-schicker-moraltorah/>

On the fridge in our kitchen in my childhood home were a million different magnets, stickers, and photographs. One of the stickers was for Planned Parenthood. I can still remember my mom saying, when I was in high school in the late ‘00s, “Didn’t we already march for these rights?”

Many of us and many of our relatives and friends, marched for years for our rights today – for what we call women’s rights. We also fought in the courts and with our lives. I view women’s rights as all-encompassing, by which I mean that I include all those who identify as women (whether cisgender or transgender), as well as those who identify as nonbinary and gender fluid. I give thanks to the Women’s Rabbinic Network (WRN) for helping me shape this idea. The WRN has just voted to officially welcome nonbinary and gender fluid rabbis into the umbrella of the WRN, recognizing that many such colleagues are already part of our membership. The WRN was created in 1975 by a group of female rabbinic students to provide the support and advocacy needed in the early years of women in the Reform rabbinate. This change in the WRN’s identity recognizes the need for a space for nonbinary and gender fluid rabbis as well as woman rabbis. The community WRN has built and is continuing to build is one of support, understanding, and vision – something the Jewish community has been striving towards for centuries.

The women of Parshat Pinchas are one of the earliest examples of striving to change the status quo in our history. They are women of vision, of understanding, and they are supportive of one another. Specifically I am thinking of Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, the daughters of Zelophehad. They join together to approach the leadership, and they request a change of the law in order to allow them to inherit their father’s portion of land. Moses takes the request to God, and God responds by saying the law should be changed, not only for these women but for all time. God acknowledges the humanity of these women in a time when we believe women were seen as not as human as their male counterparts.

Today, we note that the term “women’s rights” can be divisive, as it has been used by TERFs (TERF is an acronym for trans-exclusionary radical feminist) to dismiss the womanness of transgender women. The argument goes that someone raised as a man cannot understand what it is to be a woman in our society. I vehemently disagree, and I give thanks to NCJW CEO Sheila Katz, who in [her commencement speech at Ithaca College](#) articulated that society has expected women to fulfill impossible roles – “how to look, how to act, how to talk, how to exist.” Anyone who identifies as a woman has to deal with these unreasonable expectations. I would like to see us reclaim what women’s rights can mean – and note that our tradition

supports our demand to be seen as fully human, however we identify. Our tradition speaks to each of us both as individuals and as a collective when we are told that we were made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). I recently read that this passage is viewed by some Christians as the basis for believing that one's gender orientation has to match the anatomy one was born with, because if God created them male and female then it is understood that there is nothing else (*Beyond a Binary God: A Theology for Trans\* Allies* by Tara K. Soughers). This is surprising to me considering God made "light and dark" as well as the "water and dry land," and we know there are in-betweens of those things. Twilight, dawn, dusk, swamps, and rainforests come to mind. For, reading Genesis 1 as a Jew, I have always known that the Midrash expands this text in a powerfully meaningful way. In Bereshit Rabbah 8:1 we read:

Said R. Yirmiyah ben Elazar: In the hour when the Holy One created the first human, the Holy One created him [as] an androgyne [androgynos], as it is said, 'Male and female [God] created them.'

Our tradition sees the first creation story as one of a single being that encompassed all that humanity could be – we are each made in the Divine image because we each hold a piece of God within us. Zelophehad's daughters make clear in their argument that their desire is to remain connected to community and family, as they state "Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!" (Numbers 27:4) So too do all of us want to be fully participatory members of our community – both large and small. We want to be able to bring our whole selves to Jewish spaces as well as other kinds of spaces. We are not singular identities but rainbows of experience. (*Rabbi Simone Schicker (she/her) was ordained from the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College in 2018. She serves as the spiritual leader of Temple B'nai Israel in Kalamazoo, Michigan.*)

### [Pinchas: Sustenance from the Source](https://www.growtorah.org/bamidbar/2022/07/20-pinchas-sustenance-from-the-source) by Michael Rosen

<https://www.growtorah.org/bamidbar/2022/07/20-pinchas-sustenance-from-the-source>

"And the Lord spoke to Moshe saying, For these shall the land be divided as an inheritance according to the number of the names" (Bamidbar 26:52).

Parshat Pinchas discusses apportioning the land of Israel according to preset measurements, called "nahalot." These delineations are to remain forever.[1] These land apportionments are intended to provide the setting for true "sustenance," receiving in a way that connects us to the land and its Creator. Each shevet was tasked with specific roles in producing food for the nation, and was thus acutely connected to their food. As part of the great system of sustenance, Hashem gave us land measures to keep as a sustainable and balanced inheritance. This system informs our approach, even outside of Israel. We need to strengthen our access to sustenance, both physically and spiritually, by feeling our

connection to the land, even if we live in modern cities. We can do this by making human health and well-being a goal in the architecture and scale of our cities, and planetary health and well-being a guiding force in planning our source of nutrition. The Torah directs us to live within the workings of Creation; approximately half of the mitzvot involve agriculture or land apportionment.[2] But city living distances people from the agricultural test of emunah, and thus they are also deprived of the resulting closer relationship with Hashem. In rabbinic literature, the order of the Mishnah related to agriculture is called Emunah, a Hebrew word that means faith in Hashem's blessings. Dependence on the land deepens our relationship with Hashem through emunah. When we are aware of Hashem as the Source of all sustenance, we are able to see past the illusion of sustainability in urban and suburban areas. Without emunah, industrialized farming results in depleted soil, less nutritious food, and pollution from pesticides. This kind of farming has little regard for the natural balance of life. By working with nature, with Hashem, organic sustainable farming produces a healthy harvest that will sustain the human immune system, as well as the environment.

In addition to compromised nutrition, the overall health of city dwellers is an ancient issue. As early as the 11th century, Rashi explained: "Life is more difficult in the city, because so many live there, and they crowd their houses together, and there is no air, whereas in villages there are gardens and orchards close to the homes, and the air is good." [3]

The Rambam commented about city communities in the 12th century: The quality of urban air compared to the air in the deserts and forests is like thick and turbulent water compared to pure and light water. And this is because in the cities with their tall buildings and narrow roads, the pollution that comes from their residents, their waste ... makes their entire air malodorous, turbulent, reeking and thick...

And if you cannot move out of the city, try at least to live in a suburb created to the northeast. Let the house be tall and the court wide enough to permit the northern wind and the sun to come through, because the sun thins out the pollution of the air, and makes it light and pure.[4]

We know today that imbalances such as lack of sunlight, lack of sleep, inadequate fresh air, and environmental stress—all deficits common to city life—degrade health and immunity levels.[5] The sages' recommendations for the city are valid today, for they understood the balance of land and health.

Obviously, city living is imperative nowadays for many people seeking a livelihood. And while we cannot completely reorchestrate how humanity lives overnight, it can be beneficial to consider other effects of the city, which we commonly overlook. When we can give a name to a problem, we can address it. Individuals may be left weakened by living in places where identity is not reinforced and supported by a community[6]. Social fragmentation is created in cities where the public and private

domains are in conflict. For Jews living in cities, the balance of public and private domain is defined by an eruv, a minimal structure symbolizing a fence that surrounds the city. Today there are many cities whose Jewish communities benefit from modern eruvim. The eruv is effective for enabling the carrying of objects on Shabbat, by symbolically unifying an entire community into one domain. Eruv construction and maintenance requires cooperative work by a community of people and benefits all involved. Thus, the eruv engenders a continuous social domain, which is supportive of community life that can be focused on Hashem. Being included in a city eruv combats social isolation and spiritual estrangement. For city dwellers, one way of maintaining mental and physical health is to reconnect with the natural world, and its Creator. Cities without a connection to nature or agriculture, green space, sufficient light, clean air, and the horizon, can lend to an imbalance that can neither support physical nor spiritual life. Rabbi Nachman would go for walks in the woods to speak to Hashem just outside the town. In this manner, he was able to maintain a connection with nature and the Source of Creation.

By taking these minute, physical steps, we can reconnect to the land and the unity expressed in Creation. We can learn from our sages and return to the Source of all sustenance, "...by knowing and believing that all Creation is not separate from Hashem, but an extension of His oneness" (Rabbi Nachman of Breslov)[7]

[1]See Rashi (11th cent. French Scholar and commentator) to Vayikra 25:15. "...When you sell or buy land, know how many years remain until the jubilee year, and according to that number of years and number of yields that the land can produce in those years, the land should be sold to the buyer. Because, after all, the land will return to (the ancestral owner) in the jubilee year..." [2]Mind over Matter G-d and Nature Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson Shamir Publications

[3]Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaky, France, 11th cent. Scholar and commentator, in his commentary to Babylonian Talmud, tractate Kettubot 110b [4]"Rambam" is an acronym for Rabbi Moses Maimonides, or Rambam, Fost, Egypt 1135-1204 C.C, "The Preservation of Youth" [5]Golany, Gideon, Housing in Arid Lands, Halsted, 1980. [6]Mumford, Lewis. The Culture of Cities, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1938.

[7]Mayim Breslov Publication, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Lesson written by Moshe Mykoff.

### Yahrtzeits

Burt Solomon remembers his sister Ann Solomon Wallace on Sat. July 23 (Tamuz 24).

Bobbi Ostrowsky remembers her mother Sylvia Edelman on Mon. July 25 (Tamuz 26).

Steve Sklar remembers his brother Joseph Sklar on Wed. July 27(Tamuz 28)

Mel Zwillenberg remembers his wife Susan's father Arthur Marx on Thurs. July 28 (Tamuz 29).