Kol Rina

An Independent Minyan

Parashat Pinchas

July 27, 2024 * 21 Tamuz, 5784**

Pinchas in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2236/jewish/Pinchas-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Pinchas," refers to Phineas, who zealously avenged G-d's name, and it is found in Numbers 25:11.

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*

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/703054/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftorah 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

Pacing Change: Pinchas by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l 5771
https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/pinchas/pacing-change/

Embedded in this week's *parsha* is one of the great principles of leadership. The context is this: Moses, knowing that he was not destined to lead the next generation across the Jordan into the promised land, asked God to appoint a successor. He remembered what had happened when he had been away from the Israelites for a mere 40 days. They had panicked and made a Golden Calf. Even when he was present, there were times of strife, and in recent memory, the rebellion on the part of Korach and others against his leadership. The possibility of rift or schism if he died without a designated successor in place was immense. So he said to God:

> "May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out before them and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in. Let the

Lord's people not be like sheep without a shepherd." *Num. 27:16-17*

God duly chose Joshua, and Moses inducted him. One detail in Moses' request, however, always puzzled me. Moses asked for a leader who would "go out before them and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in." That, surely, is saying the same thing twice. If you go out before the people, you are leading them out. If you come in before the people, you are bringing them in. Why then say the same thing twice?

The answer comes from a direct experience of leadership itself. One of the arts of leadership – and it is an art, not a science – is a sense of timing, of knowing what is possible when.

Sometimes the problem is technical. In 1981, there was a threat of a coal miners' strike. Margaret Thatcher knew that the country had very limited supplies of coal and could not survive a prolonged strike. So she negotiated a settlement. In effect, she gave in. Afterward, and very quietly, she ordered coal stocks to be built up. The next time there was a dispute between the miners and the government –1984-1985 – there were large coal reserves. She resisted the miners and after many weeks of strike action they conceded defeat. The miners may have been right both times, or wrong both times, but in 1981 the Prime Minister knew she could not win, and in 1984 she knew she could.

A much more formidable challenge occurs when it is people, not facts, that must change. Human change is a very slow. Moses discovered this in the most dramatic way, through the episode of the spies. An entire generation lost the chance of entering the land. Born in slavery, they lacked the courage and independence of mind to face a prolonged struggle. That would take a new generation born in freedom.

If you do not challenge people, you are not a leader. But if you challenge them too far, too fast, disaster happens. First there is dissension. People start

complaining. Then there are challenges to your leadership. They grow more clamorous, more dangerous. Eventually there will be a rebellion or worse.

On 13 September 1993, on the lawn of the White House, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and Yasser Arafat shook hands and signed a Declaration of Principles intended to carry the parties forward to a negotiated peace. Rabin's body language that day made it clear that he had many qualms, but he continued to negotiate. Meanwhile, month by month, public disagreement within Israel grew. Two phenomena in the summer of 1995 were particularly striking: the increasingly vituperative language being used between the factions, and several public calls to civil disobedience, suggesting that students serving in Israel's defence forces should disobey army orders if called on to evacuate settlements as part of a peace agreement.

Calls to civil disobedience on any significant scale is a sign of a breakdown of trust in the political process and of a deep rift between the government and a section of society. Violent language in the public arena is also dangerous. It testifies to a loss of confidence in reason, persuasion, and civil debate.

On 29 September 1995 I published an article in support of Rabin and the peace process. Privately, however, I wrote to him and urged him to spend more time on winning the argument within Israel itself. You did not have to be a prophet to see the danger he was in from his fellow Jews.

The weeks went by, and I did not hear from him. Then, on Motzei Shabbat, 4 November 1995, we heard the news that he had been assassinated. I went to the funeral in Jerusalem. The next morning, Tuesday 7 November, I went to the Israeli Embassy in London to pay my condolences to the ambassador. He handed me a letter, saying, "This has just arrived for you."

We opened it and read it together in silence. It was from Yitzhak Rabin, one of the last letters he ever wrote. It was his reply to my letter. It was three pages

long, deeply moving, an eloquent restatement of his commitment to peace. We have it, framed, on the walls of my office to this day. But it was too late.

That, at critical moments, is the hardest of all leadership challenges. When times are normal, change can come slowly. But there are situations in which leadership involves getting people to change, and that is something they resist, especially when they experience change as a form of loss.

Great leaders see the need for change, but not everyone else does. People cling to the past. They feel safe in the way things were. They see the new policy as a form of betrayal. It is no accident that some of the greatest of all leaders – Lincoln, Gandhi, John F. and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Sadat, and Rabin himself – were assassinated.

A leader who fails to work for change is not a leader. But a leader who attempts too much change in too short a time will fail. That, ultimately, is why neither Moses nor his entire generation (with a handful of exceptions) were destined to enter the land. It is a problem of timing and pace, and there is no way of knowing in advance what is too fast and what too slow, but this is the challenge a leader must strive to address.

That is what Moses meant when he asked God to appoint a leader "to go out before them and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in." These were two separate requests. The first – "to go out before them and come in before them" – was for someone who would lead from the front, setting a personal example of being unafraid to face new challenges. That is the easier part.

The second request – for someone who would "lead them out and bring them in" – is harder. *A leader can be so far out in front that when he turns round he sees that no one is following*. He or she has gone out "before" the people, but has not "led them out." He has led but people have not followed. His courage is

not in doubt. Neither is his vision. What is wrong in this case is simply his sense of timing. His people are not yet ready.

It seems that at the end of his life Moses realised that he had been impatient, expecting people to change faster than they were capable of doing. That impatience is evident at several points in the book of Numbers, most famously when he lost his temper at Merivah, got angry with the people and struck the rock, for which he forfeited the chance of leading the people across the Jordan and into the promised land.

Leading from the front, all too often he found people not willing to follow. Realising this, it is as if he were urging his successor not to make the same mistake. Leadership is a constant battle between the changes you know must be made, and the changes people are willing to make. That is why the most visionary of leaders seem, in their lifetime, to have failed. So it was. So it always will be.

But in truth they have not failed. Their success comes when – as in the case of Moses and Joshua – others complete what they began.

Making Space for Life: Pincha by Joel Alter (2015)
https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/making-space-for-life-2/

It's not for nothing, this reputation God has for consuming anger. The Torah itself makes the case. Our parashah opens with yet another instance of God hovering at the brink. God is prepared to wipe us out in a rage over our incessant violations of the inviolable. We read in Numbers 25:10-15 that God grants Pinehas a "covenant of peace" for having leapt into action (at the end of last week's parashah), publicly slaying two people who grossly violated sacred boundaries before the entire people. "Pinehas," God explains, "has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so

that I did not put an end to the Israelites through My zeal." (25:11)

Let's note some key words in this verse. I've italicized words to which I'll return below.

Heshiv et hamati – turned back My wrath

Velo kiliti et benei yisrael – I did not put an end (from kol – all or complete) to the Israelites

Bekinati – through My zeal

The above translations are borrowed from Robert Alter (no relation) and the New JPS translation. Everett Fox is even more incendiary:

"...has turned my venomous anger from the Children of Israel... so that I did not finish off the Children of Israel in my jealousy."

Can we live with this God? It seems that to be committed to God is to stride across a volcano. . . Or that we're in covenant with a venomous and jealous serpent (God forbid!) predisposed to lashing out at our missteps and provocations. Indeed, life with God means being perpetually at risk of total destruction. And yet, somehow, this perilous existence is supposed to express God's love and zeal for us?

Now, to be fair, our parashah also offers an alternate portrait of God. In chapter 27, the daughters of Zelophehad request from Moses a variance in inheritance law. As their father had no sons, the established law would have the family's portion (still to be assigned in the still-to-be-conquered Promised Land) bequeathed to their male cousins instead of to them. "Why should our father's name be withdrawn from the midst of his clan because he had no son?" (27:4)

Again we have the prospect of total disappearance, of vanishing in God's uncompromising realm. This time the threat is not God's punishing personality, but rather the application of God's law. Moses hears their request and brings it to God for adjudication. God promptly replies, "Rightly do the daughters of

Zelophehad speak" and authorizes direct inheritance to a daughter in the absence of a son. (Equal rights for women follow in Jewish tradition, but that's a separate discussion.) Here we see God quick to preserve one who is at risk of disappearing and a ready willingness to adjust and accommodate in order to do so.

The next passage is the essential counterbalance to the seemingly uninhabitable territory of our parashah's opening. God instructs Moses to ascend Mount Aravim whence —as the final act before his life ends—he will view the Promised Land. (27:12) Upon learning that his own death is now upon him, Moses makes an extraordinary plea:

> "Let the LORD, God of the spirits for all flesh (kol basar), appoint a man over the community, who will go out before them and come in before them and who will lead them in and out on the march so that the LORD's community will not be like a flock that has no shepherd." (Num 27:16-17)

Moses, a shepherd from his first to his last, knows well what becomes of a shepherdless flock. It quickly scatters and will be entirely lost, as if it never was. Individual sheep may survive in the wilderness, but the collective—the flock, identified with its master and the land on which it pastures and grows—will vanish. And so Moses asks that God appoint a successor, and thoughtfully names the credentials he feels the new leader must have. It seems impossible that God did not already intend to appoint a successor to Moses as God had for Aaron. Why, then, does Moses make this request?

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, in his commentary Kedushat Levi, infers a quality of leadership that Moses seeks but does not make explicit: to speak to the merits of the people she or he leads. That is, that any leader of the Jewish people must speak to our merits, must be ready to defend us, given that we do not and will not carry out God's will consistently as angels do. As people,

mere basar vadam—flesh and blood—we are out of necessity preoccupied with our own sustenance. With that preoccupation, we sometimes fail to carry ourselves as servants of God.

Levi Yitzhak teaches that Abraham served a meal to angels—who have no need for food—when they visited him in Genesis 18 in order to give them insight into the human experience. Abraham's meal was a lesson in human dependency. The angels would see the effort that goes into preparing a meal and setting the table. They would note the time it took to eat and they would observe the flow of dinner table conversation. They would learn that humans are bound up in this experience, this need, multiple times a day each day. And so on with our other needs and preoccupations. This would teach the angels what it is to be human and allow them to better understand the space in which we live our relationship with God and God's demands. It would allow them to speak to our merits.

Moses, says Levi Yitzhak, understood that God, "God of the spirits for all flesh," recognizes the dependency of humans — "all flesh"—and brings compassion and boundless patience to bear in carrying humanity in the world. God speaks to the merits of humanity all the time; that's how and why humanity persists in spite of its incessant violations of the inviolable. Moses made his plea to be assured that after Moses's departure from the world, God would find a leader who would speak passionately to God specifically of the merits of the Jewish people and thereby secure God's compassion and patience for them. For we are mere flesh and blood—basar vadam.

The frightening language of the opening of our parashah is quietly echoed every day in the words with which we begin the weekday ma'ariv (evening) service—a citation from Psalms 78:38:

Vehu rahum yehaper avon velo yash-hit

Vehirbah lehashiv apo velo ya'ir kol hamato

"God is merciful, forgives iniquity, does not destroy, is quick to turn away His ire, and keeps His anger in check."

A 10th century siddur known as Mahzor Vitry prescribes also reciting Deuteronomy 4:31 at the beginning of the evening service: "For the LORD your God is a merciful god. He will not let you go and will not destroy you."

Opening the evening service as we do reflects anxiety on the one hand and confidence on the other. Anxiety: because darkness stirs up fear, but also because the passing of a day means the passing of chances to do right. We cannot take back what we did or didn't do in the course of a day. It is done. But the verses express, too, confidence that God is compassionate and will be there with us again come morning. Only a moment later in the service we proclaim that God loves us eternally. With this voice of confidence, we commence our evening prayers.

Life with God can be permeated by fear. But our parashah teaches—and our evening liturgy affirms—that God worries about exacting wrath. God worries that our proximity to God puts us at risk. And so God is happy for anything that makes it possible for us to live with God. Especially for people who, with great love, look for the best in others and speak to their merits. For people, be they national leaders or leaders in more intimate realms like family, who channel God's own love and make space for life. *(Joel Alter is a Rabbinical School graduate from JTS and Rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid in Milwaukee, WI)*

Pinchas: I the Law is Wrong, Change It by Savannah Lipner
https://truah.org/resources/savannah-lipner-pinchas-moraltorah_2024_/

In November of 2021, while I was attending the University of Wisconsin — Madison, the school raised the Ho-Chunk flag for the first time in the heart of campus. It was a part of the ongoing "Our Shared Future" program with the Ho-

Chunk Nation and the other First Nations in Wisconsin. The University of Wisconsin was one of 30 land-grant universities funded with land taken through treaties with the Menominee, Ojibwe, Dakota, and Ho-Chunk nations in the 1860s. To this day, the University receives over $1 million annually from land taken from Wisconsin Native American Tribes. The University's efforts are indicative of the United States' messy history with land acquisition, and BIPOC communities have historically borne the brunt of unjust land tenure.

This problem can also be seen in the distribution of private and public property. In the U.S., extreme disparities exist that can be directly correlated with property ownership. Sixty percent of land in the U.S. is privately owned, and the five top landowners in the U.S. are all white and own more land than all Black Americans combined. This is a direct result of systemic racism, discrimination, and legal exploitation of BIPOC communities, and without a change in how the U.S. manages property laws, the inequity will only continue to perpetuate.

The question of who gets property and how is a core theme of Parshat Pinchas. In this parshah, Moses takes a census of the Israelite men so that land allotments can be assigned by lottery among the families and tribes of Israel. This becomes problematic for the five daughters of Zelophehad when their father dies and leaves no male heirs. Israelite inheritance laws leave them unable to claim their father's portion of the land. They petition Moses to grant them their father's land, and Moses brings their case before God. God responds saying,

> The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them. Further, speak to the Israelite people as follows: 'If a householder dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter. If he has no daughter, you shall assign his property to his brothers. If he has no brothers, you shall assign his property to his father's brothers. If his father had no

> brothers, you shall assign his property to his nearest relative in his own clan, who shall inherit it.' This shall be the law of procedure for the Israelites, in accordance with THE ETERNAL's command to Moses." (Numbers 27:7–11)

Not only did God heed their request, God *changed the law entirely*. The daughters of Zelophehad had previously been disenfranchised by the system but were able to advocate for themselves in order to change the law. Not only does this demonstrate the mutability of revelation, but it also sets a precedent for how we can respond to the unjust means of property acquisition and compensation in the U.S. today.

Eminent domain, or expropriation, is the power by which governments can acquire private property for public use. This practice of land acquisition is centuries old and came to the American colonies with common law. In the U.S., the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution requires "just compensation" for the property acquired and that the land be used for "public use." Historically, however, this practice has disproportionately targeted disenfranchised populations, often through unfair and unjust means. Land-grant universities, for example, were funded with expropriated Indigenous land acquired through unfair treaties and seizures. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 built many highways directly, and purposefully, through BIPOC communities, acquiring the land by eminent domain. Across the country, descendents of those harmed and displaced by these unjust practices are advocating for their land to be returned to them — just like the daughters of Zelophehad.

In the biblical story, an unjust system denied the daughters of Zelophehad fair compensation because of their marginalized status as women. Similarly, BIPOC communities across America have been denied fair compensation and reparation from centuries of oppression and disenfranchisement. For

Zelophehad's daughters, the law was changed to protect other marginalized individuals in the future; in the U.S., it's an ongoing legal battle that individuals and communities continually face.

The rabbis of the Talmud introduced the idea of *mipnei tikkun olam* in Tractate Gitin, a concept familiar to many of us as the broad call to repair the world. But for the rabbis, *tikkun olam* was a more narrow concept used to justify rabbinic interventions in order to safeguard the social order. If the laws weren't working as they were intended to, the rabbis stepped in to make corrections. This is the same thing God does in the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, and it's the same kind of mindset it takes to make our own legal system function for everyone. Just like revelation was ongoing, civil law code must also be an ongoing process that adapts to the needs of the community. While raising a flag can be a beautiful act of solidarity, it will take broad legal actions in the spirit of *mipnei tikkun olam* to create real and lasting reparations.

Public property is necessary. We need schools, parks, and roads, but the process by which that land is acquired must be just and equitable. There are always going to be oversights when establishing a legal system, so we have to be able to respond appropriately when we see that there are problems with the system. The story of the daughters of Zelophehad forces us to consider our own relationship to land and property. We must act as the daughters of Zelophehad and reconcile the injustices we find. The University of Wisconsin has begun this process of reconciliation through its "Our Shared Future" efforts. The raising of the flag symbolically began the process that the university is now backing up with advocacy and policy change. This is the kind of work that must take place across the country, and we can look to the story of the daughters of Zelophehad and the rabbis of the Talmud as models for that process.

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as an organizing and leadership development intern at Dayenu and rabbinic intern at Hillel at Binghamton University.)

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 "nachalot." 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]

YAHRTZEITS

Burt Solomon remembers his sister Ann Solomon Wallace on Tuesday July 30th

Bobby Ostrowsky remembers her mother Sylvia Edelman on Thursday Aug. 1st