

PARSHAT PINCHAS

17 - 23 Tammuz 5785
13 - 19 July 2025

Torah: Numbers 25:10-30:1
Haftorah: Jeremiah 1:1-2:3

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 125 The First Fruits

We are commanded to separate the first fruit that ripen and bring them to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, where they are given to the priests.

This Mitzvah only applies when the Temple is standing, and only to produce of the "Seven Kinds" [wheat, barley, grapes, figs, dates, pomegranates, and olives] that grew in the Land of Israel (on the west or east bank of the Jordan River) and certain lands that adjoin Israel.

Aleph Institute

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center

5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412-421-0111

Fax: 412-521-5948

www.AlephNE.org

info@AlephNE.org



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TO HELL AND BACK

Three rabbis were talking about life and death when the question came up: "When you're in your casket, and friends and congregants are mourning over you, what would you like them to say?"

The first rabbi said: "I would like them to say I was a wonderful husband, a fine spiritual leader and a great family man." The second commented: "I would like them to say I was a wonderful teacher and servant of G-d who made a huge difference in people's lives."

The third rabbi thought for a moment and remarked: "I'd like them to say, 'Look, he's moving!'"

Surviving the Odds

There's a verse in the Book of Numbers that at first glance appears straightforward enough, if slightly random, but upon closer analysis proves puzzling.

The Torah is recounting the genealogy of the tribe of Reuben and, in passing, mentions the infamous pair of Biblical troublemakers, Dathan and Abiram, great-grandchildren of Reuben. Their mention sets the Torah off on a tangent: "*Dathan and Abiram, the same Dathan and Abiram who were summoned by the assembly, who contended against Moses and Aaron among the assembly of Korach when they contended against G-d. Then the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and Korach with the death of the assembly, when the fire consumed two hundred and fifty men—and they became a sign. But the sons of Korach did not die.*" - Numbers 26:9-12 The final verse is the verse in question, as it matter-of-factly contradicts a previous verse: "*The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korach.*" - Numbers 16:32

This account states unequivocally that everyone in Korach's camp was swallowed alive, including Korach's sons. Unless there's a way to remain alive even after being sucked into the earth, the Bible presents us with two irreconcilable reports. Fortunately for us, the classic Bible commentator, Rashi, depicts just such a scenario:

"The [sons of Korach] were the first to get involved in the conspiracy, but during the dispute they had thoughts of teshuvah [repentance] in their hearts. Therefore a secure and elevated area was set apart for them in Gehinnom [purgatory], and they settled there."

Nachalat Yaakov, a commentator on Rashi, fills in an important detail, namely, that the "settling" of Korach's children in Gehinnom was temporary. They didn't live out the rest of their lives underground, but eventually emerged to rejoin society some time after the commotion died down and their peers died off.

Not Fair

While it's nice to know that some people survived the earth-shattering showdown between Moses and Korach, we wonder why Providence chose

specifically Korach's sons to outlive their fellow mutineers.

"The [sons of Korach] were the first to get involved in the conspiracy," says the Talmud. These men, it turns out, didn't just join an existing revolt against Moses; they were its creators. And in Judaism, the ultimate sinner is one who instigates communal sin.

Indeed, according to Maimonides, this type of sinner "who causes the many to sin... does not have a portion in the world to come; rather, their [souls] are cut off and they are judged for their great wickedness and sins, forever..."

How does that square with the happy ending to the story of Korach's children? They not only escaped spiritual death, but they lived to tell the tale!

In fact, according to the Sages, these men went on to have families whose descendants boasted such spiritual giants as Samuel the Prophet and twenty-four watches of Levites in the Temple.

And that's not all. According to the Talmud, while sitting in the "special place in hell" reserved for them, Korach's sons "sat and sang praises [to G-d]," which, astonishingly, were included and immortalized in King David's Psalms.

Take the opening verse to Psalm 87, for example: "*Of the sons of Korach, a song with musical accompaniment, whose foundation is in the sacred mountains.*" What merit brought Judaism's arch-violators out of the depths of Hell to grace the tops of "sacred mountains"?

Jewish Guilt

Despite the extent of their iniquity, the sons of Korach, as opposed to their co-conspirators, still managed to retain one virtue: "During the dispute they had thoughts of teshuvah [repentance] in their hearts."

There it is, their saving grace: a guilty conscience.

Now it's true that Judaism in general has little patience for unrealized lofty thoughts and feelings, and even less for empty feelings of remorse. "Action is paramount" is a basic Jewish teaching. And it's also true that nothing practical came of the regretful feelings harbored by Korach's sons.

But that's precisely the lesson here: Do not underestimate the power of feeling contrite. Do not discount those sentiments, even when they keep coming up short of action, for they are the only real link between transgression and repentance. Without them the sinner doesn't stand a chance of reform. In the words of our Sages, "Once a person becomes accustomed to a certain transgression, it becomes permissible to him." Conscience is the safeguard of proper human behavior.

Consider the following revealing quotes from Adolf Hitler, may his name be erased, arguably the most despicable human monster to have ever lived:

"Providence has ordained that I should be the greatest liberator of humanity. I am freeing man from the restraints of an intelligence that has taken charge, from the dirty and degrading self-mortification of a false vision called conscience and morality, and from the demands of a

freedom and independence which only very few can bear." "The Ten Commandments have lost their validity. Conscience is a Jewish invention; it is a blemish like circumcision." "They refer to me as an uneducated barbarian. Yes, we are barbarians. We want to be barbarians, it is an honored title to us. We shall rejuvenate the world."

And then there's this stanza of a song sung by the Hitler Youth:

"We are the joyous Hitler Youth, We do not need any Christian virtue Our leader is our savior The Pope and Rabbi shall be gone We want to be pagans once again." Unfortunately, we do not have to look far for examples of what happens to human beings devoid of conscience...

It was the functioning inner moral compass possessed by Korach's sons that distinguished them from the others, making only them worthy of redemption. The others had completely identified with the revolt against G-d and Moses, in deed and in heart.

Korach's sons, on the other hand, remained in touch, if temporarily not in line, with right and wrong. What they lacked at crunch time was courage, not conviction, which meant that at least at heart they had never left the bosom of righteousness.

What's in it for me?

One Jewish teaching has it that "there is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." Shortcomings, then, are only human. How we respond to unfortunate flings with sin is a different matter.

Even if our remorseful feelings continuously prove incapable of producing action, we must hold on to those sentiments for dear life, lest we become desensitized or immune to wrongdoing and eventually begin to identify with our foolish behavior.

In one of his discourses, the founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, paints the tragic scene of a man whose infected arm was just amputated, and who breaks down in bitter tears. Why does the man cry? Rabbi Schneur Zalman asks. He no longer feels his hurting arm! Ah, but that's precisely why he cries; because he doesn't feel his hurting arm...

Hurting is a sign of connectivity; letting go of the pain of disconnection, however uncomfortable it makes our life, sadly means letting go of connection.

By Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson
Chabad of Belgravia, London, UK

A PEOPLE OF 3,000 YEARS Broken Telephone

Have you ever played broken telephone? This game consists of passing a message to one person, who in turn passes it to another. The object is to see how many transmissions the message can undergo before it is altered. In most cases five transmissions is considered a high number.

Does it not surprise you that we, the Jewish people, have successfully transmitted our passion for Judaism for hundreds of generations and thousands of years? Sometimes the flame of passion seems to flicker or even die down, but it always rebounds as if from nowhere. We are heirs to Abraham and Sarah from whom we inherited our love of G-d and commitment to His will. How has it survived intact for so long without alteration, let alone truncation?

Become Your Parents

The key to this question lies in the distinction between an inheritance and a gift. Suppose you were gifted a horse, which you politely declined. To whom would the horse belong? To the gifter, of course. Now suppose you were set to inherit a horse, but you declined the inheritance, to whom would the horse belong in this case? In Torah law, the answer is, you.

Torah quite simply does not allow heirs to refuse an inheritance. A gift is a transfer of ownership and as such requires the consent of both the gifter and the giftee. Inheritance is not a transfer of ownership; it is a replacement of personhood. Heirs inherit by virtue of becoming their testator. Put differently, when passing on, the testator doesn't transfer possessions to the heir. The possessions remain in place, but the heir succeeds the testator to ownership. The heir replaces or takes the place of the testator.

This is a parent's highest achievement. Throughout life we toil to instill our values in our children, imbue them with our love for life, and invest them with our passion, integrity and ethic. As we pass on, we don't simply leave them with a final set of wishes, we leave them ourselves. They become us and with that our highest wish is granted. Our highest aspirations are achieved.

This is why the Hebrew word for inheritance is Nachalah, which shares etymological roots with Nachal, the Hebrew word for river. An estate passes from testator to heir as naturally as water flows downriver. The heir's consent need not be sought nor acquired for the flow to activate. The flow is a natural outgrowth of the relationship.

From Abraham

We now return to our question about the broken telephone. The reason the Jewish soul is still aflame with a passion for G-d, aglow with the splendor of His majesty and awed by His royal grandeur is not that we inherited it from our parents, who inherited it from their parents, who inherited it from another generation

tracing back three thousand years. This is not about a chain with hundreds of links. No, it is about our direct bond with the original links, Abraham and Sarah.

If the child becomes the father, then Isaac became the Abraham of his generation after his father, Abraham, passed away. When Isaac passed away, his son, Jacob, became the Isaac of his time, but, because Isaac, in his day, had become Abraham, Jacob therefore became not only the Isaac of his time, but also the Abraham of his time.

And so it goes. Every generation replaces and becomes not only the generation that immediately precedes it, but all the generations that fold back from that point till Abraham, the original link. We succeed our forebearers and because they succeeded theirs - we become them. We are not only the bearers of a three thousand year tradition - we are the first link on its chain. Our soul has succeeded the original soul of Abraham.

The Convert

This concept becomes all the more cogent in application to the convert. Jews from birth identify Jewishly as children of their biological parents. Jews by choice are not born to Jewish parents and identify Jewishly as children of Abraham and Sarah. Though we are all spiritually linked to Abraham and Sarah, this link is most readily perceived in the convert.

The Jewish soul assigned to the convert upon conversion is of the highest spiritual order, linked directly and intrinsically to Abraham. Rather than sitting on the introductory rung of the spiritual ladder, the convert, as the direct heir of Abraham, sits at its apex. Some of the greatest of Jewish teachers were either themselves converts as was Onkelos the Proselyte, who translated the Torah into Aramaic, or were children of converts as was Rabbi Akiva.

To be in the presence of a righteous convert is to bask in the glow and soulfulness of Abraham and Sarah. It awakens our own connection to the Patriarch and inspires our own souls.

Heirs of the Divine

If we continue to unravel the thread of inheritance, we arrive at a startling conclusion. The Torah describes itself as an inheritance from G-d. This implies that Jews are not only heirs to Abraham, but also to G-d. It makes sense to think of an heir replacing a parent, but how can we become G-d?

Perhaps the best way to answer this question is the way my father once answered it when I asked

it of him. I could not have been much older than five when I overheard my father saying that G-d is in everything. The stone is G-d, the tree is G-d even the person is G-d. I interrupted him and asked with wonder, is that really true, am I G-d? "No," he replied, "you are not G-d, G-d is you."

If G-d is infinite then it follows that He fills all space. If He fills all space then it follows that there is no space for anything outside of G-d. If this is true then it follows that everything in existence is an extension of G-d. This means that we exist by virtue of His existence. When we come to realize this existential truth we suspend our ego and transcend our very sense of self. We are sublimated and absorbed by the overarching and all consuming presence of the Divine.

Rather than becoming a lesser self we become larger; so large as to become part and parcel of the Divine. This is the truest form of inheritance. It is not that we become G-d, rather it is that we realize that we never were anything, but G-d. The Torah is our inheritance because it teaches us how to let go of being an outsider. It shows how to empty our souls of our very selves. It directs us to shed our ego and invites us to become a part of G-d.

*By Rabbi Lazer Gurkow
Congregation Beth Tefilah, London, Canada*

PINCHAS IN A NUTSHELL

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.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 17 Tammuz 5785 - 13 July 2025

Moses Breaks Tablets (1313 BCE)

On 17 Tammuz 2448 (1313 BCE), forty days after the Giving of the Torah on 6 Sivan. Upon descending Mount Sinai and witnessing Israel's worship of the Golden Calf, Moses smashed the Tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments which he was carrying down from the mountain.

Temple Service Disrupted (423 BCE)

The daily sacrificial offerings (Korban Tamid) in the Holy Temple were discontinued, three weeks before the Babylonians' destruction of the First Temple in 3338 (423 BCE).

Jerusalem Walls Breached (70 CE)

The walls of the besieged city of Jerusalem were breached on 17 Tammuz 3830 (70 CE). The fighting in Jerusalem would continue for three

weeks, until the Second Temple was destroyed on the 9th of Av.

Tuesday, 19 Tammuz 5785 - 15 July 2025

Passing of Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog (1959)

Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog (5649-5719, or 1889-1959) was born in Łomża, Poland. He served as a rabbi in Belfast, UK and Dublin, Ireland, and in 5679 (1919) was appointed Chief Rabbi of Ireland. In 5696 (1936) he moved to the Land of Israel, where he served as Chief Rabbi until his passing on 19 Tammuz 5719 (1959). He authored numerous works including Divrei Yitzchak, an anthology of Talmudic discourses, and the halachic work Hechal Yitzchak.

Wednesday, 20 Tammuz 5785 - 16 July 2025

Passing of Rabbi Avraham Chaim Na'eh (1954)

Rabbi Avraham Chaim Na'eh was born in Hebron in 5650 (1890). In 5678 (1918), after having been expelled from the Holy Land by the Ottomans during World War I, he returned to the Land of Israel to work for the Edah HaChareidit (a prominent Orthodox communal organization), under Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld. Rabbi Na'eh best known for his halachic works Ketzot HaShulchan and Shiurei Torah ("measurements of the Torah"), in which he converted Halachic measurements into modern terms. He passed away on 20 Tammuz 5714 (1954).

Shabbat, 23 Tammuz 5785 - 19 July 2025

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1570)

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero of Safed, the Holy Land, known as the "Ramak", author of Pardes Rimoni, passed away on 23 Tammuz 5330 (1570).