

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

PARSHAT PINCHAS

13-19 Tammuz, 5786
28 June- 4 July 2026

Pinchas: Numbers 25:10 - 30:1
Jeremiah 1:1 - 2:3

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

What Was the "Covenant of Peace" Granted to Phinehas?

The Torah relates that Phinehas, grandson of Aaron the High Priest, halted a plague by dramatically slaying the Israelite chieftain Zimri and the Midianite princess Cozbi, who were engaging in public sin. In reward, G-d declared:

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the kohen, has turned My anger away from the children of Israel by his zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the children of Israel because of My zeal. Therefore, say, "I hereby give him My covenant of peace. It shall be for him and for his descendants after him [as] an eternal covenant of Priesthood, because he was zealous for his G-d and atoned for the children of Israel."¹

This briti shalom, literally "My covenant of peace," is a unique Divine pledge bestowed upon Phinehas. What is its meaning and purpose? Let's explore diverse interpretations offered by generations of commentators.

A Gesture of Gratitude

Rashi comments somewhat cryptically, framing this as G-d's gratitude. "Just as a person owes gratitude and favor to someone who did him a favor, here G-d expressed to him [Phineas] His feelings of peace." In Rashi's understanding, there is no actual covenant of peace; instead, G-d is expressing his gratitude, which manifests in the covenant of Priesthood described in the subsequent verse.

(Phinehas did not become a Priest when his grandfather, Aaron, became High Priest. The Priesthood passed from father to son among those born after the appointment. Phinehas, however, was born before Aaron's appointment and therefore did not receive the Priesthood by default.)

Protection from Vengeance

According to Ibn Ezra, G-d's covenant guaranteed that Phinehas would live in peace, safe from those angered by his vigilante act. Phinehas had killed Zimri, a prince of the tribe of Simeon, and Cozbi, a Midianite princess, thus potentially incurring the wrath of their tribes and allies. G-d's promise of peace was his assurance that no vengeful relatives would harm him.

Bechor Shor and Chizkuni echo this view, which also underscores G-d's public endorsement of Phinehas—legitimizing his deed so that the community would not treat him as a murderer. In fact, the Talmud relates that some Israelites initially murmured against Phinehas for killing a tribal prince, until G-d's reward made it clear that Phinehas "avenged G-d" properly.

Preserving Phinehas's Inner Peace and Compassion

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, known as Netziv, reads the covenant as safeguarding Phinehas's character. He notes that an act of violence, even done zealously for a mitzvah, can alter a person's nature toward cruelty. Phinehas might have become bloodthirsty or callous after killing two people with his own hands. Therefore, says Netziv, G-d blessed Phinehas with "the quality of peace" as a countermeasure.

Messianic Peace

The Midrash states:

Reish Lakish said: He is Phinehas, he is Elijah. G-d said to him: You made peace between Me and the Children of Israel — so in the future, you will also bring peace between Me and them, as it says: "Behold, I am sending you Elijah the prophet."

Thus, the promise of peace is that Phinehas, who is identified as Elijah the Prophet, will one day return as the harbinger of the Messianic era.

Peace from the Angel of Death – Extraordinary Longevity

Rabbi Ovadia Sforno offers a striking interpretation: "My covenant of peace" meant peace with the Angel of Death, i.e., immunity from premature death. Indeed, Sforno notes that Phinehas "enjoyed an exceedingly long life on earth, more so than any of his generation." He points out that Phinehas was still serving as a Priest in the time of the Battle of Gibeah, long after Joshua's era, and possibly even in the days of Jephthah¹¹—which would make him nearly 300 years old! This borders on immortality, leading Sforno to reference the Midrash "Elijah is Phinehas," meaning Phinehas never died but lives on as Elijah the Prophet.

Unity of Body and Soul

The Rebbe takes this a step further, understanding the phrase "My covenant of peace" as hinting at the unity of body and soul. This is clearly seen in Elijah the Prophet, whose soul never left his body—he ascended to heaven still in his physical body.¹⁴ This was possible because he had so completely refined his body, turning it into a vessel for holiness, that there was no need for death or burial. His physical body could receive spiritual revelations directly.

Uniting Souls

In a similar fashion, a teaching attributed to the Baal Shem Tov, recorded by his disciple Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoya, views "peace" as integration and wholeness on a soul level. He notes that Aaron's two righteous sons, Nadab and Abihu, had died prematurely, without children, described in Kabbalah as "two halves of a single soul"—incomplete due to their lack of offspring.

According to the Zohar, when Phinehas struck Zimri and

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IN JEWISH HISTORY

Cozbi, the souls of Nadab and Abihu united within him.¹⁶ Thus, Phinehas became shalem (complete) with two souls in one body. On this basis, the Baal Shem Tov interprets G-d's promise, "Behold, I give him My covenant of peace," to mean Phinehas was granted wholeness through a union of souls.

In Kabbalah, the Divine attribute of Yesod (Foundation) is nicknamed "Peace," because it unites the spiritual realms (connecting the sefirot to the world). Phinehas is compared to the tzaddik (righteous one) who, like Yesod, "unites all the attributes" and brings together that which was divided.

By receiving Nadab and Abihu's energies, Phinehas healed a division – "there was no peace between them, but Phinehas rectified this when he was given the covenant of peace, to unite their souls in one body."

By Mordechai Rubin

Daily Wisdom

Weaning Ourselves from Materiality

Seventh Reading: Numbers 29:12–30:1

Special communal offerings were sacrificed every day of the seven-day holiday of Sukot. But as whereas the number of rams and lambs offered up remained constant throughout the seven days, the number of bulls decreased from 13 on the first day to seven on the seventh day. On the following day, the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, only one single bull was offered up.

וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עֹלָה . . . פָּרִים בְּנֵי בָקָר שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר וּגְדֵי (במדבר
טז:יג)

[G-d instructed Moses to tell the Jewish people,] "You must offer up an ascent-offering [on Sukot] of 13 young bulls [on the first day] . . ." Numbers 29:13

If we indulge the "animal" side of our personalities, always giving in to what it insists are its "needs," it will quickly learn to assert itself and make increasing demands on us. Instead, we should accustom it to make do with the minimum, while we strive for greater and greater fulfillment in spiritual areas. On the other hand, if we try to change our animal side too abruptly, it will simply refuse to comply. We must accustom it gently and gradually, showing it step by step how spiritual fulfillment is even more satisfying than material satisfaction.

Once our material drives have been trained in this way, we can make a quantum leap and wean them entirely of their material orientation, just like the quantum leap from the last day of Sukot to Shemini Atzeret, when the number of bulls offered up drops from seven to one

Translated and Adapted by Moshe Wisniefsky

Sunday, June 28, 2026

13 Tammuz, 5786

R. Yosef Yitzchak Freed (1927)

On the 13th of Tammuz of 1927, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, received the documents authorizing his release from a sentence of exile to Kastroma in the interior of Russia. The Rebbe was actually notified of his release on Tammuz 12, but since that day was a legal holiday, the Certificate of Release freeing him to travel home was issued only the next day. Thus both the 12th and 13th of Tammuz are celebrated as a "festival of liberation" by the Chabad-Lubavitch community. (For more on the Rebbe's arrest and liberation, "Today in Jewish History" for yesterday, Tammuz 12).

Wednesday, July 1, 2026

16 Tammuz, 5786

Golden Calf Made; Hur Killed (1313 BCE)

In the year 2448 from Creation (1313 BCE), Tammuz 16 was the 40th day following the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and the people of Israel wrongly expected Moses' return from the mountain (he would actually return on the following day). When their leader failed to return, they demanded from Aaron: "Make us a god that shall go before us". Hur (Moses' nephew, the son of Miriam and Caleb) tried to stop them and was killed by the mob. Aaron fashioned a calf of molten gold.

Thursday, July 2, 2026

17 Tammuz, 5786

Moses Breaks Tablets (1313 BCE)

The Talmud (Ta'anit 28b) lists five tragic events in Jewish history that occurred on Tammuz 17, on account of which a fast was instituted on this day (see Laws & Customs").

The first of these occurred in 1313 BCE, forty days after the Giving of the Torah on Sivan 6. Upon descending Mount Sinai and witnessing Israel's worship of the Golden Calf (see "Today in Jewish History" for yesterday, Tammuz 16), Moses smashed the Tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments which he was carrying down from the mountain.

Friday, July 3, 2026

18 Tammuz, 5786

Golden Calf Destroyed (1313 BCE)

Moses destroyed the Golden Calf, and re-ascended Mount Sinai to plead G-d's forgiveness for the Jewish people.

Shabbat, July 4, 2026

19 Tammuz, 5786

Passing of Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog (1959)

Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog (1889-1959) was born in Łomża, Poland, and moved to the United Kingdom with his family in 1898. He served as rabbi of Belfast from 1916 to 1919 and was appointed rabbi of Dublin in 1919. He went on to serve as Chief Rabbi of Ireland between 1922 and 1936, after which he immigrated to Israel to succeed the late Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook as Chief Rabbi of Israel. He served as Chief Rabbi until his death in 1959. He authored numerous works including Divrei Yitzchak, an anthology of Talmudic discourses, and the halachic work Hechal Yitzchak.