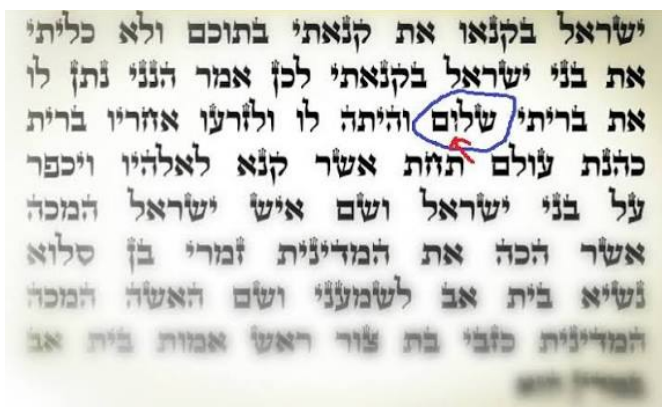


<p>CANDLE LIGHTING</p> <p>8:46 PM</p> <p>Friday · Erev Shabbos</p>	<p>EREV SHABBOS</p> <p>18 Tammuz 5786</p> <p>July 3, 2026</p>	<p>TORAH READING</p> <p>Pinchas</p> <p>Haftarah: Yirmiyahu</p> <p>1:1-2:3</p>	<p>PIRKEI AVOS</p> <p>Ch. 6</p> <p>Kinyan Torah</p>	<p>SHABBOS ENDS</p> <p>9:58 PM</p> <p>Motzaei Shabbos · Sat night</p>
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PARSHAS PINCHAS · THE TWO KINDS OF PEACE

The Broken Vav.



Brisi shalom — “My covenant of peace” (Bamidbar 25:12) as it appears in the Torah scroll: the vav of shalom written severed, as every sofer has written it for three thousand years.

Then comes the strangest reward in the Torah. G-d says, “Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace.” A man who has just killed with his own hands is handed, of all things, a covenant of peace. And if you open a Torah scroll to that verse, the word *shalom* is written with a broken letter: the vav cut clean across. The Talmud notes the vav is severed, so the word can even be read *shalem*, whole. Why should the peace given to Pinchas be spelled broken?

A man who has just killed with his own hands is handed, of all things, a covenant of peace — and the Torah spells it with a broken letter.

This past weekend Iran attacked a tanker near the Strait of Hormuz with a drone. The United States struck back at ten Iranian military targets. Israeli jets kept pounding Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. By Tuesday, envoys were in Doha for another round of talks that ended without a breakthrough, focused not on the nuclear issue the war was launched over, but on who controls the Strait and when Iran gets its frozen funds. All of it under a framework signed two and a half weeks ago that was supposed to end the war.

Another ceasefire pressed onto the region from the outside, already cracking. This Shabbos’s parsha explains why every one of them breaks, and it does it with a single broken letter.

The Covenant Spelled Broken

Our parsha is named after Pinchas, and it opens on a single violent act. A Jewish prince named Zimri took a Midianite woman in open defiance of Moshe, a public chillul Hashem, in the middle of a plague that was killing thousands. Pinchas took a spear and ran them both through. The plague stopped.

The Presence Hidden in Exile

Chassidus reads the broken letter as a window into what Pinchas saw in that moment. A public chillul Hashem is not only a sin; it is G-d’s own Presence dragged low, put on display in its most degraded state. And that lowered Presence is everywhere, in exile, hidden inside the whole broken world, inside its people and even its suffering, aching to be revealed and reunited with its Source. What Zimri exposed in the open, Pinchas felt as a wound: the Presence itself, brought low.

Whoever truly takes that pain to heart forgets himself entirely; his own wants shrink to nothing beside it. Such a person becomes a limb of that hidden Presence, and its messenger in the world.

The Man With Nothing Left But the Mission

This was Pinchas. His zeal was for that hidden Presence, for its honor in exile, and he was so consumed by it that, in the words of the teaching, nothing was left of him but the mission. He did not weigh the risk, calculate the odds, or think about what would happen to him. His own life meant nothing to him at all. He gave himself over completely.

A person in that state is above the reckoning of the law, not against it, above it. Had Pinchas paused to ask a sage whether the law obligated him to throw himself among twenty-four thousand people and kill a prince of Israel, the answer would have been no; it is a law we do not rule. The letter of the law did not even enter his mind, from the sheer force of his zeal for that pain.

A person that emptied of self does not merely carry out judgment; he sweetens it, rectifies it. Of Pinchas the verse uses a rare word, that he “made a reckoning” with his Maker, drawing a new verdict out of pure love. That is *hamtakas ha-dinim*, sweetening a harsh decree, rectifying it from the inside rather than fighting it off from outside.

The Two Vavs

There are two kinds of vav. The whole vav is the sign of Moshe: a complete, unbroken drawing-down of light from Above, *emes*, truth, a place where breakage is not even possible. This is no mere label: the vav is a single line drawn straight down from Above, which is Moshe’s own role, bringing the Torah down whole from Heaven; the Zohar calls this unbroken letter the sign of Moshe, and the Sages said of him, “Moshe is true and his Torah is true.” That is one kind of peace: light lowered whole and straight from Above.

But Pinchas’s peace is not that one. He is the messenger of that hidden Presence, who works from inside the exile, inside the harsh judgments, and sweetens them. His peace cannot be the whole, unbroken vav of Moshe. It is written small and cut, because it was never drawn down intact from Above. It was made from within the break, by a man who had nullified himself entirely into the pain of the world and transformed the judgment from the inside. You can see it in what happened: he did not stop the plague from a safe distance; he ran into the middle of it, into the very sin that had caused it, and the death-decree already in motion turned, in his hands, into a covenant of peace.

So the Torah points to two kinds of peace, both holy: one drawn down whole and straight from Above, the other forged inside the

fracture through total self-surrender. Pinchas’s is spelled with a broken letter because his was the second kind.

Why Ours Keep Breaking

Hold that against the week’s headlines. The peace the nations keep signing is neither vav. It is not the unbroken channel of Moshe, and it is not Pinchas’s self-consuming descent into the judgment. It is a deal made of self, leverage, advantage and fear, each side full of its own interest. The Torah shows only two peaces that hold, and both are built on the same thing: *bittul*, the emptying of self, whether as a clear channel from Above or as a man so consumed with something greater than himself that he goes down into the harsh judgment and sweetens it. A peace built from self-interest and imposed from the outside, on a conflict no one was willing to step inside and change, cannot hold.

Pinchas Is Eliyahu

Then our tradition makes its astonishing identification, stated outright in the Midrash and the Zohar: “Pinchas is Eliyahu,” the famous Elijah the prophet. The man of the broken vav is the very prophet who will herald the redemption: “Behold, I send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of Hashem, and he will turn the hearts of fathers to children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.”

It could be no one else. The peace of the Geulah is the broken-vav peace: not a ceasefire lowered from the heavens onto a world that stayed the same, but the world’s own harsh judgments sweetened from within. Eliyahu is the one who announces it, because the final peace is his kind.

The frameworks will keep breaking, because self-interest cannot make peace. The broken vav is not the lesser peace. It is the sign of the only peace that lasts, the one someone empties himself completely to make, from inside the fire. May we see it, completely and very soon.

SOURCES

Bamidbar 25:8, 25:11, 25:12 · *Kiddushin* 66b (the vav of shalom is severed, read shalem) · *Pri Ha’aretz*, Pinchas 1 (R. Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk: *shiflus ha-Shechina*, the *shaliach*, *hamtakas ha-dinim*, and the two vavs, citing *Zohar* I:122a & I:241b, the vav as the sign of Moshe) · *Bava Basra* 74a (Moshe *emes v’Toraso emes*) · *Tehillim* 106:30 with *Sanhedrin* 44a (“vayfallel”) · *Sanhedrin* 82a (*halacha v’ein morin kein*) · *Targum Yonasan* on 25:12, *Yalkut Shimoni* Pinchas 771, and the *Zohar* (“Pinchas is Eliyahu”) · *Malachi* 3:23–24 · Current events: AP, CNN, Al Jazeera, Reuters, Times of Israel (June 28 – July 2, 2026).

RAMBAM STUDY SCHEDULE · SHABBOS, 19 TAMMUZ

Daily Rambam

One chapter a day: Shevisas Yom Tov, ch. 3 · **Three chapters a day:** Klei HaMikdash, chs. 6–8 · **Sefer HaMitzvos:** Positive 23; Negative 72; Positive 32; Positive 36.

Sefer HaMitzvos, in brief: the day’s mitzvos all concern the service of the Mikdash: the Levi’im are commanded to serve — guarding the gates and singing over the korbanos — a duty, not a choice (P 23); Levi’im and Kohanim are each forbidden to perform the service assigned to the other (N 72); we are commanded to sanctify and honor the Kohanim, giving them precedence in all matters of holiness (P 32); and the Kohanim serve in weekly watches — *mishmaros* — all serving together only on the festivals (P 36).

SHAKED & SHOKED · THE ALMOND BRANCH

Still Awake.



The almond wakes first: one tree already in blossom while the orchard around it still sleeps. “I am watching (shoked) over My word to perform it” (Yirmiyahu 1:12).

This week scientists reported something that unsettled a lot of people. Patients under general anesthesia — fully “under,” unresponsive, by every outward sign switched off — turned out to still be processing language deep in the brain. Their minds were still sorting the speech around them, literally registering whether a word was a noun or a verb, while everyone in the room was certain no one was home.

The body looked empty. The lights looked off. And underneath, someone was still awake. (Not awake in the way that should worry anyone headed for surgery: the patients felt no pain and remembered nothing. The anesthesia still did its job. What the electrodes found is that beneath the unconsciousness, the brain never simply shut off.)

That is almost exactly the image the prophet Yirmiyahu is handed in this week’s haftarah, and it is exactly the question of the Three Weeks, which begin this Thursday.

The Saddest Season Opens With a Question

This Thursday is the 17th of Tammuz, the fast that opens the Three Weeks, the stretch of the calendar when we mourn the breaching of Jerusalem’s walls and, three weeks later, the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. So the Torah reading shifts too. Because Pinchas falls after the 17th, we read the first of the three “haftaros of affliction,” and it opens the book of the prophet who watched the destruction happen with his own eyes: Yirmiyahu.

You would expect his first prophecy to be thunder and doom. It isn’t. It’s a job interview, and a frightened young man trying to turn the job down.

“Before I formed you in the belly I knew you... I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” And Yirmiyahu answers like anyone would: “I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” G-d reaches out and touches his mouth: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.” The frightened youth is not told to become eloquent; he is given the words themselves. The mission never depended on his strength. The conversation has barely started, and the prophet is already overwhelmed by what is coming.

The First Thing G-d Shows Him

Then comes a strange little test. “Yirmiyahu, what do you see?” And he answers: “I see a branch of an almond tree,” makel shaken in Hebrew.

Of all the things to show a prophet on the edge of national catastrophe, an almond branch? But G-d’s reply turns the whole image into a promise, through a double meaning that only works in Hebrew: “You have seen well, for I am watching (shoked) over My word to perform it.” Shaked, almond. Shoked, watching, awake, alert. The almond is the tree that wakes first, the earliest tree in the Land to break dormancy and blossom while the orchard around it still looks dead. It is the tree that is already awake when everything else looks asleep.

And that is the message under the message: I am awake. I am watching over My word. Nothing here is abandoned, even when it looks abandoned.

The almond is the tree that is already awake when everything else looks asleep.

The Reassurance Comes First

Only after the almond does G-d show Yirmiyahu the second vision, the one about the destruction: “I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north.” A cauldron seething over a fire, tipped so that its scalding contents are about to spill southward. That, G-d explains, is Babylon: out of the north the disaster will boil over and pour across the land. The destruction is real. The haftarah does not pretend otherwise; this is the prophet of Eichah, of Lamentations, and the walls really will fall.

But notice the order. The reassurance comes first. Before Yirmiyahu is shown a single thing about the churban, he is shown the almond — the awake tree — and told that G-d is watching over His word. The destruction is framed, from the outset, inside a larger wakefulness. The pot boils. But Someone is awake at the stove.

What the Brain Scan and the Almond Share

This week's science says the same thing.

We assume that “unresponsive” means “absent.” No movement, no answer, no sign, so no one there. That is the entire emotional logic of exile, and of the Three Weeks. The Temple is gone. Prophecy had fallen silent. The miracles never stopped, but they dress themselves in nature now, easy to miss. Heaven looks, by every outward sign, switched off. For two thousand years the Jewish people have lived in a kind of spiritual anesthesia, and the temptation, every single day, is to conclude from the silence that no one is home.

Shir HaShirim gives that state a voice: *ani yesheina v'libi er*, “I sleep, but my heart is awake.” The Midrash reads it as Israel speaking from exile: the nation sleeps, and the heart that keeps beating inside it is G-d Himself. The sleep is real, and so is the heart.

And then the instruments get sensitive enough, and we discover that the unresponsive mind was awake the entire time, sorting every word, missing nothing. The absence was never absence. It was presence we didn't yet have the tools to detect.

The almond branch is the Torah's version of that brain scan. It is the proof, handed to the prophet at the very gate of the destruction, that the silence is not absence. *Shoked ani*: I am awake. I have been awake the whole time.

The Tree That Wakes First

The almond doesn't only stay awake while the orchard sleeps. It is the first to flower, weeks before any other tree, while the branches around it are still bare. Its blossom is the announcement that the long dormancy is already ending, before there is any other evidence for it at all.

That is why this is the vision G-d chooses to open the season of mourning. The Three Weeks are not a dead end; in our tradition they are the labor pains before a birth. The Sages teach that Tisha b'Av itself, the lowest day on the calendar, is the birthday of Moshiach: the very depth of the destruction is where the redemption is seeded. The almond blossoms first because the comfort comes before we can see why it is needed.

The pot boils. But Someone is awake at the stove.

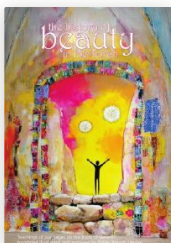
So we enter the Three Weeks the way Yirmiyahu entered his mission, knowing the destruction was real, but holding the almond branch first. The walls did come down and the pot did boil over, yet through every silent century of exile Someone stayed awake at the stove, watching over His word, waiting for the first blossom to break.

SOURCES

Yirmiyahu 1:5, 1:6, 1:9, 1:11–14 (the haftarah of affliction read for Pinchas during the Three Weeks) · the *shaked / shoked* wordplay (1:11–12) and Rashi there · the almond as the first tree to blossom in Eretz Yisrael · Yerushalmi Berachos 2:4 and Eichah Rabbah 1:51 (Moshiach born on Tisha b'Av) · Shir HaShirim 5:2 (“*ani yesheina v'libi er*”) with Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:2 · Current science: “Brain Activity Under Anesthesia Challenges What We Know About Consciousness,” Baylor College of Medicine, published in *Nature*; *ScienceDaily*, June 24, 2026.

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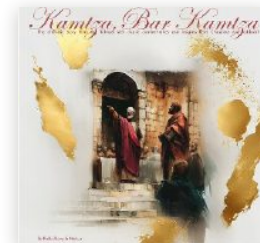
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