

When the Evangelical Farmer Comes Home, is kettling of the herd still needed?: Reflections on Exile, Belonging, and the Soul's Right to Express.

On the weekly portion: Parshat Pinchas

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This paper began, as many soul-led journeys do, with a moment of unexpected stillness—locked in a flat with a flight to catch and a soul that refused to sit still. The door wouldn't open. And for a moment, neither would I. Have you ever felt that? That your life is locked behind a door and no one is coming? Eventually, I found the way out—with the help of a bewildered Uber driver—and we made our flight. But that moment stayed with me. It became a metaphor for something deeper: the soul in exile, struggling to find expression in a world full of barriers.

Over the course of three recent trips—two to Rome, one to Lisbon—I encountered moments of deep resonance that blurred the line between personal experience, theological reflection, and social responsibility. I travel with a domestic support person, and together we navigate systems that aren't always designed for people like us. That, too, is a form of exile.

In Lisbon, part of my work focused on interfaith dialogue, particularly through MJLC and KAICIID. But beneath the formal meetings was something more intimate: the plight of women in religious captivity. I refer here to the Agunah crisis, where religious law is used

by some men to trap women in marriages they can neither sustain nor escape. As someone committed to freedom of expression, I see this as a form of spiritual violence. The soul, in my view, expresses itself through the body—it must be free to act, speak, choose. Deny that, and you exile the soul.

Freedom of expression, in this context, is not merely a legal or political right. It is the capacity for the soul to be present, to act in alignment with its deepest purpose. This is a theological imperative, not just a civil one. My conversations with a dear friend and member of the clergy helped bring this into sharper focus. We spoke about Europe, about safety, cohesion, and what happens when identity is perceived as a threat.

These reflections reminded me of a moment in Jewish scripture. In Parashat Pinchas (from The Five Books of Moses) we encounter the story of a zealot who, in the face of moral crisis, takes bold and violent action. Pinchas, son of Elazar, grandson of Aaron the High Priest, acts decisively to uphold sanctity. But his zeal is only blessed because it stems not from ego, but from deep divine alignment. Justice must be rooted in holiness. And sometimes, justice requires disruption.

I see something similar in the neurodivergent experience. Adolescents and those with forms of autism or ADHD often express their inner world in unconventional ways. This is not dysfunction—it is difference. Their souls speak loudly, sometimes awkwardly, often beautifully. In a world addicted to norms, that difference can feel threatening. But perhaps that is precisely what makes it divine. As the Queen once said in a Christmas broadcast: *“We must see the world through the eyes of our children.”* Their sight is often the clearest.

This brings me to Rome, and to the Vatican. After some security rigmarole involving Swiss Guards and official passes, I found myself standing at the front rail of St. Peter’s Square. I hadn’t intended to be there, in that particular spot. It just happened. The

square was mostly empty—lunchtime—but I sensed something important was coming. And then, as if choreographed by heaven, the white smoke rose.

People surged forward. Cheers erupted. The moment had come. And yet, no one asked me to move. An Italian voice near me said, *“He Jew, he Jew—let him stay.”* And I stayed. I was standing in the exact place where a Catholic religious journalist—someone who had trained, studied, waited his whole life for that vantage point—had hoped to be. I later realised that I had inadvertently taken his space.

The guilt stayed with me. Who was I to stand where he had long prepared to be? And yet, no one removed me. It was as if, for that one moment, a Jewish body in a Catholic space was not a disruption but a sign of respect. Inclusion not by design, but by presence.

And so I return to the title of this piece: When the Evangelical Farmer Comes Home. It’s a layered metaphor. The Evangelical tradition broke away from the Church of England. The Church of England broke away from Rome. The farmer is the one who returns to till sacred ground, long abandoned or contested. But now that he has returned—what then?

Do we still need to kettle the herd?

Or can we allow for something more radical—freedom not only of the body, but of the soul?

There is a tension between safety and expression, between cohesion and individuality. But true security, I believe, arises when the soul is no longer threatened for being itself.

We must protect ourselves and one another—but not at the cost of spiritual suppression.

So I end as I began—in exile, and on the way home. Not to a geographic place, but to a moment of presence. In Rome, in Lisbon, in London. In Jerusalem. Or perhaps, more precisely: in Mundania, our shared condition of ordinary time and forgotten holiness.

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem—let it not be only for a crown or a country.

Let it be for God, for Jerusalem, for the Monarch, and for the Country.

Thank you for allowing me to share this journey. I hope it finds a reader who sees not only with the eyes—but with the soul.