

Session 58

Re'eh – The Secret to Happiness

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6SbmE3oGV0>

Shalom, shalom, it's good to see all of you. Are you there? Yes, I can see you, I can see you! It's good to see all your faces. I love it! Hi, Naomi, hi, Cal, Eric, good to see you. That's a great background. Interesting. Shalom, shalom, everybody. So, I want to start off by...oh, there she is, hi Christina. Well, that's like a lodge you're in. Anyways, I want to start off by just saying, shalom. It's so good to see you. I want to thank all of you because so many of you have been sending me messages that, you know, due to summer vacation or various time changes or other responsibilities that you've been missing our live sessions. And that you're catching up afterwards by watching these recorded sessions, which is totally fine. But more than one of you have asked me, just today, to pray for your ability to join us in our live sessions. And I have done so immediately and continue to do so because no matter how you look at it, there's a certain power and connection that we can achieve together on these live sessions. I'm so happy to see our dear friend, Stephanie East, she was able to make it. She just asked me today. She said she didn't think she'd be able to. She was able to be here with us. She asked me for prayers. And I guess that one was successful. So, it's good to see you, Stephanie. Just now, Robin Robertson wrote in asking for prayers saying the thunder, lightning, rainstorms are so intense that he's not sure that they'll be able to connect at all on their internet, so let's all pray for that, also.

Is it just me, or does it seem like there are forces that are regularly seeking to sabotage this fellowship? It does, right? It's one of those rules about spiritual power that when there's a good, there's going to be an equal and exact opposite force to try to sabotage that, which brings me to the subject of prayers because I know that we all have this desire to come together in more meaningful ways and this will happen, please God, in the most profound way when we come together at the Arugot Farm in Judea. But until then, I had an idea I wanted to throw out there. It's not such a novel idea, but I just want to hear your thoughts about it.

So when you send me prayer requests, which I'm grateful to say have been very abundant, I thought that perhaps we could start praying together for those who are interested, in being prayed for by the entire fellowship. Meaning that for those who are interested, we can stay on after the final blessing and pray together. We'll have slides for each one that we're praying for and we can pray together. And if you do like this idea, my request would be that when you send me a prayer request, in it, tell me whether you'd like the entire fellowship to pray together for you and how much of the prayer you want me to include. Maybe there are private parts in it. I don't know. I would of course, I'd understand fully if this is personal. If it's a personal prayer and you want me to pray alone for it. I would get that. But for those of you who would like to have us all pray together for you, well in my humble opinion, there's

tremendous power and unity in that. So the action item is to consider this idea and if you like it, when you send me your prayer requests to include whether you desire the fellowship as a whole to pray for you or you prefer I pray alone.

I mean, I saw that just now Karen and Yitzchak from north California just requested a group prayer. They wrote, please be praying for our area in north California. Forests and towns are burning. Many evacuees now are homeless. Fire now roughly 10 miles away from them. So, Please HaShem, protect them and protect their neighbors and protect their community and protect the holy people of north California and extinguish this fire and just put Your shield, shelter them under Your wings of protection and protect our holy friends. So, Karen, Yitzchak, please God, you should be protected.

All right, so here we go, my friends. Let's dive in and I'm really excited to get into this fellowship because it's a special one. Putting it together has been a special experience. I really don't know how it's going to turn out, but it's special, not only because Jeremy and Tehila are arriving back in Israel in just a couple days which we are very excited about, but also because today is Rosh Chodesh, right? The new month right now. Like right now as we speak, we're in the middle of it because it's a two-day Rosh Chodesh. Sometimes I forget that you're not all Jews and I'm like going into the detail, in the depths of the Jewish calendar. I hope that's something you like and appreciate, and if I'm going too fast, I want you to tell me. But without getting into all the details, you know, it's sometimes it's two days, sometimes it's one day. This is Rosh Chodesh Elul, which is two days which I'm grateful for because it's a heavy one, and I want to double the time to really harness it for all it's worth.

So, it started Saturday night, right as Shabbat ended, Rosh Chodesh Elul began. And it will end tomorrow evening when we see three stars. So right now, we're right in the middle of it, but we don't always make a big deal about Rosh Chodesh on the Fellowship. There's just a lot to talk about and every month we don't talk about that month. So, why are we doing it today? Because it's not just any Rosh Chodesh, but it's Rosh Chodesh Elul, and Elul is a very special month. It's very special, it contains tremendous potential for growth and for coming close to HaShem. And I'm so eager to share about it with you and to think about the ways that we can really squeeze every drop of potential out of these powerful days. Because remember, I may be leading the fellowship right now, but we are in this together. It there's anything that the last year of our journey should show, it's that we're in this thing together, and I want to hear from you on how you think we can do this.

But before we get into that, yes, you guessed it. A student does not speak before his teacher, before his rebbe, so allow me at this point to introduce my dear friend, Jeremy Gimpel from somewhere in the exile. I lost track of exactly where Jeremy and Tehila and their family are, but no matter where they are, they are with us and he's coming on live which is always a little bit nerve-racking for me because I don't know how that's going to play out. But it's my great

honor and hope to introduce Jeremy Gimpel. Jeremy, you there? How are you, my friend? We miss you.

Jeremy

Can you hear me? I'm doing really good. I hope this is all working now. You know, you just started off the fellowship with two ideas. The first one is to enhance the prayer of our fellowship. Maybe at the end coming together and praying about specific things together. In general, we've received so many prayer requests and if there's one thing that I've learned on this month-long marathon of a tour, it is that prayer is the guiding force in the world. I mean, you know that science wants to tell us that well, there's just random things that are mutating and then somehow, out of the randomness of the world, there's zebras and hippopotamuses and it's like, what is going on?

But in Elul, we're told that this is the time that HaShem was literally dreaming up what He wanted from creation before creation itself. And so too, like in our lives, like when we take the time to really pray for what we want in our lives, what we want for our loved ones, that is the driving force of the world. That when you commit, the world changes around you based on the commitments that you make. And keeping to those commitments and staying aligned, it's all defined by prayer. And a chabura, a fellowship that comes together to pray together, it almost seems like a law, a spiritual law of physics. Like a spiritual physics that is more powerful. That's why the Jewish tradition is to pray together with 10 men, that's like 20 people if the wives are included. Like bring a group of people together.

And you know, Elul, I don't think that I could have asked for a better gift than for it to be Elul now. I mean, the month of this trip is over. We're now like on our way from north Florida, down to Miami to then fly off on a direct flight to Israel and even though the last few days, Monday was my last event, and I was up until I think to 2:00 in the morning, meeting with a pastor in Brandon, Florida. We just like studied until 2:00 in the morning and the next day of course, it's like recovering from that. But the last few days have just been 100 percent vacation. Like no work. I promised my kids we're going to work, we're gonna work, we're gonna work. And in the last few days, we're gonna be in one of the most fun places in the world. We're just going to have a family vacation for a few days.

And even though it's been just full-time vacation, I'm leaving America now fully drained. Like, I have nothing left in me anymore. It's like I have, it's almost like I had a certain amount of energy that I absorbed from the Land of Israel, literally from the Land itself. It like empowered me with a message, empowered me with a spirit. I went across and every night just gave over my heart and gave over whatever I had to give. And then at the end, I'm just like, I'm fully drained. I'm like out. I need to go back to the Land, like lie on the Land, like plug myself back into the charger. And I just, I've never felt a more of a time to realign myself. Because everything that I would have wanted to have seen, that I would have loved to have kept going,

I've lost on the end of this trip. Waking up early, that's just not happening. It's just exhausting with the hotel, and the Air BNB, condos, I'm eating, Tehila has somehow made kosher food for six, seven people every day in a different motel room. And so, I've added, I've become a burrito. I've become, I just, I thought, so we would never eat like that in Israel. But there's just no other option. We're traveling and going. It's been so many kosher, microwave dinners from one hotel to the next hotel. Trying to eat fruit and trying to eat vegetables. But just like so much of how I wanted to live my life in an ideal scenario. I just, the trip hasn't allowed it. It's just like, oh, it is so time for me to go back to Israel and do tshuva, just to realign.

And that's where we are now, but then I was thinking, you know, this fellowship, this chabura that we're a part of, this like group...that's what is that? What is that? What is the essence of it? It's like a group of people who come together to learn, to grow, to change, to pray together. Who are seeking to be closer to HaShem, who trying to become better people, try to make the world a better place. It's like a chosen people. I mean, they have chosen, we have chosen, to be agents of light in this dark world. I mean, it's so vast, how huge America is. And how many people are just walking around here aimlessly, purposely, just walking, just trying to figure things out in their own confusion.

And then there's some people that have chosen to draw close to God. That have decided to align themselves with ultimate good in their life, to be agents of light, to change the world. And that's really hard to do that alone because America is so powerful and it's not like, you know, it's like you, I didn't appreciate the Land of Israel. What makes it so special, it's like God's Presence rests in the Land and you leave the Land of Israel, you're leaving God's Presence. And so, of course God is everywhere and God is one with the universe, but He hangs out in Israel. His home is in Israel. And now, to be alone, outside of the Land, on your own, trying to be an agent of light with everything around you pulling you in the opposite direction, it's like the chabura, the fellowship, it gives you power. It's like a group of people working together, praying together, getting stronger, getting better, it's like something amazing.

And we've gone around here and you wouldn't believe, Ari, what we've done here. It's like, I don't know, it's people's marriages have been saved, people that had problems with their children, sicknesses, careers that were destroyed in Covid came back stronger than ever before. People with personal challenges. It's like our fellowship and it's all of us together that gave it the power. Like just been an absolute saving for people. It's been a lifeline for people and people are now living better. Some people are waking up early. Some people are doing cold plunges, people's diets have changed. People are exercising now, they're realigning themselves. They're setting time every Sunday to come and learn Torah with us. They're praying together. It's just like what else could we be doing better with our lives than gathering up sparks of these chosen people that have somehow chosen this path to be so good in the world?

And it's like, you know, a New Year's resolution, which is really what Elul is about. The resolution in the Western world is like, I'm going to lose this much weight this year or something like that, but that's not really what tshuva is. Tshuva is the ultimate resolution, and tshuva as we all know, comes from the word, la'shuv, which means to return. What are we returning to? And so, this is a theme that I've been talking about, all throughout my trip here. That the Torah teaches us that the whole Torah is a path from Egypt to the Land of Israel. From outside of the garden back to the garden. We're all on a journey from where we are now. And where we could be, where God has a destiny waiting for us. Of who we could be, who we are now and who we could be. It's like who we could be is our destiny that could unfold potentially. And that's a direct line. That's like where you are now and where you could be. That's a line and realignments like, right now, I am definitely not on the path. I'm not eating right, I'm not sleeping right, I'm not living right, because it's just been such a... I'm on a mission right now. I'm not in like my regular routine of life, and it's ok.

It's Elul now, and it's like I'm going to return back to that path. That's why the Torah isn't called the law. It's literally, it's a path. It's called, halacha. It's called the walk. It's like the Torah is guiding us on that walk of walking in the light, walking from where we are now to where we're going. And the act of tshuva isn't a one thing resolution, it's saying, all right, I'm just realigning myself and I'm back on the walk again. I'm walking with God. That's what the Torah is saying. It's like Adam walked with God. Abraham walked before God. It's like saying, I have set God before me, I have set the ultimate good in front of my eyes, I know where I want to be this upcoming year. This is the time of the year to actually dream that up. Where do we want to be? Who could we be? That's the real avoda. That's the real spiritual service, the inner work of this year is really getting straight in our mind where we want to be. It's not a one-year resolution, it's actually a full vision.

And then the resolution is, I'm realigning myself to start walking towards that. And walking towards that, it's like stumbling into the light. It's never going to be easy. There's so much, but it's actually saying, I'm back on the horse, I'm back, I'm walking again. I'm realigned toward my path, towards who I was created to be and here is my, it's in my chidish, the real insight that I had as I've traveled across the United States. Because the United States has a certain version of how they've taken the Bible, meaning America is as far as I now, right now, the greatest gift the Bible has ever given the world. The founding fathers of the United States of America were biblically aligned people. They wanted the language to be Hebrew, created in the image of God, equality, these like visions of liberty, a freedom to serve God in any way that you want. Now that foundation is what created the most amazing country with, it's like, unbelievable what the United States of America is.

Now as those biblical values are being eroded, more chaos and more confusion, and more, it's just like what the word is, like curses that have room to come in. But the foundation was so strong that it's lasted a couple of centuries of just absolute prosperity, abundance, huge. I

mean, watching Noam's eyes when we first walked into the first Walmart. My five-year-old Noam, he just could not believe, it's like the store is as big as Tel Aviv. It's like this massive, just no country has ever experienced such abundance. And because America is a certain culture, a certain capitalism and freedom, so they've taken the spirit of the Bible and a lot of the messages here are about prospering. It's like God wants you to prosper. And I say, ok, well that's like a very American message, but that's not...I mean, it's not that it's not true. Of course, God wants us to be blessed and God wants to bless us and He wants us to prosper.

But that's not like, not the straight of the arrow. I would say the best word is flourish. God created the world to flourish. And you see it around you. The grass, the trees, the species of animals, and also human beings. We were created to flourish. Not to prosper, now one aspect of flourishing is that you should be financially independent, that you should be strong. But flourishing, sometimes, someone that doesn't have much money can be the most amazing human being. Mother Teresa, I don't think she was very wealthy. Martin Luther King Jr., I don't think he was very wealthy, but the impact that they had on the world, the character that it took to stand up against the forces that were against them to bring light into the world, that's a soul that has flourished.

And then, what happens, that flourishing, that growth, in Hebrew is smichah. And what do we know? The word for simcha is almost the same word. Happiness and growth, that's where God has us. If we are on a line of growth, if we're on a line of flourishing, that's really the right word. Not prospering, but flourishing. That HaShem in Elul, wants us to flourish. So now, we're planting the seeds of what we want in this upcoming year. I want to make sure that I'm taking care of my body, I want to make sure I'm taking care of my prayers. I want to make sure I'm taking care of Torah story, my family, my marriage, my children, my parents. Just all of the ingredients that make our life beautiful. This is the time and then allow those seeds to flourish. And from that growth, smicha, comes simcha, comes happiness, comes joy and of course, that's not just a regular happiness, those are the same words as Mashiach. Simcha and Mashiach, that's like a full redemptive happiness. It's not a happiness that you've gone to a comedy club and they sort of said like jokes and you're laughing. It's like kind of silly. No, it's like a fullness in happiness, like a flourishing happiness that is a fulfillment of your destiny.

And so, it's been an amazing trip here. The time that I've gotten to spend before and after events with certain people that have had time to meet us along the way just to share how the fellowship has helped them in their lives. I mean, we're doing something that is so special, so amazing, and I just hit one country. And I just see here on the chat there there's so many countries that have all come together. And I just think, sooner than we realize. Right now, the gates to Israel are closed. And you know, you have to do this and you have to do that, you have to be vaccinated, you have to quarantine, there's like all these rules and regulations and they keep changing. Very soon, sooner than we think, the gates are going to open and there is going to be a tsunami of believers and Jews and people that have loved the Land that have never

come to the Land, that always put off their trip, that always said, oh man, they'll go next year, they took it for granted. And all of a sudden, Israel has been taken away from them. And when they open up the gates, I'm telling you, there's going to be a flood of people from all over the world. And I think that's the opportunity that this fellowship is really waiting for. That could be the time that we organize right now, that when the gates open, we open up the fellowship. We say, come on down and we all come together because meeting people here in Florida or meeting people in South Carolina, or in Texas, that's beautiful and it's amazing. And it's like bringing the light that I had from Israel and slowly kind of distributing it until I'm just totally empty and it's time for me to go home now. But imagine bringing everyone to the Land. Like a mass pilgrimage, a mass...hundreds of people from all over the world. All of us can go to the Temple Mount. All of us can, I mean, we would just make such an impact in the world. So that's the dream that keeps on popping up in my mind when I keep on meeting with you. Like oh, I have two hours, then I have to drive. That's not enough time. I want 10 days where we can just spend time together. Where people can meet each other. There's so many people that need to meet each other because they're on the same path, they just don't know it yet.

And so, I think that that would be the most marvelous thing. And when we get back to Israel, I think that we need to start working towards that. A mass pilgrimage...as many people from the fellowship as possible and we just commit. Like our vow to Israel, when the gates open, we're there. Now imagine if millions of people do that. Something historic will happen with this mass exodus coming from all around the world. And our fellowship will be there to sort of be the eye of the storm in the mountains of Judea. I think that that's something that's really awaiting us. And so that was my final dream leaving here. I think that's what's been a part, that's what's been given to me from this land. So, I'm going back to Israel with my own dream of how we can bring this fellowship closer to Israel. And to work it out.

Now is a month of working, a work to dream, a work to get our...what are the ingredients that we need to make our life what it needs to be. A vision of where we are now and where we want to be. And then, it's like, all right, we're just now doing tshuva, we are realigning. I think that is the best translation of that word. We're realigning with our destiny, realigning with the path and then we're on the halacha. We're walking the path now, we're walking in the light.

And so, all of you should be blessed. We finally got our corona test back because you know we have to take corona tests. And we didn't know. If one kid has corona, or if I have corona and I spread, we may have been stuck here for a month. And we just had to sort of take that risk. Baruch HaShem, all of our corona tests came back negative. We're getting on the plane just now, like we're driving down and we're getting on the plane pretty much. So we are on our way back. I can't wait to see you, Ari, I miss Israel so much and so it's good to be on our way back. And next week to broadcast from the Land. I'm really excited to see what will happen as I sort of bring all the lost sparks that I've collected across this trip back to the Land and let those sort of grow into something, a new message that will come out. So, I can't wait to see you.

Thank you all so much, this has been just one of the most meaningful times of my life. And so, thank you all, and we will see you soon. Shalom, back to you, Ari.

Ari

Jeremy, ok, that was fantastic. Wow, I didn't realize how much I missed you until I see you again and just the energy, the light, I'm really excited you come back from the speaking tour like this. There's going to have to be some unwinding, you know, a debriefing. I would be very honored to be that guy to debrief you and to hear all of it because you know, like you said, this what we're doing right now and picturing this mass pilgrimage that you're talking about from around the world, I think we got to listen to Jeremy what he's saying, there's a little bit of prophecy there, maybe, and let's start saving up. Really, let's start saving up. If you have enough money and you know that already, put that aside, maybe save a little bit more that you could help others that can't afford the trip. That we can come when the doors open up, when the gates open up. It's going to be a beautiful thing. I picture it all the time, what Jeremy was talking about, to be able to really connect with each other. To see each other's faces in person. You know, I'm looking as Jeremy's talking, I'm looking at Naomi and Robin and Mark and Carol and Cal and Ardelle and Eric and Christina and Erica and Tar, my friend, Tar, Caleb and the kids, it's just so good to see all of you. And anyway, so to see you in person would be incredible.

And Jeremy was talking about flourishing. You know, that's a good word. I think we often, just, we may set the bar way too low. And we should aim to flourish, not just to prosper and not just to do well and blessed, but to actually flourish. So, I thank you, Jeremy because you know you brought to the idea that the ingredients and checklists, envisioning who we want to be and while it's exciting and it's really invigorating, it's also work. Like you said, it's work, it's serious work.

And so, that's what I want to do now, fellowship. I want to get to work. And I do mean work. I don't mean the mundane type of work that sometimes you accomplish, sometimes you don't, I'm talking about a deep spiritual work that can be extraordinarily difficult, yet extraordinarily fulfilling and meaningful at the same time. The kind of work that's guaranteed to mean something. Even if you yourself may not be able to gauge any sort of advancement or progress or success. The type of work that is inherently and eternally meaningful just because you're doing it. It isn't about the outcome, it isn't about .... It's about the process. It's about the journey. And there's a central concept in this week's Torah portion that really underscores the prerequisite to even think about undertaking this work that we're going to be talking about. It's an idea without which the actual fruits of our labors would be really severely diminished. Jeremy, you're actually making me a little bit dizzy, you're sideways, standing, I don't know what you did there. Ah, there it is, good to see you again. I like watching you when I talk, it's a gauge also to see you, to see how I'm doing.



But you know, I'll give you a clue what this work that I'm talking about is. Because we named this week's fellowship after it. That's right, we're talking about, simcha. We're talking about happiness, about joy. The English word is actually very difficult to define because there's so many words for this family of emotions which provide for meaningful distinctions. There's sasson, simcha, gilah, rinah, ditzah...I'm not kidding. These are all different words that mean some sort of different type of happiness. If a language conveys its priorities based on the variety of words that describe a given thing - like Eskimos, I think they have like 90 different words for snow because that's a big part of their lives. Well, I think it's easy to say, it's safe to say, that the Hebrew people are connoisseurs of happiness.

So, if there are these words that describe happiness, so what sets the word simcha apart? It's important for us to understand this because HaShem makes it very clear in the Torah, that this simcha, this happiness, it isn't just recommended, it's expected. It's necessary to have in our hearts, at least to one degree or another. It's necessary in order to really truly serve HaShem, to do the work that we're going to be talking about today, we have to have simcha. Now there are many verses which express this truth, but the one that is the most pronounced to me, we'll encounter just three Torah portions from now in Parashat Ki Tavo where Moshe enumerates a very scary series of curses and tragedies that the nation of Israel will encounter because as the Torah tells us in Deuteronomy chapter 28, verse 47:

Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with gladness (BeSimcha) and goodness of heart when everything was abundant.  
- Deuteronomy 28:47

So, what is this simcha? And what sets it apart and what makes it so important? So this idea I'm going to present to you, it was beautifully articulated and inspired by the holy and beloved Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who I still miss and grieve for dearly. So Rabbi Sacks points out that in the entire book of Bereshit, Genesis, the word simcha, right? Joy, happiness...it's found only once.

As a matter of fact, the word simcha is found once in each of the first four books of the Torah. But in the book of Deuteronomy, Devarim where we are now, the word simcha is found 12 times and seven of them are in our Torah portion. So due to time constraints, I'm not going to go into all the verses in which, simcha is found, but they all have a certain central theme. If you want the verses, send me an email. Send me a WhatsApp, I'll be happy to send you all of the verses. But there's a central theme - the sanctuary, the Temple, the tithes, the feasts, and so many of these verses, the words are found...you, your sons, your daughters, your maidservants, the stranger, the fatherless, the widow, and being that these are references to communal, national gatherings, they refer to everyone being together.

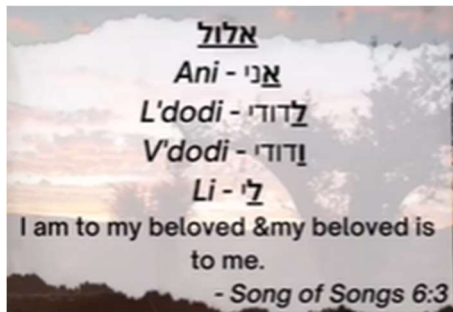
And that is the secret of what simcha is. You know Maimonides, Rambam, talks about how it's not really beautiful in the eyes of HaShem if you just close your gates and celebrate and eat the sacrifices together without letting the poor and the unfortunate in with you. It's not real

happiness. And so what's the secret of simcha? The other words I listed off before, gila, rina...they're all emotions that belong to the individual. They're states of mind that can be achieved by a party of one. But simcha, true simcha, as Rabbi Sacks at least as he defines it, simcha means "happiness shared," right? Happiness shared. There's no such thing as feeling true simcha alone. And to really serve HaShem, we need this simcha. And that's something for us to celebrate here. Because if there is any community in my humble opinion which fits that description, it's our fellowship. It's all of us here together and this is such a blessing because one of the themes of the prayer requests that so many of you send me, are regarding the hearts of your family and your closest friends. Many of you feel a little bit alone on your journey, or very alone. You ask me to pray that their hearts be opened up to the Torah and to connect to the God of Israel, or at the very least that they be opened up to you, that they lovingly accept the unique journey that so many of you find yourselves on. That's right, my friends, you're not alone. I would say that's probably the number one prayer request that I receive from this fellowship.

And by the way, that is also why I...one of the reasons that I hold this fellowship as my sacred honor to be a part of and my holy responsibility to lead. Because it's a collection of some of the bravest and holiest people I've ever met. People who have veered far from the path that is more traveled to the road that is more taken, onto their own path which can sometimes feel isolated and lonely and it would be so easy just to jump off and join the rest of the world and post the rainbow things on Facebook and be accepted and be championed and be virtuous in the eyes of those without really very much virtue. But, you don't. You don't take that route. And that's why we can all be grateful that HaShem has brought us all together. So we can hold each other up and support each other without judging each other. And achieve that simcha, the joy that we can only achieve in its highest form together.

And I believe this is a perfect example of a glimpse into the raw passion of HaShem's heart. We're not here to take care of ourselves, we're here to take care of others and I've actually seen in my life when I look at the friends who I know, that at least in my eyes, you never know, but those that are truly blessed, they're the ones that are constantly consumed with the welfare of others. And I know that this fellowship is filled with people who fit that description exactly. Because there was a time where my own personal welfare wasn't doing so great, and the amount of the flood of love that I received from all of you, it's just something I'll never forget. So, it's perfect because now that we're together, we're in this great place that we can start this sacred work. Because we're right at the starting point, we are in the sacred day of Rosh Chodesh Elul. Right now. So, this is a moment of tectonic shifts in the spiritual world. You know, sometimes on the fellowship, I feel like we're right at the tail end. It's 6:30, 7:00, it's about to end. So we're talking about what's about to end. No, we're right in the middle of these tectonic shifts in the spiritual world in which we transition from a time of concealment and pain and mourning in the month of Av, to the potential for unimaginable revelation and redemption in the month of Elul.

So let's start here. Ok, what do the letters in the word of Elul stand for?



Elul, as you see on the top in Hebrew, the first letter, aleph, stands for ani. Second letter, lamed, l'dodi. V'dodi li. I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me. So let's keep in mind what happened in Elul, because that verse from the Song of Songs, really summarizes. If there's one thing to remember from this whole fellowship, it's that verse is the time that we're in right now.

Now, we remember on the calendar, it was just a couple of months ago, that the nation of Israel built a golden calf and Moses destroyed the holy tablets when he saw it, right? He threw them to the ground and they shattered in one of the most tragically, dramatic points in the entire Torah. Now, let's remember here for a second. We review this every now and then, but it's ok. The important principle regarding the Torah perspective on time. From the western perspective, time progresses forward linearly. Yet, from the Torah perspective, time ascends like a helix of repeating patterns and cycles which are illuminated by the biblical roots at the foundation of that spiral in time.

What I'm trying to say, is that the same energy from the biblical root infuses our time even now. Passover comes and the same redemptive energy and potential in the original Passover from Egypt fills that moment. So, it's true, it's no less powerful now than it was then. So on Rosh Chodesh Elul, what happened? Moses climbed Mount Sinai yet again for 40 days, but this time, the nation of Israel learned their lesson. And they waiting patiently. And Moshe climbed the mountain and 40 days later, he descended with the second set of tables. And he brought with him a message of Divine forgiveness. That 40<sup>th</sup> day, what was that day, that 40<sup>th</sup> day? Think about it. Moses goes up right now, Rosh Chodesh Elul. Forty days later he descends with this forgiveness. What was that 40<sup>th</sup> day? Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. That's right. We're that close. The sacred days, the most holy dimension of time is rapidly approaching. As a matter of fact, it's not just approaching, it's here. Ok, we're in it. We're in that very same 40-day countdown from when Moshe ascends the mountain which is happening today, to the day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, 40 days from now.

So let's make this time count. At least I'm going to try. I'm going to try for me and let's try together for us. I was actually just talking to Shaena about this. And I asked her if she was ready for the chagim. That's what they're called in Israel, for the holidays to begin. And in some way, it seems like no more than a week ago, that I found myself on the eve of the Day of Atonement, and I was, I don't know if you remember, I told you about it last year, it's ok, if you don't. I was struck by this mysterious virus and I was out, I was in bed. I was sure that it was

corona, but it wasn't. And I just prayed for forgiveness for myself and for my family, through gasps and moans, I thought I was dying. But actually, I woke up the next day, a few hours later, I was fine. It was like a 24-hour bug.

But I remember like many years before, feeling like I just wasn't ready. That I didn't have the time or the awareness to really prepare for this holy day. And that I would just rely on HaShem's compassion and His loving kindness to forgive us for our sins. For I certainly didn't feel like I had repented like I should have or like I could have. I felt like I was cramming for a test. Like I had squandered this precious time. And the feeling was just too familiar and I had felt it years in the past. And so, this year, I proposed that we try to do it together. Who's in? Erica's in? Ok, everybody seems to be in. I'm excited about it because we can do tshuva together. It's not really supposed to be just a personal thing. I'm really excited about this because we can be accountable to each other, and we could guide each other through this powerful experience of tshuva, because it's a time of yearning. We're in a time of yearning right now, if we just listen to our hearts, it's happening.

Mankind is yearning for God. All of mankind. And by the way, when you see what Jeremy was talking about, that the fabric, the morality of America is falling apart in so much of the world. If you see it through the prism of them really yearning for God. And things are falling apart, we can really have compassion for that and replace that anger with compassion because all of mankind is yearning for God, even if they don't know it. But God is also yearning for mankind and it's a time which our sages tell us, the King is in the field. Hamelech b'sade. It's actually a song that we sing. I'm going to sing it, I'm going to sing it!

Ari sings.

Hamelech, b'sade, basade....

We repeat those words, again and again. And we just meditate on what that really means. That HaShem is in the field! He's not locked away in His palace so to say. I mean, keep in mind this is all a metaphor. Always ain ode milvado. We're always immersed in godliness, but this is a time where HaShem really, really makes Himself available and open and ready. He's even yearning and hoping for our love and for our hearts and for our attention. This is just such an auspicious time for return, for tshuva. And right now, I'm actually thinking, what do I really want to do? One of the things I want to take on is I want to take my sim card out of my smartphone and put it in one of those old Nokia dumb phones. Even if it's just for a few days. Ok, I'll keep my computer on and I'll check the WhatsApp or whatever there, every now and then if I need to. But it doesn't need to be on me and controlling me. That's just the thought I had right now. But we could get into that a little bit later in the kabbalot in the taking things on and taking on sort of commitments. That's a beautiful thing.

But I think that tshuva is something that we should really work together on during these upcoming fellowships and between the fellowships. That we not only focus on the Torah portion, but each week we focus on a different aspect of tshuva, of returning to God. And that we walk away with a practical action item. Because this idea of tshuva is so lofty and so transcendent that it's difficult to describe. The very concept that we can be born again in this world and that God can be a God of truth and judgment, yet we can truly be forgiven for our actions, that we can start again. If we really consider it and reflect on it to its depth and think about it, it's beyond what the human mind can fathom because again, the English just doesn't do it justice.

The English word for tshuva is defined as what? Repentance. But that isn't exactly accurate because repentance is seeking forgiveness for your sins, but tshuva literally means returning to God. Here's the word in Hebrew:



Tshuva is on the top, but when you just break the word up differently, it's teshuv la'haShem, to return to God, it's actually within the word. What I'm trying to explain and I fear that I'm not going to be successful at it, because every once in a while, just an idea is just eluding me. But, it's like imagine the unimaginable, impossible scenario that someone didn't commit any personal sins, nothing. Tshuva is possible still.

Because built within the fabric of creation, the very nature of human existence, and our soul descending into this world, built into that, is both the possibility and the responsibility of returning to HaShem. And in a way that is not only the result of things that we've broken, even if we haven't broken it, we can still return to HaShem, we can still come close to HaShem. It's not just an individual journey, either it's a journey for all of mankind and for all of creation.

You know, I've quoted often Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Cook, Rabbi Cook. So he talks about the power of tshuva, orot tshuva, the light of tshuva. And he brings an entirely new light to it. Maybe we should actually study it a little bit. Maybe he won't take up the fellowship, we can just do a little supplementary thing. I'll make a little supplementary video and send that out to you. Tell me if you like that idea or if an hour's enough. All right, Robin, you like the idea. Thank you for that. A lot of thumbs up. Ok, did I just say that? Did I just take that on? Anyways, I like the idea. Let's do it, let's do it, let's try to do something like it.

But anyways, it's not an individual journey, it's for all of mankind, salvation for mankind. And redemption for the world are just tied into the fabric of creation itself. So most notably, from a ritual perspective, let's just get into a few details here, every morning, during the month of Elul, we wake up and we blow the shofar. We blast the ram's horn, which as you may know, is the most primal, visceral call to wake up, to return to God, to take an accounting of ourselves. The shofar is really the language of the soul. Oh, my goodness, Ardelle has a shofar, she just pulled

out right now? How did you know? Do you just always have that there? That's so cool. It's the language of the soul, the sound of the shofar. And it affects us in a way that often just bypasses the mind and the intellect and just pierces our deepest and most innermost depths.

The shofar, it also it represents the harmony that we're aspiring to create within ourselves and within all of mankind. For consider what the shofar is. I wanted to actually take a picture for you because we have on the farm this incredible shofar that we just got from one of our rams, but on a physical level, it's the horn of a ram. It's about as animal as you get. It's literally from an animal. And there's a part of us, our physicality that is, we have an animal side to us. But then we blow this thrust of our breath into it, and as we know in Hebrew, the word for breath is neshima, which is connected to the word neshama. We don't have vowels, it's actually the same word, neshima, neshama, which means "the soul." For as our sages, tells us, as well as just basic physiology, that our soul, our life force, it's tied in with our breath. So we take our breath, which is tied in with our soul, that which makes us human and created in the image of the Divine, right? God breathed the breath of life into Adam, and then we thrust it through this animalistic horn of the ram. So spirituality, the highest level of spirituality through the highest level of physicality and what emerges is an audible blast that is the harmonious synthesis of physicality and spirituality. It's harmony, it's a sound that represents the elevation of our physical world through our spirituality which is really in a lot of ways, it's our mission here in this world.

So, of course, it summons the vision of the akidat Yitzchak, right? When Abraham was stopped at the very last moment from sacrificing his son on the altar, on Har HaMoriah. When we see the shofar, we think of that, on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Abraham was about to slaughter Isaac and then he did not. It's the trumpet in which we coronate HaShem as King of the world. I mean, God is the King of the world whether we coronate Him or not. But when we coronate Him in our minds and in our hearts and in our very existence, our personal lives and the collective lives of the nation of Israel as a whole, when that is fully reflective of that internalization of our awareness of the absolute irrefutable truth of God's oneness and sovereignty and orchestration of the world. Well that's what it means to coronate God. And it trickles down to just very simple gauges of happiness. If we really internalize that truth, then we'll be happy.

The shofar, it foreshadows the day of judgment. At the end of the prophet, Isaiah, he declares in chapter 18. This is about the end of days:

All inhabitants of the world and dwellers of the earth, when a standard of the mountains is raised you shall see, and when a shofar is sounded you shall hear.  
- Isaiah 18:3

That's about the end of days. The prophet, Tzfaniah, I think is Zephaniah, I'm pretty sure that Caleb has a nephew named Tzfaniah, he talks about the day of judgment. And it reminds us also of the ingathering of the exiles, right? A great shofar will be sounded to declare our liberty and bring the exiles from the four corners of the earth. And that's why as many of you know, I try to go to every arrival of Nefesh B'nefesh, these Jews that are making Aliyah. And I go there to blow the shofar. Here's a picture of me at one of their arrivals.



I go to the plane, I have to wake up at 4:00 in the morning. But it's so worth it. I lost the other pictures of me actually blowing the shofar as they're coming off the plane. Because, I'm just telling you, I've seen it hundreds of times. It's something that just...it marks the moment, the Biblical and prophetic value of that moment. And when a Jew hears the shofar, especially when he's descending from the plane, he just bursts into tears. The shofar has that ability to do that to you, which is why now, at this great moment, right now, I want to blow the shofar. I want to start our journey of tshuva together. For I myself have not heard the shofar yet. It's a long story, but I didn't get to hear it yet today. And so, we'll be all hearing it together at this very moment. But before I do, I want to ask HaShem to bless us for this endeavor, not only for the blowing of the shofar, but for our journey of tshuva together.

HaShem, we're about to blast the shofar. Please allow it to awaken our souls from the slumber that we've fallen into. Allow the sound of the shofar to kindle a burning desire within our hearts to return to you. Help us during this holy month of Elul to meet you in the field and to pour out our hearts before You like never before. We want to start new. We want to pour it out before You like never before. Please let us fix our sins and our shortcomings and to use them as platforms upon which we can climb to come closer to You than if we'd never fallen to begin with. HaShem, let this sounding of the shofar bring closer the sound of the great shofar of redemption for which we've been waiting for and which we've been praying for. HaShem, please let the sounding of our shofar blast open all of the gates so that there is nothing standing between us and You. So there's nothing standing between now and redemption.

(blowing of the shofar)



Whoohh! Were you able to hear that? I don't know how it would be picked up by the microphone. Did it work? A little bit. My friends, the King is in the field. And while there's definitely work to be done between ourselves and our fellow man and between ourselves and God, the heart of this journey is prayer. This is all about going out and greeting our King who is waiting to be received by us in the field. Imagine the sorrow if He comes out with His arms open, with a soft and open heart and we're not there to greet him. Because Ari has his face stuck in his cell phone. And there's just, there's just such opportunity here. And there's one special prayer that we say. It's a very sacred and mysterious Psalm. And we recite it every morning, following the blast of the shofar. It's Psalm 27. I'll recite it in Hebrew, and then we could recite it together in English and friends, I'm sorry if this is going over time, but I think this is worth it. I'll recite it in Hebrew.

WTT Psalm 27:1  
מְעוֹז־חַיִּי מִמֵּי אֶפְחָד: <sup>2</sup> בְּקֶרֶב עָלַי מְרַעִים לֶאֱכֹל  
אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי צָרִי וְאֵיבִי לִי הִמָּה כְּשִׁלּוֹ וְנִפְלוֹ: <sup>3</sup> אִם־תַּחֲנֶנָּה  
עָלַי מִחֲנֶנָּה לֹא־יִירָא לְבִי אִם־תִּקְוֶם עָלַי מִלַּחֲמָה בְּזֹאת  
אֲנִי בּוֹטָח: <sup>4</sup> אֶחַת שְׁאֵלַתִּי מֵאֵת הַשָּׁם אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שְׁבִתִּי  
בְּבֵית־אֲדֹנָי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם אֲדֹנָי וּלְבַקֵּר  
בְּהִיכְלוֹ: <sup>5</sup> כִּי יִצְפְּנֵנִי בְּסֹכֶה בְּיוֹם רָעָה וְיִסְתַּרְנִי בְּסֹתֵר  
אֱהָלוֹ בְּצוּר יְרוּמָמָנִי: <sup>6</sup> וְעַתָּה יְרוּם רֹאשִׁי עַל אֵיבֵי  
סְבִיבוֹתַי וְאֶזְבַּחַהּ בְּאֱהָלוֹ זִבְחֵי תְרוּעָה אֲשִׁירָה וְאֶזְמַרָה  
לְאֲדֹנָי: <sup>7</sup> שְׁמַע־אֲדֹנָי קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחַנּוּנִי וְעֲנֵנִי: <sup>8</sup> לֵךְ אָמַר  
לְבִי בִקְשׁוּ פָנַי אֶת־פְּנֵיךְ אֲדֹנָי אֲבַקֵּשׁ: <sup>9</sup> אֶל־תִּסְתַּר פְּנֵיךְ  
מִמֵּנִי אֶל־תִּטֹּבֵבֵאף עַבְדְּךָ עֲזַרְתִּי הִיִּית אֶל־תִּטְשֵׁנִי  
וְאֶל־תִּעְזֹבֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>10</sup> כִּי־אָבִי וְאֲמִי עֲזָבוּנִי וְאֲדֹנָי  
יִאֲסֹפְנִי: <sup>11</sup> הוֹרֵנִי אֲדֹנָי דְרָכְךָ וְנַחֲנִי בְּאַרְחַ מִישׁוֹר לְמַעַן  
שׁוֹרְרִי: <sup>12</sup> אֶל־תִּתְּנֵנִי בְּנַפְשׁ צָרִי כִּי קָמוּ־בִי עֲדֵי־שָׂקָר וַיִּפְחֹ  
חֲמֹס: <sup>13</sup> לֹא־אֶהְיֶה אֶל־אֲמֹנֹתִי לְרֹאוֹת בְּטוֹב־אֲדֹנָי בְּאַרְצָן חַיִּים: <sup>14</sup>  
קוּה אֶל־אֲדֹנָי חֲזֹק וַיִּאֲמַץ לִבִּי וְקוּה אֶל־אֲדֹנָי:



1 - Of David. The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; from whom shall I be frightened?

2 - When evildoers draw near to me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and my enemies against me—they stumbled and fell.

3 - If a camp encamps against me, my heart shall not fear; if a war should rise up against me, in this I trust.

And now, let's try to say this together.

4 - One (thing) I ask of the Lord, that I seek—that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all my days of my life, to see the pleasantness of the Lord and to visit His Temple every morning.

5 - That He will hide me in His tabernacle on the day of calamity; He will conceal me in the secrecy of His tent; He will lift me up on a rock.

6 - And now, my head will be raised over my enemies, around me, and I will sacrifice in His tent sacrifices with joyous song; I will sing and change praise to the Lord.

7 - Harken, O Lord, to my voice (which) I call out, and be gracious to me and answer me.

8 - On Your behalf, my heart says, "Seek My presence." Your presence, O Lord, I will seek.

9 - Do not hide Your presence from me; do not turn Your servant away with anger. You were my help; do not forsake me and do not abandon me, O God of my salvation.

10 - For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord gathers me in.

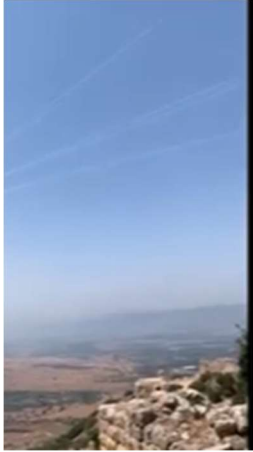
11 - Instruct me, O Lord, in Your way, and lead me in the straight path because of those who lie in wait for me.

12 - Do not deliver me to the desires of my adversaries, for false witnesses and speakers of evil have risen against me.

13 - Had I not believed in seeing the good of the Lord in the land of the living.

14 - Hope for the Lord, be strong and He will give your heart courage, and hope for the Lord.

Friends, we are in the times of redemption. We know it, we can feel it. Let's put everything that we have into our tshuva during this Elul, starting right now. Let's not leave anything on the table. This is the time for the shofar is starting to sound. Not only from our shofar here, but from HaShem's shofar. The shofar is starting to sound in Israel and around the world and in our lives if we just open our ears to hear it. This is missiles that were just launched into Israel from Lebanon yesterday.



And of course, the siren sounded throughout the north and Jews ran into shelters that weren't even ready for them. And they were terrified, but that siren is another shofar. Those sirens weren't only for them in the north, but they were for all of us. For all of us to wake up from our slumber.

Because whether we want to come to terms with it or not, we're always in a place in which an all-out war could break out any moment in which we could breathe our very last breath of air. We are always in the palm of HaShem's hands. And so, when it comes to returning to Him, particularly in the month of Elul, we should not put off until tomorrow what we could do today. For we don't know if there is a tomorrow waiting for us.

So, we said that we would decide on a tshuva action item together. Well, here's a thought that I had. It's just a recommendation. And if one of you write to me and have a better idea, then I will send a message to everybody and say, this is the new one. But I'm just...it's an idea, I'm throwing it out there. So, I recommend, I think, I suggest that we start by doing an accounting of our relationships, of our interactions from this past year. Because, it's almost on some degree that being forgiven by God is a smaller detail than our fellow man. We need to turn to our fellow man and rectify our sins with him and then we turn to God and that is a much surer thing.

So, if you keep a calendar, or even better if you keep a journal. That's maybe another thing I really want to take on. I want to keep a journal exactly for this purpose. So read through it, read through the calendar, read through the journal. If it's a journal, you could really read through it. If it's a calendar, read through the events. I know it could take a while, but try to remember if you've wronged someone or hurt someone or acted dishonestly or there's something that you need to make amends for, if there's something you need to fix. Again, start with last Yom Kippur, right? That would be last September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Start there and just go through. Make a list of your relationships from the closest and the most meaningful, the family, you know our family, our parents, our children, our spouses, our closest friends. And from experience, I can tell you that that's where the juiciest and most painful stuff lies. And make that list and that's it. I think that's it for now. Let's just make the list. Let's just do the accounting. And because in how to approach fixing those things, that takes a little bit more time and thought and we will go into that together. We'll go into that together.

But let me request that you pay attention to the emails that we have coming up because I think that things may be more dynamic in between fellowships than they have been in the past. Because this is just really unfolding for me, it's not like I have a curriculum. And we're just trying to go through this together. And I think that we will all find this process, even before seeking to fix everything and make it right, just thinking it through, it's already purifying. It already feels like there's some serious spiritual hygiene being implemented. It's like Passover, we're looking for the chametz, for that leavened bread throughout our homes. This is what we're looking through right now - what we need to fix, our sins and our shortcomings. But we're going to need HaShem's help for this journey, every step of the way.

So, please HaShem, wake us up from our slumber, bring us to a place of simcha, to true happiness that we can experience together. And fill our hearts with this happiness, HaShem, the happiness in which we're able to experience the joy of knowing that everything that happens to us is the greatest possible expression of Your love for us. Infuse us with that simcha so that we can fully serve You. With a full heart. And return to You with every bit of our soul that we can take an accounting of our actions from a place of joy and not shame and sadness, but from a place of happiness. Let us fix and let us redeem our actions and elevate them. Please, HaShem, bless us with that.

Now, allow me my friends, to end our session with my favorite part, which is to bless all of you with the prayer of Aaron, the High Priest. And again, I'm not a priest, I'm not a descendant of Aaron, but I am of the other tribes of Israel, I'm an Israelite. And just as the priests were kohanim, we are an am kohanim. We are priests for the nations of the world, so it's my greatest joy to bless all of you.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

May God bless and protect you. May He shine His light and His countenance upon you. And may He give you peace. Amen.

Love you, my friends. Excited for this journey together!