

Session 109

Shoftim – Let Us Make Man

4 September 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9xcZ9yuX5Q>

Ari

Hi everybody, can you hear me, can you see me? It is good to see all of you! I'm sitting here in Jerusalem right next to Jeremy. Give me a thumbs up if you can hear me and see me? Oh, awesome, great, great, great. Ok. So, here I am in Yerushalyim, it's been a little bit of a tricky day for me, that's the truth. Because you know, it's a Sunday, which over the past couple of years has become somewhat kadosh for me. Right? Holy for me. And no, I'm not talking about moving Shabbat to a Sunday, that's been done, not our thing. That's definitely not on the agenda. But why has it become kadosh? Because on some level, kadosh means set-aside, right? It means separate. And Sundays has been a day that I have set aside for this Fellowship. It's a day of aggregating much of the learning that I've done for the week, and reviewing it, and reflecting upon it, and internalizing it into my heart. And then, pulling it out of my heart to the best of my ability in creating this Fellowship.

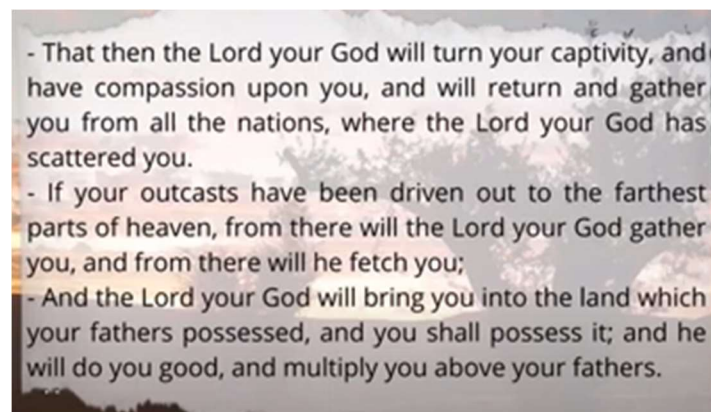
And as Shaena can testify, rarely does the world cooperate with my designs. And more often than not, something happens which pulls me out and ups the pressure and causes me to really put this Fellowship together in greater constraints. It's just part of the game. And this was such a day, because there was today an Aliyah, emergency Aliyah conference. For those of you that know me, this is it for me. I'm obsessed with this idea. Ask Jeremy, for my entire adult life, even into my teens, this is an idea I wasn't able to shake. And it was an event that was a long time coming and it was scheduled despite my protestations for today. Not only for today, but for right now. Because for me, Aliyah, again, it's one of the greatest and most important issues on my heart. And this isn't a new development.

So I was invited to the conference and due to my often vocal calls for Aliyah, which Jeremy sometimes tries to get me to moderate, you know, I was asked to speak. And normally there would be absolutely no question whether...I'm there, I don't care if I'm speaking or not, I'm going to be there ... (audio lost)

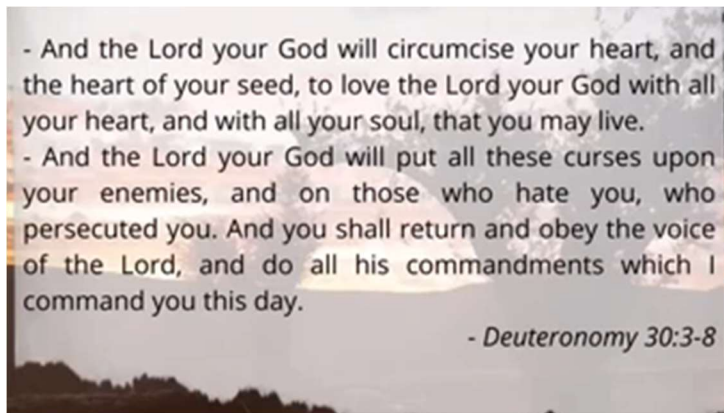
... Can someone tell me where you stopped hearing me? I don't know, maybe in the chats? I don't know. Anyways, I don't want to start over all together because I think it's going to go long anyways. Oh, Aliyah, we're talking about Aliyah, ok. That narrows it down. Ok. You know, the irony that I'm finally in the relative safe haven of Jerusalem where there's DSL and the greatest internet and I'm not at the Farm winging it, keeping my hopes and dreams that HaShem will keep our connection alive. And this is where we lose reception. It's always that way. When you have like faith in the DSL wire and the internet wires, that's when we lose the connection.

Anyways, bottom line is, we're talking about this Aliyah Conference. And I wanted to share a little bit about what I said there because you know we find ourselves right now in Elul. And it's a month of repentance, and it's a month of return, and the bottom line is that I really think that the nation of Israel, returning to the Land of Israel, will facilitate each and every one of our personal tshuvras, our personal repentance, our national repentance, and really the repentance, the tshuva, of all of mankind. And that's why I believe so much of the world is irrationally obsessed with hatefully attacking the nation of Israel and seeking to undermine and subvert Jews living in Judea. Yeah, I don't know if you know this, but Judea's about 6,000,000 dunams, which is about 6,000 square kilometers. It really isn't that much. But anyways, do you know how much of that is actually Jewish settlements? Are you ready for this? Less than 1%. That's right. All the noise, all the international focus and attention and rage, all the irrational obsession, it's over the Jewish settlements of less than 1% of Judea and Samaria. The terrible occupation, less than 1% of Judea and Samaria.

So just try to think about that for a moment. So what's it really about? We've gone through this before. A war against the Jewish people is a war against God. And there's nothing that brings manifested godliness into the world more than the return of the nation of Israel to the Land of Israel. And that's what the haters of Israel are trying to prevent. For reasons either conscious, or far beneath the surface of their consciousness, they're trying to prevent God's revelation in the world. That's what it is. So, very soon, you know, we'll read one example that's spelled out clearly. Let's turn to for a second to chapter 30 of the book of Deuteronomy. We're going to get there soon. I think it's next parsha, or the one after it is. But here's what it is, verses 3 through 8:



- That then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the nations, where the Lord your God has scattered you.
- If your outcasts have been driven out to the farthest parts of heaven, from there will the Lord your God gather you, and from there will he fetch you;
- And the Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and he will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers.



It's right there. It's again and again. We see it right there. We've talked about this before, but actually the first verse we quoted, verse 3, it has a very clear and blatant, but nonetheless, untranslatable phraseology that really conveys the depth of this truth.

It says, "v'shav HaShem et shvutcha." The proper Hebrew should have said, "v'hashivah HaShem et shvutcha." Which would mean that HaShem would return us. But it says, "v'hashav HaShem," and "HaShem will return." When HaShem returns us, He, Himself returns. This is fundamental, not only in Torah, but you know, I can tell you, just reflected in the Land of Israel today in a very real way. We can see this return. We can see it right here in this Fellowship. It's not a coincidence that we broadcast from Judea and Jerusalem. I don't think that a Fellowship from Paris or New York would really have come this far, would have the success that ours has. It's because we are here in Judea and we are here in Jerusalem and we're shining that light.

So in short, I shared with them a very short and succinct message that's been a product of many years involved in this work in understanding the complexities and the challenges around the issue. And the first thing I told them, was I said it's very critical if we're going to do this, that we have to know "why." Why we're doing it. We've spoken about this before. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler said that the greatest service of HaShem, the greatest service of God lies in the refinement of motivation. And I told them that my motivation is not about fulfilling a prophecy from the Bible or from the words of the prophets. But it's because the Jewish people are my family and I love them. And I want them to come home. And I fear for them. I fear for them because I see what's happening around the world, I see what's happening in the exile. And I feel like I see the impending danger. This room full of people were all shaking their heads, yes. And it was such a relief for me to see that I'm not the only one that feels this and sees this and is being kept up at night.

But I said, "But that is not the approach to take." This is from years of experience. I've learned that by going...I can't tell you how many synagogues I've stood up in, and I go there to speak about Jewish education or about Judea and I end up being like... "You're all going to die!" You know, it's not well received. People don't like it; they don't want to hear it. And it's also, I think, beneath the dignity of the Land of Israel for people to be running away from persecution, to go to the Land of Israel. They should be running to the beauty and the dynamic joy and mission and purpose of life in the Land of Israel, of being close to God. That's what we really

need to be highlighting. To bring them here, like a magnet. Like one that's being attracted, but not being repelled from the exile.

And the other thing I said, is that I think that when I'm speaking to synagogues in America, I've seen that advocating and trying to convince people to make Aliyah, what does it mean? To ascend, to actually move to the Land of Israel. It's too much, it's too big an ask. It's so overwhelming that it cripples them and they start making things up about why they shouldn't. They don't want to...when Messiah comes...whatever it is. I realize that a much better and more realistic ask is for a sabbatical. You know, a lot of people, a lot of Jews, I don't know if it's a non-Jewish thing, they take a sabbatical. Every seven years they take a year off and they go somewhere. I say, "Take a sabbatical, come to Israel with your family for one year. And if you want to go back afterwards, you can go back. You gave it a shot." Knowing, that if they just come here for a year, living here for a year with their family, with their children, they will see it and they will feel it and they won't want to go back.

So I shared that with all of them and that was really awesome. And by the way, you know who else has come back? Jeremy. Jeremy has come back and he is here with me in the room right now. And I think he's finally settling back into life at the Farm. And it's great to have him and his family finally back with us. I can't wait for all of you to come and spend time with us at the Farm. We're going to be talking soon, more and more about the big event, October 18th, after the Feast of Tabernacles, Sukkot, where hopefully all of you will be able to come join us. But for right now, let me just introduce my rebbe, my best friend, Jeremy Gimpel, he's right here, right now:

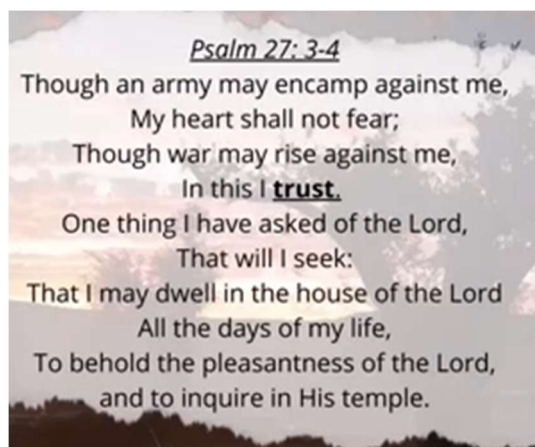
Jeremy

Hey, shalom everybody, great to see you. We're both broadcasting from the same computer. So that was our smooth transition. I wanted to talk today about, I guess it's in the air...it's really about returning. So Ari was invited to this conference about returning to the Land of Israel, we're in the month of Elul now, it's just a movement of return. Now the Jewish tradition has this amazing ability to sort of guide us on the path, in tune with the time. And every single day of the month of Elul, we say a very specific Psalm that King David wrote. So the prophets gave over this secret, saying, if you want to tap into the power of Elul, you want to tap into the power of transformation, of realignment, of return, then there is a specific Psalm that you should meditate on. A specific Psalm that you should say every day. From the beginning of Elul, all the way until the end of the holidays. And that is Psalm 27. And you know, every year I say it, almost every day if I can. And every year I find something a little bit deeper. A new insight. It's like, gosh, the depth is just so overwhelming that King David was able to write such beautiful lessons encoded in his poetry.

And so, this year, our oldest son, Lavi, went up to Yeshiva. He finished High School, and he's now going to spend between a year to two years, depending on what army unit he gets into

and he's just learning Torah now. He's just developing his inner world before he goes out into the real world. And you know, of course, he's trying to get into this elite cyber-technology unit where he's going to have to go to the Technion for four years to get a degree in physics and computer, electrical engineering. I don't know what he's doing. He's too smart for us. But for the next year and a half, he's just learning Torah and developing his inner world. And I actually went up there on his first day and dropped him off. And we learned this Psalm together in his Yeshiva. And this is just such a beautiful insight that I want to share with the Fellowship and what I learned with my oldest son, Lavi.

So Psalm 27 and if we can get it up on the screen, specifically these two verses that come right after each other, verses 3 and 4. And here's what it says:



And so, I just want to focus right here, there was one word that I underlined. Where if you read the poetry, I'm just asking a simple question here. All of these terrible things might happen to me...an army may encamp against me, the enemies will rise up against me. In this I trust...what? What is this that he trusts in? I want to know that. This is the thing that King David is trusting in. He doesn't tell us what it is.

And then the next verse, it says, "One thing I request of God, just one thing I'm asking. I just want to sit in the House of the Lord." It's like, ok, what does he trust in? So, Rashi, in the Midrash said that King David, he's trusting in the very next verse. The next verse is what his trust is in. Can we get it back up on the screen and let's read it together now. Cause it's just peculiar, what is the midrash trying to teach us? So it's saying that, the midrash says, what is David trusting in? He's trusting in his question, one thing I've asked...he's asking a question of God. One thing he's seeking. That I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life. That's what he's trusting in. It's like in Hebrew it's even more. It's like to ask...he's asking about it, he's requesting of God.

Usually, a question is like...well, am I going to get it? Am I not going to get it? I really want it, but I'm not sure. And here David's saying like, no, no, no. That's what I'm trusting in. It's like what does that mean? And I think the deep insight into that Psalm, is saying, what was King David's one request? It wasn't financial success, it wasn't power, it wasn't fame and fortune, it wasn't glamour. He had one thing that he trusted in because everything can be taken away from us. Our health, God forbid can be taken away from us. Our families can be taken away from us. Our wealth can be taken away from us. King David says there is one thing that I can rely on. In this I trust. In this, I have total bitachon. I just want to be close to God. The one

thing I'm asking, my deepest desire is to be close to HaShem. That can't be taken away from me. I can be close to HaShem in the caves near the Arugot Farm as I'm hiding from the King of Israel. I can be close to God in my home. I can be close to God in my work. I can be close to God if I'm fired. And as I'm walking with God in my life, it doesn't matter where He takes me. If that's my goal, I can trust in that. I have no where to go and that can never be taken away from me.

And that's really, I think, what this month is all about. It's absolutely realigning ourselves. Because this year I've had focus on building the Farm and settling the Land and starting this farm and helping that and doing ...it's like, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. We all want to accomplish a lot in this world. But ultimately, the inner, inner, inner core of our being, our deepest desire, our ultimate goal, the fundamental prism through which everything else needs to come from is ...our real goal is to be close to HaShem. Our real goal is to walk with Him in our lives. And so the month of Elul is just opening the doors and saying, "Ok, wait a minute. It's time to fully return to the core of my being, to the one thing that I can trust. To sit in the House of HaShem, HaShem's House." And this world is HaShem's House. Just to be in His Presence, to rely on Him, to walk with Him.

And so, in last Fellowship, kind of like a survival's guide to the month of Elul. How we want to do this. Who do we want to be? And what we want to do with our life? What do we want to be in our days? And then the last one is how we want to live?

And so I remember a deep, beautiful teaching that's so simple. Some of the deepest teachings are just really simple to remember. And it was taught to me by one of my friends, I mean it's like our rabbi friend, a mentor really. His name is Rabbi Daniel Lapid. And he said, "Listen, if I have to give over a teaching to my children, I want to give over three F's. I want them to know these three things. And that's my job. And I added on two more F's to Rabbi Lapid's teaching. And this is just if you're still working on the ingredients you want in your life. And so I boiled them down to five F's.



Faith, it's like, ok, what are we doing in this world? Faith. What are we doing here? What are we learning this year? And what aspect of our journey do we want to grow in faith? How much more knowledge and Torah do we want to learn? The prayers, the time we want to dedicate to that.

Family. There's so much to think about. And I think that the key as we go through these F's is what King David teaches us - מִרְעָ וְעֵשָׂה-טוֹב - סוּר sur mera v'ase tov – Stay away from evil and do good. So what I'm doing, is I'm thinking. Each one of these categories, which are really

simple. I want to take one step away from the bad and one step toward the good. And so, in my family practice, with my wife and with my children, what's one thing that I really want to stop doing? And one thing that I want to start practicing.

And then with my finances, what am I doing with my tzedakah? What am I doing with my money? I mean, things that I do want to do more of? Things that I want to do less of.

Fitness, our guide and our exercise. It's like our life, our body, it's like this is the Temple for our soul.

Now the last one, it's not really "fun," but I couldn't think of another "F." I really want to make sure that I get the last one and make it clear what exactly I'm talking about. But the last "F" is in some ways the destiny of every person. And it's something that HaShem puts in our hearts. That we just love. And we don't know why we love it. We just love it because God put it there. And that interest and that curiosity and that sort of magnet that's of pulling us toward whatever that is, is really kind of a pillar of fire that's guiding where we should go. I don't know why I love the Land of Israel. I love nature, and I love animals. I don't know. I've always loved the Land of Israel as far as I can remember. I've always loved nature and I've always loved animals. And so I'm building a life here out on the edge of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, surrounded by animals in nature.

And so each person. Some people, they love reading. Some people, they love...everyone has their own passions. That's really what it's about. If I had Shabbat in my whole life...I don't have to do anything. I don't need to work, I don't need to fix anything, I don't need to change anything. What do I do when I just want to do what I love? That's the fun. That's like just life for life. In Hebrew, that's when we would say, "L'chaim." Just life for the sake of life. What do we love about this life that makes life amazing? And then think, ok, this year, usually those things get marginalized. Like one day, I'll have time to travel. One day I'll have time to do what I really want to do. Now I'm busy paying my bills and raising my kids and doing this and doing that. No, no, no. This is the time to really say that this year I really want to...I love writing, I love poetry, I love...whatever it is that people love to do. It's to sort of restock and it's so easy. Five "F's," it's like so easy to remember.

Faith, family, finances, fitness and fun. It's like, if we open those up into our hearts and say like, "Listen, what do I want ultimately? I just want to be close to HaShem in my life." And these are the five access points. The five most important things in my life. How do I bring God into those five elements of my life? And this is the time to set the stage. This is the time where it's like you know, you swing at a golf ball, if you're just off by five degrees, by the time that golf ball gets down the range, it's going to be like hundreds of meters off its target. So going into the new year, you really want to get as much clarity as you can. For what we want in our life, for what we don't want in our life.

Stay away from evil and do good. And so, I'm making a public declaration that I was nervous to make, but now it's time. I have been struggling with a certain element in my life for almost as long as I can remember. And Akiva, my second oldest son, he came to me and he said, "You know, Abba, you know what the real job of the evil inclination is?" And I'm like, "No,...isn't it just kind of like to just seduce us, to kind of pull us down, to challenge us?" I didn't know what he wanted me to say. He's like, "No, but what's the checkmate? When does the evil inclination really win?" And I'm like, "I don't know."

"This is what I learned in Yeshiva this week. When we give up. That's what he wants. When there's some elements in our life where we're just like, you know, I just give up. That's absolutely victory for the evil inclination."

And for years, I have been a slave to my love of sugar. Just a slave. I just love...I have a sweet tooth, and I just can't help it. I just love sweet things. I love sweetness in my coffee, I love donuts. And I exercise, so I'm able to maintain relatively...I'm in good shape. But what can I do? I just know that it's actually corroding my insides and really unhealthy. But more than that, why am I a slave to something that's outside of me? I just want to liberate myself from that. And so when I talk about, tzur mera v'ase tov (stay away from evil and do good) the one thing that came to me throughout my trip in the United States, throughout my speaking tour was that this year, please God, I am going to roar against my evil inclination. And what? I've really just kind of given up, but that's what I am. That's just who I am. I'm just the guy that eats sugar. No! I'm not going to let evil inclination have its victory over me.

And so this year, it is a public declaration that I am going to take control back and let my soul be the one that guides my life. In my fitness and in my diet, that I do my very best to only have minimal, minimal, minimal amounts of sugar. I'm working on it. So far this Elul, I am doing...you should ask Tehila, and she's a tough grader. She's always giving me bad grades for my attempts at being better. She would even say, I think, that she's pretty proud of me. And so, I'm just sharing with you my internal work so I now have my tzor mara, that's just a practical example as I'm going through my "F's" I'm like, on my fitness and on my health and well-being. What do I want to step away from and what do I want to step towards? So it's just an example of just going through them and slowly but surely, I'm making practical changes to allow our souls to shine a little bit more. Because as our souls shine, really what's happening is that we open ourselves up for Divine Providence. We allow God to really take hold of our own life. Because our soul and Him are connected. And the more we are connected to our soul, the more we're connected to Him.

And so, as Ari's preaching the return of the nation of Israel to the Land of Israel, here I am bringing the encounter of just our own individual returns to ourselves, to our souls, to letting our souls really shine. And so we should be blessed this Elul to slowly but surely go through those lists and just make one step closer, one step closer, and then who knows? By the end of

all of those steps, we may actually make it all the way to the Promised Land! So, have a beautiful week! And have a beautiful Elul. See you soon!

Ari

I don't know, Jeremy, you're always going to be the sugar guy to me! Good luck, even trying. How many times have you even tried already, Jeremy? Again, and again, and again. And now you're going to give it another shot. Everybody needs a best friend that's going to knock them down just when they're trying to rise up. I'm just kidding. No, the truth is, that it was a crazy hot week this week. And I got these incredible popsicles and I said to Jeremy, he just came inside and he was drenched. I said, "Jeremy, do you want a popsicle?" And he said, "Nope." I was like, "Really? Even with this miserable...there's nothing better than a wonderful, crisp popsicle in this miserable heat." And he said, "No." Wow, that is impressive. I was definitely inspired and then I went on to eat his popsicle and mine as well. And Dvash's too. Yeah, just to let you know I got down to 208, and I've put on about 12 pounds. I'm not going to get into all the details of my own struggles, but I'm definitely working on that too. Anyways, Jeremy, so thank you very much. I believe in you, we all believe in you. Are you staying or are you going? Ok.

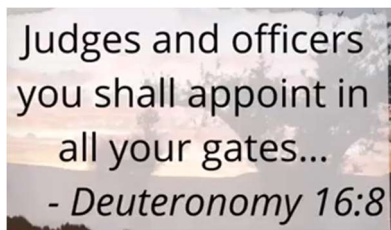
Anyways, so in the email that I sent out, we spoke about the double focus phenomena. You remember that? It sounds like it could actually be an actual thing, but I just made it up myself totally as I was writing the words. But it really should be a real thing because it's a challenge that pops up in life in general. That you know, in the Fellowship definitely it pops up for me a lot. Particularly during the next five weeks where we find ourselves reading the Torah portion while immersed in these very powerful holy days and holy times on the Jewish calendar.

And so here we are in the special month of Elul. And the times of the Hebrew calendar, if you're open to it, they are all encompassing. It's not just like, "Oh, that's what's happening in the calendar. I'm just going to go to work and do my thing." No, we're immersed in its holiness and we're surfing its energy. Our relationship with the calendar and really time itself isn't a highway like in the West. We've talked about this before. It's not a straight, linear line. But it's a spiral staircase that has both an origin and a destination. But as we ascend it, we cycle through the fundamental energies that fueled the great events in our history and in our lives and we're able to tap into that energy and draw it upwards and upwards and upwards. And so, we've a tremendous strength during these days to recreate ourselves.

And in the opening verses of the Torah itself, we learn about the creation of the world, and about the creation of man, and what does HaShem say? He says, "Let us make man." Now I know that there's a lot of theological debates that came from these words and it's very loaded. But in the end of the day, one of the simplest and most straightforward is that he's speaking to us. That He's telling us that the act of creating who we are, is a joint project between the two of us. Between us and HaShem. HaShem is speaking to us saying, "The two of us, let's come

together and you could become who you are, who you're meant to be, who you're destined to be." And this month, the month of Elul, is the time built into creation since the beginning of time, itself, for that self-creation to happen.

And so I was reading through Parashat Shoftim through Elul eyes. And you could really see it staring me right in the first verse:



Now as we know by now, it's a big mistake to, you know, limit the simultaneous truths of the Torah, meaning there's different dimensions of every word, of every letter in the Torah. There are entire books about the crowns above the letters, and the meaning that they have. So while it's true that these words are a directive for how the nation is suppose to establish our just society, you know, ruled and governed by Torah law and enforced by judges and officers, really police officers who were entrusted with that holy task. Right? To judge and to legislate and to enforce.

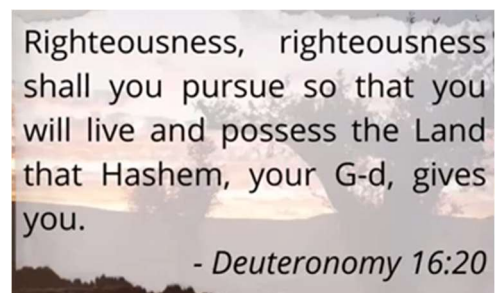
While all that's true, our sages teach us that we can also take that to the most personal level. That we should appoint judges and police officers over our own gates. The gates into our consciousness. We should appoint judges and officers now. In Elul. During this time of return and repentance because we need to be extremely vigilant over what images we allow our eyes to see, what words and what messages we allow our ears to hear, and what words we allow our mouths to say. And of course, as you can hear from both Jeremy and myself, in my opinion, it's a directive not only to judge and police what comes from your mouth, but what goes into your mouth. Because that too is a fundamental part of repentance. For so much of our physical health is determined solely by what we eat and you know, much of what our sages teach us...Rav Kook talks about it. That much of what true repentance is, it starts in the physical world, with our physical bodies. So we have to appoint judges and police to guard our gates, the gates to our souls.

So another reason the sages share for why the Torah portion of Shoftim always falls during the month of Elul is alluded to in one of the main themes of the portion of Shoftim, which is the idea of the cities of refuge. Did you guys read through the Torah portion ahead? You know what I'm talking about, the cities of refuge. It's such an interesting idea. I could really do a whole Fellowship, just as much investigation and study I've done, just about that. What's a city of refuge in short? The city of refuge, it's a place that a negligent killer, meaning someone who had killed another, but not from a place of ill will or malice, but rather just mere negligence and carelessness. So this person can go and hide from the avengers. Not the comic book avengers, but the family of the person that they accidentally killed. Because he did do something wrong. When you're negligent, even if it's understandable negligence, you were negligent! There's something that happened there. In other words, the city of refuge is a place that he could flee

to be safe from retribution. And actually, on some level, to receive atonement, if by nothing else, just by virtue of the fact that he's lived and confined to this city for so long.

So the Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches...are you ready for this? That what the cities of refuge are in space, Elul is in time. Elul is in time. Elul is a refuge in time. It's a bubble in time, it's an actual safe space into which we can take refuge from the trappings of the past, from certain ways of thinking during which we can really free ourselves from the short-comings that confine us. And simply just take refuge in the mercy and the good will of the King. Of the King of the Universe that is waiting for us out in the field so to speak, right now! At this very moment. And I don't mean just the physical fields. In the fields. Everywhere, wherever we are. We're in the fields. This is where HaShem is. He's with us, right now. He's available to us right now. He always is. But we don't have to fight the battles and pierce the callouses to get there. This is a very special time, I don't know if you've felt it yet, but it's definitely true.

Ok, so let's get back into the text. Now the next verse talks about not taking a bribe and teaches that if you do, it will pervert your eyes. You may think that you can take a little here or a little there, or that it's not a bribe, that it's just a gift. Or that you received a gift from someone who's now your litigant, but you're conscious of everything, of all the factors there and you're aware enough and it won't affect your judgment. What the Torah is telling us is, "No." Nobody is immune, it will affect your judgment. It's part of the human condition. HaShem created us. He should know. A bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and make just words crooked. That's directly from the Torah itself. Now let's go on to the next verse, chapter 16, verse 20:



Tzedek, Tzedek, it says it twice. Righteousness, righteousness. Now there's a lot of talk and thinking why does it say, righteousness twice? Now this was brought to my attention by Hanna Perlberger who points out the well-known spiritual idea of "as above, so below." We've talked about this before – as above, so below. That the physical world is a reflection of a deeper and more transcendent, spiritual realities. And the double words hint to these two dimensions. Now there are numerous times that we see double words and double names. Right? We see HaShem calling Abraham, saying, "Avraham, Avraham!" The same with Ya'acov, and the same with Moshe. Actually, look this up just to really make sure it's true because I didn't remember where it said, "Ya'acov, Ya'acov," but indeed, for both of them.

And one of the primary understandings of this phenomenon, is that when we see these double names, the earthly version of Abraham for example, is being compared with the heavenly version of Abraham. And for great luminaries like Abraham and Jacob and Moshe, you know the two versions – the earthly version and the heavenly version, were nearly identical. Right?

The heavenly version is our greatest potential. What we could be if we maximized every moment. The best potential version of ourselves of who we could be.

Now here, keep in mind, Jacob isn't being compared to Avraham. It doesn't say, "Avraham, Ya'acov," or "Avraham, Moshe." Moshe isn't being compared to Ya'acov. We're being compared to our own potential. I always think of the famous story we just said it a few weeks ago, but I just love it so much. The famous Rav Zusha, who's known to have said, "If I were offered a deal where I could trade places with the Patriarch Abraham, so that he would be Zusha and I would be Abraham, I wouldn't take it. For although I would benefit by being Abraham, what gain would there be for the Almighty? He would still have one Abraham and one Zusha." Meaning Zusha is being compared to Zusha's potential. And we're being compared to our potential, the heavenly version of us, to the ideal version of who we could be.

So getting back to our verse. So the repetition of the same word happens. And you know, according to this thought, this is what's happening here, is that the juxtaposition of the heavenly ideal and the earthly reality. And so in this verse, we're being told what HaShem expects of us. For our lives. And that we're living as individuals, to be an earthly reflection of the justice and righteousness in the heavenly realm. Meaning that there's the Tzedek up in heaven, the perfect one, and a Tzedek here on earth that's imperfect. And it's our job to bring those two together. And it's a huge ask and it's a very high aspiration, but is there anything else we prefer to dedicate our time to this world? So there is Tzedek of this world and there's tzedek in the heavenly realm. And Elul is the time for us to bring those two images in concert with each other, in harmony with each other.

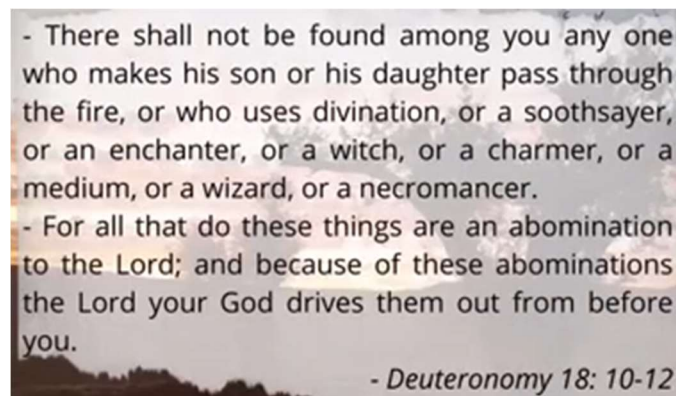
And as we go further into our parsha, we read about what we're to do if there's evil in our midst. I'm sort of flying through it right now because I see that we're running low on time, but there's evil in our midst and how we're responsible to destroy that evil that's within us. That's Elul. That's the time when we have this rare opportunity to gaze deep within our own souls. See where we've gone astray and purge ourselves of the evil that's made its way in. I'm actually going through this workbook right now that's a special workbook for the month of Elul. If you want it, send Tabitha a message – tabitha@thelandofisrael, and she will send it to you. With your permission Tabitha, if that's ok. And then maybe we could go over it together next weekend, we can talk about it. It's a very personal thing, but it's a worthwhile endeavor. Just for each of us to be able to gaze within. It's such an opportunity for us. It's like what we have on Passover when we're looking for crumbs of bread, here on Elul, we're looking for evil, the way we've been led astray. And we have eyes, we're given eyes if we pray enough, we're given the eyes to see it.

Ok, so if we have questions about any of this, HaShem says we should go to the Cohanim, the Levites, we should go to the judges that have been appointed. And we should follow their words and their directives. Which to me is another clearly articulated insight into the Divine

power of creation and legislation, that HaShem has bestowed upon mankind, upon the sages, upon the Oral Torah. And it's like, wow, we're not going to get into that whole discussion again. But I see that it's really an issue that a lot of you want to discuss. And you're sending me messages and I'm tempted to dive further into this right now. I really am. Particularly because of the very beautifully stated question sent to me by our very own Fellowship member, Lisa Gerard. I want to just read her question and answer it and touch on it and this would have been a very perfect entry point. But hopefully, we'll be able to do that soon. But please reach out to me if you have any questions about this or any other issue.

Anyways, that'll have to wait for now. We just have so much to cover. So let's go on reading in the portion of Shoftim through Elul eyes. So we see the laws of appointing a king over Israel, how it doesn't seem like it's a great idea. How despite HaShem allowing it, there seems to be at least a slight offense taken, that HaShem takes offense. As we see it in the book Shmu'el when the nation requests a king. How the ideal situation is that HaShem alone should be king over us. That we shouldn't want a king of flesh and blood. But HaShem understands that we're people and that we're human and He understand that that's a desire that we have. And He gives us the way to fulfill that. It's clear when you look at Jewish history. That king after king after king descended from David, evil and evil and evil. We don't really need a king of flesh and blood over us. And if we do have one, his primary function is to remind us that HaShem is our ultimate King. The king is there to remind us and make sure that we don't forget that HaShem is our ultimate King. He should always have a sefer Torah with him. So he remembers the source of his own strength. And where he gets the legitimacy of his own rule from.

Anyways, the Torah then goes on to tell us about various types of idolatry. And then clumps those foundational prohibitions of idolatry with seemingly less toxic activities. Let's look inside, Deuteronomy chapter 18, verses 10 to 12:



And I'll tell you, it brings me back to when I was in High School and friends of mine were going to things like this and I didn't know. I wasn't so educated, but intuitively, I just knew it didn't feel right. That there's certain things we're supposed to know and certain things we're not supposed to know. So even if what they would say is true, which I didn't believe, maybe we're not supposed to know that.

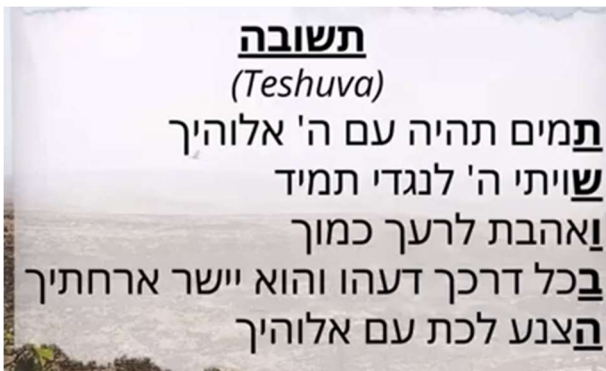
And now it becomes a little bit more clear why not. If we start looking a little bit deeper, we see a theme here which I think may be one of the greatest secrets to the simplicity of returning to HaShem in repentance in the month of Elul. Because what I don't want to have happen is

this Fellowship to end and say, “Ari, you just said a lot of things and my head is spinning and he wasn’t thinking very clearly, and what do I do now...where do I go with this? So we just saw the saw the prohibition against idolatry which of course we get the “then.” Then what? Astrology, a medium, a palm reader? What is so wrong with that? So I think the answer is given in the very next verses in the Torah. So we’re talking about chapter 18, verses 13 to 14:

- You shall be perfect with the Lord your God.
 - For these nations, which you shall possess, listened to soothsayers, and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you so to do.
 - Deuteronomy 18:13-14

Tamim – perfect. So it says there in the text, the translation says, “We shall be perfect.” You know the Hebrew word is tamim which can also be defined as maybe, simple, not complicated, which is actually the theme of you know, of all the activities we just read. They all have one thing to connect them. They all convey a lack of trust. Think about it. When does an army send spies and seek to gather intelligence on what awaits them? When they’re scared, when they don’t trust, when they feel like they need to take matters into their own hands.

Jeremy has shared before the idea of the word, tshuva in Hebrew. That each letter of the word conveyed a fundamental step necessary in the tshuva process. Tshuva is composed of these five words, so here's the whole word. Here’s the slide. Tabitha, could you pull that slide up?



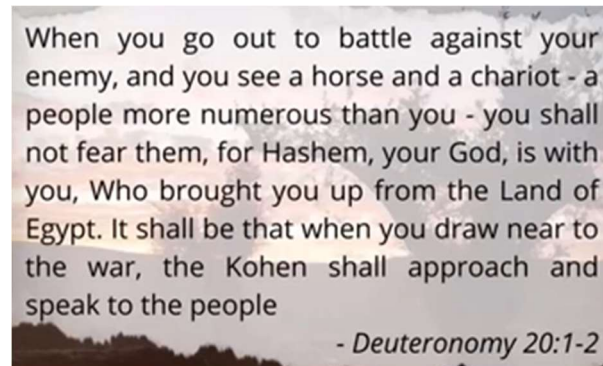
So it’s a beautiful slide. HaShem should be opposite me always. Right? Meaning everything should be equal before me. You should love your neighbor as yourself. And all of God’s ways, you shall know Him. But the first one, is the verse that we just read, is the verse from our Torah portion – we shall be tamim, we shall be simple.

Now the great commentator, Rashi, he explains that in the case of the word tamim, it doesn’t mean perfect as we said before. Because that’s impossible. But it means more whole-hearted, and trusting, and accepting. Whole-hearted, and trusting and accepting. We don’t need witchcraft or palm-readers to know the future. Because people that go to those things are afraid of what the future holds. And they want a glimpse and we’re not. Because we know that HaShem is our King and He’s our Abba. And He’s our Father and He is leading us along the way and we trust Him wholeheartedly without fears or doubts.

And so, how can we be tamim with HaShem? How can we be wholehearted and trusting and accepting with HaShem? I think the answer is by calmly accepting what comes our way. With equanimity. By accepting what happens to us with serenity, or to at least know that that’s the

goal, that that's the aspiration. The Torah goes on to tell us about the cities of refuge which we spoke about before. And there's much to say, there's so much beauty and depth, but I can't go into that right now. But I want to.

But, then we learn about the idea of these two high priests. One is anointed to be the High Priest of Israel. And the other is called the Cohen Mashuach Milchama – the High Priest appointed for war. Chapter 20, verses 1 and 2, this is what it says:

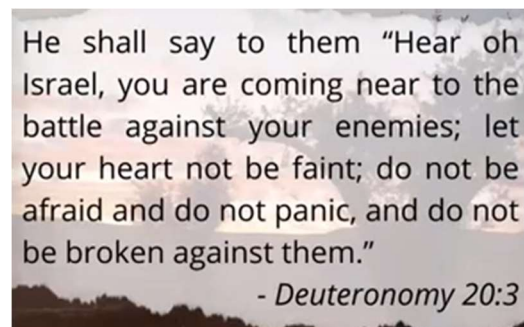


When you go out to battle against your enemy, and you see a horse and a chariot - a people more numerous than you - you shall not fear them, for Hashem, your God, is with you, Who brought you up from the Land of Egypt. It shall be that when you draw near to the war, the Kohen shall approach and speak to the people

- Deuteronomy 20:1-2

Now this Cohen is called Mashuach Milchama, which of course comes from the word, Mashiach, which we call Messiah, but really quite literally, it means anointed. That's what the Messiah is, every king of Israel is anointed. Anointed with olive oil, certain parameters to it. But this Cohen was anointed for this singular purpose. He was anointed for this reason alone. To give this rousing and inspiring speech

that was pretty much written for him by the Torah. I'm sure he shared of himself, but that was the message. Let's see exactly what he says here in verse 3:

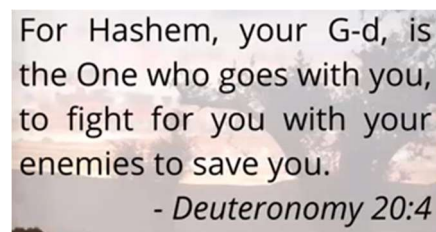


He shall say to them "Hear oh Israel, you are coming near to the battle against your enemies; let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid and do not panic, and do not be broken against them."

- Deuteronomy 20:3

And what's the reason that he gives that we shouldn't be afraid? Just picture this...we're standing in this battle formation and we see the enemy approach, far out-numbering us. By the way, it's always been that way. HaShem tells us it's always been that way, it always will be that way. We are always going to be far out-numbered by our enemies. And hear their tanks and their artillery and their calvary and their trumpets

and their battle cries. It's intimidating. It must be terribly, terribly, terrifying. We've gone out to war. I know that there's some nerves that happen there even to the bravest, right? And what's the reason given that we shouldn't be afraid? What reason does HaShem give us? The next verse, verse 4:



For Hashem, your G-d, is the One who goes with you, to fight for you with your enemies to save you.

- Deuteronomy 20:4

Because HaShem is with us. That's it. So we shouldn't be scared because HaShem is with us. And my friend, Rav Micah Hyman shares that this is not only relevant when it comes to actual war. I mean, how would that apply to all of us, even me right now? We're in Elul, we're not going to an actual war in the battlefield right now. How is it relevant to

us? And the answer is that we're all fighting a war. One war or another. Often, it's more than one war at a time. And we all know that this is true. HaShem puts us in this world, that part of

the very nature of life itself, at least the life that you're living right is that you're going to be at battle.

I was talking to my friend, trying to convince him to go to therapy. And I was telling him about therapy and how I really believe that if you can, do it. And you can find a god-fearing therapist, then I think you should. I know that right now, it's become less of therapy and more of life-coaching, but there's a fine line between the two. And I told him the truth, which is that I really believe that the very act of your soul being thrust into a body in this world is a traumatic event that needs healing and therapy. Just being alive, we need therapy. You know if we're living lives that are seeking to walk with HaShem, to shine a real light to the world, then we will without a doubt be thrust into many battles and need to fight no shortage of wars. And I really believe that HaShem wants us to fight these battles.

You know Rav Micah pointed out that there are wars in the Tanakh in which the children of Israel emerge victorious without doing anything. Right? That's what HaShem tells us when they were parting the Sea and all of the greatest army in the world, the Egyptians were wiped out. God will do war for you and you shall remain silent. The nation of Israel didn't have to do anything. Didn't have to pick up a sword or a spear. But why is that the exception? Why is it that the exception and not only in Jewish history, but in our lives? Why do we need to pick up weapons to fight if indeed HaShem is fighting through us anyways? And I think the answer is because during the wars of our lives, that's when we're most built up. If there's one truth I've arrived at personally and experientially, it's that one. And it's funny that it happens that way because it's during those wars that you're using every shred of energy and focus that you have, the colors are swirling, the dust is in the air. And that's when HaShem...I guess it's like a slight of hand thing. That's when He starts doing things, tremendous things within our hearts and we're not even aware of it, we don't even see it, we don't even know it until after the fact. That it's during war time that we can really best flex and demonstrate our faith and grow in the highest levels of trust in HaShem. It's during war time that we can grow the most and we can most refine our faith in ways that we just simply can't during times of peace and serenity.

Ok, so I want to just take a moment here and duck out of the text for a second and share with you a little bit of a vulnerable, personal experience that I had this week. Because if there's even one of you that may identify with this and be helped by it, it would be worth it to share it. And all of you know by now that I am very, very far...there are people that right me and say, "Ari, you're such a tzadek." No! I am not a tzadek, I am not, I will tell you right now, I am not. I aspire to be a ba'al tshuva. I aspire to be someone that is returning in repentance before God everyday of my life. That is the process. And that's a very noble aspiration.

And so, last week, on the Fellowship, we entered the month of Elul. Now we all have things that we're working on to improve in our character and in our lives. And you know one person's failure could quite literally be another person's success. Perhaps a shy, meek person may be

working to be more bold. And for them, raising their voice in righteous anger may be a victory. And for others, they may have their victory by defeating their temper and responding to someone meekly, whereas they could very easily be bold and scream. We could never know what is a failure or a success for anyone or anything else. If we have any hope in the repentance process, I believe we really need to stay in our lane and focus on ourselves here.

Anyways, there is something very important to me that I've been working on. The details are between me and HaShem. I don't want to go into all the details. It's just not worth it to go into right now. But now, during the holy month of Elul, where all of the opportunities are there, after I just gave an incredible Fellowship last week about Elul and all the opportunity, I literally just fell on my face. It was really hard for me to come to terms with. That during the month of Elul, where matters most, that's when I fell so hard. How could such a thing happen? Now I'm not sharing this with you as a confessional. Again, that's the holy day on Sunday, it's a different religion. We're not here to confess things to each other unless it's wrongs that we've committed to each other. I'm sharing this with you because HaShem blessed me to use this fall as a platform to climb even higher. Because it could have gone in any direction and HaShem blessed me when it came to this.

I really turned my heart to HaShem to ask Him why I fell. Why I felt like He let me fall. And the answer that I believe He put on my heart is that He let me fall because He wanted me to come closer. That before that dramatic fall, that I had fallen into a slumber without really realizing it. That I had become complacent where I was. And the goal here in this world is not to become complacent, but to come ever closer to HaShem, to continuously grow. And I remember learning, I don't remember who taught it to me, but I learned that life is like an escalator. Have you guys heard this idea? If you're not proactively going up, you're going down. And my fall was a message to me that I was not going up. That I was falling and I was going down and I needed to see it. I needed to be shocked into seeing it in order to ascend. And that fall, it really did light a fire under me that I don't believe would have possibly been there without the fall. So in other words, it was a descent in order to ascend. Right? A descent in order to ascend.

Rebbe Nachman taught that actually becoming conscious of the distance between us and HaShem is what initiates the process of return. What initiates the process of tshuva, of return to HaShem. My friend, Pesach, he put it like this. He summed up that the entire month of Elul is about being close to God while holding the awareness that we're far away. Being close to HaShem, while at the same time, holding the awareness that we're far away. That balance, right in there, that's Elul. And he explains that the month of Elul is often filled with unexpected surprises and events that challenge our notion of stability. When he told me this, I was like, "Wow, talk about emet, talk about truth, you just read me." Change becomes the only constant of Elul, that's the only constant. You know, there's familiar scenes and comfort zones, they just become violated. And eventually we come to the point often that we cry out to HaShem, we just cry out, "Help! I cannot do this on my own."

And perhaps, HaShem's response to our shouts is mirrored in the sound of the shofar, the ram's horn. Every morning we blow the shofar in our prayers. Awakening our soul. You know, its blast shocks us into this reality that transcends time and space and words. You know the shofar begins where words end. And it transcends all of that. And it just blasts this truth into our soul. Awaken! Wake up, wake up from the unconscious, from the spiritual slumber and see that ain ode milvado. There's only HaShem, there's nothing else.

And so, I'm sharing this with you about this terrible fall for me because it really was valuable for me. It helped me wake up from my slumber. And I didn't beat myself up about it too much, which I tend to do often. Because I know the cycles of darkness, that too much negative self-talk and self-punishment can take you. And it's Elul! The King is in the field. Time is too precious to waste it beating myself up. And very often when you go that negative route, you think you're doing something very virtuous and righteous by scolding yourself and punishing yourself. But very often it takes you into dark places and you end up falling into the same sin again and again. I simply took an accounting. I knew my heart. I know that I want to come back to HaShem. I didn't need to punish myself. I took an accounting and truly believed that I'm closer to HaShem now, than if the fall hadn't happened. It's like a failed army mission or a successful one. But a failed one in specific. The unit comes together and we do this post-mortem, we gather these lessons and wisdom from the fall and then we get right back out there.

And so my friends, I want to bless all of us that we should be able to return to HaShem with full hearts, with tamim, with a simple, whole-hearted faith. That every single thing that comes upon us, we shall be able to accept it with simplicity. Willingly accept it, with a simple trust that a sheep has in a shepherd. That's what Jeremy was talking about. That HaShem is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Right? We should have trust in HaShem like a sheep has trust in a shepherd. Going where the shepherd takes him without question. That we trust HaShem that our lives are exactly how HaShem wants them to be in order to maximize our opportunity to serve Him with a full heart and to come closer to Him than we would in any other permutation or life situation that we could possibly imagine.

I bless us that we remember that one thing, that one thing in our life...things would be so good if that wasn't happening. That one thing in our life that we wish were different. That that is the reason we're here in this world. That our greatest service in HaShem lies in that thing. It is our effort and our exertion in serving HaShem through that one thing, that one thing we wish was different. It's that effort and that exertion which warrants all of the other pleasure and blessings in our lives. I really believe that. All the other visions of the way that things could be, all that other stuff, it's a fantasy. It's an idol that we've construed with our own mind that we've made for ourselves, it's an illusion. Things are exactly perfect as they are right now. And we have to just accept it openly, with a tamim, pure heart.

And I bless us that we should all have hearts of tamimut, and we should have an Elul of trust in HaShem. And through that trust we come closer to each other and closer to HaShem than ever before. And so now allow me to bless you with the blessing that Aaron the High Priest blesses the nation of Israel. And I am of course, am not a priest, but I am a nation of priests. And so it's my privilege to bless all of you.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

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

Love you all. Stay in touch. Reach out with everything. All the time. Questions, thoughts, if I don't respond, send it immediately again, please. I'm so sorry about that, I'm trying. But let's stay connected, we need to be connected right now. Love you all, shalom, shalom.