

Session 199
Bracing to Let Go
13 October 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzy8FTXa42A>

Ari

Shalom my friends, it's so good to see all of you. Shalom, shalom. As I always ask, can you hear me? Give me a thumbs up. You can, ok, great. I'm grateful for that because I'm broadcasting from here in Judea. We're giving it another shot, please HaShem, let the internet stay strong and let it work. That was a powerful bit, Tabitha, I don't know how to follow that. It's so good to see all of you, like as always.

But as opposed to past Fellowships over the past months where I feel like seeing your faces was a source of strengthening during a time of extreme volatility and tumultuousness. You know it felt like those times in the army where there was some sort of large scale mission with training or an actual mission where different units were split up in different ways, for doing different things. And then you run into your friends from your immediate unit and you're just so happy to see a close friend during that sort of time of confusion. Whether you're in the army or not, you can sort of visualize that, you can understand. That's how it felt, there was an element of that feeling in how I felt when I saw your beautiful faces during many of the Fellowships over the past few months. Like...ohhhh...it's good to see all of you for this fleeting moment during this insane hurricane of craziness that is life in Israel.

But in the whole world, we're all in it together, especially all of you. I don't know where each one of you are physically. I'm looking at your faces and you know, Arkansas and Holland and whatever. I can see that, but I know that you're all really with us spiritually, emotionally, here. We've been in this together. But this moment feels for me a little bit different, the moment feels different. I don't know, maybe it will change and go right back to that. But right now, it feels like the dust is settling a little bit. Perhaps because I just spent the past full day settling down the whirlwind in my own heart. Right?

Just to give you an idea. Prayers started at 7 a.m. at Shirat David in the settlement of Efrat where I spent Yom Kippur which I have been spending there for the past number of years. I'm very connected to the community and Rav Shlomo Katz is my rebbe and my beloved friend. So I go there and I went there this year, also. And prayers started at 7 a.m. and went until 2 p.m. Straight, straight through without a moments break. And then, at 2 p.m., there was a 90 minute break until 3:30 and then we continued until the end, until the evening prayers. So we pretty much prayed for 11 out of 12 ½ hours.

And I won't claim that I was able to focus for the whole time or that I was deeply immersed the entire time. I would say that no one can say that! But I was actually surrounded by people that can really say that. My dear friend Yakiel Johnny Stein, Yakiel Stein, he was next to me and he

was crying and shaking and weeping the entire time. Ok, and so I was surrounded by people of that spiritual stature. I'm not of it. But, you know, there were times...I feel like I always like "pour it on the table." I don't know why. But I do, I just do. I feel like it would be inauthentic for me to otherwise not do so. There are times when my mind would wander off to the craziest places. I don't know what's going on in Yakiel's Stein's mind, maybe he's got that too, maybe really he does. I'm going to ask him, I'll tell you what he says.

For example, just to convey how absurd...there are times I go to YouTube to watch an important clip, an important teaching. It always starts off real and important. And then something stupid pops up on YouTube and I just...click on that and get lost in that for a few minutes. It's really a few minutes, a few minutes. You know, I never watch shows, ever. I never watch shows or mini series or movies that are out. Never! I can't remember the last time I saw a movie. I don't have the time for it and I also don't want to open up my consciousness and let that in.

But every now and then, I'm watching a class on YouTube, something, and it pops up and I'll click on a YouTube short. You know what a YouTube short is? We put out YouTube shorts every now and then. It's the YouTube clips of our generation. It means that it's under one minute, which can really add up. And so I got to watching YouTube shorts this past, I don't know, maybe about a month of random ridiculous highlights from a show that I've never watched called Yellowstone about cowboys in Yellowstone Park with Kevin Costner. Do you know what I'm talking about? I won't judge you, believe me. Yeah, there's people that know what I'm talking about. Never saw this show, but I'm watching highlights.

Anyways, there are times where those YouTube shorts of Keven Costner riding a horse jumped into my head during prayers. Which even though it was in my own head and no one else knew, it was still embarrassing. I was embarrassed in front of myself, embarrassed in front of HaShem. But I also tried not to fight against it too much. I tried not to resist it. Because from experience I know that trying to resist, that they say whatever you resist, persists and will only make it stronger. It would also be denying whatever message was tasked for that little thought to bring with it. Meaning, there's a reason that it popped into my head. We know that everything that we experience, even our own thoughts and ideas are from HaShem.

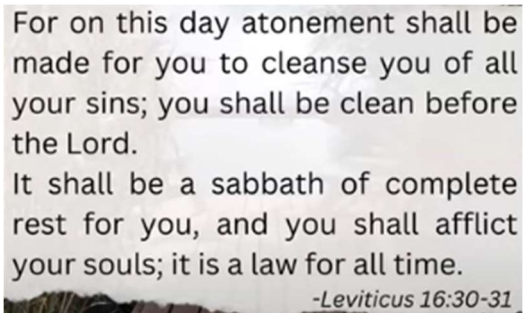
And so, I've tried to take those with me, those little YouTube shorts, offer those up, to bring them into my experience with me. To repent for those thoughts as well. If I wasn't supposed to incorporate them into my prayers in some way, then why would they be rushing into my mind? You know, I accepted those as a message that every minute counts. Each of those was a minute. One minute! But that minute is what rushed into my mind. So, every minute counts.

So much so that when I got back immediately after Yom Kippur, and oh my goodness, I was so exhausted and needed to unwind, I went and I saw...I was going to watch a thing on YouTube, and I saw that and I was like, "NO!!!" I saw you during my prayers, you're out! And I didn't

even go. I turned off YouTube and I uninstalled it. So, ok, so there was that, so that's good. It's like every minute counts. Every minute of our lives is part of who we are.

And in some ways, it's those free minutes, the free minutes, they're the ones in some ways that matter most. You know what we do with those free minutes, that I think defines who we are in many ways, I've had this thought before. That our free time, our really free time, what do we do with that? That defines who we really are. Maybe not totally. But on some level.

Anyways, a lot happens during those 11 hours of straight prayer. It's a journey. And it may sound oppressive, 11 hours of prayer. If that sounds oppressive to you, raise your hand. Well, that's not shocking, this is the Fellowship, the holiest group of people I know. Of course, but anyways, there's time where I'm just not in the holiest place and it feels oppressive. But, even more so, for me and Shaena this year, the baby was up crying all night and we were both exhausted. But that's ok because you know there's an element of it that's supposed to be...I don't know if the word is oppressive, let's look in the actual text in Leviticus, chapter 16. It describes Yom Kippur. It says:



For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the Lord.
It shall be a sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls; it is a law for all time.
-Leviticus 16:30-31

Now as we've learned before, we believe in different facets or dimensions of in English what's called "the soul," right? To oversimplify without going into all the details, there's the neshama, the godly soul. The part that is constantly, perpetually, always, no matter what we do, connected to HaShem at the deepest level. That is what animates us, the godly soul.

And then there's the nephesh, the animal soul that we have as well. We've spoken about this before, I'm sure. Because you know on a physical level, our body does have many, I think all of these same physical needs and impulses that animals have. You can't deny that we have a real animal part within us. And that is the dimension of the soul that we're seeking to afflict and to minimize in order to allow the godly soul to shine forth and allow it to "run the show." Right? For this special transcendent day. You know that's a big part of our mission in this world. To allow our neshema, our godly soul, not to deny the physical, but to navigate it, to harness it, to bring it in the right way, to bring that physical soul into service of God, of the Creator of Heaven and Earth. That's a big part of it, that's the interplay.

So we've learned before, we believe in different dimensions of that. So for me personally I try to embrace the physical pain that I experience on Yom Kippur. Rather it's hunger, usually for me it's more thirst, or in my back, my feet, my legs, exhaustion. I try to embrace it as a rectification for when I let either desire, food, drink, laziness, to run the show to dictate my actions during the past year. I try to experience this pain as a fixing for that.

So one of the realizations I've had over the years that has relaxed me from the pressure that I used to feel and put on myself, is about whether I'm in it. Whether I'm experiencing it to the max, with the proper thoughts and intentions. I've gone through this before, a lot of holidays, I've realized that this is not only a process that is happening to me, but I'm actively participating...I'm participating in it AND it's happening through me, it's happening to me, it's flowing through me. And this experiential realization that it's happening through me and to me and not just my assertion, asserting my will and trying to make it happen. It's a balance, it's a dance, but they're both very real. And this realization has helped and is fundamental in removing some of the pressure involved in needing to make sure that I'm always in it. I just sort of try to allow it to be. I still struggle, but don't get me wrong, because we need to do everything we can to be IN it. Right? But at the end of the day, our success and our failure like everything else, is in HaShem's hands and we can just rest assured knowing that that is the case.

And the truth is, that for any of us here in the Fellowship that want to be in this journey right now, because we are still in it, we're in the midst of it right now, we are all...everyone of us in this Fellowship, we're all in it. If you've been participating in the Fellowship live, I think live adds just another deeper level of connection and participation, even if we're not able to speak with each other. Just the fact that we're live is one dimension. But even if we're just watching it afterwards, we're in this journey together. And it's different for each and every one of us.

For me, it's difficult particularly right now to do this Fellowship. I struggled a lot, sort of putting it together, because we're all going through this and it's sometimes difficult, it's even a little bit scary to step out of it while you're in it and look at it from the outside while you're going through it. But if there's anyone who I would try to do it with, it's all of you. So like I said, it's a bit challenging to do this Fellowship because we're right smack in the middle of the spiritual journey. And so I want to sort of give you a snapshot of what's going through my heart, what the journey's like for me right now. But before I do that, I want to hand the Fellowship over to Jeremy, who himself has some beautiful things, I don't know what they are, but I'm sure they're beautiful, to share about these very special days we find ourselves in, right now. Having finished Yom Kippur, going into Sukkot. Go ahead, Jeremy, shalom.

Jeremy

Alright. Hi everybody, it's really nice to see you. It's nice to wave, it's really wonderful to be here. You know, last night my son was in his Yeshiva up north, and Tehila and I were on the Farm all by ourselves. And, it was like old school, where it was just me and Tehila holding down the fort on the mountain. And we were all alone for Yom Kippur. And my son came back, and he asked Tehila, "Well, Ima, did you have any insights or epiphanies on Yom Kippur?" And Tehila said something that I think was really wise. She said, "I don't think that Yom Kippur is a day to have epiphanies and insights. We had all of the month of Elul, we had ten days of preparation. And so, Yom Kippur is really when we want to reap the benefits. Yom Kippur is an experience that I hope that the last 40 days prepared us for."

And for me, in particular, because we had committed to taking up our game another level. I've been putting up this Judean Book Club almost every day. And so many people in the Fellowship have been WhatsApping me and emailing me and following it. And it's been so helpful for me because everyday I'm reading and teaching one of the greatest books that's been written in our generation, written by the first chief rabbi of Israel. He really reveals the mysteries of the world in the most relevant way and the most meaningful way, and he's speaking before the Holocaust even happens. He speaks like such a prophet to our generation right now. And he somehow had the vision, that speaks in his time, but really to speak to future generations as well.

In all that time, has really brought so many insights, and it's helped so many people on their tshuva journey. And what I wanted to do now was to specifically share what we're all going through, what we should be going through, we could hope to go through in this time of year, leading up toward Yom Kippur. Because it could be like it's random ...there's Christmas, and then there's Halloween, and then there's Thanksgiving. And it's like, well, one is in October and one is in November and one is in December, and it's just kind of random holidays that that's what happens now. Well, there's some really good sales in the stores now. I guess it must be holiday season.

And the Torah is not that. The Torah is a spiritual path and a map that helps us navigate our souls in this world to connect with God in the deepest way possible. And what does that mean? HaShem's name in Hebrew is a fusion of Hayah, Hoveh, and Y'hiyeh, past, present, and future. If we say, HaShem, literally that means, the Name, and the Name that we call God, that we don't even proclaim His Name, we don't even say it out loud, is past, present and future all in one word. And that name in Hebrew is called Shem Ha'viyah. Vayah means existence.

So what is the best translation of God's Name? It is, timeless reality. If you really want to understand who the God of Israel is, who is the Creator of the Universe, who is the One that has made a covenant with His people and brought His people back to the Land of Israel? How do we relate to the one God and the Creator of the Universe? His Name literally means, timeless reality. That sort of opens our mind...Whoa, God is so much more than I thought He was. I thought He was "Our Father in Heaven." I thought He was someone that I could wrap my mind around now. God is somebody that we really can't wrap our minds around at all. His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. And we have to live in a sort of disconnect up here because God can really only be found in here.

But what God did do, is He created tshuva. And Rav Kook explains that the best way to understand how God operates in the world, is to understand what tshuva is. What is that word? Tshuva, according to the sages of Israel was created before the world. Meaning there was just timeless reality, there was just God, Himself. And then God said, "Before I create the world, before the Big Bang, before let there be light, before any type of physical creation, He first created an engine, a power, a force in the world called tshuva. And then everything that was

created, was created after tshuva. Meaning tshuva undergirds all of reality, tshuva pushes all of reality forward. Tshuva exists in all of reality. Like the sun's rays envelop all of the world, so too, tshuva is just washing over the entire world all of the time.

But what does the word tshuva mean? Tshuva literally means return. I think most people in the Fellowship know that by now. But the real question is, return to what? Meaning, we're repenting, we're returning, are we returning to God, or are we returning to ourselves? There's a lot of ways to understand the word tshuva. And Rav Kook in these teachings in between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, gives us something unbelievable, marvelous in fact. He says that the end of the tshuva process can only happen after Sukkot. Because at the beginning when we do tshuva on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we're really holding ourselves back. We're trying to fix ourselves. It's like, you know what? I don't want to eat junk food anymore, I want to cut out my sugar. I want to eat healthier, I want to exercise more, I want to stop speaking poorly of other people, I want to like hold myself back. And I'm doing this wrong, and I'm doing this wrong, and I'm doing his wrong, and I'm doing that wrong.

And at the end of Yom Kippur, you are yourself a little bit weaker. You're a little bit of a weaker person, that's not complete tshuva yet. In fact, that is a distant pagan idea. Just to hold yourself back, don't even have children, live alone on a mountain, be a monk, be disconnected from the world. Hold yourself back? That will never create a lion of Judah. That will never create a real powerful force in the world, that will never create a King David. That will never create King David's mighty men. That kind of tshuva when you're just holding yourself back and picking yourself apart, that's only part of the process.

And the next part of the process is entering into Sukkot. That's why Sukkot comes right after Yom Kippur. You know what we do inside our sukkah? The most physical things possible – we sleep in our sukkah, we make our most physical desire, rest, relaxation, and we sleep inside the sukkah. We eat. Where do we eat? There's a mitzvah to eat inside the sukkah. We take all of our physicalities and then we charge them with a life force. We hold ourselves back and then we charge ourselves forward.

And that's why the end of the tshuva process is really happening only in these days. As we leave Yom Kippur, that's only at 2nd base. Now we're rounding 3rd base and we're hoping to slide into home base when we have Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is not end of the tshuva process. Because the real tshuva process should empower us, should energize us, should revitalize us. We need to go into Sukkot happy, excited and thrilled. We get to go to sleep in the sukkah, we get to take our entire being, our physical and our spiritual and elevate it to God.

And then, what does Rav Kook say? What is tshuva? What is the greatest catalyst to help us all return and who are we returning to? And I think that this is particularly relevant to all of the members of our Fellowship – whether they be in Iowa, or whether they be in Arkansas or

whether they be in Nebraska, and I think when you hear the words of Rav Kook, it will absolutely touch your heart. And Rav Kook says, these are the secrets of the Torah being given over. Real teshuva is a return to the Israel within you. It's attaching yourself to the nation of Israel. Meaning when you sin, or when you remove yourself from the path, you haven't necessarily removed yourself from God. You don't need to return yourself to God. God is one, what do you need to return to? You need to return to the national soul of Israel. Israel was destined to be a certain way. Israel was chosen to be a certain people in the world. And what is the return? It's actually a return to Israel. When you attach yourselves to the nation of Israel, you're actually plugging into a power that will energize you because you realize that inside you...you think it's a coincidence that you are a part of the Land of Israel Fellowship? You think there's a coincidence that you're attached to the news about Israel? That you feel so connected to Israel? Obviously, inside you there is a spark of Israel and what is the tshuva in Minnesota? The tshuva in Minnesota is to attach yourself and return to the Israel in you. That's the real return. It's to align yourself with Israel, attach yourself to the nation, and recognize that everyone is waiting for the Messiah to come. Everyone is waiting for God to reveal Himself.

But there is a savior in the world, and the savior was chosen, and the savior is Israel. Everyone is starting to realize that now. Israel is the only hope of the whole world. Europe is looking to Israel for hope. America is looking to Israel for hope. Israel is the only hope. So what is Rabbi Kook saying? He's saying attach yourself to the Israel within you. Attach yourself to Israel and that's the real return. Because if you veer from the path of righteousness, what that means is that you veer from the path of Israel. And to return to do tshuva is to return to Israel, because Israel was chosen, and you attaching yourself to the Land of Israel Fellowship means that you have been chosen as well.

So the real return, now this doesn't mean...now you have to convert to Judaism, it's not about religion, it's not about following this way or that way. It has nothing to do with religion. It has to do with actually actualizing your potential within. And the fact that you are connected to Israel is self-evident. So the return needs to be a whole-hearted return to your truest identity. That's the depths of the depths.

And with that, you'll feel energized and inspired to not only live according to the biblical calendar and going to Sukkot filled with joy and happiness, but you'll actually feel as though you too have been chosen to be a light. You, too, are to bring universal justice. You, too, are meant to bring a goodness to everyone around you because you, too, have a spark of Israel within you. That is why Israel was chosen. We were chosen only to teach everyone else that they can be chosen too, if they just attach themselves to Israel.

And that's what Zechariah says, "On that day many people will attach themselves to the House of Jacob." What is he talking about? The prophet is speaking a very lofty idea and Rav Kook is just handing it to us on a silver platter. He's just saying, "Right now, all of us need to not only

identify with Israel, and not only cheer for Israel that when Israel blows off the genitalia of the evil Lebanese, Chezbollah, we don't need to just clap our hands. But we actually need to feel victorious because we won. We have the same destiny as Israel because God's destiny is unfolding in Israel.

And everyone that's a believer in God has somehow cast their lot with Israel, whether they know it or not. And Rav Kook is just saying the ultimate return for everyone, the true light unto the nations, is to attach yourselves and return to Israel, the Israel within you. And so, with that, I bless you all that this transition from Yom Kippur energizes you, revitalizes you, empowers you to not only restrain from all the bad things that we need to fix, but empowers us with all of the good things that is still to come. And so, with that, I wish you all a beautiful Sukkot and I will see you immediately after the holiday. But keep on listening to the Judean Book Club. I'll be putting those out up until Sukkot, and so we can always chat on the podcast. Because then we have 20 to 30 minutes, it's a little bit deeper. But for those that have the patience, I would love to hear from you as always. Shalom.

Ari

Thank you, thank you, that was beautiful, Jeremy. Thank you for that. Yeah, I was just saying, looking at some of these chats that are going on here. I see that Luci wrote, you know it would be very cold if we slept in our sukkah here in Utah, high of 47 degrees. I imagine she means Fahrenheit, meaning it's just above freezing. And I'll tell you, I used to also in Houston, Texas, I can't remember one Sukkot that we actually made it through the meal. Because Houston, Texas is like the armpit of America, of the world I think. The humidity and the mosquitoes, it was just so unbearable. Unbearable!

And I was like, why did HaShem make Sukkot at such a time where it's so...and then I came to the Land of Israel and I was like, "Oh, this is the natural indigenous environment of Sukkot." And I really hope and pray that the day comes when all of you, every single one of you, and I'm looking at your faces and your names right now. And I am blessing all of us that the day will come when we can all be in the hills of Judea, in MY sukkah. I don't want you to just be here in Israel, I want you to be in my sukkah. That's what I want.

Anyways, I sort of want to bring you on this journey together. Going into this, I didn't know what else I could possibly do, and I hope this is time wisely spent and this goes in a good way. But let's start, I guess, 40 days back at the beginning of Elul, right? The King was in the field, the Creator of the Universe, the King of Kings, He's waiting there to meet us. And did I meet Him there? Honestly, not a fraction of how much I was planning on meeting Him there, how much I would have liked to meet him there. I had very great plans and they just didn't manifest themselves, I have loads of excuses. But that's exactly what they are, they're excuses.

And then we approach Rosh Hashana and I start feeling, unfortunately that familiar sense of the sands of time slipping through my fingers, of opportunity wasted. There's so much to do. But then again, three children that are four years old and under. I'm grateful for them every single day, but it's still a lot. Plus, the occasional intercontinental ballistic missile attacks from Iran and drone attacks from Yemen and terrorist attacks. So those are thrown in. A lot's going on.

And then we get to Rosh Hashana, and as we talked about all of last week, it felt like the personal tshuva for that one day, it's over on that day. It's not about us, it's about coronating the King. And if anything, Rosh Hashana is a day that encapsulates the mission of the Jewish people, of the nation of Israel. God created the world. God created the world, He's King. With or without anyone's agreement or approval, He is King with or without us. Knowing it or anything. But that isn't why He created the world to be King. He created the world so that mankind can coronate Him as King through our free will, in our consciousness in our lives and in our actions and with our every breath.

And the prophets tell us that we're His witnesses. That He reveals Himself to the world through us. And our mission is to be active participants in that revelation. That's our mission on Rosh Hashana, which leads us directly into the ten days of repentance, culminating in the ultimate day of repentance, an ocean of repentance in time, a tshuva that is so visceral and unfathomable, that I would even say it's primordial. And why do I say primordial? What does primordial mean? Since before even the existence because it's actually a fundamental Jewish belief that tshuva was created before the creation of the world. Jeremy spoke about this last week. And I know this may be a difficult idea to grasp because if man didn't exist yet or have an opportunity to sin, then what does repentance even mean, right? Why is it even necessary?

But as Rebbetzin smiles, she explains that the very act of creation itself, definitionally created a distance between the Creator and the created. Just the act of creation made that separation between us and our Creator. An imperfect metaphor would be a mother giving birth to a child. At first a child is very much a part of her. But then when the child is born into the world, there is a separateness, there is an otherness, an ability to become very distant, God forbid. We've all seen it, some of us have experienced the degree of separation and distance that can come between parents and their children. Well, it's the same between us and HaShem.

So at first, before Creation, all there was Him. There was an undifferentiated unity. And I hope it's ok that I'm going here, and if some people are like, "Ok, let's bring it back." But it's not really that far off. This is also, intuitively it makes sense. Right? HaShem created the universe by withdrawing Himself, or should I say by withdrawing the perception or the consciousness or the awareness of Himself. He essentially hid Himself behind the mask of creation. But in a world of ultimate truth we know, it's still true and it's always been true, that there is nothing but Him. Right? As the Torah tells clearly and unequivocally numerous times, you know we've seen Deuteronomy, chapter 4:

It has been clearly demonstrated to you that Hashem alone is God; there is nothing else.

-Deuteronomy 4:35

Ain Ode Milvado, there's nothing but Him. But when God created the world, as the rebbetzin says, the very act of creation, itself, caused this distance between us and Him. And that is why the reality and truth of tshuva was created before the world was. In order to grant us the ability to return to our Creator. Meaning that from the moment we're born, even before we had a chance to even imagine the sin, let alone commit one, we already have the mission and the deep spiritual yearning for tshuva, to return closer and closer, ever closer, ever closer, there is no final arrival. Constantly ever closer to our Creator.

We don't know what it is, I think that the thirst and that impulse is more alive in the world today. But it's not being punched and it's manifesting itself with the insanity that we see on college campuses and the craziness that is sweeping over the world. I think it's all coming from that place, that desire to do tshuva. And they're not being an actual address or vessel to contain it. But again, from the moment we're born, there's nothing for us to repent for. We're just babies, what sin could we have committed.

From the moment we are born, we are distanced from HaShem. From the moment we're born, we have this deep yearning for tshuva to return to our Creator. We don't know how to describe it, again, to define it, to deal with it. But from the very moment we're born, that yearning is there. Not to repent, but to return. And that's why it's so important to be careful with the word tshuva. Because the conventional English word of repentance can really lead us astray from understanding what tshuva is really all about in all of its dimensions. Repentance isn't bad, it's not going to hurt, that's a piece of it. But it's not the total idea.

And I think that this understanding brings us closer to a deeper understanding and appreciation about the somewhat confusing words of Hosea the prophet that we read during the Haftara that we read on the Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. It talks about tshuva, it says:

Return O Israel unto Hashem your God... and return to Hashem.

-Hoshea 14: 2-3

Again, it's the English here, it's tricky. I don't know how to make a distinction between the words ad and el. It's something when you know Hebrew, you just experience the difference. But it just can't be contained in English words, I don't know how to define it differently.

But my understanding of this verse is that it's two phases. The first phase is that we need to do our most to repent in the conventional sense. And I mean to repent. That we're to review and examine our actions and seek what we did wrong, where we fell short, both between us and our fellow human being, as well as between us and HaShem. Right? Like every year, this one I sent my share of apology letters and contrition. If you want to make good with someone, this is

really the time to do it. Because there's always this, I don't know if it's true what I'm saying, since I'm a kid, there's this subliminal message that I'm asking you for forgiveness. But if I ask you three times and you deny it three times, then my sin against you is actually on YOU! I remember when I was a kid, this would be weaponized so easy. But anyways, so I sent my share of messages and they were all, thank God received with dignity and grace and some people said I didn't even need to send them one. But it doesn't matter.

Anyways, then, once we've done our best to right the wrong and make good for the damage we've caused for our actions and we've returned "ad" HaShem, as Hosea says, ad HaShem, then and only then can we return "el HaShem." Only then can we return to Him in that primal sense of returning in the deepest way to our source. Of returning in a way that we ourselves have nothing, no vote, no participation, no blame for the fact that we're distanced. It's just the very nature of being created. Created that distance, and so we want to return el HaShem, we want to make up for that. That's why repenting isn't just such a great word. Does this make sense?

So let's see, I'm sharing my journey. So we have these ten days of return. And again, I felt like I'm seriously falling short and I didn't capitalize on the extraordinary spiritual gift of repentance and return and closeness that we're gifted with during these days. I'm starting to feel again more stress and guilty and heavy. It's something you can talk yourself out of. But when you know you're raised in a certain way and you have an experience for so much of your childhood, it's neurologically wired. It's not something you can just say, "Oh, that doesn't make sense, and that's not true..." It's something that you really have to contend with on an experiential level.

And so, I know that HaShem doesn't want me to feel these things. He just wants me to return, but what can I say? We're complicated creatures and we have all sorts of fears and motivations and self-judgments and sabotaging mechanisms. And you guys know me, I've got them all. So I don't want to paint this over-dramatic picture here. I'm like happy, I'm a happy Jew. It's just my nature. When I'm not, it's an aberration. Right? But I'll say that there's been this low volume sound track most of the time, that whatever I'm doing right now is not what I'm supposed to be doing right now. I'm supposed to be out in the fields pouring out my heart to HaShem. What am I doing now?

And then, somehow, it just arrives, the morning of Yom Kippur. This past Friday morning, I went to prayers 20 minutes away in Efrat, which I do nearly every morning, and I run into my friend, Jerry, and we had a moment, called a sichat chaverim, like a conversation of brothers, of friends, interconnected friends. And that's a big part of the reason why I drive all the way out there. Twenty plus minutes every morning to prayers when there's a lot of minyanim, prayer groups quorums around me. But that's where I feel the most connected. And sometimes those connections are one of the greatest gifts in the whole experience of going to pray every morning.

And so, I asked him how he's doing...if he's ready for the Day of Atonement. And he's just such a cute man, such a cute person. He has this organization that he founded called "Just One Chesed," his whole life is about chesed. And I said to him, "You don't even need to fast, you're good to go my friend." And he just shrugged and he's like, "I don't feel ready at all, I don't feel ready at all." And I told him, "I missed the Selichot, this part of prayers where you're sort of saying you're sorry. I missed so many of them." And he said, "Me, too." I couldn't believe it, him! And he asked me whether I'm ready. And I told him that I feel totally unprepared. And that I feel like I'm going into Yom Kippur feeling naked and unready.

And his response struck me deep. He said something like, "I've never before heard anyone sound more ready than you are." That's what he said and I walked away really thinking about that. And it made me feel better, really much better. When I was reflecting on those words I realized that the reason may be because I was currently right now, in this place of just throwing myself at the feet of the King. I couldn't stand before Him and claim anything because I didn't have a spread sheet to show. At least according to my calculations, there was no, I did this and you did that. There was no argument to make. Look, You're in the field, I really went, I really did my thing. I did my part. You said that I should do my thing and you'll accept my repentance. I couldn't say any of that. At least I didn't feel like I could say any of that. Maybe I could and the amounts that I did manage to do were considered more than enough in His eyes. I don't know. I don't know. That's the key here, I don't know and we don't know and that's such a big part of this journey.

All I knew was that I was going into Yom Kippur standing before the Creator of Heaven and Earth and throwing myself at His mercy. I feel like I've also in my own mind, that I can't get rid of this spread sheet. It's so funny. I have the complete inability to make any spread sheets in my life. This whole Farm, with all of the complexity of it, ask if we have one spread sheet. No! But in my mind, there's this spread sheet. But since I've been blessed with Shaena and my children, I just feel like I'm so in the red, so in the debt, and I'm not rising, so there's no argument to make. I couldn't say that.

And so, here is what I just said, I'm casting myself at HaShem's feet. But the fortunate secret that I do understand, which is what Jerry was speaking this truth to my heart, is that, yes, I am throwing myself at the feet of the King of Kings, but He also happens to be my father! Right? He's our father. And when I whole heartedly throw myself at His mercy, without any excuses or expectations or entitlements, being a father, myself, that finds the greatest favor in His eyes, I just know it. Much more so than when we have any sense of entitlement or feeling deserved. And I recognize that this could be misused and I'm not recommended this. Nor do I know if any of this is right, I'm just sharing my heart, my experience. And believe me, that I didn't go into this holiday bereft of tshuva, at least my experience of being bereft in order to say this. In order to say, "Well, I've got nothing in my soul, that's what you like most," that's wasn't what it was about. I really, honestly, sincerely wanted to do so much more.

But this is just the level I was at this year. Hopefully next year I will still be alive and I will be able to be much more accomplished in my tshuva, and I will be evolved enough by then to realize that all of that extra accomplishments and great tshuva that I would have done will not make me any more worthy than I am feeling right now, this year, and that I felt before Yom Kippur. And I think that's the reason why my rebbe, Rav Shlomo Katz, he taught this teaching. Because I think a lot of us were feeling this way. He points out that one of the most common refrains in the liturgy of the High Holidays is the word – uvechan –

Uvechen yitkadash shimcha
Uvechen Ten Pachdecha
Uvechen Ten Kavod
Uvechan Tzadikim
Uvechen lecha taaleh Kedusha

As he points out, the meaning of the word is hard to translate, but it's something like "Oh well," or "nonetheless," or "despite it all." These are my translations, but this is the idea. And he brings the very same word from Esther when she comes before the king, uninvited. Which is a crime punishable by death. And she very well may have faced that right now. We

know that Achashverosh, the king had it in him. When he's disrespected by his women, he's going to kill them! And that's in him. And she went before the king, really ready and prepared for that. It could have been her death sentence. And she says, uvechen (despite it all)...:

Despite it all, I will
come before the
King contrary to the
law.
-Book of Esther

Rav Shlomo teaches that it's with this in mind that we stand before the King of Kings on the Day of Atonement. That despite it all, whether or not you feel worthy, whether or not you understand any of this at all, "we show up and go before the King." We show up, we bring it all with us. You know, he said that even before when the gates were shutting. He said you got to

leave it all on the table.

Think about where you were one year ago, during Neilah, when the gates were shutting. If we knew what we were about to face, how different would our prayers have been? What could we have done? Leave it all on the table. You're here now. Nothing else matters, right now you're here, show up and give it your all. It was like an officer, a military officer speaking to his soldiers before going to war. That's what it felt like as the gates were shutting at 5 p.m., on Yom Kippur, as the day was ending. When it was like the moment, the most poignant, powerful moment that the gates are shutting. And by the way, we always say, the gates are shutting. But Rav Shlomo always says, "We're saying HaShem, shut them behind us, shut them behind us. We want to be in there with You."

Anyways, just to go back to the story. I don't remember where I am. So, we brought the kids to Efrat and the great moment arrived, thankfully I'm not up to bat for anything, I'm not blowing the shofar, I'm not up for it. I'm there, all the men showed up to the synagogue wearing their

kittel, which is...have you heard of a kittel? You know what a kittle is? It's our long, white robe, it's very simple, very simple. No pockets. There are buttons and there's a simple cotton sash around our waist that we tie it with. Here's a couple pictures of me wearing my kittel on my wedding day. I only have one, that's my kittel:



And Yom Kippur, this is the day in the year that we wear it. You see that there are three times in your life that you wear the kittel. On the day you are married, on the Day of Atonement each year, and on the day that you die. You're buried in it. You're married in it, you're buried in it. And that's why it has no pockets. You're buried in it to remember that you simply, you can't take anything with you, that's all you got. And so when you're wearing the garment that you know you're going to be buried in it, there is a sense there, it gets real, it feels very real. And that's the goal, to feel how it is.

Anyways, and this is the day that we wear it. So, when you walk into that synagogue, that's the energy. We're all there, dressed in the same simple, white kittel, all the men, we're all there standing together, and there's a tension, a real, real, real tension in the room. Yet we also realize in our hearts that while we're standing there together, we're also ultimately standing alone before HaShem, being judged not compared to our friend next to us, but compared to ourselves. Compared to the potential that He knows, right? We're being judged on the level of perfection that only our Father in Heaven that birthed us and knows our hearts far better than we do, judged with the level of precision that only He can judge us with. He knows our heart.

And by the way, when I remind myself of that, I'm just being honest, I don't know what this means, it always comforts me, it always comforts me. Because I just say, "HaShem, You know my heart." Because I really believe in my heart, is to do good and however clumsily and strangely and silly it may show up and however many times I drop the eggs coming out of the chicken coop or whatever, He knows my heart.

And so, I stood there, before HaShem that night and I had a little bit of a dance with the liturgy. You know there's a liturgy and I wish I had brought the Machzor with me, the siddur. It's like

this thick...it's one day, you know? And so I would follow along and say the solemn words of Unetanneh Tokef, together with the congregation, declaring, sanctifying the transcendent, unimaginable greatness of the Day, and what this Day actually really means. But I also weaved out of the liturgy and stood before my Creator in truth. You know, as Jeremy told me the other day, it was a Shabbat and I saw him praying so fervently. And I said, "What are you thinking about? What's that experience?" And he said, "I'm just standing before the Lord in truth." And I said, "What do you mean by that?" And he said, "I'm just standing before the Lord in truth." I don't know what else to say, that's what he's doing. I want to incorporate a lot of that. Just not having to think, just standing before HaShem.

And so, there is a moment that during that night, those prayers, that the entirety of the past year, the year which was undoubtedly the longest year of my life. The year that feels like a decade. It all like rushed before me. They say that when you die, your whole life flashes before you. So that's what I experienced. And, you know, the horror of October 7th and the spiral of confusion and fear and heart-shattering devastation that the entire nation felt, that I felt personally. Each one of us, particularly in the Land, we felt it very real, very personally. The eruptions of tears that I had the first three or four months of the year, the waves of terror as I did everything that I could to protect my children, knowing that there may be little that I can really do, that ultimately it's so much in HaShem's hands. And working that in, working that in and working that in, it just forced a level of faith, an internalized faith for the entire nation, that is just hard to describe.

And so, just seeing myself, seeing my community, the Jewish people have so many illusions have been shattered before our eyes this past year in the most real way imaginable, particularly for us in the Land again. And I remember how I felt when we realized how easily we really could have all been wiped out, if only Chamas and Chezbollah and Iran succeeded in being on the same page at the same time that very first day. So Chamas was just so...they were like the wolf salivating uncontrollably at the Nova Music festival to which they preemptively attacked without being on the same page as Chezbollah. And what would have happened if that happened from each one of our borders at that moment? How would we have survived that? Were we really that close to being holocausted together as an entire country?

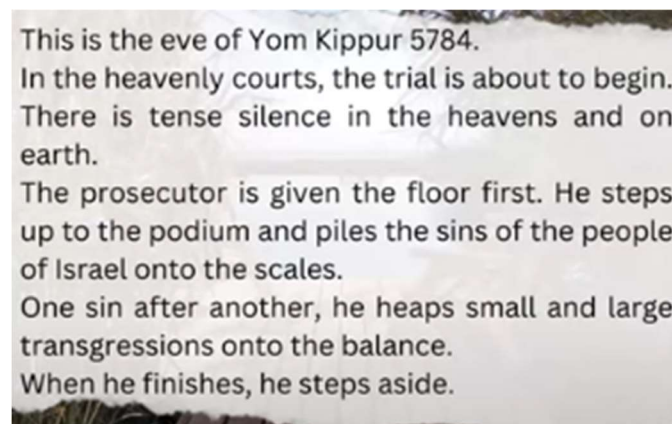
You know, I remembered the nights that I went through sleeping in my uniform with my walkie talkie next to my head, being woken up from every chatter and every communication, not really sleeping at all. I remember the devastation I felt when each new soldier was killed and the rage and the sense of betrayal and anger that I felt day after day when the world accused us of genocide, when we were just a victim of the most horrific genocide in modern history.

You know, as the brokenness and devastation of the year washed through me, like a wave, I felt a sense of I hope the right word...a sense of peace in my heart, like an arrival, like I've arrived at this moment. There's a reason that we say this blessing. Bring us to this very moment...it's a

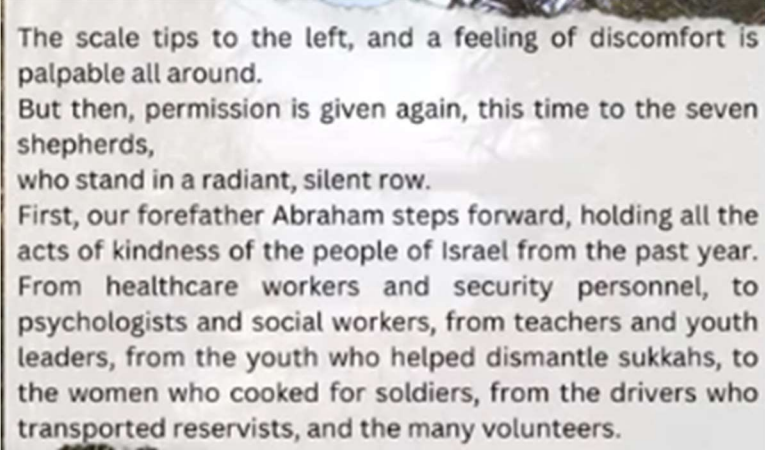
feeling, which Rav Shlomo confirmed with his words of strengthening as the war-time spiritual leader that he is, that HaShem was really looking down at us with so much love, and so much compassion and who am I to judge how anyone is supposed to look this Yom Kippur.

You know I felt this often when I hear people judge the nation of Israel. Oh, these people in the south, these secular Jews, how could they be secular? And I'm like, "You don't get it. You don't know what we have been through as a nation. Don't even go there." And I felt even more that about right now. Who am I to judge how anyone is supposed to look? Who am I to judge myself? Even myself, how I'm supposed to look this Yom Kippur? We've been through so much and nonetheless, here we are, all of us. All of us in this Fellowship. We've been through this together, we are still here, despite the appearance at times of having been abandoned, God forbid.

But we're all here because there were people in the world that really stood with Israel, that were pro-Israel, that were signing treaties with Israel. But when they smelled failure or weakness or defeat, they jumped ship. Real fast, and we were all alone, and we've never felt so alone. But there's not one person in this Fellowship who wavered for a moment. That much I know for sure. I don't know anything for sure, but I believe that's the case. If you wavered, admit it, raise your hand right here, right now. You don't need to do that. But anyway, I didn't know whether to read this to you because it's sort of long, but this really encapsulated my feelings. This was going around on WhatsApp. Is it ok if I go a little bit longer on this Fellowship, is that alright? Ok, so I want to read this to you. I don't even know who wrote it, I tried to figure out who wrote it, and it's a translation.



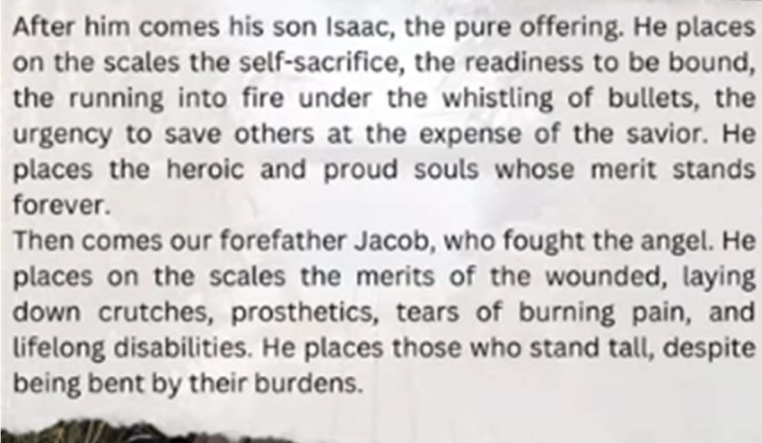
This is the eve of Yom Kippur 5784.
In the heavenly courts, the trial is about to begin.
There is tense silence in the heavens and on earth.
The prosecutor is given the floor first. He steps up to the podium and piles the sins of the people of Israel onto the scales.
One sin after another, he heaps small and large transgressions onto the balance.
When he finishes, he steps aside.



The scale tips to the left, and a feeling of discomfort is palpable all around.

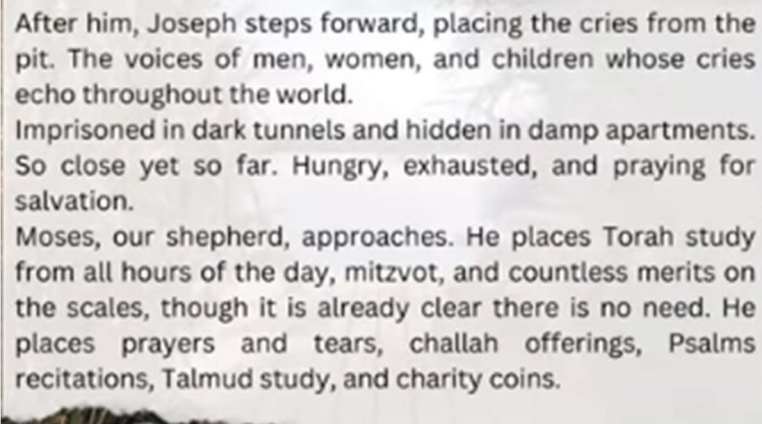
But then, permission is given again, this time to the seven shepherds,
who stand in a radiant, silent row.

First, our forefather Abraham steps forward, holding all the acts of kindness of the people of Israel from the past year. From healthcare workers and security personnel, to psychologists and social workers, from teachers and youth leaders, from the youth who helped dismantle sukkahs, to the women who cooked for soldiers, from the drivers who transported reservists, and the many volunteers.



After him comes his son Isaac, the pure offering. He places on the scales the self-sacrifice, the readiness to be bound, the running into fire under the whistling of bullets, the urgency to save others at the expense of the savior. He places the heroic and proud souls whose merit stands forever.

Then comes our forefather Jacob, who fought the angel. He places on the scales the merits of the wounded, laying down crutches, prosthetics, tears of burning pain, and lifelong disabilities. He places those who stand tall, despite being bent by their burdens.



After him, Joseph steps forward, placing the cries from the pit. The voices of men, women, and children whose cries echo throughout the world.

Imprisoned in dark tunnels and hidden in damp apartments. So close yet so far. Hungry, exhausted, and praying for salvation.

Moses, our shepherd, approaches. He places Torah study from all hours of the day, mitzvot, and countless merits on the scales, though it is already clear there is no need. He places prayers and tears, challah offerings, Psalms recitations, Talmud study, and charity coins.

Aaron the priest steps forward next. He places on the scales the love of Israel.

One great and holy congregation. United and reconciled, their hearts beating in unison.

He places the shoulder-to-shoulder battle of the people of Israel. Together as one man with one heart. From all communities and sectors. He places them like the stones of the breastplate, packed tightly together.

And the scales are about to break.

Tense silence fills the hall.

Then the last shepherd steps forward—David, King of Israel. He approaches, holding the spirit of royalty, representing a noble generation that rises like a lion. They leap with all their might—to rise and defend their brothers, to save them from the hands of the enemy, crying out the cry of all generations: Am Yisrael Chai! A generation that reminds us of what was almost forgotten: how beautiful this people is, how strong they are. Crowning Israel with glory, With the crown of kingship. A generation that yearns for the kingship of David, for the rebuilding of the Temple. That fights and wins in the name of God.

They all stand once again in a row. Their eyes blazing with fire, their entire being awe-inspiring.

The judgment is clear. No more words are needed.

Then footsteps are heard from outside,
A sound growing louder.
The doors swing wide open
And the four mothers of the nation enter.

Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah advance as one toward the scales, placing on them the pure prayers of women, the ceaseless worry for the soldiers.

They place Psalms recited no beside hospital beds.

They place women with shoulders broadened by heavy burdens. From days and nights of functioning alone, bearing great responsibility. They place the pain of widows, the warm tears of longing and loneliness.

They stand next to the fathers,
Noble and radiant.

The hall is silent.
For it is awe-inspiring.

And a heavenly voice declares:

Fortunate is the people for whom this is so, fortunate is the people whose God is the Lord.

And forgiveness will be granted to the entire congregation of the children of Israel.

The miracles of our generation.

You understand why I had to read that to you. It gives a little bit of context because there is an idea of am Yisrael, the nation of Israel, but there's also Keneset Yisrael, which is all the souls of all the nation of Israel that ever have been, that are and ever will be. And we are all together, particularly at a moment like this.

Anyways, so I'll just try to wind it down here. We stayed by friends, the baby was up all night, we were totally exhausted, and despite the unbelievable gravity of the day, a big part of my challenge was just staying awake. I knew that I was there, not just for myself, but for my entire family, for my whole household. I was representing. I could only imagine how Shaena was struggling, taking care of the kids, I felt a tremendous responsibility. I mean for the night service, she was able to bring them. She pushed the double stroller with Dvash walking all the way up the mountain to where we were praying in Efrat. Shiloh came running in, threw himself in my arms and he was just so delicious. And I prayed over him and blessed him. I just washed over him with gratitude until he started playing with my mouth and my nose and he was finally able to stick my upper lip into my nose and of course then he started cracking up hysterically, punctuating this silent gravity in the moment with his delicious cuteness. But I learned right now that while I hold his cuteness on the highest priority, that it cannot bother anything ever

that is so delicious. I've learned that it's just me, I'm his dad, not everybody feels that way. And so I had to take him out.

But that next day, such exhaustion. There were times that I was even dozing off while I stood up. I don't remember that since I was in the army. And so I lowered the bar for myself and I said that my service, my win would simply be staying the entire time and staying awake the entire time. Or at least as much as I could. If I couldn't have full kavanah, focused attention the entire time, then at the very least, I would be there, physically, the whole time. And spiritually, consciously and with whatever awareness I was able to muster up, that's what I was going to do and not beat myself up about it. I mean the exhaustion was just beyond.

And lo and behold, I got a second wind. And then there was that 45 minute nap that I got during the 90 minute break. Shaena and I split it. She got half, I got the other half. And with HaShem's blessing, that nap gave me a second wind that I needed. And when we resumed prayers from 3:30 in the afternoon, that is when I had my greatest moments of connection. But I do think that it was because I was fully committed to being there. It was almost like what they say about child raising – you can't spend quality time with your kids. You need to spend quantity time with your kids. And the quality time happens from within that quantity time. You can't engineer the quality time. And that's what it felt like.

I always felt that about prayer. I had moments...more than moments, really periods of very deep connection and prayer. And it was worth all of it, just for those moments. But it was only the product of me being there and being sent compassion for that live wire connection for me to grasp onto. And one of the greatest moments of connection was when I prayed for all of you. Right? I told HaShem how much you meant to me. I know that I wasn't able to pray for each and every one of you. I was regretting not bringing the prayer booklet with me, but I had many of those prayers in my heart and I prayed for many of you. And ALL of you, I definitely prayed for every single person in this Fellowship. And I told HaShem how much you mean to me, how much you mean to us. But I was only speaking for myself. And I told HaShem, I begged of HaShem to please judge all of you with generosity and compassion and love that you deserve. You may think that you don't deserve it, that you don't deserve anything, but that's not the way I see it. You deserve it, and I really, really poured out my heart for all of you. That He should bless each and everyone of you and your families and sign you and seal you in the Book of Life, of true life.

That He bless you with the Book of Life for Your sake, because the primary central addition...we make a lot of additions to our prayers during the ten days of repentance. And the main addition is in the Amidah, the silent meditation, we put in a number of different verses. And one of them is:

Remember us for life, O King who loves life, and write us in the book of life, for your sake O Living God.

But the famous Chasidic teaching of how to properly read that, it's not the conventional reading that HaShem should write us...the conventional one is in the Book of Life, right? Write us in the Book of Life. But the deeper reading that I love so much more, that we're trying to say as we're saying, "HaShem, please seal us in the Book of Life for Your sake. Did you follow that? We're not saying seal us in the Book of Life for Your sake O HaShem. We're saying, put us in the Book of Life for Your sake. Did you follow that? That was my prayer that I prayed for each and every one of you. That we be sealed in the Book of Chayim I'maancha, that we be sealed in the Book of Life lived for His sake. Not just life lived and we should keep living for His Name's sake, but that our life is for His Name's sake. What more could we ask for, what more could we want than to have our lives aspiring to love Him in even a fraction of the way that He loves us? And that was my prayer for you.

And it wasn't just with words. It was one of those moments of heightened and amplified connection and with my whole essence was blessing all of you. So I wanted to share that with you. And I'm grateful that I had that. It wasn't my only moment, it was within those moments. But I'll admit, a lot of that was around my family and my children and my wife and Judea and the nation of Israel, that's the thing that we've been through, I was putting it on the table right there.

And that's how I understand those interim days between Yom Kippur and Sukkot. I believe these days are meant for us to proactively open our hearts and let the dust of Yom Kippur settle. Not the dust, let the reality of HaShem's forgiveness of our sins settle into our hearts, letting the truth of HaShem's love for us settle into our hearts.

You know as Jeremy says, this is what happens as we build our sukkahs, as we build our tabernacles. We're building these huts, commemorating these tabernacles that the nation dwelled in when we travelled the desert after the exodus from Egypt. But not just commemorating those tabernacles as a thing of the past, but rather we're going through a piece of that in a real way right now. I can't remember a time in my life where the message of sukkah was less abstract. I can't remember a time in my life that it felt more real, that it was more needed for the spiritual and emotional journey of healing that the nation that we all need to go through right now to arrive in a place of happiness in the wake of what we've all been through this year. Not to have PTSD, but to actually get there in a place of happiness. And this is the time, it's still fresh, we can still do it.

You know, at the break fast, after the holiday, I was partaking in the meal with my friend, Toby, along with his wife Chayah and their children, they're known for the most warm and loving hospitality I think in all of Judea. I mean, it's just next level hospitality. And they're always so thoughtful and warm. I think this was our 4th consecutive Yom Kippur at their home. We have a

lot of friends in Efrat, but I can just can imagine they would feel deeply offended if we went to any of them and we didn't go to Toby and Chayah, they're just so loving. Anyways, there were a number of families there at the break fast. And two of them were from Brooklyn, New York, and they were visiting. And an interesting thing happened. Both mothers, there were two mothers there and both mothers had sons that wanted to join the army as lone soldiers, meaning soldiers fighting for Israel as their parents are in another country. That's what I was. I was here all alone, I was a lone soldier. When I was there, it was much less of a phenomena, but now it's a much greater phenomena, meaning they're all alone.

And one mother said that she strictly outrightly forbade it. She said that she told him, absolutely and unequivocally no. She's not going to let him do that. And then I turned and asked the other mother how she felt being that her son was right there next to her. He's already in the army, he's in the pre-army and about to start Basic Training. And I asked her if she was scared or if she thought twice about letting him join, if she shared the sentiments of the mother that we just heard. And by the way, I'm not casting stones. I can understand this mother and where she's coming from. It's a foreign country and it's a war, and it's her boy. I'm NOT casting stones.

Ok, but I asked her, did she think twice about it like this other mother did, and she said without blinking, "Not for a moment." And I asked her why she said that because I actually thought that it would hurt her son's feelings, like he may think like, "Does my mother not even love me that she's so immediate in her response that she didn't think twice for a moment?" And I asked her why and she said that she's part of a women's group in her synagogue that's very intensive where their sole and primary purpose is letting go, of releasing control, of handing the reins of life over to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. And I thought, well this lady is ready for Sukkot. She's ready for the Feast of Tabernacles. She's ready.

Because you know, if we experienced the journey that HaShem has taken on during these Holy days, if we've really allowed ourselves to be in it, then we've had the opportunity to actually and truly coronate HaShem as King of the world, and King over each and every one of us in our individual lives and put the fear of that, you know deeply experience the Kingship of God placed within us. You know, a very healthy level of fear and awe. Not only of punishment, but of distance and violating the relationship with our King, but it's still a very real fear and awe. Let's read the Torah, the Tanakh. There are punishments for sin, also.

And then, on Yom Kippur, we allow the truth, that the King is our Father who loves us and has endless boundless compassion on us to enter our hearts. We allow His love for us and His compassion to really enter us and you know, whether we feel worthy or not. And then we emerge from Yom Kippur dancing with such fervor because there's such a fire of love in our hearts, that the details of how things played out in the year doesn't even matter. He loves us and whatever happens in our hearts is an expression of that love. And only then, only then,

when we've really gotten to that truth in our hearts, internalized, only once we've...the love planted deep in there, right with the fear, on top of the fear, and the awe, then we build our sukkot, and we recognize that we're only passing through. That this is all just fleeting and ephemeral and that we really don't have any control at all over anything.

But arguably, the hardest thing to do in this world is to really, I mean really let go and take our hands off the reins and stop trying to control everything. How many people in this Fellowship would diagnose themselves as having some kind of control issue? There's a lot of hands there. I got one, ok? You know, to really let go of that, it takes real trust, real trust. Trust that we've just spent the last 40 days doing the real work, and on some level, our entire lives we've been doing this work.

And that trust, not in our heads, but internalized and infused into our hearts is the secret to real happiness. Because when you can really let go and really let God, but in a real way, you stop suffering the fears and anxieties of what could be...we're suffering all these terrible possibilities as if they were already happening, right? And if they, God-forbid do happen, which very often the fear of them maximizes and attracts them into happening, you're already exhausted from the fear of it and the bracing for it and the experience of it that you have no strength to actually deal with it in a constructive, positive way.

So, you know, Sukkot, what we've been through, gives us the eyes to see the unimaginable beauty and perfection of the moment that we're in right now. Because in the end of the day, we're just passing through. And that's what I want to bless all of you with, my friends. I want to bless you with the gift of true, healthy, fear and awe of HaShem, and the internalization of that truth into the depths of your being. And I want to bless you with not only the knowledge of HaShem's love and forgiveness, but the experience of HaShem's love and forgiveness. And finally, I want to bless all of you, all of us, that with that fear, that awe, and that love, that we can successfully hand over the steering wheel to God. Not recklessly, but thoughtfully, gently, with a trusting heart. Give the steering wheel over to the King of Kings and really experience the destiny that He has in store for us in this world. It may not be easy, but it will be beautiful. It will be beautiful, no matter what it is if we allow Him to steer us through it, in truth and in honesty. And I want to bless all of us that we can have a Sukkot, a Feast of Tabernacles where we can experience a joy and a trust like we've never experienced in our lives. And so, with that, allow me to bless you with the blessing of Aaron the High Priest. And yes, I am not a descendant of Aaron. But I am of the nation of Israel, and we're a nation of priests, so it's my greatest joy 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.