

Session 116

Chayei Sarah – Why is the Entire Torah about the Land of Israel?

20 November 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfHUkmjPll0>

Jeremy

All right, shalom everybody. Welcome to the Land of Israel Fellowship. Can you all hear me? Is this technically sound? Tabitha is off today and I just want to make sure that everything is working, looks good, sounds good, excellent! Ok, great! Ok, so I want to start today...there's a lot to talk about, there's a lot going on. But if we all took the time to come together today, I want to start off today with a prayer. I want to first start off a prayer for Tabitha. Tabitha's son, Nachman, all of a sudden had terrible chest pains, was rushed to the hospital. His heart, after all of this, is doing ok, but she's still in the hospital and every once in awhile, he just has terrible chest pains where no one knows what's going on there. And so we all love Tabitha so much. She's literally a part of our family, and I just wanted to pray for her, for her son, Nachman Yoshua Yitzchak ben Channah. That Nachman should have a refuah shlemah, a full and speedy recovery, that this should only bring more light into their lives, more clarity into their lives, they should go through this process that they're going through, come out on the other side stronger, happier, and healthier. We love you, Tabitha, we love you Nachman, we are sending you all of our best wishes, our prayers, our love, our hearts, that you should have a speedy recovery. They should figure out what happened, what's going on, and you should be 100% healed as soon as possible. Amen.

And so, my friends, a lot is going on. First good news. It was Tehila's birthday last week. It was so fun, it was the highlight of my life. And what is the highlight of my life mean? It was the funniest thing that's ever happened to me. And it was a funny that is so funny that I don't think I'm every going to be able to recreate how funny it was and I can't wait to tell you all about it. But because that was last week, I have some news about today. Today is Ari Abramowitz's birthday. A lot of birthdays happening around this time of year. And so Ari's birthday is today. There's a lot of happy times that are going on.

This Torah portion, Chayei Sarah, is epic in Israel. It's like a pilgrimage of Jews from all over Israel converge on to the Judean capital of Chevron to where Abraham first purchased his first acquisition in the Land of Israel in Chevron in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, which is the oldest functioning building in the world today. There's so much to see in Israel, but imagine a building that was built for a specific purpose for prayer and worship and it is still being used for the exact purpose. It's the oldest functioning building like that in the world. And I think 30,000 Jews this year spent the entire Shabbat to celebrate the Torah portion where we read about Abraham buying the Tomb of the Patriarchs, burying Sarah there, the first acquisition in the Land of Israel. And I just want you to kind of see what that looks like, because it's a taste of the Temple, of this pilgrimage toward this one location, and then a beautiful gathering of holiness

that happens. So can we show like the drone footage or the footage from the top of the Tomb of the Patriarchs.



There is just so much energy. Everyone coming together for a holy purpose, for a godly purpose, it's

just amazing.

And as all of the people of Israel are gathering to love Chevron, to reconnect with their fathers and mothers, their heritage, their Land, their God, their ancient ways, strengthening their moral convictions and their connection to all that is good in the world, represented by the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Sarah, and Rebecca, and Leah. The same weekend, I see something that I've never seen before in American news. Can we just put up that news article right up there really quickly?



Can you see what it says there? That the California school district is now allowing after school satan club. That's not a joke, that's not a parody. That's a Fox News article, and I'm like...that is just...it's amazing watching a society that has lost its moral compass, that's removed God from the world. And slowly, but surely, California is cycling into oblivion. As like the Jews are getting stronger and more connected, more mechubar, that's where Chevron comes from, from the word connected. California is just disintegrating, and it's kind of interesting watching a civilization unravel in live. We can watch it happen. As they remove the Torah from their life, the Bible from their schools, God from the world, why not afternoon clubs with satan? Let's teach our kids about that? So, just imagine these two forces in the world, where Israel is rising up in holiness and California which sort of represents all of the negative sides of Esav, are just descending into chaos. And I couldn't help but just see, that those two things happened at the same time.

And so, from that disturbing satan story, I want to talk about the most...it's arguably one of the highlights of my life, it was Tehila's birthday. And here's the deal. I wrote this down because

Tehila and I have a few WhatsApp groups that are just for me and Tehila. One of them is called our "Our Family Joke Book." Because Tehila is so funny and funny things happen in our life all the time. I don't want to lose them. So what we do is we have a family joke book on our WhatsApp that we like keep all of the funny jokes. And then sometimes you know, months later, we'll sort of go over the family jokes that we forgot. And then we just end up laughing so hard because of all the jokes that we remember happened. So this is one of the WhatsApp from our family joke book that I'm about to read. And the other one by the way, is "Our Family is Special." Special moments that happen with our children. Our children are special, our family is special. Those are just...because those memories come and go, but you gotta try to hold on to them. And then you kind of treasure them in your heart. Keep them in a chest where you can review them and remind yourself of those amazing times.

So here's the conversation that I recorded the night after Tehila's 40th birthday. Because I don't know if you know this, but I threw her a surprise birthday party, like a birthday bonanza surprise birthday party. And it was so funny because every year I mess up. I'm a terrible listener. I'm the worst. I'm so bad, and she tells me what she wants, and for some reason it doesn't go into my brain properly and then I don't ever do what I'm supposed to do on her birthday. And every year I mess it up, every year. And so this year, she's like, "It's insane. Every year you disappoint on my birthday. You know what you should do next year?" And I answer her, "Run away? Leave the country for the month of Cheshvan? The month of November I should just go." This time of year, it's like a trauma.

And so, this year I said, "Ok, I'm going to make it right." I'm going to listen because she didn't want to go out to sushi, she wanted to go out to the Bar Café in Tekoa, next to the Arugot Farm. And I said, "Ok, Tehila, I'm going to take you out to the café in Tekoa, and we are going to have the best time." So I quickly take her out at 7:00, I call Ari, I'm like, "Ari, the eagle has left the nest." Ari and Shaena quickly come over to the house. All of our friends start to gather and gather to the Arugot Farm. They set up all of the balloons, the food, the sushi, the drinks, everything is getting all set up. And then they're getting ready. And so I'm like at the Tekoa Bar, kind of waiting for them to be done. I get the message, everything is set up.

And so, we're in the Tekoa bar for maybe 45 minutes, and I had to take her home because everyone was waiting to surprise her. And she wanted to stay longer out on our date. And I said, "I'm sorry, Tehila, we have to go now." And she's like, "What? We have to go now? We just go here?" And I'm like, "No, no, Tehila, I'm sorry, we have to go. I'm just...we have to leave now." She's like, "Why? We are having such a nice conversation. Why do we have to leave Tekoa?" And I was like, I didn't even finish my soup. I had to pour my beer back into the bottle. Like I wanted to stay. And I'm like, "Nope, I'm sorry, we're tired, I really, listen...I listened! You didn't want sushi. You wanted to go to the Tekoa Café Bar. We went, we had a beer, we talked, you had soup." Check! I'm doing everything wrong here. I'm pushing her buttons, and then she's getting angry. She's like, "check? Check mate!" Yes, ok fine, she's

done all the right things, but you know you're messing up here, right? We didn't even have to finish our conversation.

And then I'm like, "Oh, why are you so upset about your birthday? It's just another day, be grateful that we got another year together. I mean, this whole week was like a birthday bonanza. I took you out for sushi, your parents made a dinner, we went to the Tekoa Bar like you wanted. Come on, just be happy! In my life, I've never celebrated a week-long birthday bonanza." And I said the word birthday bonanza on the ride home, maybe 15 times. Of course, she told me later, she's like, "If you said the word birthday bonanza one more time, I was gonna end up in front of a judge in court and say, 'Judge, he just said bonanza one too many times. And I snapped.'"

And she was getting so flustered, and I said, "Why are you so upset? Don't worry." And then she kept on saying, "Just stop calling it a birthday bonanza." And then I said like this, "Soon you know, we're all gonna pass this world. We're gonna be done, we're gonna die. We're gonna be buried together, and then we never have to worry about birthdays again, but we're gonna spend all of eternity next to each other. Birthdays won't matter anymore." And I'm like, "Wait a minute, I can hear it now. And we've been dead for a thousand years and you're still upset. The elevation of my soul that happens once a year. You ruined my ilui neshamah, it's shocking how you mess up every year."

It's like, "Who cares? We're dead and we're still having my problems of celebrating your birthday, even though we're a thousand years in the grave, how could this be?" And then Tehila's like, "You're laughing, and I'm upset, you're not even listening to me. Our communication, it doesn't exist. We're like broadcasting on two frequencies, how could you be laughing when I'm clearly still annoyed and upset? It's like you're AM and I'm FM." And instead of talking about our communication, I said, "Wait a minute, I don't want to be AM, I'm more like FM. You're more like AM. I'm more like music and fun. You never know what's going to come on the FM. AM it's like, you know you're going to get facts and information, very intelligent people listen to AM. You're more like AM and I'm more like FM."

And she's like, "That's not the point." So I'm just like bothering her and bothering her to the point where we get home, she doesn't want to get out of the car. She's so flustered and annoyed with me. She doesn't want to get out of the car. Like wait a minute, you have to get out of the car. All of our friends are sitting in a dark house, waiting to surprise her. And I tell Eden to call me on WhatsApp. I'm like, "Eden, quickly call me and tell me that there's a power outage in our house." So Eden our 12 year old calls us. And she's like, "Abba, there a power outage in our house. We have no lights in the house." So to understand like why is our house all of a sudden all black? I had to explain, that's what happened. And so as we drive up, all the house is dark, but the House of Prayer is lit up, but our house is dark. And Tehila's just so flustered, she's trying to get her composure. She doesn't want to get out of the car. Like,

“Tehila, you have to get out of the car.” She’s like, “I don’t want to get out of the car.” I’m like, “You have to get out of the car.” She’s like, “Why?” I’m like, “Well there’s a power outage, someone has to take care of the children, I’ll take care of the electricity.” And she’s like, “Oh, fine, I’ll get out of the car.”

And then she walks into the house so upset that I don’t do anything for her birthday. And then all of a sudden, watch what happens. God bless Ari for filming this. Watch this video of her surprise on her 40th birthday.



Jeremy

Oh my gosh, it was so funny. It was a deep funny, it was a funny that takes 20 years of marriage to cook. Kind of like a fine wine, kind of funny, like I knew exactly how to get her into the most upset mood, that I don’t do anything for her birthday. Only that she opened up to have the most drastic shift to realize that I had set up an absolute festival surprise for her 40th birthday. It was the funniest thing. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to laugh so hard again in my life. It was just the climax. It was absolutely fun, and I just wanted to share that with everyone here that we are having a blast on the mountain.

And now, from one birthday celebration to the next, it is Ari Abramowitz’s birthday today. But today, Ari is officiating a bar mitzvah of a Jewish family from Texas. And he’s not able to be on live today, but he wanted to make a video of course to share with you all about the parsha, about his life, about his birthday. And so, here is a special message from Ari Abramowitz on his birthday for all of us.

Ari

Shalom friends. So I’m prerecording this video, meaning that I am not here with you live right now. Which as you know, is quite a rare occurrence. I actually don’t think it’s happened, maybe in years. You know, I’ve missed friend’s weddings, bar mitzvahs, all sorts of things for this Fellowship. Not because I feel like I have to because you won’t forgive an occasional absence, but because of how deeply important this Fellowship is to me. Really, it keeps me anchored and inspired and connected. And if I miss it for whatever reason, it just throws me off.

But tonight, I'm not here in person because of a very special thing that's happening. I'm officiating a bar mitzvah of my best friend growing up. He was the original Jeremy, meaning that like everybody always says, "Ari and Jeremy," when I was growing up, it was "Ari and Thomas." But as opposed to settling the hills of Judea, Thomas and I were wreaking havoc and getting in trouble everywhere we went at all times. Thomas and his family, they escaped Czechoslovakia when he was eight years old, leaving everything behind. And now, he has built up his family, and while yes, he does still live in Texas, and I'm working on him, he loves Israel. And he's bringing his son and his family here for his son's bar mitzvah.

Anyways, 35 years later, I'm officiating the bar mitzvah of his son at the Kotel which is something that I just couldn't miss, particularly because Thomas and his sons are kohanim meaning they're descended from the tribe of Aaron, which makes them quasi-spiritual nobility. And the Jewish people have the idea of treating kohanim with reverence and respect has been somewhat, I guess diluted or forgotten during the millennia in the diaspora where all the distinctions between the kohanim and the regular Israelites have been somewhat forgotten. I mean there's been no Temple. But those of us in the Land, as the times of the Temple are approaching, are becoming more sensitive to these laws. You know the kohanim are to be the first ones called up to bless at the Torah, to make kiddush, to bless the bread, or the prayer after blessings. Because it's for that reason, to bless, that the kohanim are created, right? We're a nation of kohanim to the world and the kohanim, I guess the kohanim to us. Anyways, I'm trying to be more sensitive to these laws. And God-willing, with the impending construction of the Temple, I just couldn't miss this. And the whole Kohanim thing aside, he was just my best friend growing up, I had to do it. It's just a lifetime event that I couldn't miss.

And speaking of lifetime events, this past Thursday night, Jeremy threw a surprise party for Tehila's birthday. And it was special and everybody can tell from Tehila's shock and Jeremy's like unadulterated, insane, cackling laughter, joy...I could tell that something special has probably happened behind the scenes there, but that's not my story to tell. I'm pretty confident Jeremy will tell you, or he told you already. But you know, as we often do at events like these, we went around the room, and everybody was able to give Tehila a blessing. And the blessings were beautiful. I blessed her, Shaena blessed her, we all blessed her, which is a great joy for us, being that Tehila is such a great blessing for all of us. Even on Shabbat, she tended to my wound, my finger was getting infected, and she did things and fixed it. And that was really nice also. Anyways, at the end, Tehila spoke. She spoke these beautiful words of Torah, of course, just off the cuff, no prep. But she quoted the first words of the Torah portion.

And the life of Sarah was 100 years and 20 years and 7 years. These were the years of Sarah's life.

And so Rashi explains that it was written in this curious way to teach that when Sarah was 100 years old, it was like she was 20 with respect to sin. Like she was sinless, because a 20-year-old

is considered without sin because they aren't considered fully mature enough to be responsible fully for their sins. And when she was 20 years old, she was like seven with regards to beauty. And I don't think you know, this explanation is talking merely about physical beauty and youthfulness. It's something deeper. And so, anyways, Tehila spoke beautifully about how Jeremy has kept her young through all the adventures that he took them on and his antics and all of that. And she ended with the words, "May we grow old together and stay young together."

And that's what I wanted to spend our precious time talking about today on this Fellowship. What was it about both Abraham and Sarah that allowed them to stay so young, even throughout their rather tumultuous lives? Perhaps it's because they started having kids at a much older age. Their friends were parents, grandparents, great-grandparents by the time they had their kids. You know, Shaena and I can testify that while this can be very hard, it definitely keeps you younger. But I think it's something else as well. And again, just to be clear, I'm not talking about youth. Like the externally focused, Western version of staying young, which tends to be like this you know, relentless and even depressing battle against aging. You know there's facelifts, and plastic surgery, and midlife crises, and sports cars. I'm not talking about all that, obviously. I'm talking about staying young in our hearts, maintaining a youthful and vigorous spirit. Because life is hard. You know, we talk about it on the Fellowship. We see it, we pray for each other, we see what we're going through. It's just hard for everybody, everybody suffers. Show me someone that doesn't suffer and I'll show you someone that you just don't know that well. Because suffering is a part of life and people can become jaded and cynical. You know, in response to pain and tragedy and trauma, many people develop calluses around their hearts which on the one hand may buffer the intensity of the pain of life. But on the other hand, there's a price to pay for those calluses. And the prices that they really prevent us from really feeling...you know these calluses prevent us from really feeling love and joy and happiness, from really feeling a true dynamic living connection to HaShem, to the God of all life, to the God of true life.

And so, I want to share with you a picture primarily brought down by Rav Eli Melech Biederman, about the inner lives of Abraham and Sarah a little bit, just a touch. And I think they convey at least some of these deep truths about why they were able to stay so young. So you know Rav Chaim David Azulai the Chida, he points out that the very first word of the portion already alludes to this truth. The first word is v'yihyu chayei sarah. And so what's that, vav and yud and hey and yud and vav (וַיְיָ). V'yihyu. And he explains that this word, meaning the construct of the word itself, that it goes both backwards and forwards as the same word. He explains that that conveys Sarah's philosophy. Her outlook on life, that if things were going backwards and it seems bad and painful and disappointing. Which by the way we knew, much of Sarah's life seemed like that at least. You know after all, she did spend the first 90 years of her life barren and yearning, and then she was kidnapped numerous times. She felt

compelled to give her beloved husband a concubine so that he could father a son instead of her, and that's just scratching the surface of what she went through.

But despite all of that, she considered all of her bad years, the same as the good years were. Meaning everything was going forward and everything was going well in a revealed way. That's how she viewed life. Rashi says, they were all shavei, they were all equal before her, they were all equally good. She always found the good in every situation and if she couldn't see that good, she had the perfect faith that it was good. Whether or not she understood why. And of course Abraham shared that same quality. The Torah tells us about the end of Abraham's life – And Abraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content and he was gathered unto his people. So Avraham was content. He was satisfied. Despite living a life of non-stop trials and tribulations and tests, he left the world happy and content.

And what allowed for this contentment? His days came upon him, right? This was the reality every day. Every day was coming and every day he received with that same Spirit. From the day his son Yitzchak was born, to the day when he joyously awoke early in the morning to sacrifice him. Each and every day he was content with his lot. And by living being content with your lot each day, when that unknown day of death arrives, you leave the world being content as well.

So to show the contrast, you know, between Abraham and Sarah and so much of the rest of humanity, Rav Biederman brings down the verse from Kohelet, from Ecclesiastes:

He who loves silver, shall not be satisfied with silver. Nor he who loves abundance, with gain. This is all vanity.

The bottom line, leaving the world with a sense of satisfaction and contentment is simply not a common achievement. Now there was a story Rav Biederman shared that I wanted to share with you. Almost exactly word for word, about the Jews of Libya before World War II. So in Libya before World War II, the wealthier Jews lived in Tripoli, and the poor Jews lived outside the city in underground caves. And their primitive accommodations were really, they were just carved out of rock and they lived on dirt floors and lighting was only from the sunlight that shone down the stairwell, outside their homes or the caves or whatever. You know you could understand if these poor Jews were sometimes jealous of the wealthier Jews who lived in comfortable conditions in Tripoli.

But when the cursed Nazis arrived in Libya, the Jews of Tripoli were deported to Bergen Belsen and other concentration camps. But on the other hand, most of those living in the underground caves were saved and eventually made their way to the Land of Israel. And some of them are still alive today. And so that they now realize, you know, how fortunate they were to have lived in those caves. Had they resided in those spacious bright homes in Tripoli, they

too would have been deported to the camps and murdered. And you know, in ways like this, many people look back at their lives and discover that their hardships were really for their benefit. You know, not only in ways that we can comprehend, but also in ways that we can't comprehend because of our limited awareness. Just on the most simple level, right? Without having experienced our hardships and pain, we simply wouldn't have the capacity to truly appreciate happiness and joy. You know, anyone who's recovered from an illness back to health, anyone who's graduated from a toxic relationship to a healthy one, anyone who's ever really experienced darkness can testify to the profound dimension of appreciation and gratitude and recognition they have for the light.

Ok, my friends, I'm going too long, so being that it's my Hebrew birthday today, my real birthday, and I have a particularly powerful gift to bless, I wanna seize this opportunity to do exactly that. To bless all of you, all of us that we should follow in the steps of Abraham and Sarah and live lives of gratitude and happiness and youthfulness, right? Youthfulness. Well lives of love and lives of faith, and Hashem should pour upon us overwhelming abundance of everything good, revealed good, only revealed good. We should have revealed good in our lives, lives of youthfulness and zest and further love for each other, love for Hashem. And as we grow old together, may we stay forever young. Amen. Shalom.

Jeremy

Amen. Thank you, Ari, happy birthday. Beautiful. It's just awesome to get a bracha from you on your birthday. There's a special ancient tradition in Jewish thought. That on your birthday, the day that your soul came into the world, you have a special power to be able to receive and give blessings, so thank you for that.

I want to pass over the mic to Tehila today. And you know, she's such a wonderful teacher. She's so smart. And everyone that were giving her brachas, literally all of the blessings were just continue being who you are, that was the bracha. May you continue to be so wise, may you continue to be so kind, may you continue to be so good. And you know, she's just so wonderful. And you know my job in the house is to make matzav. What is matzav? Matzav in Hebrew is slang for mood. For example, at the Shabbat table, my job isn't to make the food. My job is to make the mood at the Shabbat table. It's my responsibility to make sure that there's Torah around the table, that the children are engaged, that there's meaningful conversations. My job is to make the matzav, to make the mood in the house. And matzav is also making sure that our family is like happy and having a good time, that things are like kind of you know, going in the right direction. And so my job is pretty fun. I like to have fun.

And then one of Tehila's...in her speech, she reminded us of a conversation that I had. Because that's very easy for me to be in charge of having fun. And she's like, you know, Jeremy, people say he's immature. And one time he said, "What does that even mean, immature? Immature for me is just another word for boring." And then Tehila's like, "No, Jeremy, immature is not

just another word for boring.” Well you know, sometimes you can know a word if you use a sentence. “Jeremy, you are not mature.” That’s how she explained that, so that was very good. So that whole surprise birthday part, that was my childishness, trying to kind of tease her to get her to really be upset that she’s not having a good birthday and then surprise her with the most beautiful birthday celebration ever. That was just so much fun. We’ve literally been laughing...well that happened on Thursday night, it’s now Sunday. We’ve been laughing about it for days. And every time I see that video, I can’t help myself. That was just so fun. And so I want to bless you all with the teaching of Tehila on the Torah portion of the week of her birthday, Chayei Sarah. And of course, it’s always beautiful, it’s always deep, it’s always meaningful. And so here is the AM, Tehila Gimpel.

Tehila

Hey guys, so I stumbled across a very interesting idea this past Shabbat. It’s a teeny bit edgy and got me thinking about this past Torah portion in a new light. So I’m like thinking this is something very important to share, but you have to buckle up because it’s a little bit controversial. I hope nobody falls off their seats. Now in Chayei Sarah, we hear about Avraham purchasing the cave of Machpelah from Ephron Chiti, Ephron the Chittite. Now in all of the interpretations and all of the Midrash on this, this is widely praised as this foothold in the Land of Israel. Scores of people go to Chevron on this Shabbat to celebrate the purchase of the Land. And in the Midrash in Bereshit Rabbah, it goes so far as to say that this purchase and the other purchases of the Land are the greatest anchoring of our rights in the Land of Israel. The Midrash says there were three places that were purchased in the Bible for money. Here, when Avraham buys the cave of Machpelah. And then in Bereshit, Genesis 23, when Nablus, Shechem is bought by Ya’acov, and then the third place is Mount Moriah, the place of the Temple which in 1st Chronicles, chapter 21, it says that David purchased for money. The Midrash says that these are the three places in the Land that the nations of the world will never be able to say that you’ve stolen them. Because you’ve bought them and the purchases are clearly written in the Bible. So no one will ever contest the Jewish ownership of this Land.

And you’re thinking to yourself, Yah! No one’s ever gonna contest that, except for then you start scratching your head and saying, “Wait a minute.” And I’m saying this with caution and deference to the Midrash, because it does seem to make intuitive sense, at first like, “Yes, when you purchase something that really would give you a stronghold.” But when we look at the actual reality, like the modern reality that is before our eyes, are there any three places more contested for Jews to be in then, Chevron, Nablus, the Temple Mount? Like these are the three places that everyone says you’re not supposed to be there. Like Chevron, you can go to, but under heavy protection and threat of terrorism. The tomb of Joseph in Shechem, you can go there sometimes if you get special permission from the IDF. The Temple Mount, you almost can’t pray at all because it’s controlled by the Jordanian Waqf.

So with great respect for the Midrash, you have to ask yourself, maybe, just maybe, do we need a different outlook? Meaning maybe the approach here is actually weakening our claim to the Land. When you see the verses, it's so interesting. And I wouldn't have had the courage to say this if I hadn't heard it from a rabbi over Shabbat. But he said, that if you read the verses carefully you see something so interesting that happens. When Avraham approaches and asks for a burial plot. He says, "Hey guys, I'm a ger v'toshav. I'm a stranger and a resident among you." But then the response is so interesting. They all say, "Ok," they say, "No, no, no, no. You're not a stranger, you're not just a resident here. You are a prince of God in our midst, chapter 23, verse 6. Nachmanides explains what they were trying to say. He says that what they were saying is you are not in our eyes as just a stranger and a resident. You're a king to us because God appointed you over us. And we in our lands are servants unto you. Please take any burial plot you want forever, for all future generations. How amazing what they're saying.

Now bear in mind, some decades ago, HaShem promised the whole Land of Avraham to Avraham and his children. So I'm nervous to even say this, because how can we critique Avraham? But on the other hand, we know that every story that happens to our Patriarchs and Matriarchs in the Torah is to teach us about the kind of challenge that we're going to have to deal with one day in the future. So I wonder if perhaps there's a lesson here. Because the story could have just said, "Yes, you know Avraham went, Sarah died, Avraham went, he bought the Land." Why did it tell us this whole story? There must be a lesson here. There must be a reason that the Torah takes the time to tell us about the whole negotiation, where they first offer it for free, and why did they offer it for free? And why did he not want to take it for free? And then it tells us the price, meaning that they...and we see that the price is so high. They didn't just not give it to him for free in the end. They gouged him for 400 shekels, which was a huge amount of money.

Now isn't that exactly what happens to us? Like when we have confidence in HaShem's promise to us, people respond accordingly. When we act and present ourselves as strangers and visitors in the Land...we're not here based on HaShem's promise. We're just sort of like trying to find our little piece that we can be on. And the whole world calls us thieves and takes advantage of you know, takes advantage of us in every negotiation. Perhaps when we read this story, we can imagine another way it could have unfolded. And maybe why watching the outcome of the way it did indeed unfold, there's a deep lesson for us. Like imagine in an alternative universe, where Avraham would have said, "Listen folks, thank you, I appreciate you recognizing that I am here because Hashem promised me this Land. And you will be blessed for blessing me with this burial spot. You are accepting HaShem's kingship over you and your entire lives will now be meaningful and blessed in the service of the one true Creator. Good for you!"

Imagine how that would have played out. You know, Yossi, our partner on the Farm told us a story on Shabbat about when he first came out here to this Land that would eventually become

the Farm. There was this Muslim shepherdess and every time he would drive by kept on screaming curses at him. And usually he would just ignore her. But one day he said, "I'm not gonna ignore her." He stepped out of his car and he's ready to talk to her. And he said, "Why are you cursing me?" And she said, "Why do you keep coming out here?" And he said, "Well this is the Land that HaShem, that God promised us." And she said, "Don't you know that this is Land that's just dead, nothing grows here but thorns anyway." And he said, "You'll see. The Land only gives fruits to her children."

And now that same village where that shepherdess came from, they constantly come here to bless us and say their trees have never given as much fruit as they have in recent years. And it was with that kind of standing and saying, yes, this is HaShem's promise, that that relationship was able to switch from curse to blessing. You know, and I think maybe there's like a lesson here in life. Like any time, you're willing to purchase something, it's like you're saying, "It's not really mine to begin with." And how are you really going to convince the world that way? The only way to convince people that you are the rightful owner to a place, is to explain your actual ownership that is rooted in HaShem's promise.

And it's got me thinking that maybe this idea transcends just the political, Israeli-Palestinian Land grab. Maybe this is a lesson for so many things in life. Like who more than us in these recent years has seen how tyranny will take away rights that we were given by God, Himself. Like our freedom over our comings and goings. Our freedom over our bodies. And take those freedoms and then tell us, "Oh yeah, yeah, you can buy them. You can buy them. You'll be able to leave your house, you can travel, you can work. Oh yeah, if you just pay the price." And by paying the price, what are you saying? You're essentially saying that those freedoms were never really your God-given freedoms to begin with. So maybe there's this hidden message that in every sphere of life, in our fight for the Land of Israel, and our fight for every single right, that HaShem gave us as human beings. If something is yours, you mustn't be willing to pay for it and certainly not outrageous price for it. Because when you do, it's not really yours. You're admitting that it wasn't yours to begin with. And it's just a matter of time before someone starts to say, "That freedom isn't yours. And oh, you purchased it? And it was never really yours to begin with. Now we want even more and even more for you to be allowed to have access to that freedom or that right or that land."

So maybe, there's sort of an ironic lesson here that we can learn from Avraham's interaction and say to ourselves, "How are we going to stand proudly and present to everyone around us that we truly believe in all of HaShem's promises to us. And that everything we have is ours because of that promise. So with that, I wish you guys a beautiful and blessed week.

Jeremy

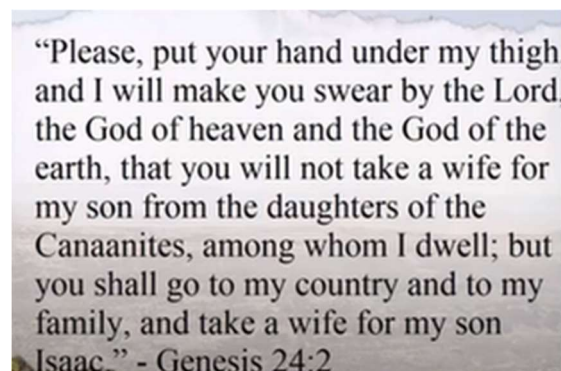
Thank you, Tehila. Thank you. So you know, she mentioned Chevron which is Judea, the tomb of Joseph, which is Samaria, and the Temple Mount which is in Jerusalem. Those are the three

places that the Bible records that we purchased that's ours. It's like no one can say that that's not ours. And those are exactly the places that are on the chopping block. Exactly the places that the world wants to kick us out of. And what do we do with that?

And so, I wanted to dedicate the rest of this Fellowship to two ideas. One is this whole fight for the Land of Israel. Everything is about the Land of Israel. But then I wanted to also play off of what Tehila was saying. Like, if we feel connected, guided by God, then we would feel more comfortable to say like, we were sent here by God. And that would be true in everything in our life. Like why are we married? I didn't choose Tehila, I feel like Hashem chose Tehila for me. My children, I didn't choose my children. HaShem chose my children for me. If everything in our life that we want to infuse with meaning and value, we kind of bring a god—consciousness to it, everything in our life, kind of like elevates. It transcends the regular conversation. How do we then live a guided life where we feel comfortable living that way?

And in this week's Torah portion, it actually gives us the code. The code of how to live a guided life. And that is the story of how Isaac finds his wife. It's the only story in the Torah that is told twice. First it happens, and then the servant of Abraham retells the story to Rebecca's father, saying exactly what had just happened. It's like the whole story is like so long because it's actually told twice. If a story in the Torah is being told twice, pay attention, because in that story is actually the key. And who is it? It's not a prophet, it's not Abraham, it's Abraham's servant. It's true for him, it's true for all of us. That's why the story is given over as an unassuming person who's not a spiritual giant, he's just the servant of Abraham, and he though is living a guided life. And the map that the Torah gives us is teaching us how we are meant to live a guided life. And then, if we start living in that rhythm, in that frequency, then obviously the posture that we'll kind of stand toward the world, toward ourselves, toward our wives, towards our children, toward everyone, toward the nations, will be a God-guided life.

And so, if you have your fellowship journals, I would absolutely encourage you to write these points down. Because it's literally steps that are taken. The first step is commitment. And we see that in Genesis chapter 24, verse 2. How does the servant of Avraham start off his journey? He starts off with a vow:



“Please, put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” - Genesis 24:2

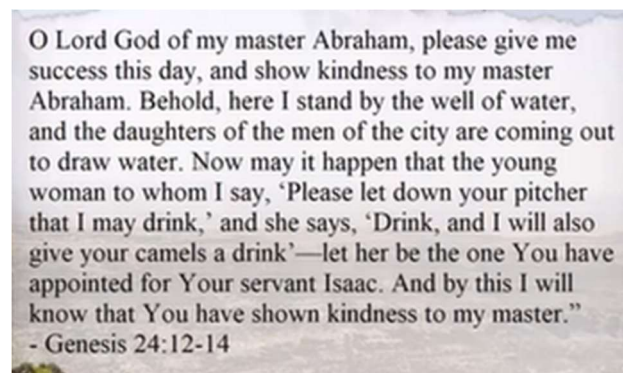
Ok, now words have lost a lot of their power in modern, secular worlds. But in ancient days, a vow, I mean the word testament actually comes...Tehila taught me this, from the word testicles, from what's happening here. They're making a testimony. They are making a covenant, they're making a vow. I am committed to doing this no matter what. And when you make a

commitment, when you make a vow, and your word creates your reality, but you stick by your commitment, the reality changes around you. Meaning usually, you're kind of living your life and then reality changes you because something hits you and you've gotta go off course. But if you live by your vow and you live by your commitment, instead of reality changing you, you are committed, and then reality changes for you. And that's a whole other story.

I remember we were in the United States, and my children, this is years ago, my children saw, I don't know some really horrific candy. It wasn't like a normal chocolate, it was like Sour Patch Kids, or something like that. With like chemicals and sugar and like the worst. Like guaranteed you're gonna get like holes in your teeth to sugar rush, to addiction, chemicals. And they're like, "Oh, can we have Sour Patches, can we have Sour Patch Kids?" And we're like, "No, no." But we're waiting in line in some store. "Oh come on Abba, can we have Sour Patches? Can we please have Sour Patches?" And I'm like, "No, you cannot have Sour Patches, no cannot have." "Please, please, Ima's not looking, give us Sour Patch Kids, please give us Sour Patch kids." I'm like, "No no, you cannot have Sour Patch Kids." And I'm like about to flip a lid, and then I'm like, "Oh children, it's not kosher." "Ok, Abba, sorry." End of conversation.

And I remember that the non-Jewish woman next to me was like, "Wow, I need to learn that trick." I remember that being really funny, that she's like watching me talk to my children and that's what did it. I said it's not kosher, well that's the end of the conversation. They're not going to eat something if it's not kosher. If it's sour, it's not healthy, it's chemicals, it's sugar, I'm trying to give all the arguments. It's not kosher, done! The reality is going to change now because my children are committed to eating kosher. And that's just like a cute story. But that's really powerful. If you live firstly committed which is no one wants to commit to their job, no one wants to commit to their partner. No one is actually living by commitment, but the commitment is what actually powers your life. So the first step of living a God-powered life is the commitment to live a guided life.

Then the second part is to ask. So you want something, you're in a challenging spot. There's something that you need. Ask for it. And that's what the servant of Abraham did. Look at Genesis chapter 24, verses 12-14. He asks, he opens up his heart and says:

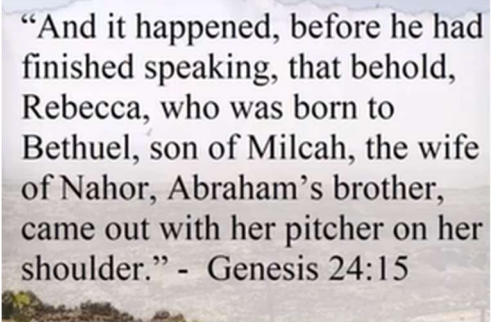


O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now may it happen that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'—let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master."
- Genesis 24:12-14

Now it's not just to ask, but the language there is now may it happen...in Hebrew, let it just happen. I'm open God. I don't know how it's going to happen. I don't know when it's gonna happen, but I'm asking. And as I'm asking, I'm opening myself up to also receiving, meaning there's a difference between going outside and complaining to

God. Complaining to God is like, "I want this, and this is so hard, and this is so bad." You're closed up when you're complaining. And I'm not saying you shouldn't pour your heart out before God. It's ok. But the idea here is to ask in an openness, not in a closed, complaining. It's a difference. HaShem, may it happen, may it happen before me.

And then look at what happens. If you're open to it, look at what happens. It's interesting because in this parsha, both happen. He's not even yet done praying and he's answered. That happens to the servant of Abraham, and also Isaac is out in the fields. He's not even done praying and his wife has already come to him. And then what does it say in Genesis chapter 24, verse 15:

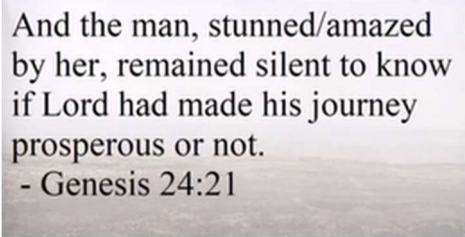


"And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebecca, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder." - Genesis 24:15

And did exactly what he asked for. He said, "God I'm looking for a sign. Show me. I'm open to it, I want to live by that. And he didn't even finish speaking and it was already manifesting. God had already started to answer his prayers before he even opened his mouth. And the same thing happens with Isaac. Isaac is out talking to God in the fields, and as he's out there, his wife is already coming. And of course there he's

praying, "Please God, send me a good wife. Send me someone righteous, send me someone that I can build the nation of Israel with.

And then the next stage. So, commitment, ask, be open, and the last one, the second to last one, be amazed. Look at what happens. This is Genesis chapter 24, verse 21:



And the man, stunned/amazed by her, remained silent to know if Lord had made his journey prosperous or not. - Genesis 24:21

In Hebrew, the word is nista'eh. It's such a beautiful word. It means like "stunned," he's like deer in a headlight. He's like, "Oh, I'm amazed." It's like a mixture between stunned, amazed, stopping, just oh my goodness!" That part of living is so important. If you are not living in amazement, if you're just taking things for

granted. Taking things for granted is closing up. Living in amazement, in awe, is being open. Open to communication, open to blessing, being amazed, look what happens.

And you see the same message as Isaac is out in the field praying. Rebecca comes. And that's literally my favorite part in the Torah. I think it's so funny. Rebecca is coming and she's on a camel, and she just sees Isaac and is so madly in love, taken, stunned, amazed. She falls off her camel, that's what the Torah says. She is so stunned and amazed and taken at just the sight of Isaac that the Torah like goes out of its way to make kind of a joke. She falls off her camel. Camels are a tall animal. It's not like falling off a horse. It's like falling off a horse on top of a horse. She's like so blown away, literally blown away, falls off her camel. That's actually a way

of living. And if you lived where everything is a cliché, everything is cynical, everything has been said, everything has been done, everything is just inroad, everything is just a habit, then that doesn't allow you that feeling of whoah! That opens your life, that opens you up. That's why in Jewish prayer, the Amidah starts off first with praise. It first starts off with praise. That praise is not to praise God. God doesn't need our praise. It's allowing us to experience that "Wow, God You are so big, You are so good, You are so great, You are so beyond." That feeling is the praise that we're expressing, isn't to give God anything. He doesn't need that. It's for us to live in amazement. It's for us to live in awe. It's for us to live in wonder at the mystery of it all. And when we live in it, we're then open. Open to receive communication, open to receive blessings, our eyes are open to see that we are being guided.

And then the last step, the last code for living a guided life is Genesis chapter 24, verse 26:

Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord.
- Genesis 24:26

Gratitude, thank you, thank you. Those two emotions, feeling amazed, in awe, and in wonder. That's the beginning of a relationship with God. And the second one that sustains our relationship is gratitude. Those five keys, first commitment, but really be committed, commit, ask, and not complain. Ask and open to receive in amazement and be grateful. Those five keys are given as marks in this story as Abraham leads us. The man with no religion, the man that had no law, the man that just lived in a connection in prayer with God. This last story before Abraham dies is giving us the code of how to walk in Abraham's ways, to live in a dynamic relationship with God

And so all of that then culminates ultimately in the purchase in the Land of Israel. And what is that all about? Why is all of this, all of this, all of the Torah is revolved around the story of the Land of Israel. It's like the first command given to Abraham before anything is to go to the Land that I will show you. It's like to make aliyah, to be connected to the Land of Israel is a prerequisite for all of Judaism. It's like a prerequisite for all of the Torah. HaShem in Genesis, Chapter 12, verse 7. Look at what it says:

Hashem appeared to Avram and said, "To your descendants I will give this Land..." and he built there an altar to the Lord who appeared to him.
- Genesis 12:7

And Rashi points out, outside of the Land Abraham was just able to hear or intuit what God wanted. Inside the Land, God was able to appear to him. Vayera alav Avraham, and HaShem appeared to Avraham. And then Avraham was like, "I'm building an altar here." The level and connection that we experience when we're inside the Land of Israel, when we're plugged to what's happening in the Land of Israel is an entire different level of interaction.

And then look at what happens. Avraham continues, Genesis 15, the last covenant, the last gift, the last statement to Avraham is this:

God said to him [Avram], “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur Kasdim to give you this Land to inherit.”
– Genesis 15:7

I didn't give it to you to be a beautiful thing, to make a Torah, to make a religion. I gave it to you for you to inherit the Land. That's what this is all about. Just so you know, but there's something about that that's really remarkable. That the base covenant with God IS the Land. The promise is the Land.

And then look at what happens centuries later with Moses in chapter 3 in the book of Exodus, verses 7 and 8. God says to Moses at the burning bush:

... for I have known its suffering. I shall descend to rescue it from the hand of Egypt and to bring it up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk with honey.
- Exodus 3:7-8

Why is God taking the Israelites out of Egypt? Not to give them the Torah. He's taking them out of that Land to bring them to the Land of Israel, to bring them to the Land flowing with milk and honey. And the whole Torah is like, the story of Avram going to the Land, the story of us leaving the Land, our story walking through the desert back to the Land. It's all surrounded through the Land of Israel.

And then you can see it also played out in the story of Rifka. What happens there? Avram's like, “No, no, no. Don't take a wife from these Canaanite women. Uh-uh. I want you to go back to the Land of my father and take a woman there. Now most commentators say, “Listen, the Canaanites, they were like Isis on heroin, Isis on steroids, they were like the most evil, they were like horrible, horrible, horrible people. Of course you're not going to take a wife from the Isis-like child sacrificing, horrible people that were the Canaanites of old. Go back to my father's house. There you'll find some good, upright people. And that's how most of the commentators put it.

But I think something deeper is happening here. Rebecca is going to be a matriarch in the Land of Israel. Abraham and Sarah, what did they have to do? They had to listen to God, they had to live a guided life. And where did that guided life lead them? It led them to the Land of Israel. And here in this incredible story of a vow, an opening, a sign, here Rebecca is now given a choice. Look what's happening. Spice carts are falling in before your eyes. God is literally showing you the way, guiding you, but you have a choice now. You have the choice that Avraham and Sarah had. What is the choice? The choice is, will you make aliyah to the Land of Israel. And Rebecca herself had to feel that lech lecha, had to walk that lech lecha, had to actually go out into the unknown and walk to the Land of Israel.

All of the stories of the Torah are all surrounded about the Land of Israel. Why? And we also know that the Land of Israel is a challenging place. Actually the sages of Israel say that the Land of Israel is only acquired through hardships and suffering. It's like Abraham was promised the Land. Why did he need to buy it? And he had to buy it like an outrageous price, to the point where Tehila is like, maybe Avraham made a mistake there. But the sages of Israel say that was

actually a test. In Avot they say that that was a test. God promised him the Land and he had to even end up buying it at an outrageous price. Is God not fulfilling his promise? And Abraham said, "No, this is all a part of the process." The Land of Israel is a challenging Land because every challenge is set for us to overcome. That is a part of living a guided life. The problems in our life are not happening to us, the problems in our life are happening for us. Every challenge that we have is exactly tailored for us. The prophets and sages promise that every individual has a challenge that you have the ability, you have the power, to overcome it. God will not set you up on a test that you cannot pass. And when you overcome them, you become more blessed. Abraham, after all of his tests, after Sarah finally passes, after he purchases the Land, then it says, "And Abraham was blessed with everything."

And so what is all of this about? It's about living a committed life to the Torah. And when you commit to living a committed life, a guided life, the Land of Israel is the arena where the spiritual workout will force us to become who we need to become. And if you're outside the Land of Israel, but your heart is in the Land of Israel, believe me, your heart being in the Land of Israel is doing a particular workout for you that you need to connect other people to the Land of Israel, you need to stand up for Israel when other people are defaming the Land of Israel. Every person, the Land of Israel is the light. The Land of Israel is the direction that we all need to be walking, and each one have our own path, and each one have our own destiny. But the theater of redemption, God's plan for all of humanity, is that by living that committed life, connected to the Land of Israel, that life, that life is going to bring us to a higher place, to a better place, to a more truthful place. We'll become more honest, we'll have more integrity, we'll become more courageous, we'll become more grateful, we'll become more humble, we'll become more loving, stronger and better. All along the way, we'll be guided, we just need to open our eyes to see it, to live committed, to ask, to be open to receive, to live in amazement and awe, and to be grateful. And you'll see. The guidance will guide us, all of us, all the way to Yerushalyim, all the way to the Temple that will be built. And that's the place where all of humanity is being called to. And every believer has a pulling and a yearning and that pulling and yearning is going to guide them toward their destiny.

So ask God for guidance, ask God for blessing, be open to receiving it, live in wonder and amazement and don't forget our patriarch's name is laughter. Yitzchak. That's what comes after Abraham. You have to remember to live and be happy and enjoy this ride. Never take anything for granted. Every day is a gift, every day is a blessing. We didn't earn this life, we were given this life. Enjoy it, bless the people around, hug them, love them, throw surprise birthdays for them. Celebrate every year that you have with your loved ones together. And be grateful for another week. And so may we all enjoy the gift of life, live a committed life, and be blessed to connect together through this Promised Land. May HaShem bless every one of you and may you be open to receive this blessing from the Land of Israel.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew) Shalom my friends, I love you and I'll see you again next week.