

Session 71
Toldot – The Story of Isaac
The Path of the Hero Like You've Never Heard
7 November 2021
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XBozfNdtmE>

Jeremy

So shalom and everyone welcome to the Land of Israel fellowship. I can't tell you...I just love seeing all of your faces. I'm watching the chats...it's like, Sweden and Croatia and New Zealand. I was wondering...when is that? They write me, it's 5 a.m. in the morning. I mean, it's like from all over the world, there's Colorado, it's like Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, it's like, Louisiana, it's like the whole country is all over. I'm looking at all of your faces from all over the world. It is just beyond.

We had the head of the Hesder Yeshiva Otniel which is the yeshiva that I studied in, which is the largest Hesder Yeshiva in Israel, out to the farm this last week. And a Hesder Yeshiva is a Yeshiva program where they fuse Torah study and military service into a five-year program altogether. And Otniel is now the largest Hesder Yeshiva in Israel, the most popular Hesder Yeshiva in Israel. And I was telling the rabbi who, he didn't know about the Land of Israel fellowship. And when I was explaining to him what it was, and what it is, and how it started, and that now we have this global community from all over the world. And we have a couple of Catholic nuns, one in Germany and one in Arizona. And we have Jews in Israel and pastors in America, and we have like this unbelievable group of believers from all around the world that just want to become closer to God, want to love Israel, want to follow His ways, want to figure this thing out as we approach these days. He was just so absolutely inspired and blown away and he said, that's the reason why he is now considering retiring from his position at the height of his career, at the biggest yeshiva in Israel. And he says that he is now considering wanting to do something more out of the box. Perhaps reaching out to the nations of the world with the Torah, perhaps join and help at the Arugot Farm. Who knows what might happen? But just teaching him about the Land of Israel Fellowship. He said that it shook him so deeply, he didn't know what to do with himself. Because for 50 years he's been in the study hall, in the synagogue, studying about prophecy, studying about, you know, just philosophy, the Torah, the guidance, what the world should look like. And then all of a sudden, he's saying the world is manifesting in the vision that the prophets had. And we're somehow a part of all of that. And it just absolutely blew him away. And when you influence someone of such stature in the heart of Israel, you just never know what the ripple effects might be.

So, aside from that, I have amazing exciting news for all of you, this fellowship. I can't wait to show you the pictures. I know that Tehila has a Torah. It quite literally changed my life, literally. It changed my life because it answers a really important question about the Bible that I never knew. And once you know that question and once you know the answer...first, you have

to ask the question, that I never really asked, or I thought that I already knew the answer, but I didn't. And then when you know the answer, it's like, wow, that's really revealing. And so, I just can't wait to hear what she has to say. It ties in perfectly with this week's Torah portion, seemingly as does everything that we're doing here. Ari's with us this time and this...it's just a blessing. This fellowship is just a blessing in the heart of the Land of Israel, what else can we say? And it's interesting because the Land of Israel is what is the source of our blessing. It's like, we are blessing the Land and the Land is blessing us. And how beautiful it is to just be in tune with God's blessing in our lives.

And just a quick story. There's so many stories, I have to pick and choose, but this one...I'm driving my car, on the way to the fellowship and I get a phone call from one of our dearest friends in the fellowship, Rena Quint. And as you know, Rena is one of my family's closest friends. She's a survivor of the Holocaust. As a girl, somehow, she miraculously survived Bergen-Belsen. And I get a call from Rena, and I'm always happy to hear from Rena, so I pick up the phone and I'm wondering, like you know, what's new? And she's like, "Hey, could I have Esther's number?" And I'm like, "Esther who, Rena?"

And she's like, "You know, Esther from the fellowship, from Germany. I heard she's in Israel and I want to invite her to my home."

My eyes welled up in tears and I almost crashed the car because I didn't know what to do with myself. I'm like, oh my goodness, to think that our fellowship has somehow brought Rina from Bergen-Belsen to Jerusalem and Esther from Germany together in the Land in friendship in these days. It's just about the most beautiful thing that I can think of. And you know, there's just...there's so much hate in the world. And there's so much darkness and so much sickness in the world. And here there's this fellowship that is just a giant global torch of light, of goodness and of love, and it just keeps on growing and getting stronger. And I just wanted you to know, that's just like one of the stories, and the impact that our fellowship is having.

And so, like we do every week, I just want to bring our hearts together from New Zealand to South Africa to Sweden to Croatia, all around the world together in prayer. What an opportunity and what a generation we live.

HaShem, thank You for this fellowship and thank You for this time. Your works and Your ways are so mysterious and wondrous. How You've brought this all together is just astounding. Thank You for allowing us to have a glimpse into the beauty of Your design and Your plan for Israel and Your plan for the world. We come here together to start our week together. Direct our hearts and our minds towards Zion, to connect to Your Word and doing our best to live a life guided by You. So, please continue to bless this fellowship and guide our ways. Fill our lives with Your light and may we be guided by Your wisdom and Your Torah. And our fellowship around the world together says, "Amen."

So, you all know that Ari and I, we've been friends for, I don't know, 20 years now? More than 20 years? I was 18, 19 years old. So, I don't know exactly what brought Ari and I together. It's hard to know, we were just kids when we were together. And you know, I think when I try to analyze it, I think we all had just a sincere desire to become better people. And we sort of discovered along the way that the closer we get to HaShem, the closer we draw to God, the better we become. And when Ari and I were 18 or 19, we had a lot. We had a long way to go. We had a lot to work on. And then, at the same time, we both just had an inexplicable passion for the Land of Israel. And then, those two kind of meaningful realities, I think set us into friendship that as until today, I mean it's lasted, I think. I don't know many people that have such a close friend like Ari and I. It's just amazing. And, you know, when I think about over the years, as we've sort of like worked on ourselves and through our friendship kind of you know, figured things out...you know, I can see that, you know, we've become, or at least Ari has become more giving, more kind, more courageous, more grateful, more honest. Just a good guy, you know, he's just...he's amazing.

But yet still, in all of that, his dog has eaten five of my chickens. And I still haven't had my chickens back yet. So, I want you to know what I did this week. And I sent this to the rabbi. I say, "Well, you know, I parked my horse in his backyard this Friday. And I just left him there because it's got green beautiful grass and it's saving me my money because I'm not making eggs anymore. So, I'm like, "All right, so at least I'll save money on buying hay. He'll eat Ari's grass." But I knew that if Hector stays there long enough, he's going to leave a present for Ari. He's going to leave a present for Ari. And lo and behold, after you know, an hour or so, Hector, he left a big pile of horse present for Ari in his garden. And at the beginning, I feel bad because I felt good about it because I wanted my chickens to be restored to me. I felt like, you know, as long as my chickens are not being restored, then may Hector should have the right to eat his grass and poop in his garden. And I just didn't know if that was good of me, was that bad of me? So I sent a message to our mutual Rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Katz. And I wanted to know what the halacha was. I was like, "Rabbi, he's not giving me my new chickens, so in the meantime, I've decided I'm putting my horse in his garden to eat his grass and that will compensate for the fact that I don't have my eggs in the morning like I used to, and if he poops in the grass, that's sort of my revenge for killing my chickens."

I haven't heard back from the Rabbi yet, but the whole thing, I just love what's happening. Because we're really going to understand the Torah law here. Like we're really going to figure this out. Like, what are we supposed to do when your friend's dog eats your chickens and your horse poops in his grass? And it's sort of done on purpose. So, once we figure that out, I'm going to let you guys know what the Rabbi says is the Torah law according to that. But in the meantime, that's sort of life on the farm, on a personal level.

On a national level, much bigger things are happening. And I want to tell you this great idea. This is just unbelievable. So, in the last fellowship, I told you that you know, we met these

people that you know, I think that we love the Land of Israel. And my shepherdess is engaged to a man who has a whole team of guys that...he's just love struck, married to the Land, living in the Land, intense, giving...he gave up all material possessions, currently just to protect, guard, and settle the Land of Israel. And when I saw that, I was so inspired, I said, "Well Ari and I we just want to help you. How can we help this team of young Maccabees?" And they said, "Well, maybe a tractor. I think if we had a tractor, we wouldn't have to then stay next to the water holes. And we'd be able to take our sheep all throughout the desert everywhere."

And so I said, "Okay, I'm going to put it out to the fellowship. I'm going to let them know that we have like...the Arugot Farm has become now a headquarters and we have branches now. Not just spiritual branches of members in the fellowship around the world, but now we have physical branches that are settling the Land of Israel in these mobile farms."

And so, I wanted to share the most exciting news to you today. Because Yossi, who is in charge of tractor purchases because Ari and I we've never purchased tractors before. So, he just sent me these two pictures. Can we put them up on the screen?



There it is. Our fellowship has just put a down payment for that tractor.



Now, I don't know what to tell you about that, but it just seems like this fellowship, there's nothing that we can't do. I just keep on putting another challenge in front of us. God reveals us to another amazing thing that we need to do and somehow, every single time, we've just stepped up to the calling and by next week, that tractor is going to have new tires, it's going to be brought to the Arugot Farm, and then...they don't know that we've done this yet. They're Maccabees, they're living in caves. They don't have smartphones. They're not on this Zoom call. So, we're going to surprise them and they're going to out of nowhere...they're going to be like, "What? God has just manifested a tractor for us to go conquer the Land of Israel?"

I just can't wait to see the look on their face. And this fellowship, it's something so miraculous because we're not just learning together, we're not just praying together, we're not just

growing together, but we are quite literally impacting and settling the Land of Israel like the cutting edge of the Jewish settlement. And the restoration of the Land of Israel, all of us are participating in, and that is just unbelievable.

And so, with that introduction, from the chicken and the horse fiasco, all the way to settling the Land of Israel in the most marvelous and courageous way that I know of today in the Land, I want to introduce to you, Rabbi Ari Abramowitz to share with us his wisdom and his insights. So, Ari, take it away.

Ari

Shalom, shalom, can you hear me? Brandon, Mark, Lor, give me a thumbs up. Ok, great, so first of all, I'm not going to go into the whole chicken scenario, the horse scenario for this program, but there are two sides to that story. Believe me, there are two sides to that story and my side is much more interesting than Jeremy's side. So, I'm going to get into that next week, deep into the kishkas of that story where you're able to see not only the righteousness with which I acted, but the actual absolute depravity with which Jeremy acted and indeed, Hector did leave a beautiful steaming present for me on my grass. And just....it was almost worth it just when Dvash came outside and said, "Hector poop, Hector poop!" Because it was like a full sentence! Shaena and I looked at each other. We were just so happy that she was able to bring that all together, because it was exciting for her to walk outside and see Hector standing in our backyard, eating the grass. And so, it's an interesting story. There's actually Jewish law and consequences of that story and I'm eager to share that with you next week.

But this week, I want to dive into something else. Because you know, it was difficult for me to choose what I wanted to discuss on this parsha because there's so much to talk about, but Jeremy asked me to share about a certain process that I'm going through regarding my own quest for self-mastery, right? On my quest for teshuva, repentance, because that's what self-mastery is. Because as you know, my friends, we've been through enough to know that repentance is not just relegated to the high holidays or the days of Atonement. But it's really a lifelong mission.

As Rav Kook says, the journey of teshuva begins in the physical domain with our physical bodies. And it was hard to say no to Jeremy regarding his request that I talk about this because he was actually a significant part of my inspiration on this critical, critical journey for myself. Because I'm getting up there, you know, we're getting up there, we're getting older. And our health is not something we could just take for granted. And I'm getting started late and Dvash is a year and a half, and please God we'll be blessed with more children and so I want to be there for them. So, I owe Jeremy a lot for that. You know, he wakes up at 4:30 a.m., and he goes running. And he does that in the cold and the dark, it doesn't matter what. And then he jumps in an ice cream freezer every day. I've seen him do it. I've actually seen him break the surface of the ice in order to get in the water. And then he jumps in a microwave. Ok, he's

either a psychopath or he's a rebbe. And fortunately, I know him well enough to know that he's a rebbe. He's one of my great rebbes in the world.

And so, when I looked at the parsha, I saw that this was actually the perfect parsha to start opening up and letting you in on this journey because I wanted to share it with you, I wanted to open up with it, I just didn't know if I was far enough into it yet, if I had the courage, the vulnerability. But I thought this was a good one because we don't know much about Yitzchak, about Isaac from the text of the Torah itself. But one of the keys to Yitzchak's very essence has very much fueled the journey that I'm about to share with you. So like many of you, I have lofty goals. And I've tried different approaches to achieve these goals. And while I've been successful with some of them, I have, others that I've failed at. I've failed at again and again and again. And I tend to sabotage myself in any sign of success. And sometimes it's hard to figure out why. And the only thing I'm proud of regarding these failures is that I'm still at it. Is that I haven't quit.

And inspiring my resilience regarding these, are the words of our sages, tzadek nofel sheva pa'amim v'kam. The righteous fall seven times and continue to stand up again. And I aspire in my life to try to be as righteous as I can. And the number seven by the way I've been told is not the number seven, but it includes seven and up. It means many, many, many. That's what seven means. And believe me, I've fallen many more than seven times. Now as you remember, this past summer, I had a few really hard weeks. And I shared those weeks with you, I shared that journey with you whether you liked it or not. I just had to be transparent and you just were so loving and so responsive. I really feel like we bonded together, between me and you guys during that time. And many of you reached out and really helped me through it. And I'll never forget what we went through together. And Jeremy was in America, and wasn't there for me like all the times I really need him most. I'm just kidding, Jeremy's there for me. But anyways, it was intense, it was intense, and I remember I was talking to a friend of mine on the phone. I believe he's a rabbi, but I'm not sure. Jeremy, without saying his name, is he a rabbi? You don't know if he's a rabbi. Anyways, he's definitely one of my rabbis. And he was sharing such valuable wisdom with me. And I said, "You know, you should really be a therapist."

And he said, "To tell you the truth, I am a therapist." So I said, "I never knew that about you. And the truth is, I've never had a personal therapist, but I'm going through a rough time, so let's do it."

And so, we started doing that together. And he was really helping me. And as often happens when you're going through a rough time, you feel like it's going to last forever, but in just a few weeks, it passes. And that's what happened here. But I said to him, "You know, brother, I want to keep this up. It can only help. So, even if it's not therapy, right? Let's just call it life coaching, advice, a student talking to his rebbe."

And so we started our work together and we were going over my dreams and goals and aspirations and trying to balance everything. And we got to one of my great challenges that I've been struggling with most of my life. And that's what I perceived at least was the challenge. And that was my weight. I've never been super overweight, but it's always been a thing. Since I'm a kid, it's always been a thing. And while I know that there were ways I was approaching it and thinking about it that were causing self-sabotage, I could never put my finger on it, I could never figure it out. And during one of the first sessions, my dear friend, therapist, rebbe, life-coach, whatever you call him, he put his finger right on it. At least, I mean if it wasn't it, right, he definitely got me closer. So sharing with him my goals and talking about the weight thing, right? The Atkins, and the Keto and the Paleo, and the intermittent fasting...Jeremy, I can't even talk to him about it anymore. He's like, ok, 20 years of this, I'm done! Keep your weight to yourself, keep it to yourself!

You know, all these ideas, from the Paleo, the Keto, it just felt like I was treading water and never really getting there. And then he said, he said, "Ari, it seems to me like your goals are off. It seems like your purpose shouldn't be to lose weight, but much more importantly to prove something to yourself. To prove to yourself that you are a man of integrity. That you're able to set a goal and stick to it. That is the purpose, in and of itself. It's not your weight, it's not your speed, it's not your cardio, and it's not your strength. It's to prove your integrity to yourself."

And I mean, it's just like, you know, that penetrated deeply and I realized that there's definitely truth to what he's saying. So he said, "Ok, Ari, here's what you should consider doing. Set a goal. Right? Something ambitious. Ambitious, but realistic. One thing that you'll stick to in order to prove to yourself that you're a man of your word."

And after a little bit of thinking, I said, "Ok, you know what? My goal is that I will eat only between 12, meaning noon and 7 p.m., for 90 consecutive days. Ninety consecutive days. Not one bite of anything outside of that window no matter what. So my thinking was that most of my damage I do at night. But I'll tell you, it's like, that's what I do. Nighttime eating. And so, this way, I can really eat what I want, but during the hours from 12 to 7 p.m., in the middle of the day. Cookies, cake, pizza, I just try not to be a schmendrick about it, but I can be if I want to be. And it was hard at the beginning and I would wake up every hour in the middle of the night and I would drink bubbly water. I would then use the restroom because I've been drinking bubbly water the hour before. So it was throughout the night, using the restroom, drinking bubbly water. And this is like a week straight. Is this too much information? Forgive me. We're family here. Maybe this won't be a public sharing documentary with the world, won't be a highlight. But anyways, for about a week I was doing this. And my body started to adapt and it felt good to have impulses. And these physiological impulses – to have them and to overcome them. To procrastinate them, to push them off. I can always eat tomorrow at noon, whatever I wanted to eat that night. I felt like my soul was emerging from the dust and I was starting to take control of my own ship.

And the first three weeks, I actually messed up when Shabbat came around. I didn't plan it right, I didn't plan the window right. And I just started again, started again, new check marks, started again right at the beginning. And I've lost over 30 pounds. I started at 246 and I just weighed in at 214. 214. That's like 14 kilos, I don't know, I didn't do the math, but I haven't been this low in years. And it's really because HaShem sent me a messenger who was able to guide me and help me realize that the goal is integrity. Not weight loss. The goal is restraint, right? It's not my pants size.

And HaShem also gave me the strength and the resolution and the ability to see things differently and to be true to that truth. And I remember hearing someone once say that discipline is what it looks like when your higher desires rule over your lower desires. Right? When your higher desires rule over your lower desires, it takes work. Right? It takes remembering. There are times I want to forget. There are even times that Jeremy says, "Ari, let's go out to dinner, let's grab a bite. No, it's ok, you can have it at 7:30 p.m., because it is actually daylight savings time." He said this! He said this, it's daylight savings time and you can do it. And I said, "No. No, Jeremy, no Jeremy sitting on my shoulder, the evil impulse, Jeremy. I'm not listening to you."

And he's like, "You know what? I'm proud of you." And there are times I go to a barbecue and I wrap up chicken poppers in foil and I eat them the next day. But it's barzel, it's iron, it's non-negotiable, it's unreasonable. And it's been liberating. Because you know, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, he said that self-respect is the fruit of discipline. That the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to oneself. And that my friends is the deepest essence of Yitzchak. Because out of all the forefathers, we really know the least about him. This was his parsha, but what do we know about him? We know that he was willing to sacrifice it all. And the Talmud actually tells a story, a conversation, right? That happened between Yitzchak and Ishmael. This was before the incident where Abraham offered him up on the top of Har Moriyah.

Here's the story, right? One day Ishmael was boasting to Isaac that he was circumcised at the age of 13 and that he did not protest. And that was an advantage over Isaac who had been too young to protest at the time of his circumcision. And Isaac replied, "You think that sacrificing one organ makes you better than me? If God said to me, 'sacrifice yourself before me, I would not hold back.'" Right? And he didn't. God brought him to that exact test and he passed it with flying colors. His father was going to sacrifice him on the altar and the sages said that at the moment he asked his father what they were going to be offering, where's this sacrifice, and his father Abraham said, "God's going to provide the sacrifice." It was at that moment that Isaac knew. That Yitzchak knew that he was going to be the sacrifice. Nonetheless, the Torah says that they went to the mountain yachdav, together. Unified in heart and in mind and in mission. So Yitzchak loved HaShem so much that he was able to restrain, right? To restrain the deepest impulse that man has, which is the impulse to survive. The impulse to live. And that's

why I'm sure Jeremy will explain it later, because he's been getting into these concepts of the attributes in such a beautiful and illuminating and inspiring way.

You know, every day he gives these classes to the shepherdesses and I've been going to them. Not to contribute, but just to learn from him. Really, it's been so beautiful, it's been so powerful. And so Jeremy will talk, I'm sure about the attribute that Yitzchak has embodied. This attribute of gevurah, of self-restraint, of self-control. And these, you know, these translations. They really don't do it full justice. The idea of gevurah is so much deeper than that, but you have to start the translation somewhere. All right, there's so much to share regarding the life of Yitzchak, but fortunately this portion transitions seamlessly to the next week's portion. So we can dive into it further together right after I tell you my version of the chicken story and the horror story which I think is worth tuning in just for that.

But until then, I want to bless us all that we should be able to reveal the Divine light within ourselves by expressing these great attributes of our forefathers, right? The gevurah, the self-restraint of Yitzchak. And by mastering our bodies and our speech and our deeds and by controlling our impulses. May we reveal HaShem within ourselves and within the entire world. I love you all my friends, shalom, shalom.

Jeremy

Amen. Amen, Ari. That was absolutely beautiful. And so, I...we're going to talk about Yitzchak, and like what Ari just said now, he is the manifestation of the Hebrew word, gevurah, which is usually translated as strength. But before we get to that, I need to add one more dimension here. And that's going to be Tehila. Now, tomorrow is Tehila's birthday. That's a big deal. I almost always mess it up. I'm really going to try this year to really do good on her birthday this year. I'm really going to try. But it's hard to be married to me because I'm all over the place. I'm constantly forgetting what I'm supposed to do because I'm juggling seven other things. And Tehila, she's been on quite a ride and the one to blame for most of the bumps on the road is the driver. And so, it's really not easy to be married to me. But, it's not easy to be married to Tehila either because she's so good. She's just like, "Come on, can you just eat one piece of chocolate cake?" Like, what? Can you just once not be the most honest person on the planet? Like she just sets such a standard. It's just hard to be around that and constantly come up short. But, we are so lucky to have her in our lives. I just...she's just such an example, such a light, and she is the rock of my family. She is nothing less than a sage. She's so wise and so intelligent and every week she teaches me something new. Every week, I'm constantly learning from her. And this week is no different. This week was just so beautiful. And so, this is an amazing Torah and I can't wait to hear it. So here, you have Tehila Gimpel.

Tehila

Hey guys, I hope you're all doing well. Today, I want to start with a pop quiz. HaShem appears in the world, He tells people things, right? Sometimes He speaks to us as a nation, sometimes

He speaks to individuals, to prophets. If I ask you, when HaShem appears and says something, is there a theme that repeats itself most often, like what is the most often, like what is the most common sentence, commandment, guidance that HaShem gives us? It's an important thing to know, right? Because if we know that, then we'll know what HaShem most often wants from us. So I did this pop quiz on Shabbat for our friends, and they said, maybe it's the verse that says not to cook a lamb in its mother's milk. Well, ok, that's a good guess, that appears in the Torah three times. I popped quizzed Jeremy as well. I knew what he was going to say, but I still asked him and I knew he would get it wrong. And he of course said, it's to take care of the orphan and the widow. Which is also a good guess, that appears like three or four times in the Torah and many other times in the prophets, like maybe tenish. Ok, doing closer, he's getting better.

The phrase that appears most often in the Bible as something that HaShem says to either us as individuals or as people, is actually also in this past week's Torah portion. HaShem says it to Yitzchak in chapter 26. And the verse says, "Al tirah." Do not fear, that is the most common thing that HaShem says to people. Do not fear. HaShem says it to Abraham, He says it to Yitzchak, He says it to Ya'acov, He says it to the nation when we're going to go into the Land, He says it to Moses, He says it to Joshua, He says it to a few of the judges, to Elijah, a bunch of times to Isaiah and Jeremiah and twice to Daniel. And that's a lot. That seems like HaShem is saying, "Notice this, notice this, big flashing light, right?" Here's an interesting fun fact though. It's not only what HaShem tells us the most. There are search engines on the internet for finding Biblical verses. And consistently over years, they've been finding that the verse that is the most popular is our verses that say, "al tirah." Last year was Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, I am with you, do not be dismayed for I am your God." Same in 2018, that one also won. In 2017, the top verse was Joshua 1, verse 9 – Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged. So this is really a two-way street when you think about it. It's like HaShem wants to tell us this message all the time, but it's also the message that people most often seek out to hear from HaShem when they want something to meditate and hold on to.

You know, there's a famous passage in the writings of Rebbe Nachman. Jeremy made a beautiful song about this which some of you may be familiar with. And Rebbe Nachman of Breslau's famous saying is that the world, our lives are like a narrow bridge. He doesn't say narrow bridges, he says a very, very narrow bridge, it's even worse, right? He said the most important thing, the most important principle and rule in life is to not be afraid. I always thought that was a little strange, like isn't the most important thing to follow the Torah, be a good person and if you manage to also not be afraid, then yeah, happy day for you, but is that the main thing? But then when I realized this about it being the central message that HaShem gives out throughout the Tanach, I realized Rebbe Nachman is not just saying something cute, he's saying something explicitly biblical. It would seem that HaShem is saying this really is the main thing. And now it's so interesting how when the Torah says not to fear, it might be, I think it might be in a different way than the modern world sees it. A lot of people these days, they

want to prevent fear by having safe spaces, trigger warnings, people wrap up their children in bubble paper so they don't experience anything hard or scary. But I don't think the Torah looks at it that way. Like Rebbe Nachman said, he didn't say, "Don't be afraid because the world is a walk in a park, everything's going to be great, don't worry," he said, "life is a very narrow bridge." Meaning, you could really slip off and fall into the abyss. It might not be a simple thing for you, but with all that, do not be afraid.

So you really see this the first time HaShem says not to be afraid in the Torah. The first time this verse appears is to Avraham in chapter 16. HaShem appeared to Abraham in a dream and said, "Do not fear Abraham, I am a shield for you. Your reward is very great." And then they make the covenant. And what do you think is the first emotion the Torah tells us that Avraham has right there? Right there in the same chapter, in verse 12, it says that a deep sleep fell upon Abram and behold, dread and great darkness fell upon him. Like great darkness and dread, that's about as strong of a term as I can think of for fear. So HaShem tells him not to be afraid and the very first emotion he has is this horrible paralyzing fear. And what does HaShem answer him? I would think HaShem would say, "We just talked about this. All is good, don't be nervous, everything's going to be great." What does HaShem actually say to him when he's in this dread? He says, "Know with great certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a Land not their own and they will oppress them for 400 years. But after four generations, they'll return here."

Well that's not the classical kind of comfort that people look for. And it's interesting he's saying, "I'm not promising to you that everything's going to be ok. I'm telling you that there's a long game. There's a plan. How different from that is the modern way that we look at not fearing where we just try to shield ourselves. HaShem doesn't say, "Don't worry, there's nothing to fear." He says, "There's a lot to fear. Things are going to be hard. Fortify yourself. Choose to believe and know that this is all part of My plan."

I have a close friend who survived breast cancer and was miraculously able to have a baby after all the treatments. And I remember her husband speaking. They made a celebration of thanks. And he gave a speech and he quoted Psalm 136, praise HaShem, for He is good, His kindness is forever. And he said, "Don't understand that as meaning HaShem's kindness is just everlasting. But he says, that when you have the right glasses, the vision that's looking at things in a forever perspective, then you really understand the kindness. Because sometimes if you just snapshot a certain moment, like in their case it was going through the diagnosis and these horrible treatments, you don't really feel the kindness, but when you look at everything in a broad span of time, the kindness becomes so much easier to see and to understand.

Now, in this past Torah portion, we read on Shabbat, it's interesting, HaShem tells Isaac not to fear as well. This is the second time we see this in the Torah. And you can see how Isaac lives this and it changes his approach to things that happened to him in his life. So we know that

Isaac is digging wells and the Philistines fill them with sand. And he digs another well and they come and bother him and fight with him. Finally, he digs a well and they just leave him alone and he calls it Rechovot, from the word rechav meaning broadness. He feels this expansive relief like, oh, finally things are ok. And then, out of nowhere, at that time of all times, Hashem appears to him in chapter 26, verse 24, and says, "I am God, don't be afraid." Well that's weird. Why now? Everything's ok. But then when you read what happens, we can understand that HaShem was giving him strength and courage to face something that was about to come. Because the next day, he gets up and they dig another well and they find water, great news. And then Avimelech shows up, the Philistine king with his army and the army, the general and the entourage. Now had HaShem told him...not told him to not be afraid, what would be his normal reaction? If we've been looking at the previous chapters, we'd say, "Well this doesn't really seem like a friendly visit. This guy's just been messing up his wells all the times. He shows up after he finally, you know, dug these two new wells with the military and the general. And after all these altercations where Yitzchak had just been digging new wells and running away...you would think that when he sees them approaching, Yitzchak would make a run for it. Or maybe this time he's a little more confident, maybe he'll be tough and try to fight with them and you know stand up for himself. But, what happens is totally different. He just comes up to them with a question, almost like a curiosity and he says, "Why have you come to me? You've always been, you know, chasing me away?" Instead of running or fighting, he's just trying to understand with an open heart where this is going. Like implicit in his question is that he doesn't assume that they're coming not in peace, even though that's what it looks like, he says, "Wait a minute. Didn't you not like me in the past?"

It's like HaShem told him not to fear and encouraged him. It changed his entire posture towards life. Like, instead of a fight or flight choice, I'm going to either run away or have an altercation, he just has this calm curiosity to see how things are going to unfold. I've been really working a lot on this in myself because I have a tendency to get really scared particularly when it comes to mistakes that I make or that I'm afraid that I'm making. I'm always worried like what will happen if I do something wrong? This really affected me when my kids had covid because I was so scared like, what if I didn't you know, keep them separate enough? And somebody caught it from them? And then, of course, Noam's teacher caught covid and she's an older woman, like an amazing God-fearing person. And I felt so bad that she was sick and she said to me, "Tehila, there are only two ways to look at life. She says, either you have HaShem, or you have ashem. Ashem in Hebrew means guilt because you can't have both. If you believe in HaShem, you won't be ridden with fear about your mistakes because you know that HaShem has a plan. And if you're busy beating yourself up and you're having ashem, meaning you're having guilt and fear, that means that you're not really having HaShem in your life. Right? So, this really stuck with me as the Torah's antidote for fear and anxiety.

And now, a couple of days ago I received an email from one of our fellowship members that just is living this so beautifully. I didn't have a chance to ask her permission to share this, so I'm

not going to say her name and I hope that you forgive me for sharing this, but it was just so beautiful I can't resist. So she writes to me the following email. She goes, "HaShem is doing great work in us. Last week I was crying out to HaShem for direction and balance but mostly for the ability to rejoice in any suffering or disappointment as we move forward to our next stage in life. And then HaShem sent me what I needed to achieve this goal." And I'm like thinking, oh great. I love getting emails with good news. I can't wait to hear what blessings came upon her!

And then, I keep reading the email, and she goes, "I got a notice in the mail on Monday that I'd run a red light and I have to pay a \$500 fine plus fees for traffic court. And then we had a sewer problem before Shabbat and found out that it'll be expensive to fix. Then my husband's van needed to go into the shop for work. And my husband has a dental problem that needs attention, but the building where the dentist works burnt down to the ground by an arsonist last week. And I have a problem with my toe that's going to need surgery and a tree is about to fall on our house and we need to trim it, but it's really expensive and then I went to the grocery store and my car won't start.

So I go, oh, this wasn't a good newsletter. This is a prayer request. Ok, I get it. Okay, so she's going to ask me to pray for things to get better. I love that. Ok, I'm ready to pray. Then I keep on reading. She goes on, she goes, "but all is well in my soul because all of the Torah messages in this last week impressed upon me to decide to trust HaShem no matter what happened. So I told my husband, 'HaShem has given us a wonderful opportunity to just watch and see how He's going to direct us and work each issue out and when it's all resolved we're just going to laugh when we look back and think how foolish we were to have any qualms at all. We've had many times in this life when we were younger, but by walking with HaShem, everything was resolved, so we have no reason to doubt HaShem now.'"

I was so moved by this letter because it just embodies the Torah truths of this message of "al tirah," do not fear. She internalized both the understanding that there's no reason to expect that things are going to be easy or smooth. But HaShem's message to Avraham is, you know, it's going to be hard, but there's a long plan. And she also adopted Yitzchak's outlook where he came to Avimelech, not with fear, but just with an open, curious heart asking, what are you doing here? How is this going to work out? What is going to be HaShem's resolution of this situation? And then it really did all work out.

So, this message really was a source of strength for me this week and I hope that it helps all of you guys be encouraged to face all of the things and all of the challenges that are going on in all of our different lives. So with that, I wish all of you guys a beautiful and blessed week.

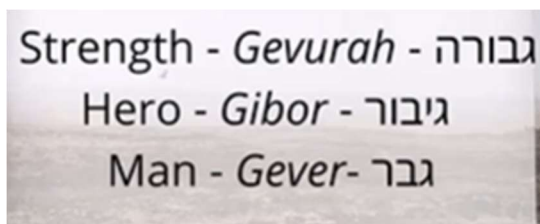
Jeremy

She's just amazing. Ok, so you know, Ari here talked about restraint, and then Tehila taught us just such an amazing thing, that the guidance given most in the Bible, more than any other

command is have no fear. And I'm watching the chats as Tehila's talking. It's like the world is consumed with fear. We're scared of the politics, we're scared of the virus, we're scared of the vaccine that's supposed to cure the virus. So we're scared of it... fear is just everywhere now.

And the Bible says, "Hey, I want you to know the most important message here. Have no fear." And you look at the story of Isaac, and these two pillars of who he was are pillars of this idea of who Isaac manifested in the world. Now last year, we studied Abraham and Isaac on the level of *remez*, where they were both symbolic representations of something psychological. Where Isaac was a man of surrender. He didn't have to change reality, he just trusted that reality was going to unfold as it should. He didn't try to go and actively conquer the Land, he never left the Land of Israel. But this year, I want to look at the patriarchs and the stories of the Bible on the level of *sod*, which is one of the deepest levels of studying the Torah. And the *sod* means secret or hidden, mystical writings of the Torah. Where on that level, the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and King David and Joseph, they're actually representations of our soul. It's a map of who we are and how God relates to us in this world.

So last week, we started with Abraham and we said that Abraham represents *chesed*. *Chesed*, love, compassion, kindness. That's the first step on the map to reveal our soul. It's the first attribute, the first virtue that has to be at the base of every believer. And then this week, we learn about Isaac. And Isaac, he represents on that same map, the attribute of *gevurah*. And *gevurah* is a Hebrew word, but I want to try to unpack it a little bit, because it involves not having fear, it involves restraint. But let's go to the core of the word itself. Can we put the slide up for us?



Gevurah is usually translated as strength. So it's like strength to restrain yourself, strength to not have any fear. But the word "gibor" gets a little bit closer. *Gibor* you would say is a hero, like a marvel, superhero. They're called *giborei al* – super heroes.

The word hero is *gibor*. *Gever* is the same root, is man. Man versus woman, *gever v'ishah*. *Gever* is man, *ishah* is woman. So it's saying like I want you to know, the core of what it is to be a man in the world...a man should strive to be a hero. He should be strong.

Like the Bible doesn't play the game of...I remember when I was in High School, there was a perfume that came out by Calvin Klein that was called CK1. And the advertisement was, "a fragrance for a man and a fragrance for a woman." And I remember thinking to myself, why would a boy want to smell like a woman? Why would a woman want to smell like a boy? Now the world is so insane, I don't even know what to do with the world nowadays. But in Hebrew, that's just not the way it is. No there, is *gever*, and a man should be a hero and he should be strong. But what is that strength? What is the biblical hero? We have like a Western idea.

That word hero has a lot of baggage to it. So, I want to unpack what a biblical hero is, because Isaac manifests *gevurah* in the world.

So, he was the one that was fully dedicated, self-sacrifice. A hero is someone that is ready to give it all for the ultimate good. Isaac is the representation of giving up his spirit, his life, for the cause. That's the beginning of being a hero. Giving up what you would want, what you need, your impulses, your body, the *nephesh*, which is different than the *neshamah*, is the life force that is your body's life force. So someone who is giving up of his *nephesh*, is saying, "I'm ready to give up all of this stuff that my body wants, I'm ready to put that aside for my *neshamah*, for my soul. I'm ready to conquer my bodily desires, my impulses, my immediate gratification because I want to be a hero. I want to be a *gibor*. So he says like, who is a *gibor* in Hebrew? *Mi hu hagibor*? What is the definition of a biblical hero? Someone who is strong enough, who has the strength to overcome his own inclinations. That's what a hero is. A hero that's able to say, listen, yeah, I want money, but I'm strong enough to give it to charity when I need to. Yeah, I want to eat now, but I'm strong enough to know when I'm supposed to eat and what I'm supposed to eat.

Not only that, Isaac is the only one of the patriarchs that never left the Land of Israel. Abraham started his life outside of the Land of Israel, came into the Land, went down to Egypt, came back into the Land. Jacob, as we all know, started off in the Land, had to run away from Esav, went to Aram. Isaac was born in the Land and never left the Land. He is in his borders. He's just inside. He sets borders, he defines reality, and he doesn't go out of it. He doesn't let himself have that midnight snack. It's like interesting, let's say in the Western world, for a Roman emperor to be a hero or a Roman legion commander to be, you know, respected as a hero. He had to go and conquer lands and show his strength. But Isaac didn't conquer anything. He stayed inside the Land of Israel. And all of his strength was inward, to conquer his own self, to become a master of his own self. What did he do? He didn't only just set the borders around Israel, but he dug the wells that his father originally dug. And then they came back and they filled his wells, and then he moved on to the next one and then he dug again and then moved onto the next one and then he dug again. And Isaac there is representing on a soul level, persistence, determination, tenacity, perseverance. Those are the words of a biblical hero. Someone that's going to fall, that's going to get back up and that's going to try again. Someone that's going to try to build and they try to uproot your vineyards, but you're going to come back stronger, with a flock. It's to tap into the power of Isaac, of determination, persistence, tenacity, and to never give up. That is the light of *gevurah*. And that light is godly. And so, someone right before the fellowship just sent me this and he said it like this. These are three beautiful lines.

A DREAM WRITTEN
DOWN WITH
A DATE BECOMES A GOAL.
A GOAL BROKEN DOWN INTO
STEPS BECOMES A PLAN.
A PLAN BACKED BY ACTION
BECOMES REALITY.

Now, that is very beautiful and I think that is really rooted in the Bible, that the prophets were driven by visions, and then that vision created a goal of Zion, where we wanted to get to and then we backed it by action. But action there is lacking. It's action with gevurah, it's action that's ready to self-sacrifice, that's fearless, that's ready to pull on restraint, that's disciplined. Discipline is the word. It was one well after another well. Abraham just prayed once a day in the morning when he woke up. Isaac made it into a discipline. Isaac established the afternoon prayer. He's like, "I don't just want to pray when the spirit hits me in the morning. I want to set times, and I want to be disciplined about my prayer. So action, backed with gevurah, with discipline, with tenacity, with perseverance, that's all of a sudden when your soul is revealed.

Now, what does that mean? There's a godly light inside us that can only be revealed in the world through man and through woman. It can't be revealed through in a monkey. It can't be revealed through in a rock. There is a godly light that can only be revealed in our souls when our souls are manifest, and we project these godly attributes into the world. Each one of the biblical heroes manifests one of those godly lights. One of those godly tzfirot. One of those emanations of godly virtues. So Abraham manifested love and compassion, but love and compassion without discipline and restraint, borders, tenacity, you'll just be a hippie on the beach loving a lot of people. That's not the biblical way. The biblical way is love matched with discipline, determination, persistence, tenacity. All of that together is the foundation of Abraham and Isaac that allowed the birth of Jacob which we will get to next week.

But right now, you know, when we say about to reveal God's light in the world, when we try to say, like, how are we going to do that? Well, we have our bodies and then we have our souls. And they're in a constant tension with each other. And the question is "who is the leader? Who is guiding our days? Is it our body that's fearful because it wants to stay alive? Is it our body that wants comfort, that wants sleep? That wants the sugar, that wants the physical? But then our soul is calling us to higher living. Our soul wants enlightenment, truth, love, compassion, living by that. But in order to reveal those godly traits, we will need the gevurah, the strength, the discipline, the restraint in order to reveal them in the world. Without that, like you know, we can turn the Bible into just like mushy, you know, love your neighbor as yourself and you're good to go. But if you really want your soul to be revealed in the world, as our soul is revealed in the world, God is revealing His self through us. He's channeling His light through His people into the world, then after love, we need gevurah. We need that inner strength.

And so, what I would say is homework for the week, is to think about one thing that if you just commit to that one thing. Ari, I asked Ari to say that because he's just such a great living example of someone that is constantly working on himself. And he's like, all right, I'm just not

going to eat from this hour until this hour. That's it. And I'm going to have all of the gevurah in the world, just for that. Let's say you have a bad habit – say you're smoking. Let's say you're drinking too much. Either to stop one of those bad habits, or to develop one of those good habits. Choose one, make it ambitious, not too ambitious, but one thing that you can flex the gevurah muscle, that you can flex that inner strength that is giving of yourself. It's like...ack....but my body wants that. I'm self-sacrificing in order to reveal my soul. And if you just take that one thing and you master just one, don't try to take on the whole world, just one. You'll start seeing more and more light will follow. That is the path of the sod of the Torah that's revealed to us through the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel.

And so, all of us should be blessed that we should strive to be a biblical hero that we should live with compassion and love and then channel that into real strength with no fear. And so thank you all so much for joining us today as we fearlessly conquer the Land of Israel together, grow closer to God together and stay connected to each other all around the world as our fellowship continues to grow. It's just awesome. So we'll see you again soon. Shalom.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

You are all blessed from Zion.