

Session 124

Va'era – The Practical Path to Your Promised Land

22 January 2023

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOKXA1LYoVw>

Jeremy

So! Welcome everybody! I love seeing everyone here. Hey, Tom. Thanks for waving. I don't know how else to explain this, other than this Fellowship is the heart of my heart, the soul of my soul. It is the thing that by far gives me the most joy, focus, growth that I've ever had in my life. I mean all of my life, in some ways, revolves around this Fellowship because all week long, I'm thinking, what am I going to be teaching, what am I going to be saying, prayers are sent to me, questions are asked. And I'm just...it is a constant dialogue and somehow HaShem has brought all of these people from all over the world together that have such a similar heart, but are from such different backgrounds, that as the world is becoming more divided and more polarized, and more different and more racist and more angry and more political, it's like we somehow transcend all of that. And what a mirror it is to be a reflection of God's dreams for the world. A brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God to actually live that. To represent that, to be that in the world. I just can't tell you how much I love seeing all of your faces and coming here every week together. It is just such a highlight. So now with everyone here from Cocolalla, Idaho, all the way to George in Germany, I just want to start off this opportunity here to pray together, to be a House of Prayer for all nations.

HaShem, Master of the world, a good Father b'shamayim, please look at us, Your Fellowship, look at this group of people who are trying to break free and to draw close to You. All of us have things that are holding us back, all of us are in our own Mitzryim. All of us are in our own Egypts. We've come here today not only to learn the Torah, but to live the Torah that we learn. We dedicate this time to You every week. We start off our week aiming our lives toward You, toward Israel, toward Your light. Please, HaShem, bless every person in this Fellowship. Bless their families, bless their loved ones. May our prayers come before You from around the world, through this Land. As so many people from so many nations join us now, may this prayer and may this Fellowship be one step closer to building Your House in Jerusalem, a House of Prayer for all nations. Amen.

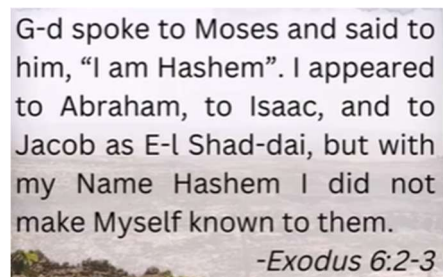
Ok, so I have a lot that I want to talk about today. But I have so much more to share. So the first thing that I want to do, is I want to share my best friend, my chavruta, my brother in arms, Ari Abramowitz with you. I know that he has a lot to say, and I want to let him say what he says first because I don't want him to derail me once I say what I say. Because sometimes he derails us. And so, I want to let him go first, give him that honor, and then I'll derail him, but I don't want him to derail me. So, Ari, you are on.

Ari

Ok, I introduce you much nicer than that. Your introduction of me, you're introducing me because you don't want me to derail you, so let's get him out of the way? That's your introduction? I'm just kidding. It's fine. But I want you to know, you know Jeremy's talking about the heart of my heart...powerful words and there's truth to that. But you know when he was saying that, I'm thinking, Jeremy, what is the Fellowship to me right now, in this season where we are? For me, it feels very much like an anchor of stability, for me. Like a place that I could go where we're together here in this place of refuge. Because as you know, Jeremy, we're going through a lot behind the scenes, at the Farm, in Israel, in Judea. There's like so much, my head is spinning from all the different adaptations we have to go through, and new ways of seeing and thinking about things. I almost feel sometimes that the Fellowship is a little bit like, in some way like my teachers, in some way my children, that we're kind of like trying to shelter them and not always share with them all of the insane, intense craziness that we're going through. But lately it's been really a lot. And for me, it feels like all of you are an anchor of stability for us. A place of refuge that we could go for like just unconditional love. Which is part of why I'm sharing this. Because Jeremy knew I wasn't feeling well. You know, Shaena is under the weather, so is Dvash and so is Shiloh. And sort of, so am I. And Jeremy said, "Don't do anything." But I was like, "You know what? I may not have it fully crafted, but I can open up with the Fellowship. And even if I'm not fully polished in there, they'll forgive me. They're there with me."

So anyways, what I wanted to share with all of you, when I was trying to figure out...it's such a rich Torah portion, but I couldn't get past the first few psukim, the first two verses. Because you know, in this short life of mine, I have come to believe that we're here in this world, really primarily for one reason. And that is to internalize the truth. That HaShem revealed to mankind in these beautiful words of the first two verses of this week's Torah portion. And with these words that we're talking... we're talking about such holiness that it's actually Jewish practice not even to write or unnecessarily pronounce the names of HaShem. Definitely not out of context, when they're not being used for their purpose. So we switch out the letters. We switch out the D with a K, we put dashes throughout the word to separate them. Like I did in some of what I want to share with you now. All this to convey our reverence of HaShem and to ensure that we're not using His Name in vain.

Anyways, let's look inside at Exodus, chapter 6, verse 2-3:



You really need to see it on the inside.

וַיִּדְבֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי אֲדֹנָי

You know, when we're talking about HaShem's Name, it doesn't matter how good the translation may be. You know, it says, "God, HaShem, the Almighty, the Lord." We almost read them as if they're arbitrarily selected and interchangeable, because no translation could ever convey the essence within HaShem's Names. So let's look at the first verse, really quick.

"Elohim said to Moshe, "I am HaShem."

Two names of HaShem, used in the same psuk. But then in the next psuk, in the next verse, HaShem tells Moshe that He's only revealed Himself to the forefathers with the Name, El Shaddai. He didn't make the Name HaShem, meaning "yud" and "hey" and "vav" and "hey," the tetragrammaton, He didn't make that known to them. And while I know it's silly to even try to broach this subject in the limited time we have together, I think that the place to even begin understanding all of this, is looking at the Hebrew components within the Names.

So the first part of the Name El Shaddai, comes from the word, El, which is Elohim. Some people define the Name Elohim as nature. But I've always sort of thought of it as a very distinct and finite vessel of the revelation of HaShem in the world. That's what Elohim is, which is really what nature is. Meaning that the sun and the moon were different Elohim, different vessels through which HaShem expressed Himself in the world which is why they are worshipped. And they were worshipped and they always have been because there was such a clear, obvious and apparent Divine power invested in this massive fireball in the sky that it isn't a big deal to go out and start worshipping it as a deity in and of itself as the Egyptians did. The sun god was definitely in the top three, let's say of Egyptian gods. Anyways, the word El, from Elohim, meaning the beginning of the world, right? It says, "The Elohim of," it's almost like a conjunctive word connecting Elohim and Shaddai. Shaddai being the expression of HaShem which creates and adheres to boundaries. From dai, the word dai, like enough. That Name of HaShem conveys the force that created the boundaries and the distinctions that fill the world as we experience it. But the Name HaShem, the yud and hey and vav and hey is the Name that HaShem is revealing to Moshe and by extension all of mankind during these portions, the exodus from Egypt.

HaShem, as you know has the letters Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey, which is Hayah, Hoveh, Yihiyeh, the past, and the present and the future. The Name HaShem reveals that while God created distinctions of El Shaddai, that HaShem, Himself is not bounded by those distinctions, by those borders. Not only can HaShem transcend these boundaries and the borders of the distinctions, but He's also fully immersed and imminent within them. Are you guys with me so far? I feel like I could have articulated this better. You're with me so far? Ok, so HaShem is telling Moshe that now, within the plagues that He's about to unleash on the Egyptians, on Pharaoh, on the Israelites, on the entire world, everyone will know that there is one ultimate mover, designer and orchestrator in the world. And they won't need to believe it, they won't need to. They will know it. It will be as plain as day, there will simply be no denying.

Now I think that we've discussed in the past how each plague, that each systematically disabused the Egyptians of their lies and their disillusionments and their idols. There's actually an article that I referred to here that sums it up beautifully by a woman named Amanda Bradley. It's on Aish's website (<https://aish.com/gods-and-kings/>). But it's so important that I really just want to jump into it real quick, Jeremy with your permission. Just to make it...I'll make it fast.

So there's the first plague, right? The Nile turning into blood. And it's pretty obvious what that's about. The Nile was considered perhaps the most primary god of the Egyptians. It was such a deity to the Egyptians that there were actually four different sub-deities within it. Right? The source of the Nile, the flooding god of the Nile, the crocodile god of the Nile, the hippopotamus, the fertility god of the Nile. And just picture the Nile turning to blood. All of the water turning to blood. The average Egyptian would have had to look at that in horror. And literally perceive that as the killing, the death of their primary gods that they've always believed in and trusted in, would fundamentally sustain them. I almost feel bad for them, even thinking about how horrifyingly, terrible that must have been, an experience.

And then there were frogs all over Egypt. Right? A story that Dvash loves! Frogs in the toilet?! She loves it. I've been telling her every night about the frogs in the toilet. Well anyways, it was a capital crime to kill a frog. Right? The frog was the fertility god. And if you killed one, you'd die for it. But the Egyptians had to, they couldn't not. They were everywhere. And then the piles of the stinking, decaying frogs all over Egypt. As the plague ended, well the illusion of the frogs was unequivocally shattered and destroyed. You can't keep worshipping that gross, disgustingness that was reeking up the entire country.

And then the lice shattered their belief in the god-of-the-ground. And as the earth itself transformed into these microscopic bugs which was afflicting everybody. And by the way, as we know, this plague is where the Egyptian magicians could no longer replicate what HaShem was doing through Moshe. And then there was erov, the animal kingdom was being possessed and turned against them. And then there was pestilence. There were animals like bulls and cows and rams which they worshipped so much that they actually embalmed them. And so all of these animal gods were killed and shattered at once.

And then boils, right? Their bodily autonomy at this point is being violated from within. And the hail, Rashi explains that the plague of the fire that burned within these frozen balls of ice demonstrated that the elements themselves – fire and water were able to overcome their fundamental natures to do HaShem's will. And then locusts, which they worshipped, too. And the plague of locusts was so overwhelming that it blocked out their other god, right? The Ra, the sun god. The sun was totally blocked out by the waves of locusts. Like two in one, what's it called when you're wrestling, you touch each other? Anyways, these gods were so thoroughly dethroned and destroyed as a deity, right?

And of course, if anything in the sun survived, just behind the locust, well the next plague ended the whole idea. The plague of darkness, there was no light. And then the first-born. Well the Egyptians believed that the first-born were traced all the way back to Osiris, right? Which was...so every first-born went all the way back. Pharaoh's own deity's son, the next Pharaoh of Egypt, the whole population already believed was a god in and of himself, died in Pharaoh's arms along with all the other first-borns in the rest of the country, were all dying. Sometimes because of infidelity, numerous of them in each home.

Anyways, all the masks came off and HaShem revealed that not only is He completely in control of the entire natural world, but He changes and manipulates the very heart of Pharaoh. And I really believe that if we have the presence of mind to read all of this with a prayerful intention, that we not only understand it, but that we participate in this revelation and we'll be able to really able to shatter the idols that we have in our own hearts. Because as we said, every character in the Torah is on some level, in some dimension, within us. We all have a little Yishmael in our hearts, we all have a little Esau inside of us, we all have some Pharaoh in our hearts, too. I know that I do.

And when it comes down to it, the spiritual Egyptian within us believes that everything is generated here in this world, in this dimension. And if we have something, if we have anything, we deserve it. Because we earned it, because we made it happen for ourselves. That's the way the real world works. The spiritual Egyptian believes that ultimately, we're in control. And on some level we are gods, right? If we're in control of things. So this of course begs the question, and I want to sort of bring it together with this. If everything is ultimately HaShem, then what is in our control? Well, the sages of Israel share a teaching. I've shared it with you before in the past because it's made its way into my emergency truth kit that I turn to in like moments of confusion. So this made the cut and those words are – That everything is in the hands of heaven other than one thing. One thing. Yirat Shamayim. Some people define that as fear of God, but quite literally it means yi'ra – to see HaShem. The only thing truly that we have in our hands, that we have any true control over is one thing. Whether we see HaShem and experience Him as the moving force of our lives, or not. Meaning that all outcomes, everything that happens is in HaShem's Hands. We have no control. The only thing we can control is our experience of the journey, our consciousness, our awareness.

And I remember a beautiful example shared by Rav Arush in his book, Gan Ha'emunah, which is translated as The Garden of Faith. Or actually I think he just leaves it as that, right? Garden of Emunah. Anyways, he says that there are two bus passengers sitting on a bus. I think it was from Jerusalem to Haifa. I forget the details that he used. Anyways, one passenger is worried sick, constantly looking at his WAYS, his GPS, he's looking out the window, is the driver going the right way? Is he driving carefully? Is he completely lost? And the other passenger is looking out the window and enjoying the view. Trusting the driver fully without a worry in his heart. And the first passenger arrives at the destination a frazzled bundle of nerves. And the

other passenger arrives calm and collected and serene and really invigorated from the whole experience. They both arrive at their intended destination, the destination that's right for them. The question is, what kind of ride they had.

And so, I think it's up to us to decide who we want to be on the journey through this world. Do we see HaShem in everything? Or nothing? That's the question because deep in our hearts we know that either everything is a miracle, or nothing is a miracle. There's really nothing in between. And so, I want to bless all of us that we're able to internalize the truth of HaShem's deepest Name. Yud and Hey and Vav and Hey, the tetragrammaton, we can internalize that into our hearts. This Name that teaches us that HaShem is fully transcendent and also fully eminent at the same time. May these portions really purge us of the idols and the illusions in our own hearts so that we can cleave to HaShem and to His goodness every day of our lives. Thank you, my friends. Jeremy...

Jeremy

Thank you, Ari, that was really beautiful. And I want you to know that I learned something new. I'm 43 years old now and for some reason, it never went into my head or into my heart that the frog was a god of Egypt and that the Egyptians themselves were so overwhelmed with the frogs that they had to kill their own gods. That's...there's a lot to think about there. When it hit me, I just know that there's something that all of us ultimately are going to have to kill our own idols. We're the ones that are going to have to like come to grips with whatever we think is real that's not real and we're actually going...like those, makot, those plagues that struck Egypt, each one of those is a lesson learned, but I found that one right now as you said that, was so powerful that the Egyptians themselves had to kill their own gods. For some reason...that was a chiddish to me, that was something totally new. Thank you for that. That's really, really interesting.

Ari

Well I'll be honest, Jeremy, I didn't actually fully internalize that until you just reflected that back to me. I know that I said that, but I didn't really internalize...we're going to have to kill our own gods. You know Rebbe Nachman talks about that, that we share, we teach each other, and sometimes there's a teaching we know that's dormant and we give it our friend because it's activated in them and he brings it back to us and it activates within us. I think that's what we're doing in this Fellowship on some level. But anyways, thank you, Jeremy.

Jeremy

Yeah, excellent. Ok. So that was a real treat, thank you very much, Ari. And now, dear Fellowship, I have another treat for you. We have our scholar in residence, our brilliant professor, our rabbanit, our wise sage, Tehila Gimpel with us. And so, she has prepared this video for all of you and it is excellent. So here you go.

Tehila

Hey everyone. So I want to continue an idea that we started talking about last week. Last week, I brought up this conversation that Moshe has with HaShem where he's saying, "I'm not good at talking." And HaShem's kind of perplexing answer, you know, I said that, well, HaShem is our Father and as a parent, wouldn't your instinct just be to kind of, you know, make Moshe feel better? Like, Moshe, you're not so bad at talking or just to fix his problem. Like, "Ok, Moshe, I'm HaShem. Of course I can take away your problem." But HaShem's answer is very surprising. He says, "Who do you think gives people their challenges and their impediments?"

Now last week we saw that appear one time, but in this portion, Moshe's concern about his speech impediment comes up another two times. And in each time, HaShem's answer is surprising and different. And so I want to suggest is that these three appearances of Moshe's concern about his inability to bear the task that HaShem is putting on him is sort of a roadmap for what HaShem is trying to teach us about facing this in life. Because Moshe's speech impediment is really a paradigm for all of those times that we feel like the path HaShem is sending us on, it's just, it's too heavy, it's too hard, I can't do this, right? And you say to HaShem, "I can't do this! I just don't have what it takes, I'm not good enough." And Moshe says this to HaShem three times and I want to kind of take a bird's eye view at these answers and see the path that it's putting out before us for how to handle that situation.

So as we talked about last week, the first time HaShem truly says, "Well you know, I'm the One who gives a person their challenge in life." Meaning step one is to recognize that your shortcomings are nothing to be ashamed of or afraid of, but rather they are the sort of set of skills and challenges that HaShem has given you in life that are perfectly matched to what you need to do.

But then, that's not enough for Moshe. Cause in this week's parsha, HaShem says to him, "Now it's time to go to Pharaoh," and once again he says, "But I can't, I'm not a good speaker. I don't know how to speak." Now this second time where Moshe brings this up, it looks in the verses as if HaShem is just ignoring him. There is no answer. And many of the commentaries, say like, "Why doesn't HaShem answer him?" And when I was looking in the verses, something very strange happens. It's true that HaShem doesn't give him a direct answer, like, "Thus spoke HaShem to Moshe..." But right after that, if you skip one verse later, out of no where in the middle of this dialogue about Moshe and Aaron having to go to speak to Pharaoh to free the Israelites, out of nowhere, suddenly the Torah starts to list the names of the generations. It says, "These are the heads of the houses of Israel." And it starts to go through all of the different leaders of the tribes.

And it seems totally out of place because right after that list finishes, it goes right back to the story of Moshe and Aaron going to Pharaoh. What is that? Suddenly it hit me. Maybe that is HaShem's quiet answer to Moshe's question. Because Moshe said, "I can't do this." HaShem doesn't seem to answer him, but HaShem gives a list of the ancestors and the forefathers.

Maybe that's another piece of this puzzle. Like when you think about it, every single person that's alive today is alive because there are countless people before us that survived in unbelievable hardship. Like, the fact that I am sitting here right now means that I had ancestors who were willing to sacrifice to give birth to my ancestors that came after them, to give birth, to feed them, to sacrifice their energy, their sleep, their food, their money. Whatever they had, the amount that went into you or me sitting here is just unbelievable. So the fact that we are alive means we come from greatness. Just by the virtue of the fact that we're sitting here. And, you know, that's something to draw strength from because somebody thought that you were worth fighting for and worth sacrificing for to be here. And we can look back at what our ancestors went through which is just so unfathomable and draw strength from that.

And it's also a forward-facing guidance. I've been thinking a lot lately about how open are we to our children's questions when they need guidance. It's like the Torah is saying, our children are going to have times...if HaShem is our Father and His treatment of Moshe is like a paradigm for us also as parents, are we always as open as we could be for our children to feel that they can come and ask us questions? I cannot tell you how many people in this very Fellowship have said to me, "Oh, when I was growing up, they didn't like me. I asked too many questions. Or in my community that I used to be part of, they didn't like me much because I had a lot of hard questions."

The fundamental culture of Judaism is to encourage questions from the younger generation to the older generation. Like when we have the Seder on Passover, the main kind of story there, the fundamental narrative of that night is, "How do we get our children to ask us questions?" The songs are the children asking questions. The stories are about children asking questions to their parents. You know the story of the four sons and how each one of them ask their questions to their parents in different ways. Are we, you know, always promoting to...opening ourselves up to our children to always know that they can ask us anything? The best thing my mom ever did to me when I was growing up and I always tell her this. Is that when I was growing up, my mom said to me, "You might think that you're a weirdo. You might think that you have a question that's so weird that no one's ever thought of such a stupid question before. But I promise you, however stupid your questions are, I've thought of something stupider. So you can always ask me whatever seems to you to be the weirdest, stupidest question that you can think of." And that was so heart-opening for me. So I feel like that's the second guidance. Is when you feel like you can't handle it, you can draw strength from the people that came before us and we pass that on to our children that they can draw strength from our life experience and our wisdom. They can always turn to us.

But that's not enough for Moshe again. Moshe then a third time says, "HaShem, I just can't do this." And then, what does HaShem say? He says, "Let me tell you. I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart." Meaning, you think you have problems? Here's the good news. It's going to get worse. It's like Hashem is saying, "Your fears, they're not unfounded. Things are going to

be rough.” HaShem is giving him a realistic expectation. You think, you know, that I’m HaShem and I’m sending you on this mission and it’s just going to be successful? It’s not going to be successful. Before you’re successful, you’re going to crash and burn. You’re going to crash and burn so hard because the people are going to be mad at you and everything is going to go terrible. But then, from that, will come out the redemption. It’s like we talk about this a lot. You know, Abraham’s experience – he follows HaShem, he goes to the Land and then there’s a famine. Jeremy and I talk about this often. Like we came to the Farm and then get smacked with lawsuits from left-wing European organizations. It’s like HaShem is saying, “Yes, at that moment when you feel like you can’t handle it? It might go bad for a while, but you have the expectation and you know that that’s part of it.” You draw strength from know that after that HaShem has a plan and that will lead eventually to the redemption.

And I was sharing this with my friend, Jesse over Shabbat for this reading. And he said what he hears from when HaShem is answering Moshe is saying, “The outcome is not on you. That’s on Me. You know what you need to do? You need to show up. With everything you are, your short-comings, and your blessings, your talents and the things that are your handicaps, you show up with all of that. But you have one job and that is to show up on your mission. The outcome, that’s on HaShem.”

And so it’s like, these three times that Moshe comes to HaShem with his insecurity, together HaShem’s answers, although they seem perplexing at first, it can be sort of a holistic guide for us on how to approach that kind of feeling that I know happens to me a lot. And I bet for a lot of you as well. So with that, I wish you guys a great week and be well.

Jeremy

Thank you, Tehila. Excellent, excellent! That is a perfect lead up for what I want to talk about today. I want you to know that I have, Baruch HaShem, a lot of blessings in my life. The greatest blessing, the greatest decision, my greatest acquisition, I was to get married to Tehila. Baruch HaShem, and now our whole Fellowship is blessed by that. She’s just a constant...she’s so special because she is one with her Torah. She is just a living expression of what she teaches. It’s not like, she’s behind doors she’s any different. She is just so solid. And actually, when she says that idea like, “Hey listen, yeah, you’re doing the right thing, but it’s only going to get harder.” That is a constant theme in my relationship with her that I’m just kind of like...it’s great, HaShem is with us, let’s go!” And she’s like, “No, no, no. It’s good what we’re doing. But get ready, its gonna get harder.” And so that’s just the truth of the world, but it’s just so wonderful that we approach it in such a way.

That is actually going to be the launching pad for this next part of the Fellowship. Because think about what’s happening here. It’s incredible that Moshe, Moses isn’t nervous about going up against the mightiest empire. He’s not nervous that all the people following him are unarmed slaves. It’s not the armies that he’s worried about, it’s not the chariots...a speech impediment?

Like, that's the thing that... "I don't know if I can do this God. Listen, I'm not a very good speaker." Three times he repeats it. That's the fear that somehow he assumes that we have something that...like that's the bug in our head. Like, "But I'm not a very good speaker." "Yeah but you're also going up against the mightiest empire in the world with a group of unarmed slaves." Like maybe that should be a big challenge. But he's like, "No, but I'm really not a good..." Three times, he repeats that over and over again.

And so, I want to put that in the back of our mind. Because what I want to do this session and I really want to kind of give an overview of what we're about to do. And so, the vision of the end of days given to us by the prophets of Israel is what inspired the creation of this Fellowship. Isaiah says, "The Torah shall go forth from Zion and the Word of God from Jerusalem. Nations will stream into Jerusalem to learn the ways of HaShem." And who would have imagined that streaming would have been like, "Hey, look what's happening. We're actually streaming in to Jerusalem to the Land of Israel on Zoom. And the Torah is going forth from Zion. Like what a time to actually start the process of broadcasting the Torah from the Land of Israel."

But I don't think that the whole world is now going to start living a Torah life like orthodox Jews in Israel. Some might, I guess. But I think something much deeper is happening and something much deeper is destined to happen. And so the question that I want to address is, "What is the heart of the Torah that is going out to Zion?" Cause I don't think that it's the Shulchan Aruch, I don't think that it's all the laws and the rituals and the details. There's a Torah, there's a law there's an essence, a spirit, a holistic life based on the Torah, and I want to get to the heart of it. And then from there, people will find their own way with God. But the world has gotten so lost in religion, in doctrine, in rituals, that we've lost the heart of what we all want.

And so, Abraham Joshua Heschel, in the opening to his greatest book, *God in Search of Man*, writes like this. This is a quote.

"It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit. When the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past, when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain, when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message becomes meaningless."

To me, that is the truth of this generation. Organized religion is collapsing in the Western World. Fundamentally though, human nature hasn't changed. And there's a massive movement of people around the world that are seeking spirituality, seeking meaning, seeking a connection to God. And the crazier the mainstream world gets, the more the hunger grows.

And Amos the prophet spoke of our times around the Arugot Farm with this message. He said, "One day I will send a hunger into the Land. Not a hunger for bread, nor a thirst for water, but to hear the words of God."

So the hunger's not going to be for religion, the hunger is going to be for a relationship. To HEAR the Word of God, for people to hear God in their life. That's why the fundamental prayer of every Jew is "Shema Yisrael, HaShem Elocheinu, HaShem echad." Hear o Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is one. Communication is the key to relationship. Husband and wife, parent and child, once the communication breaks down, it all breaks down. To commune, communication, it's the same word. That's why Mashiach and masiach, Mashiach meaning the Messiah, massiach, meaning communication IS the same word in Hebrew. It is literally the same word. If you write it down – mem, shin, yud, chet...Mashiach and communication is the same word. He will be the great communicator. That's what we all need here.

And so no one in this generation wants a religion. They want the Torah because the Torah is the path toward the beauty of attachment. The depth of connection. It's like we need a deeper connection, an emotional, intimate communication. We need to feel the love, the ecstasy of being connected to God. It's like, "My faith needs to help make me dance. My faith journey should inspire me to celebrate life. It needs to actualize my potential. It needs to allow me to grow beyond myself, connect with my true self. It needs to touch the essence of life."

So, my faith needs to go beyond religion. It needs to touch our hearts. It needs to allow us to live life to its fullest. It needs to help us emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. It needs to reveal our soul in the world. That's the hunger that's spreading throughout the world. People realize, "Aghhh, I'm just not happy. I don't feel like this world is working out." There's something outside that's calling for something greater like that. And like, food is for the body, the purpose of religion is to nourish our soul, to allow it to grow, to flourish, to shine.

It's like, according to the Torah tradition, we cannot understand God. Even Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, just like Ari said, they weren't even privy to God's Name. They were trying to seek after God, following God. God's thoughts are beyond our thoughts, His ways are beyond our ways. He transcends reality and He's imminent within reality. He's beyond us. We will never understand fully God in this limited capacity. But the biblical promise is that as we develop our inner world, we can develop a relationship with the Divine. And that relationship is to have an inner tension, a dynamic, a living relationship with who we are now and who God is calling us to be. And if we can follow that little inner, quiet voice that emanates from our heart, we can walk in that direction.

But once that relationship with the Divine just becomes a religion, a ritual, a theology, it's over. And that's why the sages of Israel say, "The Torah can either be an elixir of life, or a potion of

death.” There’s really only two options here. Either religion will be the worst thing possible and all of a sudden ISIS will emerge and horrible things will happen if religion takes hold because religion can be used to twist the Torah, misquote the Torah, you can like...all of these...or they can be an elixir of life. It’s one or the other.

And so, how do we go to insure, in some ways, we bring the life out of the Torah? And so, my hope is, that if we aim for the heart of it, maybe we’ll be able to take steps in that generation. Now the books of Bereshith and Shmot, Genesis and Exodus, those are like the meta-books. Those are the over-arching maps that lay out the principles, the ideas, the fundamentals for living in a relationship with a kodesh barachu in the world. And in the book of Exodus, we learn something so deep. And it’s so counter-intuitive. And if you don’t know this, you’ll never be able to make sense of the world and you might end up frustrated, confused, maybe even hopeless.

But the truth that the book of Shmot is teaching us about our own personal lives is that we are all born into slavery. That’s how this world works. Like a womb, the nation of Israel was formed and birthed into existence from slavery, so too every person in this world, we all travel on the same journey. Our souls were sent down into the Egypt of this world, our pure infinite, perfect souls were birthed into existence through our mother’s womb and from day one, it’s locked up. It’s enslaved and contained in this physical body. And if people don’t wake up to that reality, then they could live their whole life controlled by a matrix that they’re totally unaware of. And they’ll hear, “Ahh...there’s a matrix that’s controlling you. Big tech, big pharma, politicians, it’s the banks, the world economic forum, a few powerful people behind the scenes. There’s actually a matrix that’s controlling you.”

And my opinion, those forces, those are just pawns in a much bigger game and they have no control at all. HaShem runs all of those powers. Those are just puppets, and there’s a puppeteer. Achoshverosh and Haman, from the outside, it looked like they had all the money, they had all the power, they were issuing out decrees, they were running the show. But in truth, all of those forces, there’s a force higher than them. That’s just a distraction to the real matrix. WE ARE OUR OWN MATRIX. We are a slave in ourselves. And the Torah is here to set us free, to unleash our soul into the world to reveal our soul in the world.

The Alter Rebbe, the founder of the Chabad Movement, asks what is Galut? What is the exile? He says it’s when parts of our soul are still locked away and unrevealed. And what is geulah? What is the redemption? Yichud. It’s oneness, it’s like unity. Oneness between Creator and Creation. Oneness within humanity. Oneness within the Jewish people. Unity between heaven and earth. Oneness between body and soul. When our soul fully shines through and elevates our body, that is full redemption. Now you can say, “Why? I mean, can’t we just already have Paradise? Just make the Garden of Eden and just put us in there. Why do I have to be born in Egypt? Why did Israel have to go down into Egypt to only get out of Egypt? Like why do I need

all these troubles and why did Moses need a speech impediment? Just give me the good life. What's that about?"

Why was Abraham born into an idolatrous house and he had to free himself from that? Like what is that template? What is going on here? And so we ask the question, just like what Tehila said. Look at what Moshe says in the 4th chapter of Exodus. I really want to break this apart.

Moses replied to Hashem, "Please my Lord, I am not a man of words, not since yesterday, nor since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and speech."

-Exodus 4:10

What does that word there mean...nor since You first spoke to Your servant? I mean I get what Moses is saying...not yesterday, not the day before yesterday, Ok, well then he also says, and not since I've been speaking to you, God."

Well...obviously. I mean if you weren't there five months ago or a week ago, why now? What is he saying there? Moses is saying, you know, I think that he expected like I'm in an encounter with God. He could cure me, I'm talking face to face with God here. I'm in a full encounter with holiness. And he's telling God, "Not even when I'm speaking with You, I'm still having this speech problem. I'm still heavy of mouth and this conversation that we're having now, this encounter, this mikveh that I'm having now with a full on revelation of God, that didn't cure me either."

And then what does God say? It's such an important answer. God doesn't say, "Ah...the devil did that. Yeah, I'm good, the devil, he's bad. Everything good in your life is from Me. Everything bad in life, that's the devil." That's not what God says, and He also doesn't say, "Listen, you know, things happen. You know, there's an element of randomness in the world. You know, you have a speech impediment, George had a hard childhood, Charlie he's predisposed to really liking sugar, so he's a little bit struggling with his weight. What are you going to do? Things happen." That's not what God says. Look at what God says in the very next verse:

Then Hashem said to him, "Who makes a mouth for man, or who makes one dumb, or deaf, or sighted or blind? Is it not I, Hashem?"

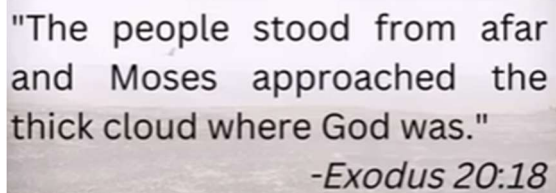
-Exodus 4:11

HaShem says, "Listen. I have put every single blessing in your life, and I've put every single curse in your life. I am the source of everything, the obstacles, the challenges, the blessings, the gifts, it all comes from one source. HaShem." We are all born into our own slaveries. HaShem put us here. Period. Now we have to get out. We have to get out. We have to find our

way out and find our way to Him.

And for us to live in a real relationship, we have to choose to be in that relationship. That's what faith is, to choose the good when the evidence is unclear. In the Garden of Eden, the choice wasn't real. The choice was like...God is walking with Adam in the Garden. It's what it is. The one choice that Adam had, he immediately like chose...just don't choose this or that. It's like, here we are now. You can stay in Egypt. In fact, that choice is very real. Four fifths got left behind. That's the Jewish tradition. Four fifths said, "I'm just going to stay in Egypt, I'm just going to stay here, I don't want to leave." And that's legitimate.

And the key to realizing the spiritual world, the key hole is the physical world. The challenges of this world are the gateway to spiritual living. God put those challenges here. So the climax of the book of Exodus is the national revelation at Sinai, the giving of the Ten Commandments. And look at what happens here. Look at what the Torah says here. Moshe went through this process. He's like, "But I have a speech impediment, but I have a challenge." And look at what happens here. When we all receive the Ten Commandments, Moshe embodies this idea that he first learned when he was first sent out on the mission. Look at Exodus, chapter 20, verse 18. The Ten Commandments are given. And it says:



"The people stood from afar and Moses approached the thick cloud where God was."
-Exodus 20:18

Rebbe Nachman of Breslev has such a beautiful Torah here. He says as the people stood from afar, Moses walked straight in. What does it say there? God is IN the thick cloud. The nation was nervous, "Whoa...that looks dangerous. That looks scary, that looks like an obstacle." And Moses says,

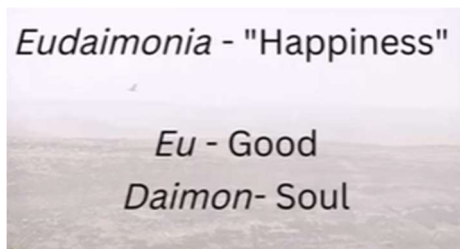
"Watch children. I'm walking in to the obstacle." That's where God is. He is IN the challenge. That was the climax of the revelation of the Ten Commandments. Moshe was saying, "Don't think that the challenges that the thick clouds where you can't see...that's not anything other than God. That's where God IS. And they say, well what is this all about?"

So here we go. I had a Shabbat meal in Efrat. And I went around the table. And I asked everyone because it was a long story. My brother had a surprise birthday party, so I had to be at someone else's house. It was very far away, so we were there spending Shabbat. And I just happened to be there with about nine kids around the table. And I went around the nine kids and I said, "Guys, what do we all want here? We're all humans, what do we all want?" So one kid said, "I want a good report card." And one kid said, "Oooh, I want to make a lot of money." And one kid said, "I just want to be successful." And one girl said, "I just want love in my life. I would just love to get married." And one said, "I just want to be famous." Each person was so funny to hear, like these kids and each one in their own ages, they all said, "I just want to be the best soccer player." It was just so cute.

And I said, "Well really guys, what is at the heart of all of that? Meaning, all of you are saying different things, but can we come to sort of a unified theory here?" And so, around 320 BCE,

Aristotle taught that the ultimate goal in life is to achieve eudaimonia, that's what he called it. And modern translators they interpret that word to mean "happiness." Meaning the ultimate desire of every person...why do you want to be good at soccer, why do you want fame, why do you want success, why do you want a good report card, why do you want money?" Then you think you have it all. Then I'll really be happy, then I'll really feel good. And so it's important to know what many people ignore, that while humans may pursue a lot of physical different goals – money, fame, power, relationships, the underlying motivation is that people in their lives really are looking for something spiritual or emotional. Whatever they're pursuing, the actual aim is they want to experience a feeling. They want to feel something, they want to feel happy. And it's hard to argue with that. I mean people want to be happy. That sounds pretty good.

But I want to go a little bit deeper into the ancient Greek wisdom traditions and the biblical Hebrew tradition. Because I think that there's a lot to learn here. And this all interconnects. I want to first look at the word eudaimonia in Greek and I want to break it down because I think that all these modern translators, I think they missed it.



And so, if we look at the word eudaimonia, it breaks down into two words. Eu, the first part, which means good. And daimon, which means "soul." So in some ways, that's a little bit different than happiness. Meaning, saying that the purpose of life, the sum is to be a good soul is a lot different than saying to be a happy person. Eudaimonia is

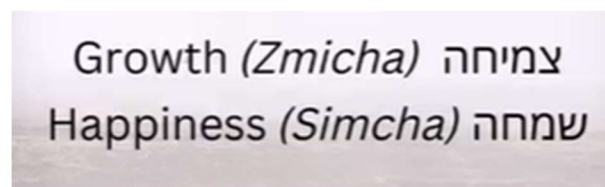
happiness, that's just not what the word says, meaning what Hebrew's calls a "soul," the Greeks call "daimon." And although the Greeks and the Hebrews, we didn't share the same meta-physical world view, the Greek philosophers acknowledged that men and women have an inner guiding spirit. They called it a daimon. And according to Aristotle, the ultimate purpose is to live in integrity with that spirit. And every time you successfully pay attention and adhere to that inner intuition calling you toward the good and you express that good inside you and you express the best within yourself. If you train yourself to consistently do that, you become a eudaimon, a good soul. And then what happens? You're going to experience eudaimonia, you're going to experience a sense of like happiness and joy and well-being.

But the translators, they missed that part. Ahh, yeah, people just want to be happy. So imagine what Western civilization is. Western civilization is actually the merger of biblical truth, biblical spirituality, biblical morality and Greek wisdom and logic and it's like the fusion of those two things created the Western civilization as we know it. But imagine if they would have actually gone a little bit deeper into it. Instead of, "We want to be happy. Well, people want to be happy. Let's give them some pills to make them happy. Let's entertain them on Netflix, let's make an entire society based around people feeling happy and just getting there as quickly as possible."

But growing in to our purpose is the best strategy for living a happy life. And I read such a beautiful book. A book written by a doctor named Martin Seligman. And it's a book called, "Flourish." And he literally says the conclusion that Maimonides and Aristotle articulated centuries before.

"To achieve the highest levels of happiness, fulfillment, and well-being, a human has to be growing and developing into a better person. A person has to feel like they are flourishing."

And that's probably the best word for eudaimonia. When we are flourishing then we have a sense of happiness and well-being. But look at the Hebrew language now. Remarkably it's so beautiful. Phonetically the word, can we get it up on the screen for just a second?



Happiness and growth, when you listen to it, it's almost the same word. And so Rav Shimson Raphael Hirsch says this is the key. If we are growing into who we are, who we're created to be, we will sense zmicha in our life. To live on

that path, is to walk in the light.

So then, imagine. We have a matrix that we are locked into. And the path toward happiness, the path toward flourishing is to grow beyond that matrix, to grow beyond that cage that we're locked into. And on that path, you grow into who you were created to be. And so, happiness isn't just experienced, it's achieved. And maybe that's the ultimate purpose of creation. Because Jewish philosophers they ask, you know they say, "Was God good?" Of course the answer is, "He's the best, He's God. He's the ultimate good." It's like, He's the ultimate good, Ok. Can God get better? How do we answer that? I don't know. Well, if He can't get better, well that's not very good of Him. That's not the ultimate good. Something that's ultimately good, should be able to get better.

And the kabbalah teaches there's an idea, God is a perfection that continuously becomes more and more perfect. How could God be infinite, become more and more good, more and more perfect? God resides in us. Our soul, that is locked within this matrix, within this Egypt. As we grow and become better, we are aspects of God and He is quite literally growing through us, becoming better. He's the One giving us the strength to overcome. We are His finest creation because we were created good and we can grow into greatness. He put the challenges before us. But if we plug into His power, He'll give us everything we need to overcome any obstacle before us.

And in becoming a co-creator with God in the world, becoming a co-creator with God in our own life, growing into who He created us to be, that is the ultimate happiness. To become a good soul in the world, to reveal the fullness of our soul is geulah. That is breaking entirely out

of Egypt. And on that path, guided by Him, you know what you're going to find? Happiness and well-being.

And so, I remember that Ari and I were actually in a class in the Old City, given over by Rabbi David Aaron. And I know that this is a story that we've told, but it's so pertinent now. And he went around and he said, "You know everyone, there's Japanese music playing in the room." And everyone said, "What?" And he said, "Yes, it's everywhere. Japanese music all around us. You just kind hear it." And we're like, "Rabbi, we know that you're a very mystical man and very deep thinker, but there's no Japanese music here." And he's like, "No, if we had a short-wave radio, and we tuned it into the right frequency, you would know, you would hear it. There is Japanese music in this room right now. Our antenna isn't just picking it up."

That is a spiritual truth. HaShem is speaking to us and our soul, it's a spiritual antenna. It's connected in the deepest way to the source of life. And the more our soul is revealed in life, the more we're able to break out of that matrix, the better your spiritual reception. The better the reception, the more you're able to live a guided life and the more open you are to the blessings all around us. That's what the Torah's telling us. When the Israelites left, they didn't just walk out into the desert. They had the clouds of glory guiding them. When the sun rose up, the pillar of fire would be replaced by the clouds of glory. And they would guide them on their journey. That story is like teaching us. Those clouds of glory, that's HaShem in our life. That is His cloud in our life. When we're confused, scared, lost, in doubt, there's a little cloud inside of us, but the challenge is, we can block our reception. We can actually banish the cloud from our life.

That's the vision in Ezekiel, that's what that means. Ezekiel watches the Shechinah, the clouds of glory leave Jerusalem from the Holy of Holies to the walls of the Old City to the outskirts of Jerusalem. And then the cloud leaves. God is one, God doesn't leave anywhere. God doesn't change anything. It's like WE banished it. Our eyes can be blinded and our antenna can be blocked. That we actually banish the clouds of glory that are meant to guide us, that quiet still voice can be blocked if we don't break out and allow our antenna to rise up.

And so, what do we do? God doesn't leave. He's with us. What do we do? We need to know what we're up against. It's almost impossible to win a war if you don't know what you're up against. Knowing is half the battle. And so, the Seven Gates that lock us into the Egypt of our lives, those are the seven things that we have to learn how to transcend. And I don't think that it's a coincidence that in the Jewish tradition, there's like seven laws, there's like these seven principles. And what does that say? It doesn't say like to do away with these. No, there are seven laws that every single human being is confined by. We talked about them last session. I want to go through them really quickly right now.

One is laziness and sleep. All of us have that. Second one is gluttony and food. The third one is comfort and pleasure. The fourth one is sexuality. The fifth one is distraction in time. The sixth one is evil speech and the seventh one is evil sight.

Now if you really go into what are those lusts? It's almost like our desire to meld in with reality. I just want to sleep. I just want to eat, I just want to ...I want to like not be an independent, strong soul. I want to kind of meld in and melt into reality itself. And so, there are things that we have to do and each one, the Torah kind of gives us the medicine. So, if you feel that laziness is holding you back, that you're just so tired all the time, wake up early. Wake up early with the sunrise. That's the first halacha in Jewish Law book. Wake up before the sunrise.

Gluttony? There are clean foods, don't eat non-kosher food. There are foods that are just off limits. They should be and if not kosher, then you should be fasting, you should be on a diet. Don't eat food that is going to kill you. Eat good, clean, healthy food. Each person at their own level. I've lived so many different diets now. I'm so confused with dieting. I don't know what's true and what's false, but I know that I'm constantly checking myself that I'm not just giving up and just eating junk food and sugar because that's what I would like to do.

Comfort and pleasure. All of us have that. So you know what you gotta do? We've got to strengthen our body. Exercise, get into a hot sauna, jump into cold water. Get out of our comfort and in order that we don't get locked into that matrix. Because our soul doesn't need that. Our soul needs total freedom from our body that's holding us back.

Sexuality. How many great men and women? How many beautiful families have been destroyed because of that? There are laws of family purity. To take that and channel it in the right direction.

Distraction in time. I would say that I really struggle with this. Sometimes I just get lost in time. I just waste time, either it's watching things I shouldn't be watching, listening to things I shouldn't be listening to. Just allow myself to control my own mind. Don't let the world distract me. And what's the medicine for that? Tefillah, prayer, meditation, Shabbat. One day, sorry world, I'm out. I control my 7th day. I'm in control of my time. I control my time every day, at least I try when I take time to pray. But also once a week, I control my time. My phone is off and I'm with my loved ones.

The last one is evil speech and that's really a hard one and I'll tell you why. Evil speech and evil sight, all of the other ones, the Torah teaches us how to channel it in the right direction. Laziness and sleep, do you know what we have? Shabbat. Shabbat is the best. You're supposed to sleep on Shabbat. You're supposed to rest on Shabbat. Gluttony, that's a problem throughout the week? On Shabbat, it's a mitzvah to have the most delicious food. Comfort and pleasure, have all of the comfort and pleasure on Shabbat. The Torah does not say detach

yourself from the body, live as a monk on a mountaintop, treat yourself poorly. That is not the Torah way at all. It's saying, "No, unity, that's geulah." How do we elevate the body and infuse it with spirituality? How do we bring light into the physical? How do we take those things and channel it to the good? So it's never just saying good-bye to the body. On the contrary, it's saying, "Body, come along and let's do this right."

But evil speech, there's never a right way to do that. Not around the Shabbat table, not on Sunday, not on Monday. Evil speech was what the snake used against Adam and Eve. And evil sight was lust for the eyes when they saw the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Those two primal evils, there's no medicine, there's no channeling. It's just NO!

And so, we know the laws of the Land now and we have to free our soul. And the Torah, I believe is the guide to allow us to unleash our soul into the world. Full geulah. To not have any parts of us that are locked up behind. And so, may we all first learn these Seven Laws, to first be aware of them. Until I actually made that list, I didn't really know what I was up against. But now, I know. And every week I got to take one. And I'm really going to work this time on my sleep this week. I'm going to work this week, I'm really going to try to eat clean and healthy. This week, I'm really every day, cold plunge. I just want to know that I can take myself out of my comfort. That my will and my desire and my soul is the driver. And not my body. And so, these Seven Laws of Transcendence, I hope and I believe that I'm aiming to the heart of it. And let's use the Torah to help us unlock the power of our soul and plug into the source of life and bring blessing to everyone around us.

So thank you all and may you all be blessed from Zion.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

Shalom my friends, may you all be blessed from this Land and from this place. I'll see you again next week. Shalom!