

Session 210

Vayigash – Why Jews are Called Jews

5 January 2025

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vYUEqfPTf0>

Jeremy

Shalom everybody, welcome to the Land of Israel Fellowship. Ok, good, every week it's like a new challenge to figure out the technology. But the fact that we're able to connect with people from Europe, and America, every week we gather. It truly blows my mind that somehow HaShem has gathered all of us together from the four corners of the world. Different time zones, different places, different cultures, it's just such a beautiful thing that exists in Israel, and it exists around the world. What can you do?

And so, I'm broadcasting today from the Arugot Farm, and I'll tell you that life has never been more...what's the word? Surprising. Ari is right now, in Reserve Duty. And I know that he was going to be called to Reserve Duty, but he actually went today. And it's just kind of like when you know you're supposed to give birth, it's like nine months, and then there's no surprise there. But then when the baby comes, it's like...whoah! There's a baby in the world now. Ari is in Reserve Duty and you know Ari and I were both honorably discharged about, I don't know, four or five years ago. I had 6 kids, I reached the age of 41, four years ago. And we were both...they pretty much said, "Alright, you've been great, thank you very much."

And Israel is in such a space now that the army is exhausted. The reservists are exhausted. And they sent out a call to the old timers. And they said, "Hey guys, listen. If you want to make it back to Israel, if you want to help fight for Israel, this is your chance to reenlist in the IDF. Now I am still struggling to just walk on my foot. So going into being a combat soldier, that was just not up for grabs. But Ari, he sure did. He said that if Israel needs me, I'm ready. And so, he kind of registered and I knew that he was doing that. But it seemed very academic, it seemed very theoretical. It was like, ok, one day, maybe they'll call us old-timers. They have enough young people fighting for Israel. And then all of a sudden, today was Ari's first day in Reserve Duty.

So soon, I am going to be sending a message, literally from the front lines with Ari Abramowitz, I imagine in full gear. I haven't even seen the video that he sent into Tabitha. But it's like, from Chanukah vacation...this is the first time that I think that I've actually gone on a vacation in my life. Usually, my family will go on some sort of trip somewhere, and it will be a mission. We'll be teaching, we'll be going, we'll be meeting, we'll be on some sort of purposeful trip filled with meaning and filled with interactions and Torah. And this Chanukah, the first Shabbat, my family went down to the Dead Sea, and my extended family. And that's a really unique opportunity. We really don't get to meet all of us together like a family reunion. And we went down to the Dead Sea. And it's not that I take the Dead Sea for granted, but I see the Dead Sea from the Arugot Farm every day. I'm like, "Ok, it's the Dead Sea. But I'm at the top of the mountains. When you

go to the bottom of the mountains and you look back up at the cliffs surrounding the Dead Sea, I don't think there is any place like it anywhere in the world. It was spectacular, beyond beautiful. People should fly all over the world just to get to see the bottom of the world and then look up at the mountains surrounding the Dead Sea. It's so marvelous.

And then from the Dead Sea, Tehila's family had a family reunion in Eilat. And we broadcast last week from Eilat. So I was like from one hotel to another hotel. That's not the way we travel. But it was a truly vacation time for my family. It was amazing quality time. That's for sure. And then I come back and Ari's in Reserve Duty! It's very jarring for me.

But I'll tell you my experience from Chanukah. I was in the Dead Sea, and I was in Eilat, and those are kind of two hot spots, quite literally for the winter vacation. The Dead Sea is very warm and Eilat is the southern tip of Israel. And everywhere that I looked, there were religious Jews. I mean the number of religious Jews was astonishing. I didn't see almost any secular Jews. Everyone there was dressed modest, everyone there was wearing a kippah, tzit-tzit, it seemed as though the entire country...because I'm a little bit removed. I live on a mountain and I'm surrounded by sheep and horses. So I actually got into Israel to Eilat, which is supposed to be the hot spot of Israeli vacationing and everywhere I looked, Israel was packed with religious people.

And I started thinking that the sifting process is indeed happening. It's obviously happening in this Fellowship. People are being sifted out from among the nations from around the world. Jews and non-Jews alike, being pulled to Israel, being pulled to something true. But even in Israel it's happening. People that were here for the wrong reasons, this war has simply removed them from the Land, or they chose to remove themselves from the Land. And secular Jews are simply not having children. And the religious Jews in Israel are having big families, baruch HaShem! And so I guess it's just a numbers game. But the reality in Israel now, from what I saw with my own eyes, not that that's like a Peer Report or statistics, but in the Dead Sea, in Eilat, I have never felt so at home in such a religious country before. The sifting process is actually sifting the believers to stay in Israel, to move to Israel, to connect to Israel. And those that don't really believe, there're just wonder democracies that happen to be in Canada, or may California. And the Jews are slowly leaving.

But this refining fire that's purifying Israel, purifying us like gold, is like slowly but surely taking the impurities away. And what we're left with now, are just the most marvelous Jews in the world. Tehila and I were walking today, and we passed by a couple of shop owners. One guy sells falafels, and one guy has a little store where he sells health food. And they're both learning a thing, I think in the Gemara, or maybe Pirkei Avot, talking about money's not what's important, all that matters in this world is our kindness and our good deeds. And these guys are quite literally like buyers and sellers in stores. All they should be talking about is like money, selling and buying, and all that they're doing is talking of the world to come and then kindness that they would find.

And like Israel is becoming a spectacular, beautiful, spiritual country. Slowly but surely, the process is happening.

And so, with that, I would love to start this Fellowship with a tefillah. The Chanukah menorah was lit in the heart of the Temple, and it lit up the whole world. The windows in the Temple were built in a way that they didn't let light in. They were built to allow the light to go out because the light that was generated in that House of Prayer for all Nations, ultimately is meant to illuminate the world. So, each one of us in our own homes, we're lighting our own menorahs, turning our own homes into a Temple of sorts. And putting it in our windows, lighting up that everyone should recognize the miracle of Chanukah. And so with that in mind, I'm still sort of dancing with the lights of Chanukah in my life. And so with that, I want to bring us together in a small prayer to kick off this Fellowship.

But before I do that, I want to say that a Fellowship member, Belinda and Dora Malkah, sponsored this Fellowship. And it is in honor of our Israel Defense Forces for God to protect and watch all over our men and women who sacrifice so much to protect our beloved Israel, and with that to protect our beloved Ari, who is right now, once again, strapping on his boots and going out to battle. So thank you for that. That's the first time I ever remember that happening that people wanted to sponsor a Fellowship and make a prayer of it. So with that, I would love to bring us together in prayer.

HaShem, thank You for the light of Chanukah. Thank You for the light of this Fellowship. Thank You for the light in our lives. May we take the light that You've given us and bring it into this coming year. HaShem, we've come here to start our week. We've come here to start our year with You in our hearts, and with You in our minds and with Your will for our lives and our sight. Guide us, HaShem, bless us and our Fellowship. You've gathered us here together from around the world and given us all this heart for You, this heart for Your people, Israel, and a heart for Your Land, Israel. Bring us together like no one has ever seen before. Bring us to Jerusalem and let that light spread and light up the entire world. Amen.

Alright, my friends, I want to tell you, that there's been a lot of songs that have been put out since the beginning of the war. But there's one song that in some ways has become the anthem of this war. And we played it a little bit, that Tabitha...thank God for Tabitha that every week she puts together such beautiful highlights of that week from the war. And there was one small clip that actually played the song for just a little bit with all of the children dancing and singing saying, "HaShem, the blessed One, always loves me and will only make my life better and better and ode yoter tov, and ode yoter tov and better and better. And Israel has been through the hardest year that I can remember. And the fact that the anthem that everyone is singing around the country now is that HaShem, the blessed One, loves us always and He will make things only better and even better and even better, is such an expression of what it is to be Israel, what it is to be a believer, what it is to really live out our faith.

And with that, I'm going to have to pass it over to Ari, who is quite literally walking the walk, talking the talk with guns, like my brother-in-arms, I'm without him now. I don't know who his commander is today, because he's on his own. But I'm excited to hear the message that he has for all of us. So check it out. Here's Ari Abramowitz from the front lines.

Ari



Shalom, friends. As you can see, I'm in the army. I snuck away to share this message with you because we're in the middle of training and we're at the shooting range right now so there may be shots heard behind me. All is well. But yes, I'm in the army, I've been called up to Milluim, to the IDF Reserves. Today is my first day and it looks like from the information that I've received, I will be in for the next two months. But one of the things that I've learned in the army is that no one knows anything. I'm in the army. Everything is a rumor, no one knows anything, only HaShem. Only HaShem knows. And so, I thought I would start this Fellowship with a prayer, with a prayer with all of us together.

HaShem, here I am back in uniform. Thank You for this opportunity to protect the nation of Israel and the Land of Israel. It's my greatest honor to be serving in Your army, protecting Your people and Your Land. HaShem, bless us, bless us here with courage and strength because all of our success comes from You and You alone. Please bless my fellow soldiers with faith and trust to defend all that is good and holy in the world. Please, HaShem, bless and protect Your people and Your heritage. Please bless my holy friends in this Fellowship. Please bless them and their families wherever they are in the world for they too are fighting to bring Your light and Your truth into the world. And HaShem, right now, we need Your light. Please shine Your light and Your blessing into Your people and into Your Land during these dark times because we need it now like never before. Amen.

So I thought I'd start, I'd share a little bit about how I ended up here in this uniform right now. I hope this is not being ruined by the shots behind me. And I figure that being in the army right now and time moves at a different pace altogether, I'd zoom out a little bit and give a little bit more background than I otherwise would. Not too much because I could fill up at least two back-to-back Fellowships just with army stories alone. So I'm not going to do that. But as you know, I was born in Texas, I'm a 4th generation Texan. And I was raised as an ardent, fierce Zionist growing up in my family. We weren't quite so observant. In some ways, Zionism was more of our religion than anything else. We just weren't so observant according to Jewish law.

My family would support the IDF, for many generations. My grandfather for example, smuggled weapons to the Hagenah before the foundation of the State and there are many, many examples of exactly that. But there really was never any expectation, any thought that I would ever join. But I did go to a very small private school in Houston called the Hebrew Academy. There were I

think like 9, 10, or 11 kids in my graduating class. I forget, it was awhile ago. But for my senior year in High School, part of the program was that I had the option of spending that year studying in Israel, an opportunity which I seized without any deliberations. And after being in Israel only a few weeks, probably less, I realized that Israel was my final destination. Right after breathing the air of Jerusalem and learning the Torah in the Holy Land itself, I just realized that this is where I would live and this is where I would die.

And after finishing a year of studies, I decided that it was time to join the army. It wasn't an impulsive decision at all. It was a dream that I had since I was a little boy and I just wasn't sure it would ever be a practical option for me. And then I learned that there was a program called Machal, which stand for מתנדבי חוץ לארץ, which means volunteers from outside of Israel, from abroad. And it was essentially a pathway through which non-citizens could join the army. It was founded by the famous colonel, Micky Marcus, before the establishment of the State. They actually made a movie about him, which is one of my father's favorite movies. It was called Cast a Giant Shadow. And he was played by Kirk Douglas, I really think you should watch it if you have a chance. Cast a Giant Shadow.

Anyways, I wasn't yet a citizen and I so, so badly wanted to serve, so I joined through that program and was accepted into the prestigious Golani Infantry Units, well at least it's more prestigious than Givati, where Jeremy served. And that's all that mattered to me, that's all that's ever mattered to me, is that it's more prestigious than where Jeremy served. I'm just kidding. It's all really the same thing, it's just army rivalry. Anyways, this was a time before this huge wave of volunteers from abroad. It was must more of a rare thing back then and it was challenging. But in so many ways, it's what made me who I am today.

So after Basic and Advanced Training, I had the merit of serving in southern Lebanon, primarily the Fathma Brigade. I was in Hebron as well, I was at different places in the country. And it was during that service that I really encountered the nation and the Land, more than any other time in my life. And after being released from my initial service, I went to university for a little bit in Israel. Then, the whole story ended with going back to the States where I actually got my degree. That's of course where the famous stabbing story happened, when I got stabbed in the back. Not in Lebanon or in Gaza or in Hebron. But in New York City. But that's a crazy story for another time. And after a year and a half studying in New York, I got my degree and immediately returned to Israel.

And just a few months later, I was called up for reserves for the first time. And we were able to arrange it that Jeremy and I were in the same unit, with him actually serving as my commander, for about 15 years. He was my commander, although the ranking system in Reserves is really totally different. But it was fun and meaningful and we got to serve together and that was great. Here's actually a little slide show I put together of some pictures, not only of my initial service in Golani, but also serving alongside of Jeremy in Reserves for all those years.



Now you have to understand, the paramount importance of Reserves, for the safety and security of the State of Israel. I remember learning during my initial service to Golani that the purpose of the standing army of Israel is essentially to buy time and protect the country for the first 24 hours until Reserves are called up. And really only once I actually started serving in Reserves, did I see how important they are for the country. And the importance is not only about security, it's not only militarily. Reserves in Israel is also critical for the social cohesion of the country, for the unity of the country, for the love of the country and within the country. And the reason is because everybody is mixed together, everybody. Whereas the rest of your life as a civilian, people usually end up in their own communities, surrounded by people who share their values and ideologies for the most part. And everybody else just becomes sort of "the other." But in Reserves, when you're on long patrols together, when you're under fire together, "the other" becomes "your brother." I think I just made that up. That we should make a bumper sticker or something like that.

But anyways, it's just a critical opportunity for transcendence, of your own personal interests to do something for the nation as a whole. There are just so many benefits to it, for the individual and for the country. Anyways, so Jeremy and I served together in Reserve Duty for about 20 years, approximately a month every year on average. Now there are two bench marks in your life for which the IDF retires you from Reserves. One is if you have 6 kids and the other is when you turn 40 years old. And Jeremy was retired for both of those reasons. He turned 40 and he had 6 kids. And I was retired for one of those reasons. I turned 40. I think at the time, we only had D'vash. I had not yet been blessed with Shiloh and Mordecai Shimshon. Anyways, so we were officially released. Our time had come and so we reluctantly turned in our uniforms and handed over to younger soldiers our greens, our uniforms, our supplies to give to them to take our place, just as we took the places of the heroes who served before us.

And so we were officially retired from Reserves just a few years before the horrific attacks on October 7th when that fateful day arrived. Everything changed, all of the standing Reserves were called up and everybody showed up. And we'd been retired. Jeremy and I were not called up, not officially, but unofficially we certainly were, we were in action. Because as you know, Jeremy and I and our partners, we settled these breath-taking mountains on the southeastern tip of

settlements in the Judean frontier. And about 10 years ago, it was just thorns and thistles. And now it's a Garden of Eden-like oasis, only with HaShem's help and blessings. But that's what we were, that's where we've been. And there's just a few of us out here on the very tip of the settlement. And when the war broke out, Israel was taken by surprise to put it lightly. And just as a nation, we were humbled. And the near-by village of Ibei HaNachal, our dear friends and neighbors were called up to the army, leaving almost no one behind. And the families of Ibei HaNachal are mostly young families with almost all of the men being active members of Reserves. And so between Lebanon and Gaza, there were very few left in the village. I can only say this now because enough time has passed and it's not like a real security threat. But the troops that were actually left behind to actually defend the villages in Judea were spread very, very thin. And there were periods, particularly immediately after the war broke out, when our Farm had very little, if any protection from the army. There was even talk about evacuating us, a proposal which we didn't entertain at all. But it was a very trying time for us personally, for the Farm, for Judea, and for all of Israel.

And so being that Jeremy and I were trained veteran soldiers, we were provided with all the necessary military equipment and vests and ceramic and everything we needed. We were really deputized to defend our mountains and the entire area. We were incorporated into the official guard and patrol list, even though we weren't officially enrolled. And this was important. Because our lack of being officially enrolled, yet serving and patrolling and protecting nonetheless, gave the nearby village two extra soldiers serving during a very important time when every soldier mattered, when every bullet mattered. Right now every bullet matters. We only have a few bullets to actually calibrate our weapons. We're still recovering from the shock of October 7th and just being so short on supplies.

Anyways, during that time, it was really a tremendous asset to have Jeremy and I serving out there, patrolling without taking up those two soldier allocations. And it also gave us more freedom to do a lot of the important things that we were doing at the time. And by the way, I just want to say now, many of you were critical in sustaining us during those days. In helping us acquire security systems, not only for our Farm, but for the nearby settlement of Ibei HaNachal, which really needed it and with other needs during those times, to all of you. You really share in the merit of all of the light we were able to bring into the world, to protecting us and to sustaining us, the nation of Israel and the people of Judea. All the protection you helped provide. We can never thank you enough.

Anyways, it was a very difficult time. And for me one of the most difficult challenges was not being in the army in an official capacity. I was surrounded by friends and neighbors getting called up to Gaza, Lebanon, front lines of Judea and Samaria. Men with wives and children who were literally sacrificing their lives to protect Israel and the Jewish people. I mean how many orphans? How many widows? Still now, every week that goes by, we have more and more. Just this past Shabbat, we had the parents of a soldier killed in Gaza come to the Farm and spend Shabbat with

us. Every time the father, who was so strong, and so much faith in his heart, every time he burst out in tears, I burst out in tears. And we all did. I mean it was devastating, it's heart-breaking, it's unfathomable. I mean it was just so fresh and so new. It was December 24th his son was killed in Gaza.

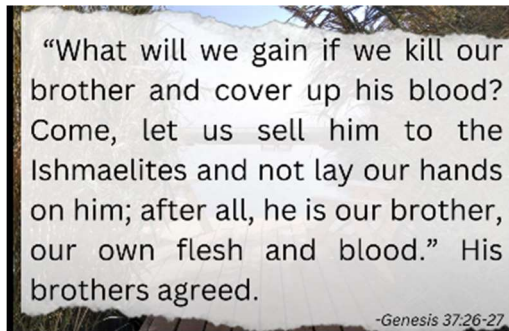
Anyways, throughout all of this, we were not officially called up and so we were spending most of our time guarding our mountains and guarding our families. And it was important for Israel, but in my heart, I always wanted to do more. And then about four months ago, our army unit spent out a message requesting the veterans, the retired veterans of the unit, us included, to get our medical test done and return to the rank of reserves to be available to be called up, should the need arise. Which I did immediately of course. And if Jeremy wasn't so seriously wounded, being thrown from a horse, I have zero doubt, knowing Jeremy that he would be there too. And about two weeks ago my phone rang and it was the army and I was getting called up. Fortunately, my primary region of service will be southeastern Judea, which is very important to me because it allows me to be in proximity of my wife and my children. If I was too far away from them, I'm not sure I would be comfortable having them stay on the mountain alone without me. Which is why it was so important that we were there during this period of time because if we were not there, if we were called up, the mountain would have had to be evacuated and we could have lost those critical mountains for the safety and security of southeastern Judea. We were holding them down. And so that's been important.

But anyways, now I've been called up and it looks like I'll be patrolling southeastern Judea, the nearby settlements, also, but mostly in Ibei HaNachal, and that's where I'll be from what I understand. And I'm just so grateful to be protecting this holy Land and these holy people. And I remember feeling the same way I felt when I first put on this uniform in August of 1999. I still feel overwhelmingly honored and grateful to be serving in the first Jewish army since the times of King David. And that's really the truth. We are the Jewish army.

But that's what I wanted to talk about here. Why? Why are the Jewish people called the Jewish people? Why not Hebrews? Why not Israelites? We've spoken about this before. That Mordecai was called Mordecai the Jew because he was from Judea, that's the Land we're from. But on another dimension, there's something even deeper. I think part of the beauty of the answer is from this week's Torah portion. This Torah portion we see the historic encounter between Judah and Joseph. Joseph is dressed as an Egyptian viceroy. He recognizes his brother Judah who sold him into slavery. But Judah, like the rest of his brothers has no idea that it's his brother Joseph that he stands before, putting his very life on the line. He has no idea that he's standing before Joseph. That Joseph is the source of all this torment that he and his brothers are experiencing. He has no idea that this all powerful Egyptian dignitary is the very brother he sold into slavery.

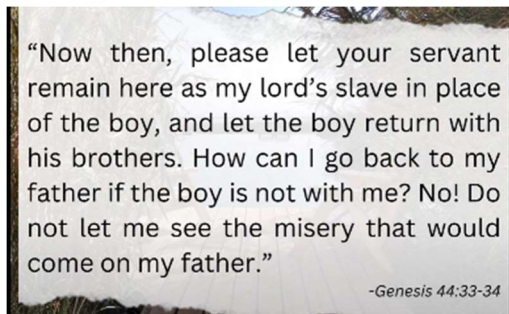
But in this historic archetypal exchange between Judah and Joseph, we see not only why the Kings of Israel are descended from Judah, but also why we the nation of Israel are called Jews. Because

as Rabbi Sacks points out, the words that emerge from Judah's mouth during this exchange demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was a radically different person than he was 22 years before when he sold Joseph into slavery. We remember the story, it's too painful to forget. The brothers were filled with so much rage and jealousy of their brother Joseph that when they saw him approaching from a distance, they decided to kill him. That is until Judah, who they all yielded to as a leader amongst them says:



His argument really isn't heroic, it's pragmatic. Why kill him when you can sell him and make money? It really seems like hardly the character of the forebearer of the King Mashiach. But that is who Judah was. Now, however, that this mysterious Egyptian ruler has been putting him and his brothers through really a Divinely inspired journey of confusion and torment, culminating in them being forced to return with Benjamin, their 12th

brother to prove the veracity of their stories that they're not spies. And every step of the way they demonstrated that they are indeed true penitents. From confession of their sin, to regret of their sin, to the final manifestation of the entire process which culminated in Judah, himself, when he stood before his brother, Joseph, disguised in plain sight and declared:



He's in the exact same situation, but this time his course of action is diametrically opposite. He has every reason to envy Benjamin, whose father clearly didn't want to part with until Judah finally offered his very own soul as collateral. Benjamin who just received five times the portion that his brothers did, Benjamin, the last remaining son of their mother's rival, Rachel, right? But

rather than turn his back and walk away...and have the same thing happen again, Judah offers himself as a slave for life in exchange for Benjamin. An offer that if the Egyptian ruler refuses, our sages say, Judah was willing and ready to attack Joseph and the entire Egyptian monarchy. Bring them down until either he was killed or they were destroyed.

That is the power of Judah. A fierce warrior, but a man of truth. A true penitent, a ba'al tshuvah, a man of such honesty that he would confess the truth, even if it meant his own demise. And that's why we are called Jews because you don't have to look back at ancient history where the Jews would fall into idolatry again and again and again to see our flaws and our sins and our shortcomings. October 7th, the war we find ourselves in right now was the clear result of pacts that we made with evil in violation of the Torah. Arrogance, complacency, and putting our faith in flesh and blood rather than in HaShem. But we will rise up like the lions of Judah, we will confess our shortcomings before HaShem, we will repent and atone for them. It's happening right now

and I'm grateful to be seeing it happen from the front row, from center stage. That is why we are called Jews, because we are a nation of Judeans, a nation from which redemption itself will blossom. May it be soon, my friends. Love you all. Pray for me and I will pray for you and shalom from the front lines here in Reserve Duty in the hills of Judea.

Jeremy

Wow, Ari, that was just so awesome. It was worth it just to learn Torah with a man with an M16 around his neck. There was something about that that was so real and so raw. And I want to tell you sometimes people look at Israel and they just see spectacular miracles. Beepers blowing up in the most pinpointed anti-terror attack in world history. Three hundred ballistic missiles from Iran, the largest ballistic attack in world history and none of them hit. And then the 6 Day War, who wins a war in 6 days? But then sometimes when you get a little bit closer, you sort of see like, Israel is just a regular country with regular people. I mean, Ari didn't tell you this story, but this is one of my favorite Ari stories.

When he first came to Israel, he wanted to enroll in the army and his Hebrew wasn't perfect yet. He said, "It's ok, I'll just go to the army and I'll pick it up, full immersion. I'll just learn it as everyone around me will be speaking Hebrew, it will be fine." He comes to Basic Training, his first day in the IDF, the first time wearing an IDF uniform. And all of the soldiers are standing in a perfect line with all of their equipment by their feet looking down as their commanders are slowly checking them, one by one.

Well, the worst thing you can do on your first day in the IDF is to show up late. And Ari, on his first day, meeting his commanders for the first time was late. And it wasn't exactly his fault because he was a lone soldier from Texas and they were sort of talking to him. Where was he going to go for Shabbat? Who's going to do this boys laundry? They were just like...the army wasn't really ready for lone soldiers yet. And they were trying to figure out what to do with this giant Texan that's now serving in the IDF. But his first time meeting his officers, he was late.

And all the soldiers were standing at attention. And they see this big boy from Texas running across the base. He of course has fear in his eyes because he realized that he's meeting his officers for the first time and he doesn't know what to do and he doesn't know how to explain where he is. He stops, salutes and apologizes in Hebrew. Instead of saying, "I'm sorry that I'm late, Selicha sh'ani me'uchar...Ari says, "Selicha sh'ani mechu'ar." I'm sorry that I'm ugly. And so you can imagine what that looked like. "I'm sorry for being so ugly."

And all of the soldiers were like, "What's happening right now?" This boy is apologizing for being ugly. And everyone was sort of stunned and shocked and it was their first day in the army and no one had ever worn a uniform before and no one had ever heard anyone apologize for being ugly before. But there's always that one guy in the unit. And there was one guy in the unit that had the courage to say, "Listen, it's a tough break. What can you do?" And then everyone broke out

laughing because no one had ever seen such a spectacle before in the IDF. Then all of a sudden all of the soldiers were laughing. Then all of the commanders were laughing and Ari still doesn't know why everyone is laughing. They're laughing at him because he just apologized for being ugly. And no one knew what to do.

But the last thing you want to do on your first day in Basic Training is make your officers laugh. Because now the Drill Sergeant needs to prove he doesn't really have a sense of humor. And the rest of the day, the Unit was punished, climbing through thorn bushes, running up and down mountains. It all made Ari very popular of course. It was his introduction into the unit, getting the whole unit punished for being ugly. But that's why when you look at Israel from a bird's eye view, you really only see the marvel and wonder. But then you look a little bit closer and you see that it's just people. Some of them know Hebrew, some of them don't know Hebrew, some of them are ugly, what can you do? And you just don't realize that the miracles that are happening are happening through us, they're happening through real people, real believers that are living with their faith in action. And that's what makes the magic of Israel.

And with that, I want to introduce you to the magic of my life who once again has delivered like she always does. A Torah just next level analysis, understanding. It's like she just has these brilliant lightning bolt blow her mind and then she shares her mind with all of us. And so with that, I want to introduce Tehila Gimpel, Tehila, come on over.

Tehila

Hi everybody, so great to see you. That's some tall praise to try to live up to, Jeremy. I hope I don't disappoint and that I keep up with those expectations. Ok, so this week's coming portion is Vayechi. And there's a part in this portion, it gets me every time. Like right in the gut. There is this part where the brothers all come back from burying Ya'acov. And they finish mourning Ya'acov and then they're afraid that Yosef is going to take revenge on them. And they come and say, "Listen, dad said before he passed, you should be nice to us." And then they concoct this lie and then it just says, "Yosef cried." And it's a sucker punch to my gut every time because you can just feel Yosef's pain. Like what can he do but cry?

It's not the first time that he's crying. But the other times where he was crying, it had a different feel to it, right? Like the other times when he cried, when did he cry? When he heard the brothers talking amongst themselves about how bad they felt about what they had done to him. He like stepped aside and cried. It was like this crying of healing, of realizing that his brothers had changed. And then later when he reveals himself and they're all reunited and they're hugging it says like he cried and all of Egypt heard him crying, right? But it's like a beautiful cry because it's this crying of reunification and coming back together. But this time when he cries, it's a different feel, right? This is a different cry. Let's think about the position he's in. It's in Genesis 50. It says that they sent messengers, it says in verse 16:

וַיִּצְוּ אֱלֹהֵי יוֹסֵף לְאֹמְרָא אֲבִיךָ צֵה לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ לְאֹמְרָא
So they commanded [messengers to go] to Joseph, to say, "Your father commanded [us] before his death, saying,

-Genesis 50

כֹּה תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף אֲנִי שָׂא נָא פֶשַׁע אֲחֵיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי רָעָה גָּמְלוּךָ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפֶשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ וְיִבְרַךְ יוֹסֵף בְּדַבְרָם אֵלָיו
So shall you say to Joseph, "Please, forgive now your brothers' transgression and their sin, for they did evil to you. Now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

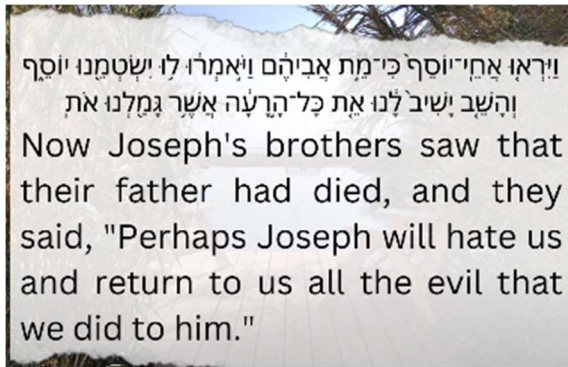
-Genesis 50

Now think about how this looks to him. Now, he really only has two options when he hears this thing that they're saying to him. One is that they're telling the truth. In which case his father's dying words to him...to the brothers, were that he suspected Yosef, right? Like something negative about Yosef. That would be so painful. But Yosef has to know that that's really unlikely, right? Because he just met with his father when he brought Ephraim and Manasseh. The other brothers might not know about that by the way. That they just met and their father was saying how happy he was that he got to see them and he got to see his children. And his father's blessing him. It doesn't make sense that his father thinks that he's gonna like do something horrible to the other brothers, right?

So the only other real option is that they're fabricating this. That they really think so poorly of him, and that they don't know him. They're assuming that he wants to hurt them. So you know if in the first times that we see Yosef crying, he's crying because he's so moved by their repentance, their tshuvah, imagine how he feels right now. Has nothing changed? Like they still think I'm this awful person? Like we've had all this time together and nothing has been healed? They don't know him?

And you know, it's so crazy because when the first story happens, when Yosef has the dreams and the brothers are mad at him, do you remember what the Torah says, how old he was? It says he was 17 years old. Now pay attention. When Ya'acov, when Jacob comes down to Egypt with all of the family, it says that how long did he live in Egypt? All of the family together living in Egypt? Also 17 years. So it's like, there were 17 years where he could be misunderstood in the beginning of his life. And then, from his perspective, now we have 17 years to fix it, to correct it. I was misunderstood, but now we're together. You know, like they thought like my prophecy was this haughtiness, but now they'll see that it was just coming from a good place. I was just sharing my vision that HaShem gave me. He thinks they've finally reconciled and they got blessed together and they go to Israel to bury their father together and they're mourning together and he's like, "Oh, 17 years," and then they come back and do this to him and he's like, "Really? After 17 years, this is what we have to show for it? This is what we have to show for ourselves?"

And what can he do but to just cry. And if you're not feeling like the complete emotional weight of this moment, then just look at the words that the Torah uses in verse 15. It says:



But in Hebrew, the word used here for hate is actually unusual. It says, “יִשְׁטַמְנוּ”. The only other person that I know that that verb was used for, is in Genesis 27, verse 41 when it says that Esav hated Ya’acov for taking his blessing. It says יִשְׁטַם Esav at Ya’acov, the exact same word about his feelings towards Ya’acov, is the exact, exact same feelings the brothers think that Yosef is going to have for him.

What are we learning here? We know that what was Esav’s plan? The Torah tells us what was his plan in his heart, right? His plan was, “My father will die and then I’m going to go kill Ya’acov, I’m going to go kill Jacob.” So they’re thinking, “Wait a minute. Our father just died. He feels the same about us that Esav felt to our father. That’s how awful he might just be inside.”

Like if you’re not getting the full pain of this moment, like this word just comes in and make sure that you don’t miss it. They’re thinking that maybe he’s going to kill them. And it’s so painful because Yosef doesn’t deserve this. All he’s done is be good. When his brothers reunited with him, he forgives them. He tells that it was all for the best, he receives them with open arms. And what’s so incredible and heart-wrenching, at the same time about the Torah, is that the Torah just doesn’t tell us happy fairy tales. It’s so real that sometimes that sometimes you want to crumple up from how real it is. The Torah isn’t selling us a fairy tale. Because if it was a fairy tale, it would say, “You know, Yosef had a hard life. But his brothers, they repented. And then Yosef forgave them and then they lived happily ever after. The end.”

The story is so real because like that’s not how it ends. And it almost ended that way. They could have just said, “They buried their father and they hugged each other, the end.” But it doesn’t. The story is so real because it’s like, “Oh yeah? You think you fixed your family relationships? You think you got this? You think so?” Well just when you think it’s all under control, it can all can decompensate in a moment. That is real. And, then, what are you going to do? That’s the Torah question. What are you going to do then? When you’ve been through all of the Torah tests and you say, “I’ve been through these tests and I’ve fixed myself and I’ve repented and everything is going ok.” And then everything comes crashing down, then what do you do?

That’s what the Torah is asking you. It’s hard to be Yosef and forgive the brothers, but when he says that they repented, you kind of understand. Like, ok, bygones are bygones, water under the bridge. Like you can kind of get Yosef. Like he’s great, but we can all sort of relate with that. But when the brothers are sending him right back into that childhood trauma of being totally misunderstood, being suspected of something untrue about himself, that’s when his true

greatness comes out. That is like when the ultimate Yosef comes out. And that greatness holds like such a powerful lesson.

Because broken family relationships are like a universal thing that so many people deal with. And I'm not just saying that because I'm a divorce lawyer as you guys know. Like right here on our Fellowship, on Shabbat, I was praying everyone's prayer requests and I would say, I didn't do a statistical analysis, but after illnesses, I would say that the majority of tests that people share that they're going through, even right here in our group, is tests with family things, estranged children, siblings, in-laws, family members that might be trapped in addiction and bad relationships. It's just so hard...I'm reading and I'm praying for you guys and it's just so hard. And so many times, like just when someone thinks like, "Ok, and it's getting better," that's when it falls apart. And that's when Yosef is here to show us the way.

Yosef had every justification to say get out of my face, people. Like after all of this, this is what you think of me? Are you serious? But he chooses to save his family. He saves his pain and he doesn't deny his pain. He doesn't bury it. He steps aside, he cries it out, and then he gathers himself together and he takes his highest self to make the highest decision to save the unity of his brothers. And ultimately, in doing so saving the unity of the Jewish people.

So I want to look at two lessons, just maybe to take out a few snippets of what he can teach us about these kind of family situations. So I think the first thing that we can notice when we read Joseph's response to his brothers is his incredible patience. Cause if you look at the verses, he basically says to them the same thing that he said to them 17 years earlier when he reunited with them. "You thought it was for bad. You wanted to do something bad, but God had a plan. He wanted to save people from a famine. He's given me all this ability in Egypt to save people. He doesn't lose His temper, He has patience, He understands that it can take years and years. He doesn't say, 'Hey, weren't you listening last time?'" He stands strong in his position, he doesn't change his position, but he holds that space. He says, "I told you then and I'll say it again," and he has faith in them. That no matter how long it takes, eventually they will absorb this lesson of just having faith in HaShem's plan.

And the second thing that I think is so striking in his response, is the actual words that he says to them. He says, "Am I instead of God? Do you think that I am in the place of God to punish you for what you've done?" Now it's marvelous, because we've heard this sentence once before, right? From his very own father speaking to his mother. When RakeL, when Rachel was begging Ya'acov, she said, "Give me children, I can't live without children." What does Ya'acov say to her? He says, "What, am I God?" The exact same words in the Hebrew. "What am I God to give you children?" And you can feel her pain. That's not like considered a really healing interaction, right?

It's often contrasted with his father, Yitzchak who prayed in like Rivkah's presence. But what did she need right then? She needed his support, not to just say like, "Hey, it's a God thing, it's not a

me thing.” That was painful for her. Here Yosef uses the same words, but it seems to be healing for the relationship. Why? Why does the exact same phrase have the opposite effect in a different context? I think that Yosef here is making what is called a tikkun, a correction, a fixing of those very words that pained his mother so much. He’s using these words this time for healing.

And it’s a really deep blessing because what is he saying? They think that he’s going to take out his revenge on them, right? And he says, “What am I? Am I God?” What is he teaching us? When it comes to other people’s pain, it’s our job to kind of comfort them, to pray for them, to make space, to empathize. But when it comes to our own pain and our own desire for revenge, Yosef says, “No, that’s when you say am I God? I’m not God. Don’t take out your pain on the brothers. That’s a God-thing. I don’t need to punish the people around me. I’m leaving my pain and other people’s wrongdoings and mistakes, that’s for God to take care of. My responsibility is to love and to keep my family together.”

Now of course, I have to make my divorce lawyer, asterisk, and say, “Don’t take this to mean all relationships need to be maintained at all costs.” Because I’m certainly not in favor of toughing out abusive relationships. I’m a divorce lawyer for a reason. I think I literally spend all day long helping people out of unhealthy relationships. It doesn’t mean to be tyrannized or abused. Yosef doesn’t allow himself to be tyrannized or abused. He stands strong. He rises above his pain and says, “What is right? Not what feels good in this moment. Not what can I do to lash out my pain in this moment. But what is right for the unity of my family, for the betterment of my family.”

So Yosef is teaching us to look at each family situation, not to focus on why we’re right and returning the pain to the people that caused us pain. But to look at what’s going to save our family tree? What is the right thing we can do right now no matter how hard it is to save our family tree. Not to be a God that needs to teach everyone, but just like Yosef, to shine patiently our faith on everyone around us and just believe that no matter how long it takes, we’re putting that out in our best effort and the rest is up to HaShem.

And just to finish off, I think that everything in the Torah has a personal lesson, but also a national lesson for Israel and for the world. You know, Israel is a family. And here in Israel sometimes there can be a feeling of like, “We’ve seen so many miracles. How are there still parts of Israel, parts of the nation of Israel that don’t see it? That don’t see HaShem’s Hand. That don’t see HaShem’s providence over us. And on the other hand, we say, “How can there be people who think that their religious integrity prevents them from participating in the rising of the State of Israel or from going to the army?” Like you can get so frustrated with your family, of the other parts of the people of Israel.

And again, Joseph is teaching us, we continue to shine our faith with integrity, we don’t back down, but we continue to have patience for all of our brothers and sisters, for all of the people that they will ...and just with faith, just like Yosef says, “HaShem had a plan, that eventually that

plan will grow into the hearts of all of our brothers and sisters, to all see HaShem's Hand guiding our lives and guiding our nation."

So with that, I wish you guys all a good week.

Jeremy

Thank you, Tehila. That was amazing. Really amazing. I just feel like, you know the whole Torah is about family. I mean Adam and Eve has a family. Cain and Abel is family. Abraham, Sarah, family. It's all about family. And this final lesson is like just keep the family together at all costs. Rise above your lower self and keep the family together and Yosef won. I mean Israel survived more than 200 years in slavery. And that means, that whatever he did to unify the people of Israel, the tribes of Israel, that worked. Meaning it ends off not on a happy note necessarily in that Torah portion, but the story of Israel continues and we continue to live as one family, as one nation. And it was that patience and that integrity and that emunah that allowed Israel to thrive.

And that's actually what I wanted to talk about today. Because Yosef is known as Yosef Hatzadik, Joseph the righteous, Joseph the believer, Joseph the savior. But what made him so righteous? What made him a Savior is that he had a way that he saw the world and nothing would shape the way that he saw the world. And you need to understand that all of us want to see the world in a godly way. But the world is going to do everything it can to throw doubt, to throw fear, to confuse us, to make us think other things. I mean, imagine what Joseph had to live through, the doubts and the fears and the loneliness. And he never wavered because he was a Tzadik. He was righteous.

And you look at the news that's coming out of America now. And the Biden administration is on its way out and they're now kind of doing the final movements of their declarations and their final say. Like the big fireworks at the end of the administration. And now the Biden administration has offered the medal of Freedom to particular civilians. And you can see it right here:



That's from USA Today. And people don't realize that that is the highest level recognition and honor that you can receive in the United States of America.



I want to look at this article that was actually written by George Soros, himself. George Soros...

And so, this man is being acknowledged and recognized and respected above all other Americans by this administration. So the world is going to try to manipulate us and shake us and confuse us.

And Joseph had to live through so much. But that's why emunah isn't just a theology or a belief. It is a moment-to-moment choice saying, "I want to believe, I trust, I will live by my belief in practice and with loyalty." And you know, there's a transition that happens from the avot, from the fathers, where there was just one righteous man, Abraham. One righteous man, Isaac. All of a sudden now, there's 12 leaders. Judah has his whole story as he goes down, leaves the family. Joseph has his whole story. There's different lights now. And also we transition from prophecy to guidance.

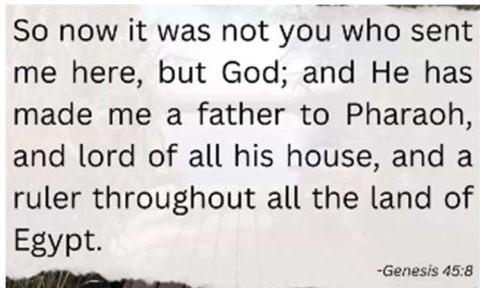
And that's really why Joseph is a leader like the patriarchs. Meaning his children, Ephraim and Menasha, they have tribes in Israel, as if he was a father of Israel, because he taught us all how to live. He taught us how to live a guided life. Joseph never spoke to God, Joseph never had prophecy, at least not the way that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did. He had dreams. And I don't know, I've had a lot of dreams. I do have a lot of dreams. Sometimes, I have dreams that don't make any sense at all. I'm being chased by a three-headed dragon, like running away, trying to protect my family. And does that dream mean that I have prophecy? No.

But Joseph had dreams that he felt were so important that those dreams were going to guide his life. And his whole life was guided by those dreams. Now Joseph never made a covenant with God. God didn't make a covenant with Joseph. God didn't speak face to face with Joseph. Joseph had spice carts. He had guidance's in his life. And you know, in our Fellowship, every week Tehila and I and Ari, we print out 13 pages that Ardelle puts together of the members of this Fellowship. And I think about the challenges that so many people are going through. And you know, you don't really know the challenges that people are going through. But the more that I get to know people, the more I realize that EVERYONE'S life is an epic drama, a novel like best-seller. You just have to scratch beneath the surface. And everyone is being pushed to their limits and everyone is going through such unbelievable life stories. The highs, the lows, the challenges, the drama. And can it be everyone? There has to just be people that are just kind of like living their life and kind of like, waking up, going to a cubicle and coming back home and watching TV and going to bed.

And I realized that all of us here in this Fellowship, we are all going through the training of the Delta Force in Israel, of Sayeret Matkal. If you just want to be a regular soldier, so there's regular

training for regular soldiers. But if you want to be an elite commando, Delta Force, Matkal soldier, the training is totally different from regular foot soldiers.

And so Joseph, his life was radically different than all the other brothers. Because he was being trained to become Yosef Hatzadik. He was being called to save all of Israel, to save the whole world, to bring the family together, to actually teach all of us how to live a guided life. And when you look at the verses that Joseph teaches his brothers, the verses in Genesis 45 when he first reveals himself, this is what Joseph says:

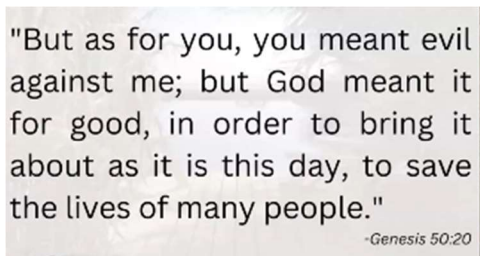


So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

-Genesis 45:8

Now that's hard for the brothers to comprehend. It wasn't you that sent me, it was God that sent me. That was the way that Joseph saw the world. Everything was from HaShem, everything is one, everything is guided.

And then, 17 years later, after they buried Jacob. You can open it up to Genesis chapter 50 and look at what he's teaching. Teaches the same lesson:



"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save the lives of many people."

-Genesis 50:20

So even though the brothers had evil in their hearts, God used those evil thoughts and those evil intentions for His purposes. And that is the ultimate lesson of emunah. It's to realize that everything is from HaShem, every person that we meet, every action that we take, even the actions where we're sure that we've messed up... "I had bad intentions, I really had wrong intentions here. My heart was not in the right place, my mind was not in the right place, this was an absolute sin."

Joseph was saying, "I want you to know, that from God's perspective, where you are now, everything was a part of a master plan. And you have the chance to be like Judah. You have the chance to repent, to return, to revolutionize your life. And even if you made a mistake then, you only now can rise up and make it that much better. And that really is what emunah is. Emunah is not only a moment-to-moment choice, to live with your higher self and not your lower self. To live with the knowledge and the belief that HaShem runs the world. Emunah is to step out in faith and know that HaShem will have your back. You're going down to Egypt, you're at Potiphar's house, I guess this is where HaShem wants me now. I'll do the best that I can and I'll become second to Potiphar. I'm in prison, ok, Joseph starts running the prison. Then he comes to Pharaoh. Everything that he did, he believed and he saw the world that everything that was happening to him was happening for him to allow his dreams to manifest.

And so, with that, I want to bless everyone that we have the integrity of Joseph, that we have the emunah of Joseph, that we have the ability that as the Jews are leaving Egypt and they're right in the Red Sea, God is saying, "Why are you calling out to me?" And then they start walking into the water, Nachshon Ben Aminidav walks into the water. And if you walk out in faith, HaShem will have your back. That is emunah, faith practiced in loyalty, always. Every moment of your life is a chance to practice emunah.

And so, we have Joseph Hatzadik. We have this amazing example of someone that always saw the higher side of life, the higher side of himself, and he tried to speak to the higher sides in each one of his brothers. But he also tried to see the higher side of reality. That sometimes the world looks so chaotic, but to realize that there's a pattern within the chaos and that there's a conductor that's orchestrating this symphony of life.

And so, with that, I would love to bless you from the mountains of Judea, from the mountains of King David, who also went through quite a training unlike anyone else in order to grow him into the person that HaShem chose the King of Israel to be and then ultimately Mashiach will be born from. All of the training is all for us. And so with that, I want to bless you with HaShem's courage, and HaShem's strength in your life and with HaShem's light and blessing.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

Shalom, my friends, have a beautiful week, have a beautiful year. See you again soon.