

Session 33 – Vaeira

17 January 2021

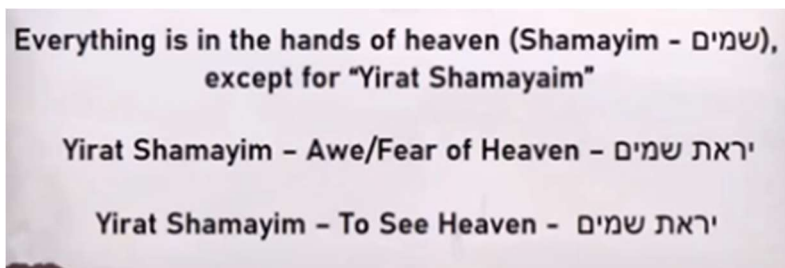
How to Thrive in Times of Plagues

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

Shalom everybody, Shalom fellowship! It is so good to see you all this week!

Things are transitioning now. Get ready. Things are happening and transitions are not easy and that's why we are coming together now. We are preparing for this transitional time and it's like, how timely, how blessed we are, to be learning about the greatest national transition in human history in the book of Exodus. I mean, could the timing be any better for us to come together? To delve into the wisdom of the Torah and extract life lessons for how we are meant to proceed in these days. I can't think of a better thing to do with our days. And Sundays, let's kick off our week strong. It's like we're connected to the rhythm of Torah from Israel and something happens. We start living in a little more consciousness, with our eyes a little more open. It's like the pulse that beats every week and we have the guidance that's prepared for us. How to transition from one stage of history to the next. So many things are beyond our control. Kings rise and kings fall. Huge economic waves, viruses, plagues, the only thing we have control over is our response to the situation, our perspective, our faith.

But in Hebrew, we wouldn't call it faith, we would say, yirat shamayim. There's a famous phrase that I say every single morning – brought down by the prophets of Israel through the sages of Israel –



Yirat Shamayim is usually translated as the awe of heaven, fear of heaven, respect of heaven, yirat shamayim, but it also literally means "to see heaven." Yirat comes from the word ra'ah, which means to see. It's interesting, also, the English word, respect, comes from the Latin word, respectus. Literally, an act of looking back. Re means back, spect means to look, like the spectacles of eye glasses. From the root of all languages, Hebrew, we learn that respect and vision, awe and vision, they are interconnected. And the prophets of Israel say that everything is in the hands of heaven, except our vision, our perspective of heaven. It's like, how do we want to see things? How do we choose to see things? Do we want to see the hand of God in our lives? Do we honor that? Do we respect that or not? It's like things are going to happen

no matter what, and it's like the choice is for us to find God working in our lives or not ...that's the one thing we have control over in our lives. How we see the world. How we see the world will create the world in which we live.

That's why Biblical prayer is a lot more about realigning ourselves with how we want to see the world, then to trying to change God's plan for the world. It's a practice, three times a day...whether you feel like it, or whether you don't feel like it, whether you're inspired or not inspired. It's like bringing us back to center, bringing us back to the truth that we know in our lives, back to our priorities, back to the way we need to act in the world, the way that we need to see the world.

And so, this is our Virtual House of Prayer for all the nations and by the chats, it just covers the whole world, so let's take a moment, to realign ourselves in this marvelous, world movement. These few minutes of global prayer, in some ways, they energize my whole week. Thank you all so much for coming and praying together with us. It's like a power that's just unprecedented before. We've never been able to do this. As the world is coming apart, somehow we are coming together and a new form of prayer is being born in the world. And what an opportunity to start our week praying together.

Hashem, all of us, friends and family in this fellowship from nations all over the world come together before you with one heart, with one prayer, from this Land to you. Hashem, sometimes it feels like there's tremors of an earthquake that are coming. And there's so many things out of our control that feel so much larger than us. Powerful politics, big corporations, economic trends...and we're just caught in the middle of this storm. Hashem, please guide us on calm waters through this storm. Seal our ark behind us. Give us the eyes to see that you're the guiding force in the world, bringing your people together, bringing your people home, bringing us all to exactly where we need to be. Thank you for this fellowship. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to live out your prophecy, your dream and your example of how we're meant to live in this world, how we're meant to pray together. How we're meant to unconditionally love those who seek you and seek Your ways. Thank You for today, thank You for life, thank You for our family, thank You for all the blessings You've given us and for all the love in our lives. Bless us to grow in love and to spread Your light, and to bring healing to this world that needs healing now so badly. Thank You for bringing us together for your purposes. And the whole world said, "Amen."

Alright, so here's how we're going to take it today. We're going to learn the book of Exodus, really as a guide. We're going to see it not as a book of history, but as a book of lessons that through the history of the Jewish people, specific things were encoded, specific things were remembered and they were passed down from generation to generation so that when tough times happened, we were able to pull out the wisdom of how to see the world, how to live in the world. And that's really how we're going to try to look at the book of Exodus today. The

prophets of Israel were always looking at nations. They were very aware of global politics, of international developments and while reading the Bible, you are being trained to also be aware of what's going on outside of your neighborhood, outside of your city. Just don't just read your local newspaper. Know what's going on in Israel, know what's happening in Iran, know what's happening in the U.S. and in the governments, and the changes, and all of that was really important for the prophets.

And it's like as the story of the Bible continues and the promises of the prophets are coming to pass in our lifetimes, it's like new books are being written and chapters are being written and sealed. And in the book of Exodus, it begins with a new pharaoh that didn't know Joseph, and it's like a new book. The book of Exodus, now. It's like a new book in God's story that's unfolding. And that's the way the Bible trains us to see the world. A story unfolding before our eyes.

And last week for me, it felt like the end of a chapter. I don't know how else to put it. Last week the big corporations flexed their muscles and President Trump was just removed from all social media platforms, signaling the end of his term as the President of the United States, and in the same week, Sheldon Adelson, the greatest Jewish philanthropist of this generation passed away. He was such a public figure, he embodied Israel so much. You know, his last public act was to fly Jonathan Pollard home to Israel on his personal plane. And I think that just speaks volumes to how he saw the world and how he was dedicated to Israel and for the last 4 years, Israel had these two huge men, side by side. Men that were forces of nature in their own right and both of them were lost to Israel in one week. And it feels like, "Ok, now it's like the end of a chapter and now a new chapter begins." And in this new chapter, Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu stand alone, against now the whole world. But perhaps that's the way it's meant to be. Israel is called to be a nation that dwells alone. (Numbers 23:9) Our existence is a testimony, not to the powerful men that support Israel but to Living God of Israel.

As soon as it became clear that Trump was going down, France, Germany coordinated a meeting with Egypt, Jordan and Machmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority to immediately start working again to divide the Land of Israel. As if Germany and France don't have enough problems of their own. It's like, immediately they had an opportunity to go and hurt Israel, like a supernatural compulsion. How fast they reverted to their anti-Israel ways. It's like illogical instincts that are out of their control. In the Israeli news, it was just released that Biden's new team which is made up of Obama's old team, are secretly already meeting with the Iranian team to roll back the Iran deal that Trump pulled out of. It's like, "Oh my, post-traumatic stress of the Obama administration is hovering over Israel now."

And you know, I remember in the middle of the Obama administration, I was invited to the Bahamas to host a Passover Seder. Leaving Israel for Passover is a little out of my comfort zone, but I thought, wow, this is like a once in a lifetime opportunity. A teacher from Judea,

how would I ever be able to take my family on such an amazing adventure. All the way to the Bahamas. So I came home and I brought it up to my family and I explained that we were given this amazing opportunity, a gift to stay in the Bahamas, all expenses paidI just had to be the rabbi for the Passover Seder for all the people there, and give some lessons there, lead the prayers...it's like an opportunity of a lifetime.

And my son Akiva, who must have been about ten at the time just stood up in protest. "Absolutely not! I will never go." I'm like, whoa, Akiva, what's going on? I thought my kids would just jump at the opportunity. Why Akiva? What's the problem? Why don't you want to go? And he looked at me in the eye, and he said, "After everything he's done to Israel, I will never spend Passover with the Obama's...no matter what!" No! Not the Obama's, the Bahamas! (laughter) That was quite an adventure. We're still reeling from the Obama administration and now it's back. Oey v'voe! But it's like a throwback to harder times. That's what it feels like.

But listen, right now, Israel is stronger than it was then. Israel is stronger now than it's ever been. If you ever start getting down, you ever start losing hope, think about the Jewish people and think about Israel, 80 years ago. Where were the Jewish people 80 years ago? Where were we 70 years ago? Where was Israel 60 years ago? Look at Israel today. The trajectory is like....up and up. It's like the train has left the station. There's no need to fear as long as you've cast your lot with the winning team. Thank God, we know that at the end of the book, Israel is going to rise up and be a marvel and a praise among the nations.

And so, if you look at the backdrop of the story of Egypt and the Israelites. Look, Egypt is the most sophisticated and powerful empire at that time. After Joseph's plan, preparing for the seven years of famine, I mean they played the market as well as they possibly could. They capitalized on the situation, becoming the strongest country in the world. By far. Their military was unmatched. And right there, under their feet was this large tribal group of slaves building their pyramids and their cities, a workforce like no other empire had at that time.

After 210 years of slavery, the children of Israel were hopeless, broken and weak slaves. And the Egyptian empire was the marvel of the world. Now imagine for a second, going back in time three thousand years, and take a snapshot of the Egyptians, and then a snapshot of the Israelite slaves and that's all you know. Which one of these two groups here is going to have a long lasting impact on the world? Which one of these groups is going to change civilization forever, reveal divine morality in the world, give birth to prophets and ultimately to Mashiach Himself? It's like the whole story was started with the odds stacked against us. There was no chance. It wasn't like we had a chance in the natural order of the world. That should never have happened.

But the world isn't run by a natural order. And Israel is a witness to that. It's like the paradigm of David and Goliath where the impossible just happens. That is the way of the God of Israel. And now, Israel stands alone among the nations that seek her destruction. Israel will rise to greatness and the glory of God will go to no one else but God.

And so, this plan that's unfolding now, we have to know how to transition in it, but we have to know who's running the show. We had a beautiful Shabbat together on the mountain. And Ari and I spent a lot of time learning together. And I think he had such a powerful insight into our times through the Torah portion. And perhaps, as we march closer and closer to the full revelation, the Torah itself just might start speaking louder and louder to us and that's what it looks like to me. And so, as we begin this fellowship, Ari, I just want you to take over, you have the Zoom.

Ari –

Shalom my friends. Before Shabbat started here in Judea, Jeremy and I had a conversation about how we were going to proceed with the fellowship and ensure we would be able to stay connected and in touch with all of you if our current methods of communication were shut down for some reason. Even a year ago, such a conversation would have seemed ludicrous, but in light of the shocking events that are unfolding before our eyes in the world today, it feels like in order to be responsible, you really need to have a contingency plan for every scenario.

The reason we had this discussion was because of the unprecedented moves of control and censorship on the internet. The very means of communication that we're using every day. The degree of partisan censorship in banning by these social media giants has gotten so out of control that the big five internet titans – Apple, Google, Twitter, Facebook and Amazon all came together and actually colluded and cooperated to knock the up-and-coming non-censoring alternative Facebook called Parlor off the internet – totally off the internet! Not just out of the Google store, the Apple store, but totally off the internet! Whether you're following all this or not, most people feel that something very significant and dangerous is playing out in America and the world. So much so that Germany, Poland and other European countries that are not fans of President Trump on a personal level came out in defense of President Trump, criticizing America for its violations of freedom and liberty. When Germany is criticizing America, rightly and justly criticizing America, for violating liberty and freedom of speech, you know you've arrived at a very strange and alarming point in both American and world history.

And while this all seems very new, the truth is it is simply a new manifestation of a very old, even ancient phenomenon, the spiritual seeds of which we can see in this week's Torah portion. After all, the same elements of control and manipulation and domination which these high-tech social media and internet giants are drunk upon, we see manifested in ancient Egypt – in both Pharaoh and in his sorcerer magicians. You see the Egyptians were polytheistic. They worshiped many gods which represented different forces of nature. And these magicians

believed that they could control these forces of nature. Rabbi Sacks points out the parallels that once you see, you simply cannot unsee. He explains that magic in the times of idolatrous and mythical Egypt was very much the same thing as technology in the age of science. A civilization that believes it can manipulate the gods, he explains, believes it can exercise coercion over human beings. And in such a culture, the concept of freedom is unknown. If you can control the gods, the next rational step would be to believe that you're a god yourself. If you can control the elements, then you can control mankind itself.

So, in dealing with the first two plagues, Pharaoh's magicians saw the blood and the frogs, not as miracles, but as magic. These plagues were a manipulation of the forces of nature which they themselves were able to replicate. They were able to copy them. Therefore, they looked at Moses and Aaron, not as men of God, but as magicians like themselves. It is only at the third plague, the plague of these little microscopic lice, that they realized that they could not copy it. They could not bring forth lice. And therefore, they were forced to admit that these plagues were done by the finger of God.

And there is more than a little humor that while they were able to turn the Nile red with blood and fill Egypt with frogs, they were not able to create creatures as small and as insignificant as tiny little lice. The magicians admitted that they were bested. They were embarrassed, they were humbled and they admitted to Pharaoh that a god more powerful than him was beyond these plagues. This must have been a devastating blow to their self-image, to their perception of Pharaoh as a god, and themselves as mini-gods, but they had the eyes to see. And being that the only vaccine for arrogance is humility, indeed they were humbled.

But Pharaoh was not. God hardened Pharaoh's heart and prevented him from returning or repenting. And while there are volumes written as to what that really means – that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, the answer that always felt the truest to me was the answer given by the great sage known as the Sforno. Sforno explains that God did not remove Pharaoh's free will, he granted it, he returned it to him. That any person who saw these nature-defying plagues, wreak havoc on an entire nation, and mock each and everyone of their deities, would be forced to admit the truth. So just as God bent nature in the plagues, he had to bend Pharaoh's free will in the opposite direction to restore it to him.

However you understand it, Pharaoh decided not to let the people go, but to keep the nation of Israel enslaved in Egypt. But here is my question. Here's the question that I want to throw your way. At that moment when the plagues were so bad that Pharaoh's advisors said to him, "Ad mati....." For how long will these people be a snare to us? Let the people go to worship their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is ruined? At that moment when Pharaoh was told that by his advisors and Pharaoh did not let them go, he could not let them go, at that moment, who was really the slave? Pharaoh was so dedicated to his belief that he is god, that it became an insane obsession. He became fully enslaved to this belief. So great was his arrogance, that

even the death of the firstborn and the downfall of Egypt would not fully be able to bring down his prideful belief in himself being god. While the nation of Israel was still in physical chains, Pharaoh was the greatest slave of all. A slave to his own unwavering belief in his own divinity.

And so my friends, we're seeing the rise of governments stripping people of their liberty and freedoms. We see these internet tec giants more powerful and more wealthy than most world governments. So powerful, that they've come to believe that they are gods. That they can control and manipulate not only nature, but people. That they can strip people of their freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of privacy. Because they are in control. Because the power lies with them.

And that's why, at the moment, from a simply shallow perspective, it may seem like they are in control. That to some degree, our fates are in their hands. But on a truer level, they're the true slaves. Slaves to their own perceived power. And slaves to their own arrogance. But just as Pharaoh and his magicians were humbled, so will be their fate. The stage is merely being set. That is why in our prayers we recognize that the God of Israel humbles the wicked, and glorifies the humble. Their power will be short-lived. And just like Pharaoh and his magicians, they will be brought down. Not even so much as a punishment, but as a kindness. However painful it may be for them, because humility is the consequence of the recognition of the truth. That we are not the authors of history, but God is. And if God puts us in a position of power over others, we are to use that power to demonstrate love and kindness. To grant freedom and liberty, for that is the nature of the Torah. To be kind and compassionate to the powerless. That is the nature of the Sabbath. To release shackles and end oppression. That is our mission in this world. And so I want to end with this prayer.

Hashem, the world is in a place of instability. Of fear and confusion. Governments, organizations, and people are seeking to enslave and to control. Hashem, please reveal yourself and shatter their illusions of their own power and of themselves as gods. Reveal yourself to the world, Hashem. Unshackle those who are bound, free those who are enslaved and sound the great shofar of liberty so that the world will know that You alone are in control. You alone are our Father and we are Your children – brothers and sisters who love You and love each other. Children of the one true God.

Thank you, my friends. Hold tight. Stay strong. Stay connected. Reach out to me with any questions, comments, anything. ari@thelandofisrael.com. We love you very much. Back to you, Jeremy.

Jeremy

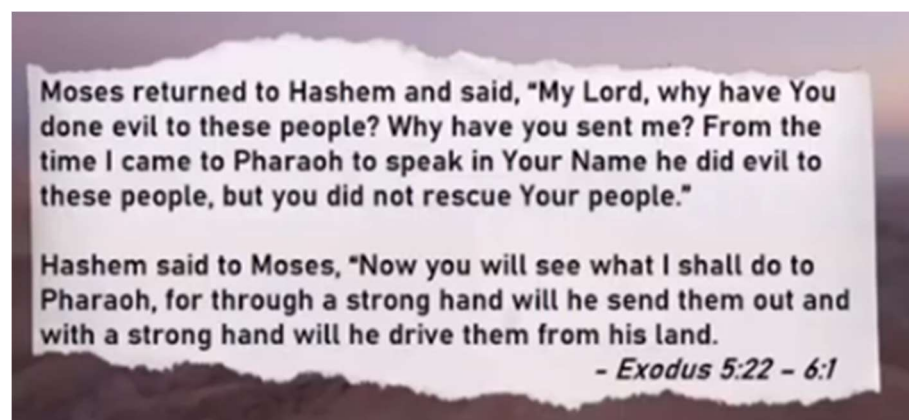
Thank you, Ari. You know I love that idea. The idea that the magic of the Egyptian sorcerers is akin to the technology of modern times. That just really rings true to me and I think there's a lot to think about there. I'm just hearing on the chats. It's just so marvelous how the Torah

portions are just so interactive with the world that's around us, like it's giving us absolute guidance and wisdom for exactly what's happening in our times and it's like this supernatural reality of tapping into the rhythm of God's message every week. It's just marvelous.

And so the question that I want to think about. The question that I've been praying about...that I want to seek out...how do we prepare in this transition? And obviously, huge things are happening all around us. It's not exactly the ten plagues one for one, but it's pretty close. The corona virus, the lockdowns, the riots, the torched American cities in the summer, the political instability that spawned DC riots, and the takeover of the Capital, Biden is now planning a 1.9 trillion-dollar stimulus package, at the same time the economy and big tec is rearing its ugly head to try to censor people, it's like...what is going on. Whoa! That's just a lot to deal with at one time. It's like one hit after another. It's like one of these subjects is enough to freak someone out. It's like one after another. Wow! We're really being bombarded, it's like one plague after another.

And just this is really important, to remember how this Torah portion actually starts out. At the end of last chapter, Moshe confronts Pharaoh. Tells him to let the people go to worship God. In response, Pharaoh punishes the Jewish slaves with harder work, making the people angry, because they're blaming Moses for their harder life and Moses goes to God, "What, why did you do that? Why did you send me? Pharaoh made the lives of the children of Israel even harder after I spoke to him."

Look at the conversation. This is the end of last week's Torah portion:



Now on one hand, that's just a cool way to end the Torah portion. It's like, now you're going to see what's going to happen. End. Now you're going to have to wait a week to see what happens. But the truth is, Moses is asking God a question here. It's like, "why are you doing evil to these people?" And God doesn't really answer. It's like the people are suffering and you send me to save them, and after I go to Pharaoh, he doubles down on their hard work and now their suffering is more! Hashem, why have you done evil to these people? And God doesn't

answer. It's like, wait a minute. When something like that happens in Scripture, you can't just move on to the next chapter. You have to pause; you have to think. Something is going on there. What is that conversation about? Why doesn't God not answer the question? God's not answering the question because there's nothing to answer, perhaps. It's a code. It's a secret about life that's being given over here. In the Torah for those who are seeking it, God doesn't answer because we're just being shown the structure of existence. We're being taught how the world works. Just like the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, there are rules and structures in creation.

In these verses, we learn the rule before redemption. Something happens. If God were to give an answer why it got harder, then you'd think, "ok, that's the reason it got harder." No. There's no answer because right before redemption, it's going to get harder. When things deteriorate, that's a sign of imminent redemption. It's like on a personal level, you can see this a lot. I see this all the time in my life. Right before I'm about to breakthrough, there's like some kind of fall. There's like a collapse. And I have to get back up and then the breakthrough happens.

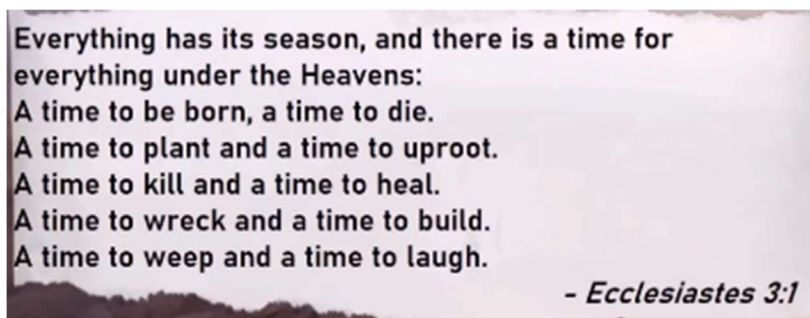
It's like when I'm on my A-game, I wake up before the sunrise, and Corona has just knocked me off of my A-game. But even still, when I get up before the sunrise, it's like, those are my best days. The night actually gets darker before the sun breaks. It's like before the breakthrough, for whatever reason, it just gets darker. So, we can see a pattern in our personal lives, we can see the pattern in nature, we can see it in history. The Jewish people lived through the pain of two thousand years of exile. And it's like right before the resurrection of the state of Israel, humanity got really dark. I mean, evil was exposed like more than ever before, right before the sunrise of the state of Israel, we experienced the depths and the darkness of Auschwitz. And that total deterioration was a sure sign that the people of Israel were about to break through and redemption was near. And so, knowing that the dark chaos is a harbinger of a new light and a better world, well that's good news. That's good news for us because the last couple of weeks have been like a salad.

But today, I want to talk about how we are supposed to live through these times, knowing that something is breaking through right now. It's just getting crazier and crazier. Something is going to emerge out of this. And if we have the eyes to see it, we know that it's going to have to do with Jerusalem, it's going to have to do with the Kingdom, it's going to have to do with God, it's going to have to do with all the things we've been waiting for.

And I've never lived through anything like this, but you know who has lived through things like this? The Jewish people. We've been through plagues, viruses, ghettos, lockdowns, hard times. Now is the time to dig down into our collective wisdom and see how the Torah guides us to live in times of absolute instability. Everyone needs a strategy for life. And betting on the strategy of the Bible – that's not a bad idea.

So, the first thing that I want to do – if we're now taking the Bible as our armor and we're going out to battle now, and how are we going out to it? We have to contextualize everything. What is the right mindset for looking at these turbulent times?

Now a good friend of mine name Zev came out to the farm. He's an orthodox Jew, made aliyah, he's a member of the fellowship, he lives in Israel with his wife and his kids. I think they're watching this right now as they're having dinner, and I would say he's possibly one of the world's most knowledgeable people on King David. And so, obviously he loves our farm, our center, comes out as often as he can. The last time he visited me, he told me a story about King David's son, Solomon that has stayed with me ever since. And the story is an ancient tale, a midrash. It's refined life wisdom, extracted out of the book of Kohelet, out of the book of Ecclesiastes, that king Solomon wrote. Look at the book of Ecclesiastes 3:1. In the 1960's and 1970's, these verses became very famous, but I just want to look at them in a new light.



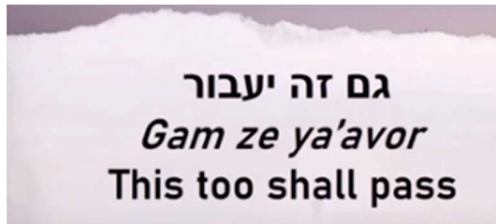
And so, the chapter continues on, just with all of the different possibilities. But what it's saying here is that everything in this world under heaven is a season. Everything has its season. And what's happening now, with all of the chaos and instability, it's just a season. Its going to pass. There will be times to laugh and there will be times to cry. But in times of crying, don't think that's all there is. People get locked into depression because they see the current situation and they don't see a way out and they get swallowed up by sorrow, by fears, by what the future, by what the future has, oh my goodness, this is the way it's going to be forever!

King Solomon teaches us, look at the world and know – everything is a season. Nothing lasts forever. Not the good, and not the bad. So right now, things look crazy. But it's just a season. And if we know that salvation is right around the corner. If you really know that, you can withstand anything. And this ancient Judean tale of King Solomon is like pure oil, that's just been pressed out of his writings. And so this is the story that I was told:

After Solomon became king, he was obviously blessed with experiencing the entire spectrum of human living. Highs, lows, pressures, pleasures, joys, pain, everything. And he knew that he would have high times and he would have low times and he asked his royal jeweler to make him a bracelet that he would wear on his arm at all times. A constant reminder of how to live in

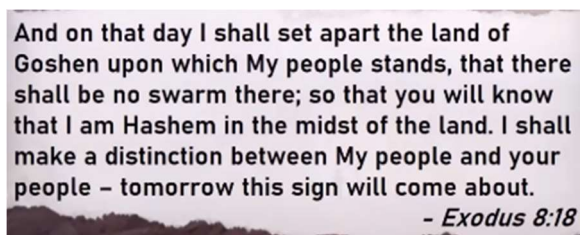
the world. And his bracelet would help him stay humble in times when he was high and hopeful in times when he was down. And he knew that he was on the rollercoaster of life, and he wanted to design a personal reminder to help him in every scenario. And after prayer and thought, he came up with the design of a bracelet and Solomon was the wisest of all men.

And he said three words will accompany me my whole life. And these three words will be my reminder in high times and in low times.



If life is amazing now, enjoy it. Soak it up. Live it up. Really, just swallow it. Be satisfied. If you're having a good time, ride that wave and enjoy every moment. Because that too shall pass. Enjoy every moment you have with your wife, with your husband, with your children, with your friends, with your loved ones. Because these days, they are going to pass. Life is tough. Corona, politics, uncertainty, don't let it get you too down. Gam ze ya'avor – this too shall pass. Everything is a season. And it feels like winter is coming and so, let's stock up on some firewood, let's make sure we keep warm but never forget that in the wintertime, spring is right around the corner. And if you feel despair creeping in, King Solomon gave us this amazing, eternal message of seasons. Gam ze ya'avor. This too shall pass. And the wisdom of King Solomon should be a blessing to all of us. That is the right way to approach everything we see in this world.

But now, let's get to Toklas. We have the right eyes now, but I want the tools. I want to know what to do. The winter is coming. How do we prepare? And so, what we do now, with so many things that are out of control. What do we do? I have gotten countless messages, from members of our fellowship. It's like the feeling across the board is tense, scared, unsure, Twitter, WhatsApp, Signal. What do we do? What's happening to us? It's like, "wow!" Everything is being flipped upside down. It's feels like one plague after another is striking us and so what do we do in times of plagues? Let's turn to the Torah and look at what happened when the plagues struck Egypt:



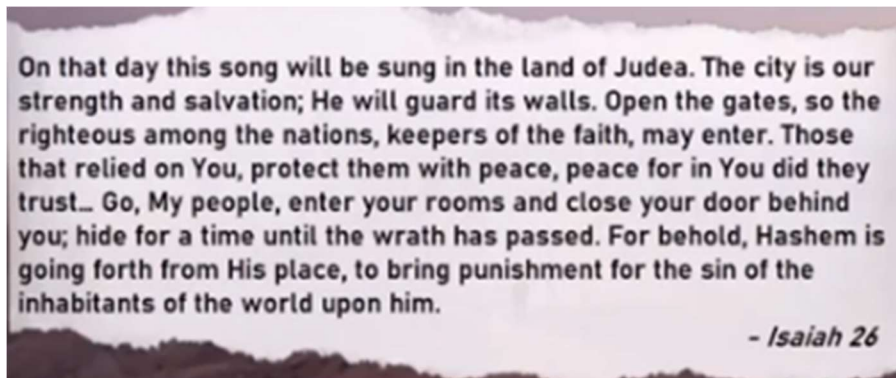
This was said specifically about the fourth plague. The fourth plague. The wild beasts. See the wild beasts should have ravished Goshen, just as it did Egypt. But the beasts never touched the hometown of the Jewish people. The Nile was in the heart of Egypt. Goshen was a separated community out of the big city. When the frogs came out of the Nile, when the Nile turned to blood, Goshen was just geographically removed from all that chaos. The lice, the small insects, the maggots that came on to Egypt, in the third plague, it was seemingly a result of all the dead frogs that piled up and still, Goshen was pretty removed from all of that. But wild beasts, coming from Africa into Egypt...well they came from everywhere and they should have gone everywhere. But Moses tells Pharaoh, pay close attention....who is being affected by these plagues? And who is being protected from them? Then you will know that Hashem is in the midst of the Land.

So the first step, as these plagues are coming down, is separate yourselves. Outside of Israel, Jews and believers in God need to separate themselves. Guard themselves. First, separate yourselves from networks, Hollywood, Netflix, People magazine, the culture of Egypt, the culture of America. Watch your media diet. Your mind is your garden. Be careful what you plant there. Plant good seeds because you don't want weeds to grow.

Session 8 in our fellowship is an amazing session, specifically about that. If you live in Brooklyn, Chicago, LA, any of the big cities, consider a home in the suburbs, or in the country. Like if you're a Jew, and you haven't made aliyah, well that's the ultimate separation. Israel is the ultimate refuge. But it's more than just physical separation. The Jews during the plagues, for the most part didn't separate themselves in location. They were inside their homes, and that's especially true during the 10th plague. They weren't focused on the Egyptian economy or on the Egyptian politics. Their focus was on their families, their close friends, on their base. When everything around you outside, is out of your control, it looks like everything is falling apart, ...that's the time to build your base. In the fellowship we call it, to build your ark. And as the flood waters are coming, that's exactly what the Jewish people are doing during these plagues. They're in Goshen, they're separated, they're in their homes and they're focusing on what matters to them most.

So look, I want to go back to the verse that set the foundations of the portion and the ten plagues, like when things were tough on Israel, God makes it tougher. Like we said, God doesn't defend the reality of that injustice. The Torah is just teaching that that is the way it is. But maybe another way to read that, is that when things get tough, don't retreat, don't despair, don't become passive, and go to bed...find inspiration, get proactive, pick up a burden and take it to the next level, a higher level of responsibility. When hard times come, it's actually time to work harder. Make sure your efforts, though, that your work is being channeled properly to the right place. Make sure you're working on the right things. And what are the right things?

Isaiah tells us as he sings the song of redemption, what we should do to prepare for redemption. The redemption from Egypt is a blueprint, a map of the final redemption that we're living through right now. And Isaiah the prophet gives us the song of redemption to guide us through it all. In Isaiah 26, and I would encourage all of you to read the entire chapter. Here, I'm just going to read the very beginning and the very end. Because that's what I want to focus on. But one day, we're going to have to read the entire song of redemption in the fellowship, we're eventually going to get there, but until then...



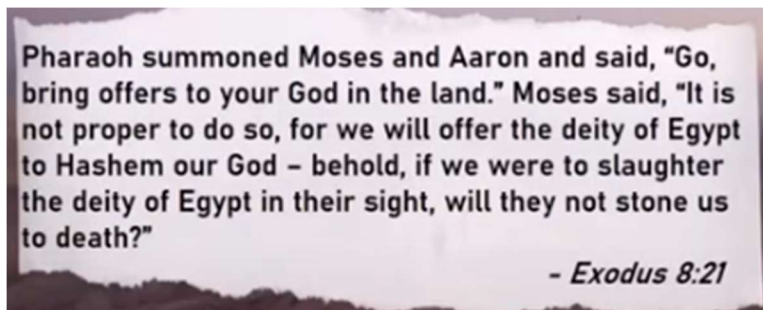
Let's stop there for a moment. Wow, first, the Land of Judea, we are the choir. We are singing the song of redemption to the world, and it is literally not only to Jerusalem, but it is to open the gates to the righteous in the nations and the keepers of the faith, to all believers around the world. That's how the final redemption is going to come. But look at how it ends...

Go my people, enter your rooms, close your doors behind you... Go into your ark. Close the door, God will seal the ark behind you. Just like he did then. Wow, if you really read what's happening here, the prophetic wisdom encapsulated in this one chapter is so mind boggling, we have to go through the whole chapter. But right now, look at this. The first is that He opens the gates to the righteous among the nations. We need the calvary now. We need all believers to come together now and join together with Israel as we move forward. That's how the whole song starts, from Judea, to invite the believers together. Open up the gates, invite them in.

And then what happens? We go into our homes. Each one of us into our homes. In the last of the ten plagues, the people of Israel were called to make a sacrifice. Put a sign on their house, blood on the doorposts and stay inside. Wow! That sacrifice, that was the final separation from Egypt. The sheep was the God of the Egyptians. That's why the children of Israel originally settled in Goshen, outside of Egypt, away from the Nile and away from civilization. Being a shepherd and eating meat was an abomination in Egyptian society.

It's like after being devastated and stunned by the wild beasts that destroyed Egypt and never touched the people of Israel, Pharaoh surrenders for a moment. And in negotiations, he tells

Moses the slaves can go up and worship their God, but he doesn't want them to leave Egypt. Look at what Scripture says here, chapter 8, verse 21:



How could we possibly offer sacrifices to God, Moses is saying, if we're offering up the god of the Egyptians to our God, the Egyptians are going to stone us, they're literally going to kill us!

Now imagine what happens in the final plague. The night before the death of the 1st born, the people of Israel are commanded to do just that. Each home has to take a sheep, slaughter it outside, roast it on a skewer....you couldn't just boil it in a pot in your kitchen. No, no, it has to be on a fire outside. You're roasting the god of the Egyptians outside of your home, taking its blood and marking your door to make sure that every Egyptian knows exactly who you are and what you've done. It's like, bye Egypt, I have separated now. There's no excuses. It's like, I am done with this culture. You're going to be marked, you're going to be hated, you're going to be threatened by Egyptian culture.

Israel had to choose. Complete and total faith in God, total separation from the idolatry and the attractions of Egyptian culture. And how does that transition happen? It happens with every family in their home, having a Passover Seder. Focusing on what they can change. Aligning themselves with the good, making themselves strong and ready for the transitions. They couldn't control the plagues. Imagine the instability. The plagues were an absolute nightmare. Also, for the children of Israel. They have to be terrified of what was going on.

But what they could do is work on themselves. They could build themselves up. And what does the Bible say we should do when things are falling apart? Go inside, and what you can, make better. Husband, wife, children, brothers, sisters...that's the focus. That's your base...and I think it is supernatural that the newly elected US government passed House rules that ban these exact words from being used in official government documents anymore. It's absolutely unbelievable. Can we put up the picture?



I don't know if you can see it. But the guidance in the Torah, in Isaiah, return to your homes, to your families, and in the same weeks, the House says you can't write, father, mothers, sister, brother, you can't say words that talk about your family anymore in government documents. You have to make up new words for brother and sister and father and mother and mother-in-law and father-in-law. It's like, what is going on? You can't make this stuff up! They're trying to erase the words, father and mother and son and daughter? It's like, wow, in the time of transition, we're supposed to focus on our inside. And right now, the enemy is going right for the inside, trying to erase it from existence. It's like, I couldn't have made this up if I tried in this week's Torah portion.

It's like the world around us is communicating to us all the time! Spice carts are sent to us through His Word, keeping us aligned, and focused and knowing that we're on target. If you have shalom in your home, you have everything. And if you don't have peace in your most personal space, the forces are looking to destroy, burn and take over and go right for the heart. They're going right for our homes, and right for our families. This is the time to pray into that. Work on that. Work toward that. There's no time left. This is the time to strengthen our homes more than ever.

But like, life is so hard now, I just need a break. That's the idea of the extra work that was added on to the slaves in hard times. It's like life is getting hard, don't retreat, add on more work. Just make sure your work and responsibilities are focused inward. That they're focused in the right direction, that they're focused on yourself, that they're focused on your home.

Listen, as you know by now, I see myself as a disciple, a student of Dr. Jordan Peterson. I've never met him, but I've read hundreds of pages of his writings. I've watched and listened to countless hours of his lectures. The man is like a god-send for our generation. And in his last book, *The 12 Rules for Life*, which I recommend to everyone, he has a chapter in his book that focuses exactly on this point. So, he's not talking about the exodus or plagues, but just in general, tough times that people have in their lives. And I'm going to quote directly from his book because I can't find a better way to articulate this. Here's what he says:

When the hurricane hit New Orleans, and the town sunk under the waves, was that a natural disaster? The Dutch prepared their dikes for the worst storm in 10,000 years. Had New Orleans followed that example, no tragedy would have occurred. It's not that no one knew. The Flood Control Act of 1965 mandated that improvements in the levy system that held back Lake Pontchartrain. The system was to be completed by 1978. Forty years later, only 60% of the work had been done. Willful blindness and corruption took the city down. A hurricane is an act of God. But failure to prepare when the necessity for preparation is well-known, that's a sin. That's a failure to hit the mark and the wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23.

The ancient Jews always blamed themselves when things fell apart. The acts of God's goodness, the goodness of reality was axiomatic and took responsibility for their own failure, always. That is insanely irresponsible. Clean up your life. Consider your circumstances. Start small. Have you taken full advantage of the opportunities offered to you? Are you working hard on your career or even your job? Are you letting bitterness or resentment drag you down? Have you made peace with your brother? Are you treating your spouse and your children with dignity and respect? Do you have habits that are destroying your health and well-being? Are you truly shouldering your responsibilities? Have you said what needs to be said to your friends and family members? Are there things that you could do and that you know you could do that would make things around you better? Have you cleaned up your life?

If the answer is "no," here's something to try – start to stop doing what you know to be wrong. Start stopping that today. You can know that something is wrong or right without knowing why. Your entire being can tell you something that you can neither explain or articulate. So simply stop, when you apprehend however dimly, that you should stop. You can use your own standards of judgment. You can rely on yourself for guidance. You don't have to adhere to some external arbitrary code of behavior, although you should not overlook the guidance of your culture.

Life is short and you don't have time to figure everything out on your own. The wisdom of the past was hard earned and your dead ancestors may have something useful to tell you. Let your own soul guide you. Watch what happens over the next days and weeks. Your head will start to clean up as you stop filling it with lies. Your experience will improve as you stop destroying it with inauthentic actions. You will then begin to discover new, more subtle things that you're

doing wrong. Stop doing those too. After some months and maybe years of diligent effort, your life will become simpler, less complicated, your judgment will improve, you'll untangle your past, you'll become stronger and less bitter. You'll become more confident; you'll move more confidently into the future. You'll stop making your life unnecessarily difficult.

Perhaps, your uncorrupted soul will see your existence as a genuine good, as something to celebrate. Even in the face of your own vulnerability. Perhaps you'll become an even more powerful force for peace and whatever is good. Perhaps you will then see that if all people did this in their own lives, the world might stop being an evil place. After that, with continued effort, perhaps, it could even stop being a tragic place. Who knows what existence might be like if we all decided to strive for the best? Who knows what eternal heavens might be established by our spirits? Purified by truth, aiming skyward, right here on the fallen earth. That's the end of the quote.

It's like, all we can do is fix ourselves. Fix our rooms, fix our homes, fix our families. In times of total chaos, our inner core has to be strong. It's like God is moving heaven and earth right now. These historic shifts, I mean, we're changing reality as we know it. And like, what is our part in this move? Go into our homes, go into our souls, start building our ark. Building our families. Building our minds, building our spirits. Aim toward the heavens. As God brings heaven down unto earth, we're going to meet right in the middle. Fix what's closest to us. That's the guidance of the prophets, and I can't think of a better strategy for life.

It's like, you know, every once in a while, I just like living my life, and I have a flashback to times I served in the Israel army as a younger man. And it's like certain scenes that I lived through, were all parables of my life that stayed with me. I just want to share this one story with you.

It's like at the end of advanced training in the IDF, it's about 6 months into your training. They have a week, that's called Shavuah milchamah - War Week. From the first day of basic training all through advanced training, subconsciously and consciously, we're all sort of counting down to war week, because you know that you're going to experience in that week more pain, more endurance, more mental anguish than anything you've ever lived through in your entire life and probably anything you ever will live through.

And it gets closer and closer every week, and finally the week arrives. And you're never prepared. The entire week you don't really sleep a night's sleep, maybe a couple of hours here, an hour or so there. You've been given a small amount of food that four guys need to ration and share, and if you mess it up, there's no seconds, like you're out of food, you're out of food. And from mission to mission, from encampment to encampment, from night to night, it's like all your gear is on you all week. You don't take your shoes off the entire week. I don't want to tell you what my feet smelled like. But, the IDF should come up with a patented chemical warfare, with the smell of my unit after war week.

And it was like the last march of Thursday night and it's an all-nighter. And it's like, exhausted is not a strong enough word. It's like your legs are just moving without your brain's communication anymore. It's the closest thing I've ever experienced to actually being a zombie. And the march goes on. And there's a truck behind the unit waiting for people to drop out and pick them up.

In some ways, all of war week boils down to this final march, and the truck in the back. Who's going to give up? Who's going to fall out? And soldiers around me are crying, and the stronger guys are like grabbing the weaker guys by their uniforms and trying to drag them forward. No one needs to give up. As a unit, we're trying to finish off together. Ahhh, it's like, I don't know what to say, it's like excruciating and unbearable are words that come to mind. And the week-long sleepless nights, the lack of food and the heavy gear, it's just like breaking you. It's like just like breaking your mind. And I'm looking at my watch and I see that there's at least two more hours until daybreak. And I'm just about to tap out. And, you know, tapping out is just like collapsing on the ground, and the medics come and get you and pull you into the truck. That's what tapping out looks like. And I just feel like I can't take another step.

All of a sudden, one of my friends in my unit, his name was Elad, he started singing. And he sounded like a howling, dying dog, off tune, but he was singing his heart out. And then a few guys joined him. And in less than 30 seconds, all of us were like singing our freedom song. No one in the unit tapped out that night. All it took was for one courageous guy to start singing. And a new spirit like, PHEWWW! Hope filled our hearts.

I want you all to know, friends, that we have been blessed by being called to this fellowship. We have a task in the days ahead. We need to be the guy singing to the people we love around us who need a boost in their spirits.

Zechariah says, "sing and be glad o daughter of Zion for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst." Zechariah knew exactly what we needed. We are the song of redemption, and by tapping into the spirit of Israel, you're given a gift that people around you in your cities may not have. Not yet. So, take this light, take the guidance we learned today, take it inside, strengthen yourselves, and for the people that are in your base, that are in your ark, be that song for them. Share the light with your loved ones who need it.

And know that here in Israel, I and Ari and Tehila, here at the Arugot Farm, we are praying for you and that you are blessed from Zion.

Aaronic blessing.

Stay strong!