

Session 77

Vayechi – Genesis to Exodus: The Story of Israel, the Story of our Lives

19 December 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZBSbUQvg8c>

Jeremy

Hey everybody! Welcome, welcome, welcome to the Land of Israel Fellowship. I'm so happy to see you all. I can't tell you. It's just...I wanted to start off today with a song, just all of us praying for Mashiach to come. I just feel like for thousands of years, that's been a real dividing point among the world. And I just feel like right now, let's all daven for redemption, let's just all really pray HaShem, just God save us. It's like the days are getting short, they're cold, the Judean winter has arrived, I think that's pretty fair to say. And they're changing the laws of Israel all the time. They are now, not only talking about blocking people from coming in, but they're now talking about blocking people from going out. At least until now, Tehila and I could leave the country and try to connect to the people in our fellowship. We could try to skip over to Europe maybe and try to meet some people and give them strength. To fly to America, we did that in the summer. Now they say, "Nope, you can't come in and you can't go out." And it's just like they're cutting us off from each other, cutting us off from the Land of Israel. It's like, what is going on? Thank goodness we have our fellowship, but something is going on and I feel like in everyone's gut, it doesn't feel pretty. And we are just so fortunate to be connected to each other, to have this fellowship, to navigate through these choppy waters, to connect us to each other and to make it through this storm.

And it feels like waves kind of come and then they go – pressure rises and then it like sort of releases. They take away our freedoms and then they give them back partially. And it just feels like contractions, just contractions and then contractions before birth, not that I've experienced that, but I've been Tehila for all six of our children and the contractions, they come and then they go, but towards the end they become closer and closer and more and more intense. Like more frequent and stronger. And that's what it feels like to me. It seems like every week there's a new thing that's like...what is the logic to not let me leave, don't let me go? I can't even leave the country anymore, like what is going on.

And so, the prophets say that the redemption will come exactly like that. Birth pangs of Mashiach, chevlei Mashiach, that's the words of the prophets. And I never understood it like that before. But that's what it feels like to me. It feels like contractions before the birth of something new. And it feels like while the forces of evil are trying to capitalize on this situation and they're making their schemes and their plans, HaShem is set on using all of this to bring forth His plan and to fulfill His will.

And so, with all of us together here this week, let's start our week together praying together. I feel like that is the best thing that we could possibly do. And so, HaShem, Master of the World, thank You for bringing us together. We've come here to learn Your ways, to grow closer to

You, closer to ourselves. It's the first day of the week and we dedicate this time to You, to direct our week, to align our will with Your will. To fill our life with Your light. It feels like we're living through dark times, so please, we need Your light now more than ever. Show us the path to walk on and we will walk it. May we take the lessons of Bereshith, that we've learned together. We've learned it in our minds, help us bring it into our hearts. Help us practice it in our lives. Make it rain, make it rain, make it rain. Make it rain on Your Land, shower us with Your blessings, shower us with Your blessings in our lives. Clean us, bless us, give us life, we have no life without You. Bless the families of this fellowship. Guard them, heal them, and shine Your light onto them. Shine a new light on Zion and bring us all there to see it together. Amen.

And so, I want to start this fellowship with a new twist. An email that I received from one of our members. Sometimes I get questions that are so fundamental and so important that I feel like maybe they're on everyone's minds. Maybe a lot of people are getting asked these questions and they need an answer. And so, this is just...it's out of order, but I wanted to answer him, but then as I answered him, Daniel, I feel like this is just something that might be on other people's hearts. Because you know our fellowship talks at a very lofty language about having a relationship with the Creator, living a guided life and living in a dynamic relationship with God. Not in a religion that we abide by rules, but that whatever religion we abide by, that should only be a tool to develop a living relationship with God. And so, Ari and Tehila and I, we receive a lot of emails, a lot of WhatsApp's from members around the world. I answer every question I can. I see this fellowship as the most important work of my life. And especially, as long as the borders of Israel are closed and tourism is shut down, I hope we can serve as a direct connection for people to Israel, for people who love this Land, people who want to be close, to hear the Torah from Zion. And so, I thought this was an important question. Because it's just the fundamentals. And sometimes we're talking at such a high level, to bring it all the way down to the basics is really important. And so, here's the email from Daniel, here's his question, it might speak to your hearts. Here's what he wrote me.

A screenshot of a text message from Daniel to Jeremy. The text reads: "Dear Jeremy, I can't thank you enough for this Fellowship. I have learned so much. I have a question and it may be to complicated to address but I thought it can't hurt to ask. Can you offer me a rational reason to believe in God? So much of what you talk about is having a relationship with God but before that, can you give a rational scientific proof of God? Thank you so much! Daniel"

Ok, fair enough. Here we are to talk about God. Here's how I make sense of it. And so, first, Daniel thank you for writing and thank you for letting me share that with the fellowship. I think we need to define the terms. What does the word "God" mean? What does the word, "believe" mean? I think "emunah in HaShem" are not the same words as "belief in God." I think those are two different things.

But for me to really answer that question, you're just going to spend a lot more time here in the fellowship. I know you've already been here for more than a year. It just takes time, it takes time, it's a lifetime. But in the meantime, to address your specific question, about can we actually have a scientific approach to God? I have a video that was made by a mentor of mine.

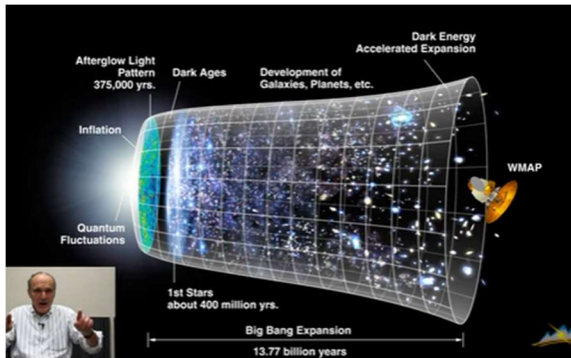
And I got a lot of feedback from the interview that I did last week with Moshe Gersht. And I feel like, “Wow, that was really beautiful. People bought his book and people really appreciated that extra voice on the fellowship.” And so I thought bringing experts in different fields that have influenced and inspired me in my life seems to be a good recipe for the fellowship every once in a while.

So, this video is really short, it doesn't need to be long, but it's very profound. And although I'm not a scientist, I love science. I love learning all about the universe. The more I learn, the more I'm just in wonder and awe of our Creator. And from my limited understanding, every scientific discovery that I've ever encountered continues to point us in the direction of one God, one Creator, one source of it all. But this here is a short video by Dr. Gerald Shroeder. He is an MIT nuclear physicist who now lives in Jerusalem. I've known Dr. Shroeder for many, many years, literally since my bar mitzvah. He's a world-renowned scientist, a nuclear physicist, he's a genius of a man. And this video, he made a few years on YouTube addressing this exact question. Today it has over 3 million views on YouTube and there's no like pizzazz. It's just a very simple scientist talking about how we can relate with God the Creator from a scientific perspective. And so, before we go into this week's session, which is all about taking the lessons of our patriarchs and matriarchs who lived life without religion. All they had was relationship. I want to first address that foundational question, can we from a rational, scientific perspective, take the first step and say, “You know what? I'm ready to enter into a relationship, but I can have that first step of a rational belief?” And that's totally legitimate. And so, I hope this video gives us enough to take the next step forward. So here is just an amazing, beautiful short video for you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQVm8RokoBA>

My name is Gerald Schroeder. I have, thank God, a strong science background from MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Bachelor's Master's PHD, seven years on the Physics staff. Seen a whole range of atomic bombs detonated, moved to Israel, met my wife Barbara, Sofer, a great writer, and then teach Torah and science. And luckily, I'm lucky that I have the two that come together.

And one of the questions that I'm asked as a scientist is how can a scientist really believe that there's something that we refer to usually as God? You know, this metaphysical whatever acting in the world, or producing the world? The irony is the question's really a non-starter. Science has in fact discovered God and you can talk to the hard-line atheists and they will say it looks like science has indeed discovered God. And how would that be? Well, if you take the trouble of going to the web and there type in WMAP, the initials for a satellite, it's a diagram that shows the development of the universe from the creation over time. It's a timeline. Every word on that diagram comes from the NASA site. It is the condensed knowledge of the scientific community of how the universe created and how it got to where we are today. Each of the lines, the vertical lines, is another billion years, ok?



You start from a burst of energy at the extreme left side of the diagram and you end up at the far end with the oval. The oval is to indicate expansion in all directions. Of course, because it's a timeline, we can't show that on a single piece of paper. We see here most amazingly that on the extreme left edge, it shows a beginning to the universe. Now go back less than 50 years. If I were teaching that, at Tech, I might have, you

know, a person could lose tenure saying that there was a creation of the universe. It sounds like it's Bible. Because less than 50 years ago, the overwhelming scientific opinion was the universe is eternal. There was never a beginning. The Bible is wrong from the very first sentence.

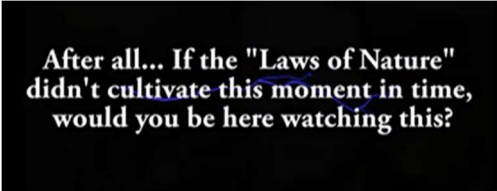
And then we discovered suddenly – Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, the Bell Labs in New Jersey, the northeast of the U.S., discover the echo of the Big Bang, the energy left over which George Gamow, 60 years ago predicted that if there had been a universe created hot and small, it would have exploded and the energy would get more and more dilute and Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, they discover this energy that had been predicted. Overnight, the Bible got it right. There was a beginning to the universe.

Now, the black in the diagram is nothing. It's not a vacuum. Vacuums are within that diagram, within that cone of expansion. Black vacuums are empty space and space is something. The black of the paper around the diagram is nothing. It doesn't fit in our human brain because humans think in a box, a box made of time, space and matter slash energy. No human as clever as they might be, as expansive as they might be, thinks out of that box. So when we say, outside that diagram, there's nothing. We can use the words, but we can't conceive of nothing. It doesn't fit in the human brain.

How are we going to have this idea, is there a God or not? Notice that the creation force isn't the three-letter word, G-O-D. If you look at the words carefully, say quantum fluctuations. That understanding was first brought down by Ed Tryon, brilliant human being in the journal, Nature, almost 40 years ago. The universe allows creation of something from nothing, provided you have the laws of nature, the quantum fluctuation. Tryon realized and he published in the journal, Nature, one of the two leading peer-reviewed journals in the world, that you can create something from absolute nothing, provided you've got the laws of nature, quantum physics and the laws of relativity, in other words, the laws of nature. So look what science has discovered. We can create the universe from absolute nothing, provided we have the forces of nature. Now the laws of nature, the forces of nature aren't physical. They act on the physical, so if they create the universe, that means they predate the universe.

So now, we have a set of forces we call them the laws of nature that are not physical, that are able to act on the physical. They create the physical from absolute nothing, and they predate the

universe which means they predate our understanding of time. Put that together, it sounds very familiar. If you haven't noticed it, that's the biblical definition of God. There's only one nuance that's left hanging, we can talk about another time, perhaps, is that which created the universe, those forces active in the earth? But up to that point, science says you are correct. The definition of the biblical God is - predates time, outside of time, God is not a physical being, is a force, and it creates the universe. You'll notice that the opening chapter of Genesis, the only name for God is Elokim, God as manifest in the universe. Science has indeed discovered the biblical God, or we just need one part left, crucial, that which created the universe is also active in the universe itself. The very fact that you're watching this now pretty much establishes that point.



After all... If the "Laws of Nature" didn't cultivate this moment in time, would you be here watching this?

(end of video)

And so, I just love that video because science itself says that there is one source for creation. It is before time, outside of time, non-physical, it acts on the physical. That's wow! Now do we understand that? No, no one ever claims to understand God. But what is the chiddush, what's the new good news, what's the message, what's the besorah of the Bible? It's that in fact we can have a relationship with this invisible Creator. And that is what the book of Genesis is all about and we're about to say goodbye to the book of Genesis and we enter into the book of Exodus.

The book of Exodus is a transition where this relationship, out of this relationship comes the laws, the traditions, the holidays, how to live even closer in line. But the whole beginning of the Torah has no religion. Because the relationship trumps the religion. The foundation of the Bible has no religion, has no laws that are defined in like the Ten Commandments. Because the relationship is the heart and the religion gives an expression to that heart. Tehila likes flowers. Ok, that's good for me to know that. But I've got to have a relationship with her first. But now she's told me what she loves. So now, I can bring her flowers. I had to have a relationship with God before He says, "I want you to know I really love orphans. I really love the weak. I want you to take care of them." Now I know what God wants of me. He wants me to spread love in the world. He wants me to spread light in the world. This is the path.

And so, one of my heroes of light who's just constantly spreading light into the world is Ari Abramowitz, and we are just so lucky to have him here. And so I want to introduce Ari for all of us and hopefully we'll bask in his light in these dark, winter nights.

Ari

Shalom, my friends. Shalom, Jeremy. That was beautiful. You know, Gerald Schroeder? That guy has given me a lot of strength. And even if we've already past the phase of knowing that there is a God in the world, even then, it still strengthens me to see those proofs and those ideas.

It's a powerful thing, even though I've read his books, which by the way I highly recommend. So thank you for bringing him on and introducing me to him. I've had the honor of meeting him on many different occasions, really because of you. So, thank you and it's good to see all of you. Shalom, shalom. I hope you're doing well. I hope HaShem is blessing you abundantly.

And these are as Jeremy said, continuing to be very difficult times and also I really appreciated the chevlei Mashiach. I've thought about it before, but the way you said it just hit me differently. The birth pains of Mashiach, that comes in waves and it feels like those waves are really coming into the world.

So, the first thing I want to do is express gratitude to all of you my beloved friends in the fellowship for continuing to send me your prayer requests. I pray for each of you individually, immediately as you all know. And next week we'll include more of those as well. But the second thing I want to do is express gratitude to HaShem for today. For today was a little bit of a challenging day for me. As my 10-year-old nephew came out to the farm last night, all in order to go shepherding with me this morning. And since the last time he came out for Shabbat, this kid that just plays Fortnite on the video, that's all he wants to do. So we made it happen this morning.

Anyway, so I was in the middle of videoing him from the lead, and without warning, the alpha male ram, this huge massive animal charged me, I didn't even see...slammed into me, throwing me backwards over this huge stone. It was very unpleasant. But nothing that I probably don't deserve for one reason or another. And that I can handle. Ok, that I can handle, even though I did pop out a few vulgarities which I regret in front of my ten-year-old nephew. But then, before I really had a chance to orient myself, he did the same thing to my sweet little nephew, throwing him into the side of the mountain. And you know, I've been out with them many times, with these sheep. This has never happened before. Anyways, I was really shaken up from this. His lips turned white, he was shaking, he couldn't really walk. I just didn't know what happened to him. Was something broken? Or even worse, was there internal bleeding? I guess I'm like a Jewish mother that way. But I took him to the emergency room. So it turns out, he seems to be ok, but it was really quite a scare. And I was really, really praying. And I just can't thank HaShem enough for protecting him and for protecting him. Because I'll just tell you that while I'm ready to leave the world whenever HaShem calls me when I'm in the Land of Israel...I'm on call to leave the world when HaShem wants me. But I just prefer it not to be at the hands of a sheep. You know, a bear? I would take a bear, I'd take that. A mountain lion. That would be ideal, especially if I was able to wound the lion, right? That would be fine, I would take that. But not a sheep. Anyway, so that's the good news.

But this has been a challenging week for me and for the Jewish people and really for the world. Because like Jeremy said, everywhere you look these governments seem to be getting more authoritarian, and nations seem to be getting more polarized and more divided and you know the strong arm of the law is increasingly flexed on irrelevant infractions of just this arbitrary policy. Meanwhile, for example, here in Israel this past week, we suffered another unbearable murder of



an innocent, holy Jew who was on his way back to his young, beautiful family from a Torah class that he was learning in the yeshiva in Samaria. His name was Yehudah. Here's a picture of his widow, Tabitha, if you could put that up.



I don't know if you can see it. But, anyways, I don't know the picture of his widow and of him, it's just such beauty just emanating from his face, from his essence. Yeah, this is Yehudah and that's his widow and there's just so many tears and orphans and sadness and grief.

And maybe it's just me, but right now, you know, as Jeremy said, it seems dark and cold and so naturally when we read through this week's Torah portion and Ya'acov tells his sons to gather around, right? That he wants to tell them the end of days, we're all gathering around with them. Right? Here's what he says:

And Jacob called to his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.  
- Genesis 49:1

That's the first verse of chapter 49. The "end of days." If these aren't the "end of days," I don't know what they are. It doesn't really make sense, like intellectually that we're in the end of days due to the fulfillment of the prophecies that the prophets of Israel foretold would occur in the times of Mashiach, whether it's the ingathering of the exiles or the revival of the Hebrew language or the righteous of the nations attaching

themselves to the House of Israel. That's so many of you in this fellowship. Just like Gerald Shroeder said. It's a sign, just what's happening right now that HaShem is really in connection with us and orchestrating everything. It's not just this intellectual thing, it's energy that you feel, at least I feel it. It comes in waves, you know all of a sudden my heart starts beating sometimes, sometimes I even start sweating. It's hard to explain, maybe I sound crazy. But maybe it shows up for everybody in unique and different ways, but it's a feeling and it's an intuition. And as time progresses, I feel it more and more, and you know it's one thing to pray for it, to study about it, to recite blessings about it that are in liturgy. But to feel like we're on the cusp of it. Like it's starting to unfold right now all around us...that's another thing that's not so easy to deal with.

Anyways, so Ya'acov tells his sons to gather around, that he's going to tell them what will happen in the end of days and then...right? And then, he launches straight into the blessings. We're on the edge of our seats and the prophecy that we've been waiting for...it just never comes. So, as you can imagine, there's much debate about what happened. There seems to be some level of consensus that HaShem removed the prophecy from Ya'acov's vision right before he was going to share it. But although clearly, there are illusions and hints to it throughout the

blessings given to the tribes, the prophecy itself, most of our sages say, “Well the time has not yet arrived for that precious information to be revealed. That perhaps it’s because HaShem yearns for the prayers of the righteous. That Hashem desires for us to put our hopes in Him.” And if we knew, I mean if we definitively knew, if we knew when and how the redemption would come, then it would remove that yearning and the hope and the anticipation and the prayer.

So that makes sense, but then I heard a beautiful teaching from Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt that could be as true as that. And as you know, sometimes the simplest answer is the truest. Perhaps this is the case as well. Because this is quite simple. He says that Jacob told his sons to gather round him to hear the secret of the end of days and then he immediately launches into the blessings for each son. Each one according to their strengths. Because, why did he do that? Are you ready for it? Because that is the secret. That is the secret of the end of days. Ya’acov was telling his children that they each contain their own unique strengths and weaknesses. That they each have their own gifts and their own shortcomings. And if each one knows their own strength, then they can cover for each other’s weaknesses. They can capitalize on each other’s strengths and they can help each in their weaknesses. That they shouldn’t get lost in the futile, very human endeavor of trying to make everyone else into their own image. That they should love each other for who they are and they should be able to support each other in the ways that they can. That that is the way that Mashiach is going to come. That’s the hidden secret. I don’t know, it just really spoke to me.

You know it’s like the example of Yissakar and Zebulun (Issachar and Zebulun), the two tribes. Yissakar were Torah scholars, that’s what the sages teach us. And Zebulun, they were sea traders and they supported each other, sharing both the finances and the spiritual merits, each one to their own strengths. And they shared them both and they were stronger because of it. The secret to the end of days laid in the very blessings that he gave his sons, the tribes of Israel. For without those blessings, Mashiach couldn’t come. And that is one of the many ways that I think our fellowship, itself, gives me so much hope. Because you know, here we’re all going through this holy process of learning who we are and how we can support each other and how we can build each other’s strengths and support each other’s weaknesses, and encourage each other. And we could really hold each other up. I know you guys have held me up so much. And we really complete each other. And what we’re doing here is just one of the ways that I think HaShem is really preparing all of us and preparing the world for the arrival of Mashiach. May it be soon and in our days.

So please, my friends, keep sending us your thoughts and prayer requests because while we’re learning the most beautiful Torah of the Land of Israel here together, it’s our relationships and our friendships that make this fellowship so beautiful. But just before I end, just a couple of very quick prayers that I’ve just received. One is for our dear friend, Ruth Bliker. She is suffering from extreme pain from sciatica, from sciatic pain. I’ve seen...my parents have it. So we’re praying for her and for our friend, George and his wife. So George suffered a stroke just this past Thursday. He’s here in the fellowship with us. He suffered a stroke with a cerebral



hemorrhage on Thursday and he seems to have paralysis and speech disorder and his holy wife doesn't even know when she's going to see him again. So, HaShem, please heal Ruth and George. Give them a full healing, give them a miraculous healing – a healing of the body and a healing of the soul. Please HaShem, make Your Name even greater in this world and heal them. Heal our beloved friends and bring them and their families together.

Thank you, my friends, and God-willing, we'll see you next week. Shalom, love you, Jeremy, love you everybody. Shalom, Shalom.

Jeremy

Ari, thank you so much. Thank you for praying for us, with us, selecting the people that need it most. I really appreciate you. I'm also really happy that you survived the attack from our man-killing sheep. I'm really happy about that. The sheep, that would have been...that would have been intergenerational laughing at you. That would have gone into children and grandchildren.

Alright, so, I want to, you know, just share what's on our hearts. And you know, hope is a fundamental tenet of a believer's life. God is in control. God knows what He's doing. Everything is for the good. Within that, we have to have our eyes open. We have to see that something is going off here in the world around us and we have to be smart. So there were some Jews in Europe that stayed, but they should have left. They should have moved to Israel. And their eyes weren't opened, not fast enough at least. And so, I can't help but look at the world governments that are calling to mandate vaccines, locking people down, closing our borders, taking away our freedoms. And the most fundamental teaching of our fellowship is that the Torah itself is a Divine text because it's speaking directly to us, personally in our lives, but also nationally and internationally. It's speaking to every believer around the world, giving us guidance.

And lo and behold, we're now learning about the stage that was set in Egypt that allowed the nation of Israel to be enslaved. Where they took away all of their freedoms. That was all a part of the Divine plan, but all of these life lessons are there to teach us when this happens again, open your eyes. And that is what Tehila and I learned all Shabbat together. And I think it's a teaching from Tehila, she's just so smart and so sharp and she has just a godly insight into the text. It's so unique, it's so important to read the text as absolute prophecy for our time, not our time like in this generation. For our time right now. And so, this is a teaching that Tehila made special for our fellowship. I don't think you can find it anywhere else. I've never heard this being taught. But this is a message that needs to be heard. It needs to be spread. So here is Tehila for you.

Tehila

Hi guys, I hope you're doing well. This week I want to talk to you about what I see in the end of the book of Genesis, which is really the slippery slope of tyranny. As we're making the transition from Bereshith, from Genesis, where the Jews, where the Hebrews are their own kind of families, kids running through the land and in different places. We move into Exodus where

there's this slavery of the Hebrew people, leading up to the Exodus and becoming free. And as I'm here in Israel talking to you and all of you guys are out there in different places around the world, no matter where you are, I imagine that unless you're one of the few lucky ones, you're probably in some way or another feeling over the last two years and I think particularly over the last few months and weeks, a growing sense that a lot of liberties that we've taken for granted and just seemed natural are slipping away. It doesn't seem quite so easy to say what you think out loud anymore. It doesn't seem like media is really free anymore. It's hard to remember a time when you could just go out wherever you want. It's getting harder and harder to make your own medical decisions, or to be able to keep your job if you don't follow the proper protocol. And it's getting harder and harder to choose where you want to go freely and how you get there. And it's kind of astounding when you think how quickly we've gotten used to it. And it doesn't seem to be slowing down.

So there's something that really drew my attention on this subject in the Torah portion two weeks ago and continuing into this past week's Torah portion. So let's start by looking at the end of the portion of Vayigash, that's in chapter 47, the end of chapter 47. There seems to be this digression from the Joseph story about him and his brothers to talk about the political management in Egypt. It seems a little strange to stop this fascinating drama to go to that. Well, what's the Torah trying to tell us in this long exchange? So we know that Joseph, he knew that there was going to be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine, so he said, let's save in the years of plenty so we will have extra in the years of famine. Then that actually comes to pass and in the end of the portion of Vayigash, the Egyptian government, the Pharaoh and Joseph, they're selling the grain back to the people. They don't want there to be any supply chain problems, they're selling things back.

But then what happens? We see in verse 15 that the Egyptians run out of money. And now, there's this long like 11 verses dedicated to this exchange between Joseph and the people of Egypt. So he tells them, "Well if you don't have money, you know, give me your livestock." And so they bring their livestock to Joseph. And he gave them food in return. And then, it says that after a year, they ran out of livestock and they came to him and they said, "Well what do we do? All we have left is our land and our bodies. Can you buy our land and our bodies?" And then it says that Joseph buys the land from the people. Now all of the land. These people went from being farmers and cattle herders...all this land now belongs to the government.

And then, you know, they give up their land and he moves them into the cities and it says, he just didn't take the land of the priests because they'd gotten an allotment of grain from Pharaoh, but the rest of the people, all their land became nationalized. And then, towards the end, he gives them the land, he doesn't give them the land to keep it, but he says, "I'll let you plant on the land, you have to give a large portion for taxes, but the rest, I'll let you keep." And they say, "Thank you, you've saved us, Joseph." And it seems to be a kind of happy ending and these verses have bothered me for years because, first of all, why is this even here? Like he could have just said, the Egyptians bought grain using money and land and cattle without all this back and forth.

What's so significant here? Right? And you know, the people around the world were hungry. Egypt had plenty, so they're giving food to the citizens. Citizens are buying, you know, it seems like it's ok. Right? But then, it seems a little bit morally troubling. It seems as if Joseph is almost taking advantage of this natural disaster and the people's fear and lacking and worry, that he starts to take more from them than he really needed. Like he has enough grain to give them, it seems like he's sort of taking advantage of the situation to gain a lot of strength for the government. When you read these verses, it seems a little bit troubling. Like he's disempowering the people to take more power for the government.

Now, many of the Jewish interpreters felt this was a little bit harsh on Yosef's part, or it might look harsh on Yosef's part. But I noticed something really interesting. If you read the verse 19 carefully, it says that the Egyptians came to Yosef and said, "Buy us, our bodies and our farmland for food so that we and our farmland will be slaves to Pharaoh." So you would expect, that he'd say, "Great, yes, sounds like a good deal." But what happens? Listen carefully. In verse 20, it says, "Joseph bought all the farmland of the Egyptians for Pharaoh." Right? The verses are very careful to tell us that he did draw this line. He didn't enslave them, but he was willing to take their land. Ok? And so, you know, he didn't acquiesce to them begging to be slaves, right? But he didn't take their bodies and even when, you know, we come into the future, we don't see that the Egyptians were actually physical slaves, but they did have to pay high taxes. So, you can imagine that this wasn't as bad as it would have been had Pharaoh been running the show. If Pharaoh was running the show and they offered to sell themselves, he probably would have said, "Great! More slaves."

So Joseph, according to that interpretation, actually softened Pharaoh's economic plan, but other rabbis have suggested that maybe it wasn't so great what Joseph did, and maybe the people resented it, and that's why it's not a coincidence that a generation later they weren't so disturbed to see the Hebrews enslaved and maybe it was a little bit like a sweet revenge for them.

But I don't want to analyze this from Joseph's perspective, although it's interesting, I want to look at it from the perspective of the people. What happens to them in their relationship to the government during a time of fear and disaster? Because the Torah as I said is bringing this unusual attention to the conversation, the development of their position, even though it's not really necessary. Like you would have been just fine knowing that Joseph sold back the grain in return for a lot of money and livestock and land and then he really enriched Pharaoh's, you know, department of treasury. There's something in this public dialogue that's revealing a universal truth.

So here you have these people and they're landowners, they're cattle herders, they're free, they have families, they live off the land, they support themselves. And then, little by little, because of this natural disaster, they lose one liberty after the other. First the government takes their stuff. They take their land, they take their money. They take away their ability to live independently on their own. They have to live in the cities, you can imagine cities are more crowded. There's a lot more supervision by the government. There's a lot less freedom, there's

more cultural influence. And then in the end, Yosef gives them back their land, sort of. But it's not really theirs, he lets them plant as long as they pay a hefty fee. But the land isn't theirs, they're allowed to work on what used to be their land. You would think they'd be angry, right? Like you're letting me work on my land that you took away from me?

But look what happens, look at verse 23. Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have brought you, and your farmland today for Pharaoh. You have seed, so sow and toil and it shall be concerning the crops that you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh and the remaining four parts shall be yours for seed, for your food." So, what used to be theirs, he's now letting them use. So, what do you think they're going to say? They're going to be like, "What do you mean, Joseph?" What do they reply? In verse 25, they say, "You have saved our lives. Let us find favor in my lord's eyes, and we will be slaves to Pharaoh."

So step one, you take away people's existing rights and then give them back slowly and they're thrilled. They're thrilled! One thing that's so interesting in these verses is that the idea of becoming slaves comes from the people and not from the government. They just want safety. They say, "We just want to be healthy, we want to feed our children, we want to have security, we want the government to take care of us, we don't want to be afraid anymore."

And so, they are voluntarily willing to give up every last shred of freedom, twice, in this one conversation seemingly out of nowhere without Joseph even asking they blurt out, "Let us be slaves!" It reminds you of the Jews in Egypt when they don't have food and water saying, "Oh, if only we could go back to Egypt and have food." Like do you not remember being slaves? But yes, they're willing to be slaves to have safety and security.

Another thing that's interesting to notice is that taking away the liberties doesn't apply equally to everyone. It says that the priests got to keep their land and get an allotment of grains. So they were still totally free and happy. You know, there's this funny video I saw on the Knesset channel filming a meeting of the Meretz party. The head of the party is the Minister of Health, and you know there's all these masking rules in Israel. And they're talking and talking and talking. They have their masks on and then the channel, whoever you know, the film guy says, "Cut," but forgot to shut off the camera. And then, as soon as they think the cameras are off, they throw off their masks and they're in a you know, closed room and they're supposed to be wearing masks and they're the ones who made the masking rules. And they're sitting there and they rip off the mask and go, "Oh, it's so nice to breathe." And then it turns out that they're still being filmed live on television, and all that is while they're telling my seven, you know, my six-year-old in first grade to wear a mask for seven hours a day in school with no break. So there's always these special freedoms that remain for certain people.

And the last thing I noticed in this chapter, is in the words "ad hayom," in verse 26. It says, "ad hayom," which means "until today" they got permission to use their land with these high taxes "until today." Now obviously it's not "until today" today. It's not like there's different Egyptians in Egypt now. What I think the Torah is trying to say is that even though it was meant

to be a temporary rule, at least presented that way, like, “Oh, we’re going to centralize all the food distribution to help you,” even when the famine finished and they didn’t really have a need to centralize the food management, you would think they would say, like, “Oh, here. Here’s your land back. We don’t need it.” But no, the government liked this new way of running things, and even if it started for a reasonable, good cause – to protect the people, it is very hard to backpedal and get back liberties once you’ve given them up. You might not even notice. You might be born into that and think that that’s just the way things are supposed to be. So, it’s like the Torah is kind of giving you the guidebook for how these types of things happen.

And then the plot thickens. In this week’s parsha, you know the sages often say that Jacob’s death is the beginning of slavery which is weird because a lot of time passes until the Jews actually become slaves. So, why do the sages always say that Jacob’s death was the beginning point? Well look at what happens when he dies. Joseph goes to ask if he can take his father to be buried. Jacob’s family lives in Egypt, but they don’t have to. They came here voluntarily. They’re like honored guests. Shouldn’t they be able to come and go as they please if they want to bury Jacob? But once they ask permission and act as if Pharaoh has the right to tell them when they can and can’t leave the country, Pharaoh starts setting limits. He says, “Well, ok, I’ll let you go, sure, no problem. But don’t take your cattle, don’t take your children.” Doesn’t that remind us of when later Moshe would ask Pharaoh to lead the Jews to pray in the desert. He said, “Well, why don’t you leave your children, leave your cattle behind.” It’s like a foreshadowing of the slavery that’s on the way that begins right after Jacob’s death.

So, I think we see the Torah is warning us that there’s this eternal pattern in times of fear, some sort of natural disaster will come and people will be willing to give up their freedoms, and willing to offer themselves up into actual slavery. And they won’t only make peace with slavery, they’ll be thankful to get whatever little morsels the government will be willing to give them back as meager freedoms. What is so interesting is how then careful the Torah is to combat these very dangers, through all of the laws of the Torah again and again. My doctoral advisor professor, Beni Parat, pointed out that if you look at these verses, everything about them is counteracted and prevented through Torah law. For example, in the story of Joseph, it says the priests got to keep their land. What’s special about the Torah? The tribe of Levi and the priests, the Cohanim, they don’t get any land. As opposed to all the other cultures, they don’t get special treatment, get to amass land and power. If you want to be spiritual leaders, concentrate on the Torah, concentrate on the spiritual world, not on making a big business out of your land.

Second, if you want to sell yourself into slavery, well look at the law of slavery. On the 7<sup>th</sup> year, the slave has to go free. And if he refuses, it’s a whole big deal. And then certainly in the Jubilee year he goes free. So there’s gonna be times you’re gonna be persuaded to give up your land. The Torah is telling us it’s gonna be hard to get it back, so you have the Jubilee year. If the government ever takes away your land, if the king takes your land, he has to give it back on the Jubilee year. If you have to sell your land because you’re poor or you’re miserable, you’ll get it back. Everyone goes back to their original land. And if you even look at the sabbatical year like we’re in now, it’s so cool because the cycle of seven it’s like it’s right there to remind

you of the story of the famine in Egypt, of the cycles of seven and seven years. In Egypt they used the seven-year cycles to tyrannize. In the Torah, the seven-year cycles are to give you more freedom, to secure your freedom.

If you look in Leviticus, there are even verses about saving grain. It says that Hashem will bless the sixth year and you'll have enough for the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and the 8<sup>th</sup> year. But it's not the government taking the grain for you and then doling it back to you slowly. The Torah trains you, trusts you, that you will know what to do with the abundance of the 6<sup>th</sup> year carefully and wisely. The Torah trusts that you will manage your resources better than any king or government can. And look at the laws of the king. The king can't have too many horses, can't have too much gold and silver. The situation in Egypt doesn't fly in the Torah political system because the king can't even...isn't even allowed to amass all of those things that were taken away in the Egyptian story.

So this story isn't just a side story. It's setting the paradigm of how government should and shouldn't be. And the Torah comes and puts the mirror image of what Egypt did to the Egyptians. And it sets the solutions into place, vigilantly protecting freedoms and liberties and limiting the ability to take them away. And so now we're starting the story in the book of Exodus of slavery and freedom. And something I noticed is in the whole story is how this tyranny began, was people wanting help, how you know the Egypt system of tyranny started was people wanting grain. And what is the ultimate symbol of our freedom on Passover? Is it not the matzah, the bread of affliction? It's kind of an awful bread, right? It's not as good as what they could have given us in Egypt, where the government was tyrannizing us and still taking care of us as if we were. It's our own bread. It's a yucky bread, it's a bad bread, but it's our own. It's what we were able to do when we were free. And so you would think on the day that we celebrate our freedom on Passover, we'd be eating the most luxurious foods, but no, we focus on the simplest, poorest bread as if to say that we're happy because it's our bread, it's the bread that we were able to make on our own and that even if we could have given up our freedom to get a little more security, we prefer to eat even the bread of affliction, but to eat it as free and independent people, then eat the glorious bread of slavery.

And so, with that in mind I'm excited to begin the study of the book of Exodus with all of you guys and get to the true center of the biblical faith, the ultimate freedom of man. Have a good week, guys!

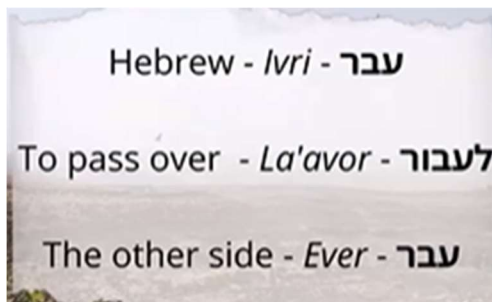
Jeremy

Wow, thank you so much, Tehila. That's just so insightful, it's so awesome. And what I think is happening now is that the Torah gives us a map of this tyranny and slavery and then it takes us into freedom. And it could be that the world now is kind of showing us what a world government, organized, tyrannical reality would look like, only to then contrast it to God's kingdom and ultimate freedom. A place where people can live life as they see fit and worship God in their own way. And it could be that we're meant to like contrast the dark with the light, and we need to see the dark one last time to then finally see the new light that will shine on Zion.



But it feels like we are absolutely living through the prophecies that are said right there in the book of Genesis and right at the beginning of Exodus. It just feels like we're just in that story right now, right before our eyes. So where does that leave us? It leaves us with the core lessons of the book of Genesis. I've kind of numbered them down. I've gone through all of the sessions that we've done this year and I've tried to extract the core messages. And then what I want to do is now like wrap them all up as we end off Genesis, going into Exodus. Because the truth is, I'm like looking at Cal and Ardelle, Ryan and Moen, and I'm like, we're not gonna change world governments, we're just not. So what are we going to do? What are we just, the people, the believers, what are we going to do?

So, Genesis says it's all on the inside. We have to now go on the inside and then from that, each person like what Ari said, our strengths, our weaknesses, that's what's going to bring the new light. And so, ok. So, what does that mean? When you look at the book of Genesis, the same theme happens all the way through. There was Noah, one man, and then all of society was against Noah. And Noah had to be comfortable being different. Then you have Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The whole world is thinking one way and they're thinking a totally different way. As the whole world is living immoral, evil - Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, they're on the other side. Be ready to be different. I think Joseph, this one like Israelite that somehow like made his way down into Egypt. He never lost his belief. He never lost his identity. He was always a Hebrew. That's how he defined himself. And what does that word mean? Can we put it up on the screen please?



Look at the word, Hebrew. In Hebrew, it is ivri, that's how you pronounce the word Hebrew. That's what Abraham was, that's what Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were. What does la'avor mean? It means to be on the other side. It means to pass over, la'avor. Ever is on the other side. What is the essence then of the book of Genesis? It says get ready. There is going to be a whole world of pressures coming from all around us.

But a believer is absolutely comfortable on the other side. That's what it is to be an ivri. In Deuteronomy in chapter 7, verse 7, it says HaShem did not love you or choose you because you were most in number than any people, but because you were the fewest of all people. There is something that is so charming about the few in number. The Maccabees, David's army, the small group of people that are not going to follow the herd. We have a new word that we say all the time in our family. We call them, sheeple, because as we've gotten so close to sheep now over the last few months, just sheep follow whoever's in front of them. It could be Ari, it could be Ari's neighbor, it could be me, it could be my children. As soon as they start walking, they just...they're not very smart animals. They just follow. And so, we're calling a lot of the world now, not people, we call them sheeple. And we don't want to be sheeple. We want to be Hebrews. We want to be on the other side of the sheeple. And so, lesson number one, that's

written all over the book of Genesis from the very beginning, all the way to the very end. No, to being a sheeple. Yes to being a Hebrew on the other side.

Number two, it's all about loving God. And what does loving God mean? It means loving life. It means you are all in. Every single matriarch and patriarch, they had their life and they were all in. They gave everything they had to live as best as they could. And there were ups and there were downs. They didn't just like stay on the sidelines, kind of like try to survive through life and weather the storm. They took life on and they just wanted to gobble it up. And even in the darkest dungeons of the prison, Joseph was able to rise up all the way to Pharaoh. How did they do that? They lived in a relationship. A relationship with everything around them. They saw it as communication. They didn't see it as some universe that's just removed from them and there's some speck that's fumbling through the world. No. There's a unity here and the world is somehow in relationship with you. Everything around you is a communication. The men and the women of the Bible had no religion in the book of Genesis. They lived in a covenant. They lived in a relationship with God. That relationship was the source of their love of life. That love gave them strength in the good times, in the hard times, and what's very clear is that life is hard. No one in the Torah had an easy ride. That's not a part of the deal. Life is going to be challenging, but when you live in a relationship, that relationship powers you through every challenge. So that's lesson number two, love life and we ought to all be in.

Number three. When you really boil it down, the epic challenges of the patriarchs and the matriarchs of Israel were all revolved around the challenges of raising a godly family. Abraham and Sarah, and Yishmael and Isaac and Esav and just everyone was just constantly trying to figure out how do we raise a godly family on this planet? All of them struggled, all of them struggled! The greatest spiritual masters of the people of Israel, all of them really struggled. All of them had challenges. How comforting that is for all of us that their epic challenges are our epic challenges. That everyone, just building our own homes is our most important task. It's like that's the genius of the prophets of Israel. Because on one hand, the prophets of Israel talk about world peace, that a consciousness is going to hit this world that's going to change the entire world. How is it going to happen though? It's not going to happen from government. One person at a time, one family at a time. If every family in the world just took responsibility for their family, that's all it would take. The whole world would be changed. That's the underlying theme, is that family is the foundation of everything and don't worry. It's gonna be challenging. Even they had it hard, so it's ok if we have it hard.

Number four, lech lecha. Go to yourself. All of our outward journeys of life, in truth they are an inward journey to allow us to develop ourselves, to reveal our soul in the world. All of the challenges and struggles that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Judah, all of them went through, it shaped who they were. It's what carved them into the marvelous people that they ended up being. It's what made them who they were. The language we used during the series of soul map was...it allowed them to reveal their soul in the world. When your body rules your life, you're always pulled to the immediate gratifications of the world, the immediate lusts, the temptations, the impulses. When you live life with your body as the driving force of your life. Watch out.

It's going to end up ugly. Our body is constantly pulling us toward the physical – toward comfort, food, sleep, the pleasures of this world. And in reality, this body doesn't really even like this world. Aside from momentary pleasure, the body is usually suffering in this world. It's constantly in a state of trying to survive. Survival is the body's primary goal and it pulls us into fear and stress and maybe momentary satisfaction, but that path, following your body, letting your body be the captain of your ship is the surest way to end up depressed and miserable.

And so, what do we say? Let your soul be revealed in the world. Your soul needs to rule the world. And so what happens then? The soul was created to flourish in the world. And as people grow and flourish, they're happy. We've learned that the Hebrew word for growth and happiness are phonetically, they sound like the same word. Tzmicah, Simcah. It's almost the same word because where is happiness? It's in growth and in flourishing like tzmicah literally is like a plant. Tzmach is also another name for Mashiach. It's a plant that's growing. When you're growing, developing, and flourishing, that's when people are happy. That can only happen when you're following your soul. Because when people, when your soul is the guide of your life, you enter into a journey of where you are now and where you could be if your soul was fully revealed. That is literally the journey of lech lecha, go to yourself. This journey is all about finally just revealing your full self in the world. And on that path, that's where happiness is found. That's where serenity is found. To reveal your soul means to reveal the unique light that only you can bring into the world. And as you shine your unique light, you light up everyone's life around you. You choose to become chosen. Chosen to serve as a conduit of Hashem's Presence, as HaShem's light in the world. You become a light, a light unto the nations around you, under the people around you. And that can only happen if your soul is in the driver's seat.

Number five. Israel. The Land of Israel, it starts with Israel. Abraham's told, the first commandment given to the first Hebrew, the first Israel, the first Jew, is like, go to Israel. Make aliyah. Stay connected. That's where this thing is going to end up. Israel is the beginning and how does the book of Genesis end? Jacob is like, get me to Israel. When I die, I don't want to stay in Egypt. Get me to Israel. And then Joseph says, "When I die, I'll stay here for a little bit, but get me to Israel." It starts with Abraham's journey to Israel and it ends with us not forgetting to get back to Israel. It's like God's plan is going to unfold in this Land. And if you're disconnected spiritually from the Land of Israel, you've removed yourself from the front lines of God's plan in the world. It looks like big tech, big pharma, the politicians are all directing the world. Make no mistake about it. God runs the world and he will use Israel as His vehicle to reveal His light. Just hold on and keep facing Jerusalem. Don't get distracted with all the fake news. Israel is the center stage. The forces of evil are doing everything they can to separate us from each other, to distract us with fear and news and headlines. Separate people from the Land of Israel, close down our borders. But they can't close down our spirits. They can't disconnect us spiritually. The roots of every believer need to be planted in the Land of Israel. And it's everywhere across the book of Genesis. It's all over the Bible. It's the reason we are called the Land of Israel fellowship. Israel is the one thing that has the power to unit all the tribes, all the nations, every believer. This is the center stage that's gonna bring us all together.

And number six, and maybe the most important, the book of Genesis ends with Jacob, with Israel blessing all of his children and the grandchildren that will become the tribes of Israel. That is the purpose of the whole Torah. To be a blessing in our lives, to bring light into our lives, to guide us toward blessing, and as we learn together, as we pray together that the Torah becomes who we are in the world. And we actually become a blessing, and then we have the power to be a blessing to all of our loved ones around us. But that's the goal here. The goal of everything that we're doing here is that we become a blessing. And that we ourselves bless everyone around us.

Now if we take that seriously, this fellowship keeps on growing, slowly but surely, the blessing is getting larger and larger. The light is going out farther and farther. They're trying to lock us down, but they're just creating more of a desire for people to connect on Zoom, for people to connect on the internet. And lo and behold, in the heart of the Land of Israel, in the mountains of King David, there's this broadcast that keeps on going out and more and more people are attaching themselves to this network of believers. More than 50 countries around the world. Something's going on. The blessing is growing. And if all of us become a blessing from around us, a new light is coming out of Zion. And that is the goal. That we should all be blessed and that we should be a blessing.

And you should all know that every member of this fellowship is a blessing. And everyone here is blessed from Zion. And you should know that because at the end of every fellowship, you get a blessing from the heart of Israel.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

Shalom my friends, Sukkot 2022, I'm not giving up yet!