

Session 127

Mishpatim – The World is Shaking

19 February 2023

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6c2EZ3HhxA>

Ari

Good to see everybody. Maybe I...oh no! It says my internet connection is unstable. I know that I am unstable and that you're unstable, but I didn't know that the internet connection is unstable. Hopefully, HaShem will strengthen it. But, maybe I was just scrolling through too many of your faces, looking at you, sending a lot of love. That's what I love doing coming into the Fellowship, just looking at your faces. And I feel like it's...it's like a little taster of what's to come. We're all gonna be out here in Judea having the Fellowship someday soon. I really know that that's going to happen. But something I feel that really brings us together, at least for me, has been this prayer booklet, where is it? I don't know where it is, but I have it here, that Ardelle sends me every week. And I print it up and I use it to pray for all of you and I know that we use it for praying for each other. And I continue really to be inspired by the compassion that so many of you have towards the difficult people in your lives. The adversaries one could say in your lives. Something that I think I've actually been falling somewhat short in lately. You know this world is a very compelling mass. It's very convincing and if we let our guards down, if we forget, it's really easy to forget all of the truths of the Torah and start like the dog biting at the stick. You know, not remembering that there's someone behind it. That's been happening to me a little bit lately, but I'm going to try to cut myself a little slack. Cause we're facing a lot out here right now.

And by the way, regarding the whole prayers, the prayer booklet, there's something I do want to say about that. That there are some of you who write things in, to the tune of like, "Please continue to pray for me as I'm still facing the same challenges that I was facing last week." And things like that. And if I could be so bold, I'd like to encourage all of you to write it out again. All of it. The entire thing. Every week, the whole thing. Because when you're writing it up, you're not only doing it for us in the Fellowship to be able to pray for you, but you're writing it for HaShem as well, you're expressing it for HaShem. It's part of the reason it's happened. Let's remember the challenges that we're facing are custom designed for us by HaShem, to allow us to come close to Him in the exact way, with the exact fixing that our soul needs to experience. And I really believe that part of that fixing on the deepest level, one of the foundational Divine motivations for the challenges that we're given, is to provide us with an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with HaShem by pouring out our hearts to Him about those challenges. Does that make any sense? So if that's the purpose, for us to turn to Him and hand it back to Him and put it in His lap, to ask Him to carry the burden with us, if that's part of the purpose of the whole thing, then this booklet is not the place for short-cuts. Right? Write it all out again in new words. You are different this week than you were last week. So the challenges are different. Everything is different. It may feel, from sort of a

superficial glance, it may feel like the same, but everything is different. We're constantly changing, we're constantly growing. And by the way, just on a practical note, it does help all of us that we don't have to go back to the last week's pamphlet to reference and see what you're talking about. So anyways, thank you for sharing those prayer requests and thank you Ardelle again for compiling them and thank you for praying for each other. Sometimes I really feel like that's really the meat and potatoes of this Fellowship. And our meeting there is just the appetizer. I don't know. I don't know if that's the case. But sometimes it feels that way to me. Anyways, there is so much that I want that I want to share with you today, but I first want to introduce my dear friend and brother, Jeremy, who strengthens me and inspires me EVERY day, or MOST days, most days, definitely some days. Some days. Today being one of those days.

Jeremy

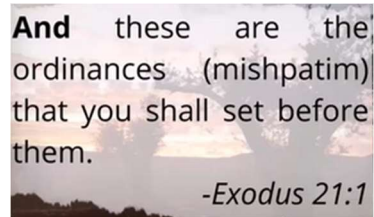
There was a day at one point, it was sometimes.

Ari

No, no, no. Really, especially lately, you don't know, I haven't like told you. But you know how I write to you every day and I say, "Jeremy, what are you doing today, what are you doing?" There's a reason. Because when you share with me what you're doing today, inevitably it strengthens me, it inspires me, it moves me, like whatever, like a mother who needs to know what you are doing? No. But I really appreciate it. And anyways, Jeremy, please.

Jeremy

Yes, ok, let's go. So this last week, I had one of the most powerful experiences in my life that I remember in many, many months, maybe in many years. And it was so powerfully interconnected with the Torah that I was learning, and the Torah that Tehila and I were learning. And it was something that Tehila and I experienced together. And I just really want to share the Torah, I want to share the experience because in some ways, it was life-changing for me. And so, let's like go right into it with the Torah. So the first verse of the Torah is Exodus, chapter 21, verse 1:



**And** these are the ordinances (mishpatim) that you shall set before them.

*-Exodus 21:1*

And what I want to point out first is that the first Hebrew letter is peculiar. The first word of that verse is weird, it's out of place. AND these are the ordinances? I mean, the Torah is the greatest literature to ever be composed. You don't really start a sentence off with the word "and." You definitely don't start like a chapter, a parsha starting with the word, and? Like what is that?

And so the first thing you need to know is that what happened in last week's Torah portion, which was the revelation at Sinai, the giving of the Ten Commandments, arguably the greatest event in human history that has just shifted the course of Western civilization and maybe the entire world, as we know it. This parsha is "AND these are the ordinances." This is directly

connected to the revelation at Sinai. This parsha is stage 2 of stage 1. They are absolutely interconnected. And what is that is teaching us? A lot of spiritual traditions, they're about getting to a certain high, getting enlightened, getting inspired, meditating, hoping and waiting for a peak experience. And this parsha is teaching us receiving revelation, getting enlightened, getting inspired, that's not enough. Having an inspired moment is not the point. You need to bring that high into the daily details of the mishpatim of your life. Of the ordinances, of like the little rules and regulations, bring that high experience all the way down into the daily details of life.

And so, when you take that high experience of revelation, of the truth that you experienced, because sometimes life will give you a truth. And then you bring it down to the day-to-day details of your life, that's when you become the author of your life. So let me explain. After the first verse of Mishpatim, it's the first parsha in the Torah that there's no story. I mean, it's just a list of rules and laws and ordinances, just a lot of details. There's no hero, there's no story, there's no person. It's like, every other parsha, up until now, Abraham, Moses, Noah, Adam, Isaac, someone...no! This is the first time that there is no hero. And the reason is that after the revelation at Sinai, Israel becomes the story. The nation of Israel becomes the hero. That movement from revelation to the exact details of living brought down, is when Israel becomes the hero in the story. That's how we become the masters and the authors of our life. Now what does that mean to us practically? I want to bring this down to practical practice for living.

And so, the first of the two commandments in the Torah, because we're now connecting the revelation to the details. So let's look at this revelation. Now most people when they hear about the Ten Commandments, they just hear, "Well God delivered Ten Commandments to Israel." But if you pay close attention, there is a difference between the first two Commandments and the rest of the Commandments. So let's just look for a moment at the first two Commandments. Can we get them up on the screen? First two Commandments, here's what it says:

**The First 2 Commandments**  
1. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt.  
2. You shall not have any other Gods before me.

Ok, that's first two commandments. They're spoken from God to Israel, we can see that. Now look at the third commandment. Look at what it says here:

**The Third Commandment**  
You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vein

Do you guys see the difference? I mean it's screaming in the pashat. Like, what is going on here? The 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment. God was speaking, "I am the Lord your God. Have no other gods before Me." And all of a sudden now, it moves to 3<sup>rd</sup> person. It's like, "Do not take God's Name in vain." Why doesn't it say, "Do not take My Name

in vain, My Name is holy?" What happened there? Why is all of a sudden, the Ten Commandments shifts to 3<sup>rd</sup> person? And so, someone that doesn't have the Midrash, someone that doesn't have the Jewish oral tradition, I honestly don't know how they explain that. But the Midrash tells us that something happened. The first two commandments at Sinai were so powerful, that the nation of Israel, they died. The revelation caused their soul to leave their bodies and they experienced death. They were like.... encountering the ultimate was too much for their bodies. It actually says that. You shall not see my Face and live. Man cannot just experience the ultimate truth, the oneness of God, because then you are just absorbed into the oneness and their souls left their bodies. A part of the revelation at Sinai was an encounter with death. And you want to get a deep insight into your life? Have an encounter with death. The insight will come.

And so let me tell you what happened this week. Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday afternoon, I dropped Akiva, my son off at the central Gush Etzion intersection. And it's like not a safe place, but it's not a dangerous place if you get on a bus. But just a few years ago, three kids, three minutes away from there were kidnapped, it started a war in Israel. And I dropped my son off, Akiva, at 9:00 A.M. at the bus-stop. And he knows he's not allowed to get into any hitch-hiker's car. He's supposed to wait for the bus. But you know, he's 16, I don't know what he's doing. And so, I trust him, but you know I did what I did. I dropped him off at the bus-stop. And I just want to show you a picture of my kids here really quickly. You know, Ari and I we don't share pictures of our kids on social media. Only with the Fellowship.



But you know, I just want you see...this is Akiva, he's the star. He's the star of my family. We love him.



Here's Eden. There's stories about both of them. That's my daughter, she's just 13. And she's planting a tree there. HaYovel came out to the mountain and they planted trees all over the mountain next to us. And so

Eden got out there and she was planting a tree with everyone, just really beautiful. And so, they're just the treasures of my life, they're the most important things in my life.

And all of a sudden, I get a WhatsApp. I'm in the middle of a meeting with Ari. And I get a WhatsApp at 2:00 from Akiva's Rabbi. Where is Akiva???? Four question marks, where is Akiva? Two o'clock in the afternoon! I'm like, "Where's Akiva? I dropped him off at the bus-stop at 9:00. It's 2:00 in the afternoon. Five hours have passed and Akiva's not in school?" Immediately my mind goes to the worst case scenario. I'm like, "Oh my God. That kid got into a hitch-hiker's car." He's so deep into Hebron now. The Chamas is holding him." The worst

thoughts possible are now entering my mind. And then immediately, I'm like, wax on, wax off. I try to flex my emunah muscles. Ha'chol hatovah. HaShem runs the world. Everything is ok. There must be an explanation for this. So I'm like, "Ari, I have to leave now." And I left the meeting in the middle of it and I went to tell Tehila. Tehila's not in the house, I gave her call and I'm like, "Listen they don't know where Akiva is, I think we need to call the police." I'm in touch with the teacher, I say, "Just give us a second, I want to check with his friends." Two thirty comes. None of his friends have seen Akiva. It's now 2:30. None of his friends have seen him. I thought, maybe he went to bed, maybe he went to, I don't know, to go to sleep in his dorm. Maybe...I don't know, but now, none of his friends have seen him either. What?!! Where is my son? What is going on here? Now to make a long, painful, just the anxiety, from 2:00 until 4:30, finally at 4:30, they found in a small little room, outside of the synagogue. It's kind of like a little place that he goes to study, they found him studying and learning Torah by himself. Because he's such a holy, awesome kid.

And then at 4:30, I'm like, "They found him!" He like ditched secular classes to learn more Torah classes. He did something that was like relatively good, but he freaked everyone out. And at 4:30 I called Tehila as soon as I could to alleviate like the stress as soon as possible. Tehila just burst out crying on the phone. Because we were just like calling the police, Akiva's been kidnapped. Oh my gosh, the international scandal, my son, oh my Lord. And then Tehila, many, many, many seconds was just sobbing and crying out of relief. The emotions, it was 2 ½ hours of just absolute, an encounter with death. That's what I want to talk about, a wake-up call. The whole thing was so traumatic.

And you know, all of the things we're concerned with, all of the things that me and Ari are meeting about and all the things that we're just dealing with in our day-to-day lives. Some of those things are just not important when you have the big picture in mind. And that encounter with death was such a deep revelation. Everything that happens to us in life happens for us in life. And everyone listening to this, I just want to bless you. Take a moment now and have an encounter. Here's the scenario I want you to think about. You have two months left. This is what I talked about on our Shabbat meal with all of my kids. Ari was there, our guests for Shabbat were there. And I said, "You have two months left and you're destined to leave this world. What do you do now?" Deep insight comes when you encounter death. How do you want to spend that time? What do you want to say to the people you love most? Eden almost had a nervous break-down, my daughter that you saw her picture there. Because they went on a tiule together, a hike throughout Israel with all of the kids at Ibei HaNachal. And somehow, Akiva snuck rocks into Eden's bag. And Eden was like, "My bag is so heavy! My bag is so heavy!" And she did the whole two hour hike, only at the end to find out that Akiva filled her bag with rocks. So I couldn't help but laugh at that story because that's kind of a funny thing for Akiva to do. But she was so angry at him and her last words to him were, "You have a place in hell for what you did to me." And they left on a fight. And Eden was like, "My last moments with Akiva were a fight. And I said such terrible things to him. I can't believe it."

Yes, deep revelation comes when we encounter death. What would you say to the people you love most? What would you want to do for them? So now, v'elah hamishpatim, these are the ordinances. Go in love, that insight. Make time in your calendar right now to take your wife out, to take your husband out, for a special night. Take the time to put your children to bed. The revelation is revealed in the details. Put it in your calendar right now and do the things that you WOULD do if you knew that you didn't have the time to do them. Pick up the phone and call the people that you would have called. Call them this week. Put it into your schedule. That is the path from revelation to authoring your life into a work of art.

And so I want to end this Torah with a prayer and with a blessing for all of us. You know as we journey through this world, it's a very narrow bridge. There are dangers, tragedies, that can side-swipe us, any of us, on any random Wednesday afternoon when we least expect it.

And so may HaShem bless us this week. May you bless everyone in this Fellowship and bless their loved ones to live your life with your highest ideals and your priorities. Reveal to you, live them in line with the Mishpatim, with the details of your life and bring them into real practice. Because that's the way we can author our life into a work of art. Bless you all.

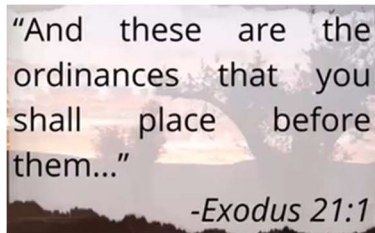
Ari

Thank you, Jeremy. Yeah, that was a pretty traumatic thing for the Abramowitz family as well. You know, I remember, before I was married and before Shaena and I had kids, I remember being afraid, would I have any more love for my own children, when I have children, please God. I didn't know. I loved your children as my own and my sister's children as my own. And I thought I was just using it all up. And then I would finally have my own kids and I'd be like, "Ahhh." That was not the case, obviously. Love is not a resource like that. But it was terrifying for us. The Abramowitz family stopped everything that we were doing. We were reciting the Psalms, we were reciting Tehilim, we were praying to HaShem. And it was a really traumatic thing for us also.

And when we were hearing Akiva's version of the story over the Shabbat table and he mentioned that he had put all these stones in Eden's backpack, we all cracked up. That is officially a funny move by Akiva to do and it reminded me of when my sister put books in my pillowcase and that was the one time that I jumped onto my bed with my face into my pillow and got a bloody nose. And I told my father and he laughed. Which is exactly what you did during that part also. Anyways, yeah, you never know what your last words are. I remember hearing from a Holocaust survivor that told me that he was separated from his mother by the trains in Auschwitz. And he was a little kid and he was mad at her for something that happened in the cattle car and he was so angry at her that he said, "I hate you, I hate you," and he said that those were his last words. And he always, always regretted that. You know, I heard that story years ago, more than half my life ago, but the pain in his face. You know he was a little

kid, little kids don't know what's going on. But it still hurt him. So really, we need that lesson you shared with us just now, we really need to internalize it.

Anyways, there's a lot that I want to share here and I really hope that I don't ADD it out with this Fellowship because I'm really at a place with some clarity, some confusion, trying to work it all through. So I just ask you ahead of time, if it's not all one coherent narrative, just understand that I'm just like sharing my heart in a flow, but I think the best place to start would be exactly where Jeremy did in chapter 1, verse 1.



So, you know Jeremy mentioned that the Torah begins, this portion, that contains seemingly mundane laws. You know, growing up I really saw them as boring. This is where the boring begins. That's really how I felt growing up when I got to this. Stories are over, statutes beginning, all of that stuff and irrelevant. But the older I get the deeper we dive. This is where so much of it really begins. You know, but it seems mundane, as if such a thing were possible.

You know, but it begins with the words, "V'elah," which means that we are about to read the continuation of the famous, dramatic, star-studded Ten Commandments. But these are no less important. And that's what it's saying. If anything, what we're about to read is an extrapolation of those Ten commandments. They say that the entire Torah really is an extrapolation of those Ten Commandments. As a matter of fact, the Ramban Nachmanides says that the laws we're about to read are not only a continuation of all Ten, but even more specifically, the last one. Right? Arguably, my favorite one, which is "Do not covet." And I really shouldn't say favorite. That sounds silly. My favorite commandment.... But it's silly to play favorites, but it's the one I reference the most in my day-to-day life. Because in those few words, it's compacted with a whole world of meaning that I automatically unfold into my consciousness when I just think of that commandment. Because you know, the more thoughts I put into that, that's the deepest truth. That everything, not only our family and our possessions, but our pain and our challenges, our whole life situation, both the good and the bad, everything is from HaShem. Perfectly designed for us. Everything on our soul-journey through this world. So coveting anyone is just false. It's a false emotion and that's why we can be commanded not to feel it. We spoke about this last week.

And remembering and internalizing that truth is perhaps one of the most important things we can do in this world. You know internalizing that truth, I would say is the most important ingredient to living a life of inspiration and of happiness and of love. So run with that theme. The great sage known as the Sforno, he goes on to say that if indeed these laws are a continuation from the commandment not to covet, right? It says, "You shall not covet." V'eyla, immediately he goes into the rest. So if that's true, then we need to have clear boundaries and clear understanding of what actually belongs to us and what belongs to the other guy.

Otherwise we can't be sure if we're coveting or not if we don't know really where the lines are, where the boundaries are. Where one thing ends, where one thing begins, what is ours and what is the other guys. And that he teaches cause a summary of what we're about to read in the Torah portion of Mishpatim. And really in the rest of the Torah.

And so now, I want to look at the last word of that verse and really dive into it. So the last word, before them, in Hebrew is lifnehem (לְפָנֵיהֶם). Now Jeremy, I'm going to ask really keep your heart and your ears open here in case I make any mistakes with what I'm going to share here. Because there are many approaches to understanding this word and what HaShem is trying to teach us through it. And with an open heart I think you'll see that while none of them contradict each other, they really do complement each other beautifully as sort of different dimensions of a greater reality. So one of the primary, more simple direct understandings of the word "lifnehem," is that HaShem is telling us that the adjudication of these laws are to be presented before Jewish courts. For them to decide upon. Lifnehem. We bring these laws before the Jewish courts. Now for a Jew to voluntarily take another Jew to a secular court is actually forbidden. It's actually a desecration of HaShem's Name, because it's some sort of like...it's like a tacit admission that they think that the secular courts are in some way comparable in the administration of true, Divine justice. That it's comparable to Torah courts, which implement the laws of HaShem and serve as vessels in the application and the administration of HaShem's wisdom to our dimension in the earth.

So in the past, we've spoken of the many cases of family members and friends and partners bringing each other to a Beit Din, to a rabbinical court without any anger or aminos or even a disruption in the friendship. Because you know each side authentically just wants to know the truth. HaShem's truth, right? And I don't think it's a very common phenomenon in secular court, to hear of something like that. Where really it's an accepted principle. You know, just a truth, that each side is looking to win and will do whatever they need to do to achieve that end, to bring that outcome to fruition. It's not really about truth, it's about winning.

And so, I found myself reflecting on this over Shabbat and actually really yearning for HaShem's truth and justice to be implemented. Because here in Israel we find ourselves in a very difficult times as far as the unity and cohesion are concerned. As there's...finally, as you saw in the last elections, I think we've explained this in the past, there's a real push towards judicial reform in this country. Like how many of you are following this crazy drama that's happening here about judicial reform? A lot of hands are going up. Don't feel bad if you're not. But some people, you know, everything! They want to know everything about what's happening in Israel. So I'm not really one to explain all of the details of this to you. Tehila is really the scholar on that because you may not know this, but she is not only a lawyer, but she is a law professor...voted the number 1 law professor in Hebrew University. Anyways, but if I had to explain it, standing on my leg,



Jeremy

Alright. Tehila is an assistant professor. She would want me to say that. But the most popular in all of the law faculty of Hebrew University. She is the most beloved. That's true enough. That's amazing.

Ari

They voted on her, right? Anyways, she should really be explaining this because I understand in England, she like taught a whole class on this Judicial reform thing that's happening. But if I had to explain it standing on one leg, and Jeremy, feel free to chime in, you know about 30 years ago through this very devious, political move, the judges in Israel on the Supreme Court stole the power to overturn any law, ANY LAW, that the Knesset passes, if they deem it unreasonable, meaning that they just didn't like it. Unreasonable. They didn't like it. Now opposed to America's system where the members of the court are selected by an elected President and confirmed by an elected congress and tasked with enforcing a document that was drafted by the founders that exists, it's called a constitution, Israel's Supreme Court is a group of leftist activist judges that are self-selected, they select themselves, and they are not bound by any constitution. And the whole idea of Israel being a democracy for so long, feels like a big joke. At least to me and so many others. Because you know, it's just these oligarchic dictators nullifying any laws that they don't like and really it feels like the whole Knesset is some sort of just for a show. It doesn't really hold that much power.

And now that a government is elected that is an overwhelmingly strong reflection of the desire of the nation of Israel to not merely be a Western vessel, puppet state, but a strong Jewish nation with Jewish values, who are trying to make real changes and really like take our country back. To free the nation, you know, from this insane tyranny of these leftist judges. Jeremy, so far, I'm right?

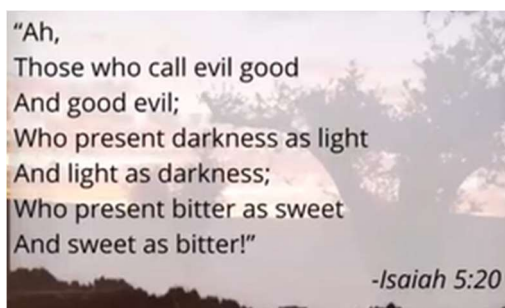
Jeremy

Yeah. I think it would actually be a really good idea for Tehila next week, to just give over like a ten-minute summary so everyone can really understand it. Because there's so many things that need to be understood. Israel has one of the most activist Supreme Courts in the world. Meaning they cancel more laws than almost any other Supreme Court. And they are they are the least democratically elected Supreme Court in the world. So there's a small minority of unelected people who politically represent probably the Meretz party, who didn't pass the threshold in this election. So it's a very small, leftist, secular, WOKE Supreme Court that doesn't reflect the nation of Israel at all, but they are the most powerful body in Israel's government and they rule the roost. And they're trying now to bring democracy back into some kind of balance, even though...all of Israel's democracy is being ruined, it's literally the exact opposite. They're just restoring balance and allowing sometimes right-wing judges to be elected. And sometimes, left-wing judges to be elected, depending on the majority of the people. So yes, Ari, so far you're doing well.

Ari

Ok, so one thing that I want...Tehila, I see that the people here are writing, "Yes, let Tehila explain it. We'd really appreciate it if Tehila would explain it." I would be grateful to hear why are there judges at all. I don't understand why there are judges at all if there's no constitution that they're judging based on. Even if it's right-wing or left-wing. I would rather leave our fate in the hands of the democratically elected Knesset. At least they're a reflection, whatever happens. Whether it goes this way or that way, at least they're a reflection. Listen, over 70% of the country supports taking back control from these dictators and reforming the system. And the left in Israel is going absolutely insane. You know, while their numbers of the left have actually steadily been going down over the years, as Jeremy said. You know, the Labor parties and Meretz party, they used to be like huge parties in Israel. Now aren't even passing the threshold. These lawyers have this tyrannical foothold that allows this leftist minority to enforce their will over the majority.

And so I believe that they rightfully see this as their last stand and they're going nuclear. I was going to put clips in, but I don't want to waste all the time in putting in clips in of all these leftists that are calling on Western countries to boycott Israel. Israelis are calling on countries to boycott Israel! And downgrade Israeli's economic standing and rate and ties. The mayor of Tel Aviv is calling for blood in the streets. And leftist politicians are calling for civil war, literally. Not like an ideological civil war like with weapons. Knesset members are getting like physically threatened and attacked in the Knesset plenum itself. You know they're refusing to even discuss compromises or debate the issues. And I believe it's because they realize that their arguments are totally and completely without merit. They're screaming that Israel will no longer be a democracy like Jeremy said, which is a total and complete opposite of the truth. It actually is...I've been thinking a lot about that verse from Isaiah, you know in chapter 5, verse 20.



That's what I see happening. I've been thinking about that verse more than ever lately as I look around, not only in Israel, but in the world. And I've started thinking that more often than not, the politicians and the media around the entire world are presenting reality as the exact opposite of what it is. The very idea that the small, secretive, self-selecting group of leftist lawyers maintaining total control of the country as being democratic, is insane! And that's what we're dealing with here. Being so sharply contrasted with the Torah portions we're reading which like illuminate the depths and the wisdoms of the laws and the legislations of HaShem. And the reason I've really spent so much time you know talking to you about this is because I see this conflict as part of the unfolding redemption. Because for thousands of years, in the Shmoneh Esrei, the Amidah, daily primary mediation prayer, we've been praying three times a day, saying,

הַשִּׁיבָה שׁוֹפְטֵינוּ כְּבְרָאשׁוֹנָה, וְיִוְעֲצֵינוּ כְּבִתְחִלָּה,  
 ke'vat-chillah veyo'atsei nu ke'va rishonah sho fe teinu ha shi vah  
*as at the beginning and our counselors as at the early times our judges Restore*

Asking HaShem to restore our judges to the days of old and our advisors to the ancients, meaning like the Sanhedrin. To remove from us pain and suffering that has to do with all this horrible legislation. So You alone, HaShem, You alone, HaShem will rule over us with kindness and compassion and justice in your decrees.

And so, you know, each of these prayers in this prayer, I mean seeing we've been praying for Jerusalem, for a return to Jerusalem. For the ingathering of the exile, they're all happening. All of these prayers are finally being answered. It's like they were aggregated and collected over thousands of years and now HaShem is unleashing them and opening them and answering them to the entire world. And this is one of those things that I see happening. You know, it's finally being answered. And maybe it's not pretty-looking. But no one promised that the unfolding of redemption would look pretty. You know, a woman in labor looks painful and chaotic and terrifying. But it's worth it! You know for what's in store. And restoring HaShem's truth and justice to Israel is a fundamental part of the redemption that we're all waiting for.

Ok, ok, moving on. So I hope that wasn't too long, but you know just so many of you say, "I want to know everything about Israel, the good, the bad, the ugly, the inside, the outside. So I'm just sharing with you what I believe is part of the process of the restoration of HaShem's justice in the Land of Israel.

Now the second explanation of the word, lifnehem. Now remember that's what we were talking about, lifnehem. The second explanation is to show the face. You know, of these commandments, of these ordinances. Because the word for face is panim, from lifnehem, the root of lifnehem, meaning that as much as possible, we should be learning the deeper reasons of the commandments. Those should be taught so that the nation wouldn't merely be accepting them as dogmas and sort of blinding fulfilling them, but also we should be inspired by the wisdom and the beauty and even the reasoning of the laws themselves.

But I want to focus more on the words of Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi. You know he sees the word lifnehem as a clear allusion to the word, lahafnim. Lifnehem, lahamnim. Meaning to internalize. So that the words of HaShem shouldn't only be relegated to the intellect, but rather infused into the heart. That these ordinances should penetrate all the way into the soul, itself. Not just in here, but to be infused into our entire essence. And this is important, for while I know that there are probably...there aren't many of those in this Fellowship that think like this. I've met many people, particularly Christians who think that Torah Judaism and Torah Jews are too legalistic. The religious Jews are too under the law, too immersed into like into

nuanced jurisprudence. And not really connected to the Spirit. And the fact is, what I believe the Balatoni is communicating here, to us, is that when we internalize the truth of HaShem's words, of His decrees and His laws and His ordinances, when we immerse ourselves in studying His Torah, then we internalize HaShem, Himself within us. That's why the Jewish law is called halacha. To walk, to journey because when we walk that path, on some level we're back in the Garden of Eden, walking with HaShem, Himself. We're walking on that path with Him.

Now, I want to share with you a living example of this truth of this internalization. Because we've been talking about this theme of fighting the darkness and shining a light is everywhere. The people are thinking about it and focusing on it. That seems to be one of the great universal themes right now being taught today in Israel and around the world. That somehow the nation of Israel, like the rooster, is realizing that now is the time, more than ever, to prepare ourselves for the most epic battle against darkness in human history. That we have to be ready to be thrust into the darkness, either willingly or unwillingly, because HaShem determines we're ready. It's not really up to us. But we need to be ready to face the greatest of darkness and extract the sparks of Divinity and holiness and light from within it.

So now I want to share with you the perfect example in my mind of what this looks like. Here is a video of Miriam Peretz, a beloved mother of Israel, one of the most disappointing days I can remember in a long time was when she was not elected to be president of Israel. And instead some sort of career, bureaucratic politician Hertzog. I'm not saying he's a bad guy, but he's not Miriam Peretz, a mother of Israel who buried two of her sons that were killed in combat in the army. And shortly thereafter, she buried her beloved husband that most agree, simply died of heartbreak. So here in this video, she's at the shiva house, the mourning house of the Pali family, speaking to Dvorah Pali, the mother of Ya'acov Yisrael and Asher, may their memories be for a blessing. You know, her sweet, innocent, beautiful 6 and 8 year old sons were so viciously cut down in this horrible terrorist car ramming attack last week. And her husband is still in the hospital, fighting for his life. HaShem should heal him. And so, here's Miriam, you know, at the home of poor Dvorah, who's nearly in the identical situation that Miriam was in just a few years ago. And here's what Miriam Peretz said to Dvorah as she sat on the floor mourning her sons. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7KrgPPoZKA>)



None of us were asked if he wants to live. None of us were asked when he will pass. That's in God's hands. And I want to tell you how I actually learned from King David. When his son was sick, the King sat on the floor. He didn't even eat, he didn't drink. He literally mourned, because the child was sick and he was praying for him. And when his servants came to him and told him the child died, the first word written there in the Tanakh, that's the word that you need.



That God willing will enable you and bless you to be able to do – Vayakum. He stood up. How do we get up? He stood up! And he got dressed and he ate. And the servant said, “Your Majesty, when the boy was sick, you didn’t eat. You didn’t drink. But when we told you the boy passed away, you get up?” And he replied with these powerful words, “The boy is no longer. Can I continue to mourn for him?” These boys, these angels, they are there in heaven. They have a father. A father that will care for them. Their spirit is here. Their spirit unites us. At the end, we all pass. But the boys are no more, so I continue. And God gives us strength every day. I have buried two boys and a husband. But still every day and I raised kids and grandchildren and joyous occasions. And

God opens up gates and we learn even more ways to connect with Him, specifically in the moments of deepest despair, we come closer to Him. (Dvorah speaks) “You are giving us strength.” (Miriam continues) No, are strengthening us. (Dvorah speaks) “I’m gaining strength! I see someone here who ‘got up.’” (Miriam continues) To get up, although to get up takes time, it’s not immediate. Soon all these people will leave and we’re at home and then we open up their closets and you have no idea what comes over a mother when she sees their clothing and their beds. There are going to be days that are not easy. (end of video)

To see how beautiful tapping into the grief and the journey and the process of King David. And you know, she sang to her. She had the audacity, only she could really say to this woman, “Stand up! Stand up! We have work to do, we have light to bring to the world.”

And here’s a clip. I’m only playing it because it’s from CNN and it’s in English and you can hear it, even if it’s very small. Of all the places, of how Dvorah, herself, responded to the tragedy:

(video)



She has lost two of what she calls her most precious jewels. But somehow, Deborah Pali still has strength and her faith. These children were given to us as gifts, treasures to cherish, she tells reporters, as she clutches photos of 5 year old Ya’acov and 8 year old Asher, plowed down on Friday at a bus stop, just around the corner in what is really, authorities say, was a terror attack, carried out by a

Palestinian driver. Pali says she reached the scene to see paramedics administering CPR on one of her sons.



“We understood we were getting close to the place of death,” she says. Her two boys, buried side by side in Jerusalem, which has become the flash-point in the current wave of violence sweeping the area. But this grieving mother, who believes her

sons were killed for being Jewish, calling for peace and prayer. "Don't look for someone to blame, don't look for revenge," she implores. "We're in a place where there is a message from God. They have taken our sweet boys, the innocent. So that we will be stronger." Pali says she doesn't need to worry about her children anymore. Now, in heaven. Asking for prayers for her husband, injured in the attack, still hospitalized, under sedation. Six other children at home. She calls for these sacrifices taken from the people from Israel should not be sacrificed in vain. "Take this sacrifice," she says, "this sacrifice will bring God's redemption." CNN, Jerusalem

I'm not going to pick apart CNN's annoying usage of words, that's not what this is about. The reason I'm sharing this with you is because, you know the words I shared in our last Fellowship together, you know, have been really echoing in my head and haunting me since I said them. I don't know if you know what I'm referring to, but you know I was talking about my questions regarding faith in terms of the plastic car windows that I was having installed to protect my wife and children from boulders and stones, as well as the bars I was having installed to protect them from terrorists. And I remember saying something in that Fellowship, I don't remember the exact words, implying that something bad, God-forbid, if something bad happened to my family, that's not a test that I was ready to be called upon for. Do you remember when I said that? So it's just been haunting me, those words. I don't know, I was just sharing my heart and that's just what came out. And so it was true for me at the time. But like as if we get to decide. As if we know what we're ready for. As if we know what we're capable of. Only HaShem really knows these things.

And I think that the reason those words are echoing in my head is because it just didn't sound like me. That's not how I perceive myself. I can never remember ever saying anything like that. But you know, at the time, it was so real, I've just been thinking about it a lot. Because if it's true, you know that HaShem only uses those people that have these deep reserves of faith and trust in their hearts, that they'll be able to shine such a light from such crippling darkness. And from that sort of childish place, it doesn't seem like the Torah incentivizes us to do the work that we're doing here in this Fellowship. Because if we are successful at strengthening our faith and our trust in HaShem. If we are faithful in building up the courage and the trust to rise and say, "Hineni," you know, here I am, no matter what HaShem throws our way. Then HaShem may just call on us for such a test. And who wants that? You know?

And I think I was saying last week, you know, I'm not there, HaShem. I'm just not there. I wouldn't be able to handle it. Please don't test me like that. And like I said, those words have been weighing heavily on me ever since cause it doesn't seem true, it doesn't seem consistent with who I am or at least who I aspire to be. And so I was praying about this a lot and wrestling with it, where I'm holding and where I'm standing. And then this past Wednesday, the same day that this whole thing happened with Akiva, Dvash came home from her kindergarten and she walked in the door and my heart stopped. Her mouth was so swollen that she couldn't even close it. There was blood all over her shirt. It was horrifying. It was horrifying. It turns

out that she was on a tiule, like a little hike with her little kindergarten friends and she fell on her face on this wooden beam and we didn't even realize it, the teacher didn't realize it, but she actually totally lost her tooth. Her tooth just flew out, her front, middle tooth, gone. And you know I wanted to actually show you pictures here, but last second, Shaena asked me not to share them. That you know, she said I couldn't get Dvash's approval, the poor little girl, she deserves her privacy and she may be sad that I shared that someday because it's not a very flattering picture of her. So, Shaena said I could share this picture of Dvash eating her first frozen yogurt after we brought her back from the dentist.



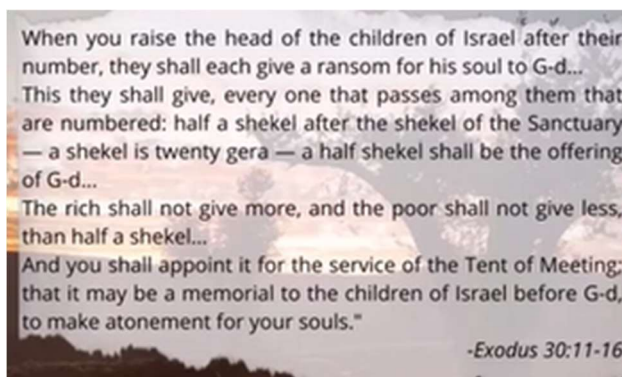
So, that's a nice picture to share. It doesn't really convey the horror of what I was experiencing. It doesn't look so bad in that picture, but when she walked in the house, I was so horrified that I couldn't even hold back the tears. And it was the first thing of its kind, of witnessing something like that with Dvash. So I had to turn away and cry so she wouldn't see me.

And then, you know, to imagine the magnitude of what Miriam Peretz faced. What Jeremy was facing. You know, the potential possibilities. You know, what Dvora Pali is facing right now. I mean these just be super heroes of faith. And made me think of the whole, of Dvash waddling around, missing her front tooth for a few years until her grown-up teeth come in. It's just not that big of a deal. You know, it just sort of put it into perspective for me. But it turned out also to be an opportunity for me to work it through. Because I really was working this through, through this past week. And maybe HaShem gives us the little tests here and there to build us up where we are at. You know maybe someone losing an arm is roughly equivalent in pain to someone else stubbing their toe. I don't know. But you know, it was an opportunity for me to work it through, to reflect on the gratitude that my sweet little girl would be just fine. And to consider the fact that it really is out of my hands. And that Dvash isn't mine, and she doesn't belong to me and Shiloh isn't mine and Shaena isn't mine, nothing is mine. I'm not even mine. My life is a gift I'm essentially entrusted with as well. Everything we have, we feel like we have and own is really a gift that we've been entrusted with, on loan, for safe keeping from HaShem. I'm realizing it's the only key to true happiness because if there is something that we are simply not willing to give up to HaShem. There's some part of our lives that we don't...essentially that we don't trust HaShem. If there's an area that we're riddled with fear and anxiety, the punishment for that... not even punishment. The consequences of that, is the lack of faith itself. Because it's impossible to have the emotional bandwidth available to truly love and to truly be happy and to truly be present if we're so crippled by fear and anxiety and potential life. Is this resonating with any of you? This is just like, yeah, that this is ... Rivkah, yes, I saw a big hand-raising there.

Cause the more we're actually at place of being willing to say, "hineni," here I am, for whatever challenge HaShem sends our way, the more we'll be able to experience you know presence of mind and true peace and true happiness. We don't need to know HOW we will get through whatever devastating challenges to life will inevitably send our way. We don't need to know how. All we need to know is that whatever comes our way, HaShem will give us the wisdom and the strength when we need it at that time. Not only to get through the challenge, but with prayer and with a lot of Divine compassion, we can not only get through it, but to serve Him through it. To release and to elevate and to liberate the sparks of light from whatever darkness that we may face.

You know it brings us to one of the special dimensions of this Shabbat. This Shabbat was actually a special Shabbat in which we have two Torah scrolls. And read from two different portions of the Torah. And for those congregations that have only one Torah, you know like ours out here in Judea on the Arugot Farm, the way it works is after reading the first portion of the reading, meaning the entirety of the portion of Mishpatim, two men come up and they grab each side of the Torah and they just keep rolling it until they get to the next portion that's to be read. Which you know, wouldn't have been a problem this week as both portions are in the book of Exodus. Anyways, I'm just sort of sharing details of the backstory of how things in the synagogue because I know many of you are so interested and curious and thirsty to know all of this stuff.

Anyways, this Shabbat was called Parshat Shekalim, Shabbat Shekalim, after the reading of the Torah portion of Shekalim in the Torah that we find in Exodus, chapter 30. So just a brief background here. When the beit hamikdash, when the Temple stood, each two contributed a half shekel to the Temple. Tabitha keep that up cause we're not there yet. Contributed a half shekel to the Temple, maintaining the Temple, fixing it up, vessels and other things. So while that half shekel donation was only really due on the first of Nissan, they started reminding the nation on the first of Adar. So the Shabbat BEFORE the first of Adar, which was this Shabbat, being that we celebrate the New Moon of Adar on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week, we read the verses from Exodus, chapter 30 about when Moses took the first half-shekel contribution from the nation of Israel. And so here it is inside, I didn't put every word in there:



So this half a shekel, you know there's so many deep meanings in here. Twenty gera, there's a whole teaching that could be another 20 minutes that we don't have, just going into that. But let's just, on a very superficial level, I just want to share this half-shekel contribution was actually instituted, interestingly enough as an atonement for worshipping the golden calf, which our sages



tell us, was sort of confusing to Moshe... for obvious reasons. First and foremost would be that a sin as serious and as historic as the golden calf, just giving a half a coin? You know giving a coin, let alone half a coin would be enough of an offering for the redemption of someone's soul, for that sin?

So our sages teach us that this symbolized that a Jew without HaShem is fundamentally unfilled and incomplete. You know HaShem and the nation of Israel are two halves that only together form a complete whole. And when we worship idols and we stray from HaShem, we are fragmenting our souls and cutting them off from their source, from our Creator in the most fundamental way and we're just half an entity, we're half a being.

But on another level, we've discussed before, the Jews are not allowed to be counted. You know, for it's only the King himself that can count his most precious diamonds and jewels. And so King David, as you remember probably, was severely punished in the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of Samuel, the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter. Because, I don't understand the psychology of it, but his evil inclination led him to take a census, even though he knew it was wrong. And so he was punished and he wanted to fall into the hands of HaShem and not into the hands of man. But this all reminds us of a truth that's become so abstract and you know hard to grasp and internalize. Which is that on a certain level, a Jew only measures his worth and national presence by his contribution to the Temple. To the holy Temple. That's how central the Temple was in the minds and hearts of the nation. That's how central the Temple is to the commission of the Jewish people. That's how we judge our presence, our population, who we are.

And so starting with Moses and carrying over to Temple times, you know beginning on the new month of Adar, but culminating with the new month of Nissan, each Jew would donate this half shekel and through it they were counted and blessed. Meaning that the people themselves weren't counted. Rather they were counted indirectly, through the half-shekel that they contributed. And so to me it also says something a little bit more existential. You know one of the messages there is that while a rich man...and I've met a lot of them...that actually get convinced by the illusions of this world...that you know, he's actually worth more. That he's actually more important. And a poor man may actually start believing that he's worth less, inherently lesser than. And HaShem reminds us, that in His eyes, you know, it should be obvious. In His eyes, none of that matters one bit, as far as our worth. You know, we are all His children and He loves each and every one of us. And on some level, I think even the poorer of us, if we're still able to give a tenth of our money to charity. And we're able to move forward in faith. That's a higher level of service to God than the billionaire would do in his thing in his yacht.

But anyways, so we've never actually stopped this practice. We continue to until today, it's just changed since the destruction of the Temple. Now, today, on the fast of Esther, we have the practice of giving that half-shekel, which goes to charity. And so again, you know, I guess why

are we talking about this right now? Because this Shabbat is the Shabbat before the month of Adar when the reminders for this important commandment started being broadcast to the nation. And so to bring it together, I don't think it's a coincidence that this is all happening now as we're on the verge of welcoming in the month of Adar in just a few days. Because you know, as we know...I think last year I sang this song to you...Misha, misha....I'm not going to sing it because Jeremy will make fun of me. But whoever enters the month of Adar...who really allows themselves to enter and experience this month, increases in their happiness. Whoever goes into the month of Adar, magnifies their joy in the world.

Which brings us back to one of the initial questions. How can HaShem command an emotion? How can increasing our happiness be an actual commandment from HaShem? And the answer again, to go back, HaShem can only legislate emotion when that emotion is truth. Only when achieving that emotion is within our power and our ability by internalizing the truth of the Torah. And why of all months is it Adar, when we increase our joy? I believe it's because of that, you know, great mystical holiday, smack in the month of Adar, Purim. A holiday which is the clearest manifestation of HaShem's relationship with our world and our lives today than any other. Because as you know, much like our world today, much like our lives today, Purim is the only holiday where HaShem's name is not expressly mentioned, even once. And there's not one nature-defying miracle. It all happens as nature runs its course. And we see God behind, orchestrating everything. Much like our lives today, right? Things seem so dark, and they're only becoming darker.

Yet we see that behind the scenes HaShem was directing the events more perfectly than we could ever imagine. That HaShem was using what seemed like the worst curses to bring about the greatest blessing. That He was using the darkest, darkness to bring about the most brilliant light. And internalizing them as such a form in our lives, well that is the secret to happiness. By opening our hearts to that deepest truth, we don't need to try to be happy. Happiness is just a natural consequence of internalizing and living that truth.

And that's why I'm so grateful to Miriam Peretz and Dvorah Pali and so many others and really, so many of you. So many of you who shine such a brilliant light of trust and faith from within the darkness. You know I don't know for sure why HaShem chooses the people He chooses to shine the greatest light, but I can't help but to see and believe that it's those historic heroes of faith that live their lives constantly ready to say, "Hineni." Here I am, HaShem, here I am, ready and willing and eager to serve You with every fiber of my being with everything I have, b'chol meodecha, with all of my greatest everything, I am ready to serve You and to shine Your light into the world.

Ok, so I guess that's what I have right now. And I love you guys, keep reaching out, please keep reaching out, please stay connected. Please, HaShem should shine that light in your hearts and you should shine your light to all of the world. Your light of faith and of trust and HaShem

should strengthen us to be able to say, “Hineni, here I am HaShem,” more than ever. Really, we need to be here for each other and to inspire each other and to bless each other and to strengthen each other in this crazy world that we’re living in. And so may we see more blessings coming from this Fellowship. And speaking of blessings, here we are. It is my greatest joy to bless all of you with the blessing of Aaron the High Priest.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

May HaShem bless you and protect you. May HaShem shine His light and His Face upon you. And be gracious to you. May HaShem lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Love you all, thank you so much. Please be in touch, stay connected. Shalom, shalom.