

Session 128

Terumah - Tapping into Happiness

26 February 2023

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

Ari

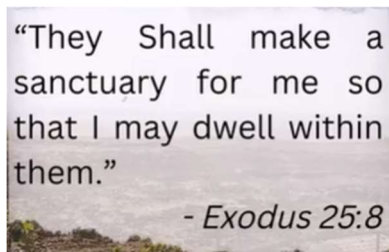
Shalom my friends. Shalom, give me a wave. Ok, we're all together now and it is so good to see all of you. I just love seeing your beautiful faces. And each time, I feel like I'm matching more names and faces to the prayer requests that I have here that has become like a siddur for me, like a prayer book for me. And then I'm putting it all together and making all the connections, and I really appreciate that. And what powerful, powerful heart-wrenching prayers so many of you have been sharing. Thank you. Really, thank you for trusting me, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share in your...in your pain and in your joy and in your journeys. And for giving me the opportunity to pray for you and pray with you. And you know, in light of these prayer requests, I thought I would open up, you know, with our own prayer.

HaShem, please answer all of our prayers, and there's so much pain, please dry up all of our tears. Please, HaShem, bring light to those places of darkness, those places of darkness in the world and in our lives. Those places of darkness that we can't even imagine. Like being in there, but HaShem, we know that that's where the greatest light is hidden. Please HaShem, reveal that light and release that light. We need so much healing. HaShem, it's our greatest desire that the teachings that we learn here in this Fellowship and that the Torah that we learn in general throughout our lives, that it can pierce through the calluses and it breaks down the walls and the barriers around our hearts. Please allow us to break through those walls and those barriers so that we can truly make a Mishkan, a tabernacle, a dwelling place for You within us to serve as Your humble, loving servants through which you can shine Your light to the world. Please HaShem, may it be so. Amen.

Ok my friends, spoiler alert. That's what the Fellowship is about, it's about building a sanctuary within our hearts and shining a light of joy and happiness to the world. Because you know we need it now more than ever. Just in Israel, just a few hours ago, there was a horrible, murderous shooting of two Jews, brothers actually from Har Bracha that were murdered on their way to Har Bracha. HaShem should console their families, HaShem should avenge them. It's so horrible, so horrible. And there's so much darkness and we really need to build these sanctuaries in our hearts because that is the reason for all of creation. And I know it may seem like in so many of our Fellowships we say that that's what creation is all about. And so the whole purpose is about...but really the closer we come to the truth, the more everything really seems to converge.

And so, you know, as we know, the sages teach that HaShem created all of this, this whole world because He desired a dwelling place in the lowest realms, in our world, whatever that

means. And the only place that HaShem can truly dwell down here today, in the non-tabernacle, non-temple times, the only place that HaShem could really dwell in the way that He seeks to dwell is exclusively in our hearts. And as a matter of fact, you know, that's what the entire book of Exodus is all about. I used to think, you know, when we got to these Torah portions, ok, now we're at the whole Tabernacle thing, stories pretty much over. Right? This is when it gets a little bit, God forbid, boring. That's the way I used to feel. And I think many of you could identify with that. But the truth is, that the deeper we dig, and the more dimensions we explore, we see that here's where the real story begins. The book of Exodus is not really about the exodus. Only the beginning talks about the exodus because the exodus is not the true purpose of the book. The exodus was not the end goal. The exodus was the means to the end, but not the end in and of itself. And so what is the end? What's the purpose? The Mishkan, the Tabernacle, the dwelling of HaShem in this world. That's what it's all about. This portion shares with us the true purpose. You know as we see in chapter 25, verse 8:



Within them, is the purpose of the Tabernacle for HaShem to dwell. Not within it, not within the Tabernacle, but within us! And so, if that is the purpose, so how do we do that? That's the million-dollar question. Perhaps the most important question that we can ask ourselves in this lifetime is that one. How do we make our hearts, our beings, our very essences, into

dwelling places for HaShem.

So before I dive into the portion which I'm very excited to do, I want to first introduce the esteemed Tehila Gimpel...Jeremy just walked in. Jeremy, permission for Tehila to go first? Ok, the esteemed Tehila Gimpel who wants to share with us her insights about exactly that question. Shalom, Tehila, so here you are.

Tehila

So, I want to talk a little bit about the meaning of this month and how we can prepare ourselves to go into it. As many of you know, but maybe some of you don't, there's a famous saying that when the month of Adar comes in, we increase our happiness. Everyone knows this. I mean if you go into any school in Israel, the kids are singing Mishe-Mishe-Mishe-Mishe-Mishenichnas Adar, whenever the month of Adar comes, we increase our happiness. It's sort of just a given. Of course, in the month of Adar, we're supposed to be extra happy. But then I started thinking for a moment, like why? But seriously, "why?" Like Pesach, Passover, that's a big deal. But we're happy on Passover, we never think that we need to be happy for all of the month of Nissan. Being happy is a responsibility, I don't know maybe for some of you, it comes naturally. For me, I have to work at it. Like, don't forget to be happy! So you know, why not be happy in the whole month of Tishrei because of Sukkot and Rosh Hashana, and Shmini Atzeret and Yom Kippur, there's so many great holidays. But we don't have to be happy for all of the non-holiday days in Tishrei. So what's up with this?

So, I started kind of in my nerdy way, researching this subject. It turns out there's no like super ancient source. I mean all of our sources are ancient. But you know in the Megillah, in the Scroll of Esther there's no mention of needing to be happy throughout the month of Adar. And in all of the Mishnah, there's no mention of needing to be happy in the month of Adar. It appears for the first time in the Talmud. What does appear in the Mishnah, in the Tractate of Ta'anit, is a statement about a different month. The Mishnah states, when the month of Av comes in, we need to have less happiness. And that kind of makes sense, right? Because even though we know the 9th of Av is the day of the destruction of the Temple, so of course we're in terrible mourning on the 9th of Av. The 9th of Av didn't just happen in a moment. The destruction of the Temple didn't just happen like, boom! There was first a siege and then the siege, you know...was breached the walls and then in the inner walls and there's, you know, this sort of development towards the final destruction. And so, it makes sense that from the beginning of the month we would already be sort of lowering our enthusiasm and getting into the sort of down mood of the month of Av. And that's all the Mishnah says.

Then comes the Talmud. When the Talmud comes to interpret the Mishnah, the Talmud says, "As we are sad in the month of Av, when the month of Av begins, so too must we be happy when the month of Adar comes in." And then, a different Rabbi in the Talmud asks, "Well what does that happiness mean?" And then he says, "Well, if you're having some sort of legal conflict with a Gentile, you should avoid going to trial in the month of Av and you should try to sort of push your trial into the month of Adar."

Now I know I've shared with you some strange Talmudic passages, but you guys have to admit that this one might be the strangest. We're all just taking it as a given that we need to be happy in the month of Adar. But there isn't any source in the Mishnah for it, and then the Talmud says, "Because of the month of Av, we need to be that we're sad in the month of Av and we need to be happy in the month of Adar." And then it says, "What kind of happiness? If you're having a legal conflict, then you should choose to have...like you'll have good luck or something in that month."

And therefore we're all running around dancing and singing that we're happy in Adar. You guys have to admit that that's extra strange, even for the kind of sources that I like to bring you guys. Now you'll say, "But Tehila, go look at Rashi. Rashi will explain everything." So we look at Rashi and Rashi says, "Well, the month of Adar, it has Purim, and then the month of Nisan has Pesach, and those are related to one another. And so therefore we're happy."

And you're like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. We've been busy trying to figure out how Adar is related to the month of Av. Now Rashi, you're connecting Adar to the month of Nisan, and then you're telling us that the kind of happiness we have...you know there's certain types of happiness that we have on holidays. Maybe it's having a celebratory meal, special prayers. You're saying the

special kind of happiness that we need to have now is that we're gonna have good luck in these times because somehow all this is related to Pesach. That is super strange."

I think maybe the key to understanding this is actually a different midrash in the Tractate of Megillah. There it says, you know, it's interesting, the Megillah, it doesn't say that Haman just threw a lottery to see which day it should be. It said first he tried to figure out the month and then the day. And he specifically went first to the month because the month had significance. It wasn't like he was just picking a day. He wanted to first focus in on a month that would be good for destroying Israel. And the Midrash says that when it fell on Adar, he was extraordinarily happy because he knew that Moshe Rabbenu, that Moses had died in the month of Adar. So he said that that means, that's a bad luck month for the Jewish people. Therefore he was happy. But the Midrash says that the joke was on him because he didn't realize that the righteous are known to be born and to die at the same day very often. And so Moshe actually also as born in Adar, meaning that the beginning of our salvation started in Adar as well. So you, Haman, think that that's our dark time, but it's actually our light time.

Now, if we sort of try to bring this all together, what does that mean? It means that there's a connection between the type of salvation that we have on Passover, the type of salvation that we have on Adar. And the Talmud is trying to draw our attention to a certain type of happiness that we're supposed to draw in these months. Ok? And then it's also related to the month of Av and this destruction of the Temple, but like a mirror opposite.

So let's try to bring all these ideas together. What is it trying to tell us? Does that mean, that you know, is it trying to tell us, well you know there's good luck months and bad luck months? Is it like a horoscope? That seems to be Haman's approach. That doesn't seem to be our approach. I think we put this all together, what do we know? We have holidays that celebrate different things, but the real holidays of salvation, where it looked like our neck was in the noose and we were about to be destroyed...but then HaShem saved us, mercifully, those are Purim and Pesach. We have Hanukkah too, but Hanukkah was a 26-year war, and you know the day that we celebrate it was for the miracle of the oil, it wasn't like the specific day of the salvation. We have two holidays that mark real salvation.

On the other hand, we have the month of Av where HaShem dealt with us...less on the attribute of mercy, but more on the attribute of justice. Where we got what we deserved. You know, we sinned and we had destruction. And so that's a time, you know, what are the sages teaching us? That when you have a month, like the month of Av, it's a time for caution and reflection and realizing that you need to have a fear of heaven, and you know to tread very, very cautiously and carefully.

When the month of Adar begins, what is the Midrash telling us? Adar is a time that lends itself to salvation. It's a time that HaShem set into sort of the calendar where He is extra generous in

showing us His mercy. That He's with us, that He will deal with us miraculously, even when things seem to be lost. Why is Rashi connecting Purim to Passover? Because he's saying, look carefully, look at this Midrash. Pay attention. It's true that the final salvation of Pesach, Passover, happened in the month of Nisan. But when did it begin? It began with the birth of Moshe. When were all of the plagues? They were all in the month of Adar. So he's saying, pay attention. Even the salvation of Passover is really rooted in the month of Adar.

And so, that moment was set into time and he's saying that when our enemies look at those times, they don't really understand our relationship with HaShem. They don't understand that HaShem, through dark times, accompanies us and lifts us up with mercy. And so, he didn't understand that relationship, he just looked at the darkness of the month of Adar and thought this is going to be a great time for annihilation. He didn't understand. And so, when we look at Adar, we see these times in our history where HaShem said, "I see that you're in the darkest place, but I'm going to save you. I'm going to lift you up." And so when the Talmud is saying, that's a good time to have your conflict...specifically it says in the Talmud, a conflict with a Gentile. What does that mean, a conflict with a Gentile? Is that just like, "Well, I was having some lawsuit, let me do it in Adar." What it's trying to say is that when you have a conflict and you feel like all is lost, focus in on the message of the month of Adar. Try to bring that into Adar and connect with that special time where HaShem is so generous with His love to us, specifically in our relationship with the nations that would seek our destruction, with people that would seek our destruction. And so, it's a time for not a happiness of, "Oh yeah, you know, let's drink and merry make and eat food. It's a totally different kind of happiness. The Talmud is saying, "Don't think that this is the regular happiness. This is the happiness that comes from that quiet confidence and knowledge that even in dark times, HaShem is going to come and save us like He did in Egypt and like He did in the book of Esther.

So with that, I wish us a Chodesh Tov, a blessed new month of Adar that we go in and experience in all of our dealings and in all of our frightening...you know, interactions, that we feel that energy of Adar, giving us that emunah and bitachon, that faith in HaShem that He is with us, just like He was with our fathers. Bye guys, have a great month.

Jeremy

Hey, shalom everybody. Thank you, Tehila, that was beautiful. I'm in the guest house in the Farm. You can see Ari's face kind of coming in and out. There he is, behind us, there he is. We're all together now. Today has been an absolute mad day. Can everyone hear me? Is the internet connection here working? Can I have some thumbs up here? Yeah, ok, good. Excellent. Thank you so much, Eric, it's so nice to see you all the way in Colorado. I miss you my friend. Thank you for that thumbs up.

And so, here's what's going on. Today, we've had a small Torah group from North Carolina, a mega church with 100,000 members from Dallas, Texas. We right now have 44 Jewish mothers

from America, that are here. And I think the idea there is brilliant. It's like you strengthen the mothers, you strengthen the entire home. And it's just been a packed day of intense teaching and touring on the Arugot Farm. I just got here and this is the month of happiness. That's what the month of Adar is. That's what Tehila is talking about and that's what I want to share with you today.

And I just got this message from one of our Fellowship members, Erin. And here's what she wrote to me: Good day, Jeremy. I hope this message finds you well. I wanted to send you a follow-up to the prayer requests I sent at the beginning of the Fellowship. I asked you to pray for a husband. Guess what? My husband and I met just about 10 weeks ago and we just got married. I wanted you all to celebrate in the joy of this answered prayer request. He is literally everything I asked HaShem for.

And so, I don't know, that just made my Adar happy...just really, really fun. Really, really awesome. And I just want to share like a spirit with you. Because it's hard to...like what does that mean that Adar is a happy month? Because there are spiritual powers that are encoded, almost like spiritual potentials, auspicious times for certain energies in the world. Elul is a time for renewal and self-reflection and kind of getting ready for the New Year. And Passover is a time of freedom to free ourselves from all of our slaveries. Adar is a time of happiness. I just want to show you this video that I just go sent from a Yeshiva, to see these young Jewish men growing up. Watch the energy here, and see if you can find any other young Jewish men or young men at all anywhere in the world that exude this type of holy, masculine, happy energy. Look at this video here:



There's nothing like that, I don't believe, anywhere in the world. And so, that's sort of the energy that's just in the air here. But it's not enough to just be in the air. Avoda. It's like a service of God. We have to work on it, because there's so many reasons to not be happy. There's a reason that we can be concerned, we can be nervous, we can be upset, we can be anxious. We can be, you know, there's like we can always choose what to think about, and we don't always necessarily want to choose about the things that make us happy. But Adar is saying, we're actually told, this is the time to crank out the happiness. To bring it out within us.

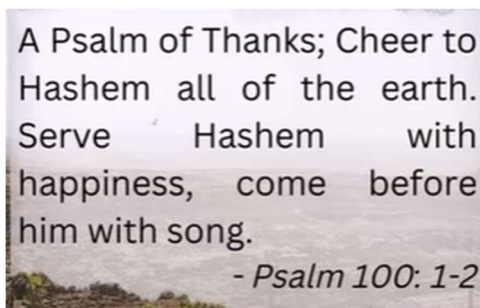
And one of the things that makes me happiest is just looking Israel. So someone sent me this beautiful picture of Israel about a hundred some odd years ago and Israel today.



That on the left there, in 1909, those people standing on the sand dunes, that's Tel Aviv in 1909. And that one right there, that's Tel Aviv in 2020. Like look at what is happening in the sand dunes of Israel! It just very often, you know, there's a saying in Psalms.

God is good for His love endures forever. *Ki l'olam chasdo.*

Now His love endures forever...forever isn't necessarily the right word there. *L'olam*, means an eternity. So sometimes you need like a little bit of an eternal view to really experience God's love. You need the bird's eye view to see the trajectory about where we're going. And to see those 20 Jews sitting on the sand dunes in Israel trying to figure out how they're going to build the first new city in the land of Israel. And then to see what Israel has built over the last 100 years. To me, that just makes me happy. But that's not it. I want to now take it to another level. This was a Torah actually that Ari taught me, and I think about it all the time. I've actually...it's a little chapter in my book. I think it's so important. But if you open up to Psalm 100, look at what it says:

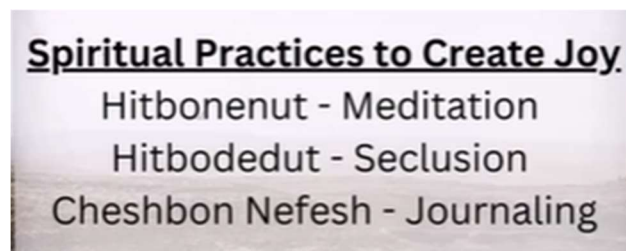


Serve HaShem with happiness. I always thought that that meant, "Listen. There's a lot of ways to serve God. Take care of the orphan, take care of the widow, feed the poor, help those that need help, celebrate Shabbat, eat kosher food. And when you are serving God, serve HaShem with happiness." I thought that that's what it's saying. And I think that that is a legitimate way of reading that.

But King David says something so much deeper. It's saying, "Serve HaShem." How? How do we serve God? Serve HaShem with happiness. That is the service. God wants us to be happy. That is the service. It's not the outcome, and it's not just a branch. The service of God is like, if you are living an inspired, happy, meaningful life, and you're filled with happiness. That is the service of God. God created the world to bestow His good. And when He sees that we're happy, that is the service. That's all He wants.

And so, I want to make this really practical, and I want to give over three methods that I've been learning about in a beautiful book about how engender happiness according to the

ancient Jewish spiritual practices. There's three that are really powerful. You can do all three of them, you can choose to do one of them, but as we enter into Adar before Purim, this is the service. The service is the happiness. So how do we like generate that? What can we do to actually bring that into our lives? So there are three spiritual practices that the Musar movement kind of gave over. And the Musar movement was kind of established maybe kind of gave birth in the 1800's. And it was a beautiful...kind of squashed really by the Nazis. And it's almost kind of disappeared and forgotten about. But it was a beautiful kind of bud that came out of Europe saying, "You know, the Torah is really trying to mold us into the people we were meant to be. And so, how do we really focus on that side of our service of God?" And I said these three practices are amazing tools if you want to engender them. So let's work on it with happiness. Can we get them up on the screen please?



So the first practice is called hitbonenut. Hitbonenut I translated it as meditation, but really, the word is l'hitbone, is to look. And what they're saying there is, "Take one verse from the Bible, one verse from the sages of Israel, one verse that something meaningful in

your life, and look at it. Think about it, chant it, sing it. You know, sometimes my little kids, they say, "Abba, you know your music isn't so modern. It doesn't have enough words. Your music is usually just like two or three verses from the Bible that repeat each other. And I'm like, "Well, I'm not really singing popular music. I'm singing Jewish music. I'm teaching people hitbonenut. I'm teaching them how to take one verse of prayer and to really sing it over and over again as you think about it and you look at it and you study that verse and if you're focusing on happiness, choose the ones that bring joy to your life. Think about things that you're grateful for.

You know, sometimes I walk outside in the mountains here, and I just say the words, "Thank You," over and over and over again. In English by the way, not in Hebrew. Say, "Thank You, thank You, Thank You, thank You, thank You for my wife, thank You for my life, thank You for my children, thank You for my Farm, thank You for my Fellowship, thank You for my friends, thank You, thank You, thank You, just over..." And it's so natural to say, "Thank You." And it inspires me. It's just so obviously wired that we were created to give thanks. And who is this You that I'm so naturally saying thank You to? It's just so natural to live in a state of gratitude.

And then what did Psalm 100 say? A Psalm of thanks, and then serve HaShem with joy. So hitbonenut, meditation on verses of gratitude, that's going to bring out joy because we can think about the things that we don't have, or we can really focus on the gratitude on the things that we do.

The next one, is called hitbodedut. And hitbodedut literally comes from the Hebrew word, boded, which means “alone.” And what that’s saying is you need to have time alone. You need to have time away from your house, you need to have time away from your children, you need to have time away from your husband, away from your wife, away from the TV, away from your phone, away from people, away from distractions. Find a place where you can be alone. Maybe you can even do it in the car. Maybe you can do it in a forest behind your house, or a field, or on a trail around a lake. Or for us in the mountains, it’s kind of easy, I just like walk outside, and just like walk out a little bit into the mountains. I’m already all alone. But being alone is so important because the thoughts that are inside, instead of constantly having stimulus, that you are listening to what the media is telling you, pinging on your phones, notifications on your phones. Finally the stuff that’s on the inside is able to come to thought, the stuff that’s inside you is able to come to like forefront of your consciousness. And in those places, when you’re alone, that’s when you can practice the hitbodedut. That’s how all of my music album came, from me just being alone with my guitar in the mountains. And then melodies came, just more gratitude and more gratefulness. And that is the second, arguably the most important spiritual practice. Every prophet, every single one, they were alone when they were receiving. They’re just in their own thoughts, in their own minds, connecting to God in their own way. And the world is so distracting, now the world has never been more distracting. One hundred years ago, compared to where we are today, it’s like we are literally aliens. To compare it to the people like our great grandparents. They can’t even imagine the amount of things that are thrown at us. Every day, billboards, and signs, and magazine, and phones, and TV’s, and computers. Alone, detach, alone, seclusion, hitbodedut.

The third practice, can we get it up on the screen please? The third practice is called, cheshbon nefesh. And cheshbon nefesh is soul searching. But this particular cheshbon nefesh is in journaling. Actually taking a journal, taking your thoughts, and then bringing it into words. Journaling the things that you’re grateful for. Now I told you that I try to practice this every day. Seven things that I’m grateful for with Tehila. I don’t always able to do it because I have ADHD, and I’m always doing other things. But I’ve never lost the goal of every day thanking Tehila for seven things that she does. And the days that I do that, and the days that I remember, oh, those are the best days. They only generate happiness in me. I become happier with her because I’m noticing the wonderful things that she’s doing for me, that she didn’t have to do. I’m just grateful for. And then it makes her happy because she’s hearing that I’m being grateful, and I’m recognizing and seeing the things that she’s doing that may have just been taken for granted or may have just been ignored.

And so, actually writing down, writing down the things that we’re grateful for, are the things that is like the engine to trigger our happiness. And so, this is the time of year to take the thoughts, to take the ideas, but then the sages of Israel, the wisdom is so beautiful. This is the month to like crank out the joy, sing, dance, to be happy. And so I want to bless everyone in the Fellowship that they take those three practices, at least one in this month and then be

blessed with happiness. Be blessed with Torah, be blessed with Adar as we celebrate the last geulah in the Bible. It's the last redemption. May that be a sign that we come to the last geulah in our times. Amen.

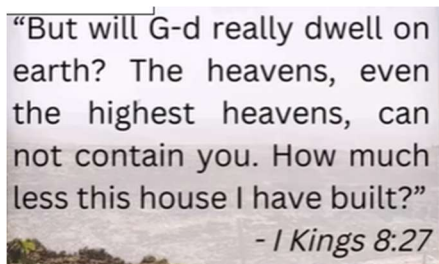
Ari

Alright. Take your happiness somewhere else, Gimpel. That was beautiful, thank you so much, Jeremy. Jeremy, wait. Jeremy, already on the phone. That would have been a problem. Ok, Jeremy tangles this up, I don't know exactly what he did here, but I'm gonna try to undo it. There we go, ok. So, Jeremy, Tehila, they both shared. Can you hear me everybody, give me a thumbs up. So they shared their ideas about joy, happiness, what it's all about. And you know, I'm sitting here listening, thinking to them, because I often feel conflicted about that message. Sometimes I'm like well, I feel like we may be setting themselves up for failure on some level. I don't know, we're going to work it through on this thing.

But, ok, we're talking about joy. Let's start here. I think the challenge that many of us have is that you know, is that we say that it's such a high level, such a service to HaShem, to be filled with joy, but when we position it like that, it's very difficult to do. Because joy isn't really the goal, right? Joy is the product the outcome, almost the gauge to know whether the real mission, the real purpose is being fulfilled. I want to see on your comments whether this is making sense to you. Meaning whether we're truly internalizing the knowledge that HaShem runs the world and everything is for the best, joy is the outcome of that. It's the product. Anyways, it's really intricately tied into the message in this week's Torah portion about the Tabernacle and Terumah.

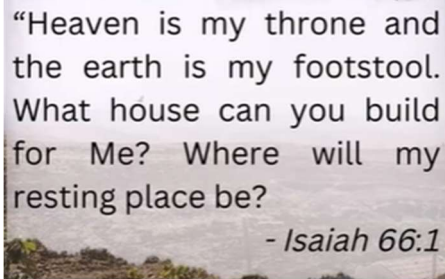
So before we dive in the first verse, I think it's worth taking a moment to reflect on the very idea of a Mishkan, of a tabernacle. Why is it necessary at all? If the truth is, as we say, ain ode milvado, there's nothing other than HaShem, then why is it necessary or even possible to have a house for HaShem?

So Rabbi Sacks summons the words of King Solomon from the inauguration of the Temple, and these words really strengthen the question itself. It's from the book of Kings, right? Chapter 8.



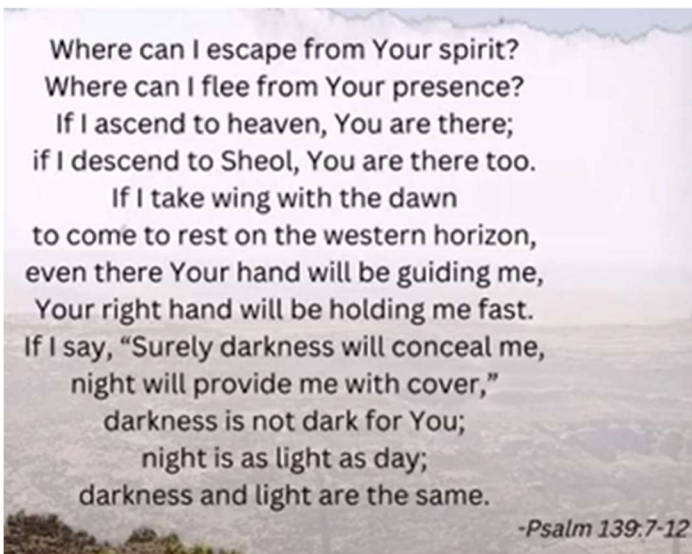
“But will G-d really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heavens, can not contain you. How much less this house I have built?”
- 1 Kings 8:27

Seems like it's sort of a difficult thing to say in the inauguration of the Temple, itself. And he actually strengthens the question further with...you know a quote that he brings from Isaiah, right?



“Heaven is my throne and
the earth is my footstool.
What house can you build
for Me? Where will my
resting place be?
- Isaiah 66:1

Now there's a verse that I had to share here because it strengthens me and it really fortifies me in my journey. And this is from the book of Psalms, chapter 139:



Where can I escape from Your spirit?
Where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, You are there;
if I descend to Sheol, You are there too.
If I take wing with the dawn
to come to rest on the western horizon,
even there Your hand will be guiding me,
Your right hand will be holding me fast.
If I say, “Surely darkness will conceal me,
night will provide me with cover,”
darkness is not dark for You;
night is as light as day;
darkness and light are the same.
-Psalm 139:7-12

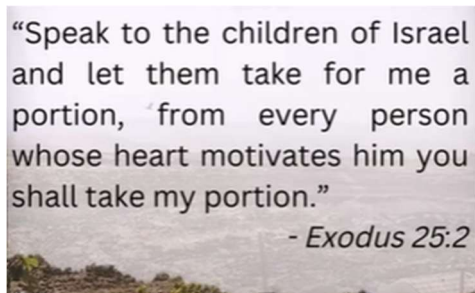
HaShem is everywhere. So why any of this Tabernacle thing? Right? Why is this Temple stuff necessary? The whole world is his Tabernacle, right? And I think that the answer is because while each of us strive to make a dwelling place for Hashem in our personal hearts, we also have a national mission. We have a collective identity as well. And the Tabernacle provided a meeting place where we as a nation, traveling through the lonely dangers of the desert, where we could come close to Hashem.

You know, as many of you know, on a chronological level, and I think this is pretty much universally agreed upon, the golden calf actually happened before the laws of the Tabernacle that we're reading right now. The principle that there's no, you know, before and after the Torah. HaShem organizes the Torah in a way that is thematically relevant, and not necessarily about what happened exactly when. And so our sages say that the sheer panic and terror the nation felt when Moshe disappeared up the mountain was so great, their loneliness was so overwhelming, that HaShem determined that there would be a place where they would always be able to come close and to feel close. That it was really a result of the golden calf that they needed this Tabernacle, that became very clear.

But what does that mean, right? To come close, to be close to HaShem? Aren't we always close to HaShem? Remember the famous story of the two fish in the water? And one says to the other, “Do you believe in water?” The other says, “I don't know, my grandfather did. I don't know if I believe in water.” There they are, immersed in water. So what does it mean to be close to HaShem, if we're all immersed in that water, immersed in HaShem? So we've talked about this before, but it's important enough and timely enough that I really think it's worth visiting again. Ok, so if there's ain ode milvedo, if there's nothing other than Hashem, then what does it mean to be close or far?

We're approaching the holiday of Purim as Tehila mentioned, Jeremy mentioned. What happens on Purim? We celebrate the forces of light overcoming the impending forces of darkness that seemed like they were going to emerge victorious. The righteous Mordecai overcomes the evil Haman. But if we're all immersed in God's undifferentiated oneness, then what makes Mordecai closer to HaShem than Haman? They're both totally immersed in HaShem's Oneness. So we get the question. Alright, and I think the answer that we've discussed before, is that in the spiritual realm, there is no physical distance. Physical distance is a construct of this world. And is ultimately an illusion, right? In the world of truth, closeness is similarity to...when you're similar to something, you're close to them and distance is difference from. So why is Mordecai closer to HaShem than Haman? Because by being a man of love and kindness and compassion and givingness, he's actually channeling HaShem's light into the world. Because HaShem is those things, and what HaShem is those things, but those attributes are HaShem's attributes, or among them. And what's closer than actually serving as a Tabernacle within which HaShem dwells and through He illuminates the world. What could be closer than that, than being an actual funnel. It's not like Hashem is next to us, He's through us, He's infusing us. He's channeling His light through us.

And that's why the first time the entire concept of the Mishkan, Tabernacle, is introduced is in chapter 25, verse 1 and 2. So it says:



The whole concept is introduced with the invitation for each and every person, right? Not the judges and the priests or the princes or the aristocracy, but kol ish, every single person. Every single person has a portion in the mishkan, has an opportunity to give to become a part of the greatest mission in the world, to build a dwelling place for God in the physical universe.

And so the verse begins, "Take for me a portion," which leads us to the famous question as you all know. Why does Hashem say, "take" from me a portion and not "give" to me a portion. And so the Sforno and others say that HaShem was speaking to the leaders who are tasked with collecting the free will donations. And while that's true, I think, on a simple level. On a deeper level, the message is that when you give to a truly godly Divine cause, when you give of yourself to HaShem, you actually are "taking." Right? When we give to HaShem, we end up receiving far more than we actually give.

You know, I'm sure everyone in this Fellowship can testify to that truth. Raise your hand if you have experienced that before. That when we really give of ourselves with God in mind, we end up feeling that we've received far more than we've given. And the word for donation here is the title of the portion itself, Terumah, which has the root word, "Rom," which means to uplift. Meaning that when you have the opportunity to give to HaShem, and you take that

opportunity, you seize that opportunity, you are the one that is elevated and uplifted through the experience. And interestingly enough, the Torah doesn't even say what the nation is being called to give towards until verse 8 in the portion, right? Meaning that the first seven verses describe "what" needs to be given. And only when we get to verse 8 do we even find out "why," what it's for. Only in verse 8 is the word, mikdash, Tabernacle even mentioned. Which is really counterintuitive. Usually when making a request, we first give the reasons, and only in the end do we make the actual ask, right?

When people come out to the Farm and they let me know that they're considering supporting us, I first take them around and share the biblical importance of what we're doing, and then the strategic military importance of what we're doing for the safety and security, not only of Judea but for all of Israel. And only afterwards, after I share all those reasons, do I share what it is that we need to further this mission. But that's not the case here. Here we're told everything that's needed, even before we find out what it's for. And I think that the reason for this is because ultimately Hashem wants us to love Him as He loves us, right? Unconditionally. Hashem doesn't want you know, dependent, conditional love. He wants our hearts. He wants our hearts, He wants us to love Him unconditionally, without knowing all the how's or the why's or any of the other details. And by being given the opportunity to give to HaShem after how much He's given to us, right? Jeremy's talking about just walking around saying, "Thank You, thank You, thank You, thank You." If we had the eyes, there would be something following each of those "thank You's." We may not see it, we may not have the eyes to see it, but we know that it's overwhelming. So when we have the opportunity to give HaShem after how much He's given us, by having the opportunity to give HaShem, not from a place of compulsion, but from a place of desire, well that is the greatest opportunity imaginable. And I think that is what makes the Tabernacle so beautiful in the eyes of HaShem. What makes it so beautiful to HaShem is that it is a gift from us. HaShem could provide it all very easily Himself, much more easily as a matter of fact, then it would take Him to ask us for anything. He could provide it for Himself, without the vulnerability of rejection that comes when you make any sort of request, or the disappointment that would happen when we probably would fall short in that, very likely. But that is the point. The point is that it comes from us. The greatest kindness HaShem gives us, is that He gives us the opportunity to give Him. Maybe it isn't even that we're told what we can give so that the Tabernacle is built, but maybe, maybe the whole idea is that the Tabernacle is built so that we have the opportunity to give to it. Right? So that we have the opportunity to give to HaShem in such a special way, that's why the Tabernacle needed to be built to begin with.

And this isn't true when it comes to the giving of the Tabernacle, but to any giving. This is true with the charity tithe that we even give today. How many of you try, maybe that's a personal question, you don't need to answer, but how many of you try to give...to tithe, to give to charity, to give that 10%? Right? I would say most of you, yes, I'm seeing all the hands go up and that doesn't shock me at all. You could even read the first verse, "Take from me a portion,

from every person whose heart motivates them to generosity, from him you shall take My portion.”

So Rav Biederman shares, “libo,” his heart, you read it like this. If you want to know what’s going on in his heart, then libo, in his heart, then take My terumah. Meaning that if you really want to know what’s going on in his heart, then see how he gives tzedakah, how he gives charity. When he gives tzedakah, what’s happening within him? Does he give it angrily? Resentfully? Begrudgingly? Or is he filled with happiness and joy and gratitude? Gratitude not only that he has the resources to be the giver and not the receiver, that’s a blessing that we often give people. You should always be blessed to be on the side of giving and not needing to receive. But also, that he has the opportunity to give. That there’s someone to whom he has the opportunity to give to.

You know Rav Shlomo Carlebach would always thank everybody when he gave them tzedakah, that they were willing to receive from him. That they gave him the opportunity. How someone gives their tithes, their charity, their tzedakah is indeed a gauge for their spiritual health. How one gives charity says far more about them than necessarily how much they give and who they give it to. Because you know, when things are tight and we’re already stressed and these are difficult times and I think a lot of us know exactly what I’m talking about. I’ve read the prayer requests, I know that many of us know exactly what we’re talking about here. To give 10% away, is not an easy task. And it doesn’t make someone evil to struggle with it. It doesn’t make you stingy, it doesn’t make you selfish, it makes you human. It makes you human. It makes you a person. And therefore, particularly when things are scarce, the way that you feel when you’re giving can be a very valuable test to gauge to see how you’re standing spiritually. At least in this realm of reality.

And the solace that we can take from this whole thing, the solace that we can take from the pain that we experience when we give, is that the tighter things are, the more it hurts when you give, the more valuable the giving is in the eyes of HaShem, right? According to the pain, is the word. Arguably, someone who made ten thousand dollars, then giving a thousand dollars is more precious to HaShem, than someone who made ten million dollars and gave a million away. Usually. You know, as you know, there’s no blanket rules when it comes to these things. It varies based on the heart of the person, and only HaShem knows that. But you understand what I’m saying, right? I don’t even know if I understand what I’m saying.

But anyways, there’s something to it, Rav Biederman explains in the name of Yetev Lev, that this is why Hashem desires our terumah, our free will love offerings more than any other creation or living thing in the world. He desires our offerings because we are the only creations that have been imbued with free will. We’re the only creations made in His image and in His likeness. And to take the question one step further, what is it that gives us this free will? What is it that differentiates us from every other creation? And the answer is...drum roll...our yetzer

hara, our evil inclination. And yes, we're about to go there. We're going back there, back to the issue of satan, right? Or the satan, it's pronounced in English as satan, but really those two words have totally different meanings because of the context, of the connotations of them. But as we discussed in the past, you know many Christians perceive the satan as a fallen angel that rebels and fights against Hashem. And as you know by now, that's not at all how the Jewish people understand this satan. In Torah, you know, thought...in Torah thinking, such an idea is not only impossible, but it's also really dualistic. It contradicts the foundational principles of the Torah that there would be a force outside or external to God that God is battling against. It's not even fathomable.

So we see that the satan is the prosecutorial angel who HaShem has appointed for this world. And in this angel, the satan, is also the force of the evil inclination within us. Right? It's the same name, it's the same force, it's the same energy, it's the same power. The evil inclination within us. When Adam ate from the forbidden fruit? The evil inclination of the satan became infused within us. And it's this evil inclination which causes all of the struggles within us, and it's our overcoming of these struggles which gives Hashem pleasure. You know, that gives HaShem the savory aroma, by harnessing the power and the strength of our love for HaShem to overcome the very human emotions of selfishness and anger and resentment and hatred and that whole family of stuff...that's what creation is all about.

And so the sages teach that when we overcome our yetzer hara, our evil inclination in order to fulfill a commandment, to perform a mitzvah, to serve HaShem, well in His eyes, it's worth a thousand mitzvot that we do without any resistance from the evil inclination. Overcoming our lower base impulses and inclinations to serve HaShem is more valuable than any deed we commit in which the evil inclination is not warring against us. When we're facing an evil inclination that's using every manipulative argument in the book, when we're battling a yetzer hara that is playing every deceitful seductive trick that it's amassed over the past 5,000 plus years, when we're contending with these challenges, these wars that are happening within us and we overcome them? Well, that's what life is all about. That's what makes life worth living. That's the whole reason we're here, serving Hashem in such a true and deep way. That is the secret to true happiness, or that is the secret that results in true happiness.

You know Rav Biederman shares a perspective that really strengthened me, and I think may strengthen a lot of you as well. And he explained that sometimes people who are older can become full of regrets that they didn't devote their lives to the service of HaShem when they were younger. That they didn't know, that they weren't exposed to it, that they didn't do all this stuff when they were younger. They regret that they're coming to this now and they feel like it's too late. And that they feel like in truth, at this stage of their life, it really may not matter. Have any of you ever experienced the thought that even resembles that? I know that I have. And I'm like, "I just wish I knew it before...I wish." But the good news, I'm going to share the good news with you. The good news is that in HaShem's eyes, the opposite is true. The

good news is that in HaShem's eyes, the opposite is true. The opposite is true because the older we get, the harder it is to change. We all know that. You're right...you can't teach an old dog new tricks. There's a reason why that's such a famous saying. I don't think that there's any debate that it's a hundred times harder to change when you're older. And so, because it's so much harder, the reward one gets for successfully changing when you're older is a hundred times more than successfully changing when you were young and it was so much easier. Right? Does that make sense? Right? That's like...I don't know, that just, it really hit me the right way.

Anyway, so back to the Tabernacle. While we mourn that we don't have, you know, a beautiful, glorious Temple built on Mount Moriah, right there. The Mountain of Teaching in the heart of Jerusalem. While we mourn that we don't have the Tabernacle and its miracles with us on OUR journey through this insane outrageous world. The fact that we don't have the Tabernacle and the Temple is actually really an opportunity for us right now. Because when that great day comes that the Temple is built, may it be soon, when that day comes, we won't have this opportunity anymore. And what opportunity am I talking about? The opportunity to have our hearts as the only place...really the only place for HaShem to dwell in this world.

I'll share with you a parable that Rav Biederman shares. I think it may be from Rebbe Nachman, but I got it from Rav Biederman. And it's a parable that really illustrates this idea. It's a story of a King who was banished from his Palace and banished from his kingdom. And he was on the run, right? And a simple, humble, modest, loyal servant of the King sought out the King and found him. And he was a poor man, and he didn't have much, but he brought the king to his home. He cleaned his home, he made the King dry bread, which is really all that he could afford. He made a bed of hay for the King on the floor, right next to his bed of hay. It was all he had! And while this was far beneath the dignity of the King, the King rejoiced in it. For it was an act of love. And at that special time, at that moment, it was the only place left for the King to go.

And that's our souls, that's our hearts right now in this world. There is no Tabernacle, there is no Temple. We can make our hearts the dwelling place for God in the world when there's really no other place for God to go. Where that's what He desires the most as things are right now. So the question is how? Jeremy spoke about it, Tehila spoke about it. Sometimes I feel like I'm on a perpetual search, quest, chasing my tail figuring it out. Remembering, arbitrarily forgetting. How can we make a home in our hearts for HaShem? Now I think it may have been Rabbi Fohrman that points it out that the Tabernacle is an exact parallel from below to what HaShem did from above. Have you heard this idea? That the universe was undifferentiated Oneness. There was no universe. It was just HaShem's undifferentiated Oneness and HaShem withdrew Himself. Or He withdrew the perception of Himself, the consciousness, the awareness of Himself in this world to allow for the existence of humanity to allow for us to exist.

And so by building the Tabernacle for Hashem, we're building a dwelling place for the Divine, for the infinite, from within the finite. So what we're doing for HaShem, what He did for us like on a micro level – building the Temple, building the Tabernacle. It allows for something which really should be impossible, which should be a contradiction in terms. It allows for us to have the opportunity to actually give something to HaShem, right? Because life is the ultimate gift. And giving is the ultimate expression of HaShem's relationship with us. We're so inundated with HaShem's gifts, that if we had the eyes to see all of the gifts, our mouths would be filled with gratitude and praise and song. We'd not be able to say or do anything else.

And so how do we reciprocate all the giving that Hashem has bestowed upon us? We create a dwelling place for Him in this world by spending our lives, becoming givers, right? When we replace anger with patience and with kindness, we become givers. When we replace hatred with compassion, we become givers. When we give people the benefit of the doubt, we become givers. When we become a wellspring of love and light in a world that is so filled with hatred and darkness, it's so easy to fall into it, to react to it in the most natural way. But when we overcome the natural, automatic way of seeing things within the obfuscation of the mask of this world and we infuse within us our faith and our trust in HaShem, then we become givers. And then we're able to elevate our base, natural instincts of selfishness into givingness. And only then does our heart transform to a dwelling place for HaShem in the world. A true dwelling place for HaShem in the world. And it's then that we can look at our greatest adversaries, the greatest thorns in our sides, the greatest sources of our torment and pain, and we can finally see them as what they are. They're our greatest blessings, because without them, we wouldn't have that contra, right? We wouldn't have the pushback, we would have the opportunity to truly serve HaShem and give to Him. It is they who give us the opportunity to elevate ourselves and to elevate the entire world with us.

And that's why our sages say that a thousand prophets couldn't accomplish what Haman's seal was able to accomplish. Not his seal like a ball on his nose, the seal like on his ring that he put into the wax on the document that said the nation of Israel would be wiped out on the 14th of Adar. Because Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and the prophets of Israel each came and called on the nation to do teshuvah. And pretty much every time, what did we do? Did we repent? Did we do teshuvah? No. We simply didn't listen. We didn't do teshuvah, no matter how fervently they begged and pleaded and warned.

But then, Haman comes along and declares that the nation will be wiped out in a genocide of historic proportions and that is actually what sparks the greatest mass repentance of the nation of Israel in all of history. It's funny because it seems that despite the horrible threats on the left, it seems that the judicial reform that we discussed last week, miraculously is about to pass in the Knesset. And so, I'm shocked at how many people are arguing against these reforms, family member of mine, people that I know. I guess you had to have been terrorized by the Supreme Court to really understand how horrible it is and there's such...you all know around

the world...the media power of the left to really sway people's thinkings. It takes character to stand against what it feels like the whole country and the whole world and everybody's saying. It takes character, you don't want to do it. But to me, it's so obviously clear, and it seems like this Supreme Court thing is about to pass. It's difficult to imagine.

You know and last week again, as I touched on the issue, many of you requested that Tehila actually share with us what all this is really about. Because one thing I've learned from so many of you is that when you really love Israel, you want to know it all. You want to hear the good and the bad and the ugly. You want to know what's happening, warts and all, the whole thing. You don't want it whitewashed, you want the whole story. And so I asked Tehila to make a short video to explain it so a guy like me can really understand it. And she agreed. And she took an issue that would normally take hours to explain. And she laid it out so beautifully in just 17 minutes. I know it sounds like a lot, but this is Tehila we're talking about. It's concise and although I haven't heard it, I'm sure it's going to be worth it.

And being that that goes beyond the normal time limit of our Fellowship, as we're approaching that right now, I just want to quickly share a thought that I had about it with all of you. I want to bless all of you. And then those of you who want to learn from the wellsprings of Tehila's wisdom and brilliance and understanding of this critical issue once and for all can stay on afterwards because we're going to play it right then. But before I want to introduce you, like I said, I wanted to share that I've, you know, I've spent some time reflecting on what actually led to this unbelievable turn of events that we're right on the threshold of. Of the overthrow of the Supreme Court oligarch in this country. And I was thinking about what led to this unique government, and I realized that lo and behold the answer was, Naftali Bennett. Hashem should bless him with everything good in the world, other than any levers of power. But without getting into all the details, for those of you who don't remember and aren't like living it all and remembering everything. Naftali Bennett, he used to be a friend of ours actually. He was on our television show. He ran as a right-wing leader on the premise that he would prevent the Netanyahu government from going left and making a coalition with the left-wing parties and Israel-hating Arab parties. And he barely broke the threshold, I think he had four or five seats. And in one of the greatest bold-faced lies in Israel's history, he did exactly what he promised he wouldn't do and he made a coalition with Israel-hating Arab parties and leftist parties so that he could become Prime Minister.

And if you remember, I had some trouble controlling myself, I felt a lot of anger. Many of us did. We felt so infuriated, and so betrayed. But in retrospect, it was that move that led to the nation voting for Ben G'vir in the next elections. That they rightfully believed that he was not a wishy-washy sort of compromising type of guy like Bennett was. That he wouldn't lie to them. And so, it was actually Bennett's betrayal that sent the rest of the party, the rest of the country, even further right than they've ever gone before, which led to this government which is actually doing truly good things that I would have thought nearly impossible. You know, I've

been holding my breath, I was refusing to be too happy, just we've been so disappointed so many times voting right and getting left. But day after day, we're seeing real great, beautiful things happening.

So much like Haman's seal is what ultimately led the repentance of the Jewish people, it was Bennett that brought this whole thing about. I wish I had the faith and the presence of mind then, not to get all wound up in a tizzy to say, "HaShem knows what He's doing, He's running the world." Anyways, it's an interesting experience to be so deeply immersed in these dramas that are unfolding in Israel. To feel so passionately about it, to really care about it, and to try to do things to move it forward. And at the same time, to really try to recognize that ultimately, HaShem is running the entire show, not to get too wound up like I said. HaShem is expertly orchestrating every detail in order to bring the nation of Israel to return our hearts to Him. To seek His faith, to place our faith and our trust in Him, our emunah and our bitachon in Him.

And ultimately, there are only two ways that we can truly give to HaShem, right? The only ways we can really give to Him are by trusting in Him with such unreasonable, relentless faith that we're able to create a dwelling place for Him. Not only in our hearts as individuals, but in the Temple that we will soon build, please God, as a nation.

So you know just last week, I don't know if you heard, groups in America, as we're approaching Purim, chose a day of hate against the Jews of America. Did you hear about this? The day of hate...they had a day of hate! Iran, Persia, they're on the verge of developing weapons grade enriched uranium. Things are looking dark and foreboding. But as we will soon see, just as in the book of Esther, Haman flipped everything for the good, we'll soon see all the darkness in this world transformed into light. All the badness in this world transformed into good. And that's our job! To transform the darkness into light in the recesses of our own hearts. And by doing that, each and every one of us, kol ish, every single one of us matters here. Each of us, when we do that we hasten the great revelation that we've all been waiting for.

And so may HaShem give us the strength and the courage and the faith to make our hearts into a Mishkan, into a Tabernacle through which Hashem can shine a light, the light, the lights of salvation to all of mankind.

And now before I say goodbye, and I bless you in the Name of Hashem, remember hang on for Tehila. I'm going to be here, too, listening to every word. Hang on for Tehila, who's going to share a very interesting and enlightening explanation of what is going on, on this whole frontier in Israel.

Anyways, I love you so much my friends. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you, to connect with you, to pray for you and to bless you!

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

May HaShem bless and protect you. May He shine His light, His face, His countenance you, and may He give you peace. Amen.

Shalom my friends, stay in touch.

The Judicial Reform Explained with Tehila Gimpel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=878cdtiwPFY>

Hey guys, so I heard a lot of folks last week were interested in talking with me about judicial reform. I'm sure that a lot of you read the newspapers in Israel and you're probably scratching your heads thinking, "What in the world is going on in Israel?" There are protests and counter protests and everyone's so angry about what seems to be like nitty gritty boring lawyer stuff. And so I thought that I would try to give you guys a little bit of background so that we could just be sort of like educated consumers when we are consuming media. To make sure to not fall prey to fake news. On the other hand, not to get too carried away in the visceral, and to be just a little bit calmer and more informed when we are reading about the issues that are happening, that are taking place, the reforms that are taking place in Israel today.

So in order to understand the situation, I'm just going to talk about one of the elements of the reform. There are about four or five major elements to the reform, but I'm going to talk about what I think is the most important one. If we get feedback that this is something interesting for you guys, then we can go on in coming weeks to discuss other elements. But I'm just going to focus on one which is the issue of judicial review of Knesset parliamentary legislation.

So in Israel, it's hard to understand any reform without going back to the beginning because everything has a history. If we go back to 1948, the state is being established in May of 1948. And in our Declaration of Independence, it says we are going to have a constitution. Not only are we going to have a constitution, but this constitution needs to be written by October of 1948. Because imagine, you know that when we declared independence, all of the Arab countries around us pounced on us. We're in the middle of fighting for our survival, there's no time to sit down and write a constitution.

But the assumption was that a constitution is important. What is a constitution essentially? Constitution usually has two, you know, areas of...two types of legal material. We have the side of government, a constitution defines what is the government authority, what is the government allowed to do? And how is the government structured? How is it elected? And on the other hand, individual rights. What kind of rights are the government not allowed to

infringe on? What are the protected rights of individuals in our society? So the idea was this is an important thing to have, but we don't have time to do it, so it needs to be done by October.

But as you could imagine, in October it was not done. Why was it not done? For a lot of reasons. Try to make a constitution in Israel, you know the saying goes, for every two Jews, there are three opinions. Because Jews love to argue about things, and there were so many different kinds of people, from all different ends of the earth. The ingathering of the exiles, good luck getting people to agree on the fundamentals of what are going to be like the agreed upon values of our society. It's really hard. Just take for example the idea of religious and conservative. Imagine at that time the religious are like, "A constitution, why do we need a constitution? We have the Torah as our Constitution." And the secular were like, "The Torah, we don't want the Torah to be part of the story. We want to have Western, secular values here." Crash! Right?

Then think about at the time of the establishment of Israel, many people held communist, socialist views. Many people held free market views...what is going...is the Constitution going to talk about a free market? Is it going to be communist at its core? These are huge issues that needed to be ironed out. But no one was able to iron them out because they were like explosive issues and Israel was fighting for its very survival. So a couple of years later came the Harari Decision which said that we're just going to create a constitution, not all at once. It's too difficult, we're going to create a chapter by chapter, find consensus over time on different issues with the hope that as consensus develops, it'll create momentum for more and more agreements.

So the idea was that there was going to be what's called basic laws. Basic laws were just laws, but they were called basic laws in the sense that they covered constitutional issues. And so throughout the years, they made basically the basic law of the Knesset about how the Knesset operates and who can be elected to Knesset and who can vote for Knesset in the basic law of the judiciary. Who can be a judge, what are the different courts, and what are their authorities, and how are judges chosen, and you know all sorts of basic laws discussing how the various branches of government were to operate. No one made any basic laws about human rights. Did that mean there were no human rights in Israel? No, of course there were human rights. First of all, there were regular laws protecting human rights that were legislated. Like the law of equality in the workplace and the law of equality between men and women and all sorts of laws that were meant to protect human and civil rights.

In addition, the Supreme Court often would make rulings and precedents that would protect human rights as well. For example, the first case on that was the case of "Kol Ha'am." It was called Kol Ha'am case. In 1949, where the government tried to shut down a newspaper because it spoke against...the newspaper wrote something against one of the politicians and the Supreme Court said you can't do that. I don't need a law to tell me why you can't do that.

Because as Israel is defined as a democracy in the Declaration of Independence, it can't be that there would be a democracy without freedom of speech. And therefore we're going to protect freedom of speech, and so on and so forth. There are many court rulings which sort of which protected human and civil rights of the individual from the tyranny of government. But at the same time, nobody thought that that authority to protect human rights was able to override Knesset laws because the Knesset is the representation of the will of the people. And so, no one in the Supreme Court in the first decades thought that the Supreme Court could override a law. They thought that the Supreme Court's authority was to protect, sort of jurisdiction, was to protect individuals from government overreach. If the government was acting in a way... if various government bodies such as the police, the military, any of the other ministries...if they were acting in a way that was not in keeping with human rights, then the court could say to them, "Wait. Roll that back and review that again, because you didn't follow, you were infringing on individual liberties." But they didn't think that that could actually override the will of the people, just of various unelected bureaucrats.

Now in 1992, what happened was that Knesset enacted two basic laws that for the first time were not just talking about how government works, but talking about individual rights. Now the idea was in these two basic laws, the first one was the basic law of freedom of occupation, which said that anybody could work in any profession that they choose. And the second one, which is more important, is the basic law of human dignity. The idea was to take, to aggregate human rights that everybody agreed on. That were very consensus and put them into a basic law. So the law protected very, very kind of basic, agreed upon human rights. Such as the right to life, the right not have your body harmed, the right to not have your property seized illegally, the right to just basic dignity, the right to freedom of movement.

But the Knesset was very careful because there were certain rights that people just weren't ready to agree upon. For example, the ultra-orthodox were very worried about including the term equality because they said, "Wait, wait, wait, wait. If we put in equality, does that mean that men and women won't be allowed to be separate in the synagogue? Does that mean that we're gonna have to serve in the military?" And all sorts of issues like that. And on the other hand, you had people, the secular side, who wanted freedom from religion. And they said, "Well, we don't want to have to have Shabbat, or learn about the Jewish holidays or Jewish symbols in the school systems." And the religious was like, "Wait, wait. We don't want to change that either."

So people said, "Let's keep this just in the consensus, and you can see this in the Knesset discussions. People said, "Let's just keep this simple, and we're going to put into law, into basic law the agreed upon rights." Now what happened? This passed and nobody thought that it was a really big deal. I know that nobody thought it was a really big deal because hardly anybody showed up to vote. The law passed at something like 32 versus 24, meaning out of the 120 Knesset members, most of them didn't even bother to show up. Nobody thought that

there was a revolution going on. They only found out retroactively that they had made a revolution in 1995.

In 1995, Israel's Supreme Court ruled in a relatively not important case, like the details of the case were not important, but it kind of went under the radar because they let it out right around the time of the assassination of Yitzchak Rabin, so it didn't really even make headlines. But right there under the radar, the Supreme Court made a ruling saying that these two new basic laws that talk about human rights are essentially a Constitution, not in the sense that they are just talking about constitutional material, but they are constitution in the sense that they are super laws, like they are the laws that override all other laws. Now how will they override all other laws? That's our job as the Supreme Court to make sure that now new laws in the future ever contradict these basic laws.

And so what they essentially took at that point was, they said, "Now we have a constitution, and now we're able to cancel any law in the future passed by the Knesset if we think that it doesn't fit. For example, the basic law of human dignity. Now no one saw that coming because when they created those laws in the Knesset, they did no write into the laws that the court could cancel future laws based on that. They just thought it would be like the other basic laws. The other basic laws were there in the sense that they spoke about very important and constitutional matters. But they didn't actually give the court the ability to override the Knesset itself. No one saw that coming, so now, the second stage. And that was the court then expanded over years its interpretation of what was included in that law. So they said, "Well it's true that you didn't want to write, for example, equality in the law or freedom of religion or freedom from religion. It's true that you didn't want to write that. But how could there be human dignity, which you did write, how could there be human dignity without all those other rights that we interpret are included in human dignity?"

And so now you have the perfect storm. You have a court that says, "This is a constitution." Nobody knew they were making a constitution. You have a court that's saying, "We have the power to override laws and the content of this constitution is not made by you, the Knesset. But it's interpreted by us the court." So you have a self-appointed court interpreting a self-created constitution in order to now be able to override the Knesset. And throughout the years, they have cancelled more than 20 laws and even more importantly than the laws that they've cancelled has been the cooling effect that it's had on our leadership. Because anytime one of our leaders, one of our elected leaders wants to pass a law, even if the law is very popular and it is the will essentially of the majority of the people, they're afraid to do so. Because they know that it will be canceled by the Supreme Court. And so it's created this sort of fear of even trying to do anything. And so, although they've, let's say only cancelled 20 laws and these are sometimes very important laws. For instance, laws that have to do with Israel's security or that have to do with protecting settlements. So even if these laws, and not many

laws have been cancelled, then you have this problem that our leadership is sort of paralyzed and not able to move laws forward.

Now to make this storm even more complicated, is that the way the judges are elected in Israel is by a selection committee. The selection committee is made up of nine members, but five of them always seem to vote as a block. You have three members of the Supreme Court, two members of the bar association, meaning two lawyers, and then four representatives from the government and the Knesset. Meaning the majority automatically is either lawyers or judges. Now, I'm a lawyer. No one wants to get in a fight with Supreme Court judges, so over the decades, almost always the judges and the lawyers vote as a block. And what does it mean they vote as a block? They choose that what happened, the Supreme Court essentially chooses judges that have the same philosophy as they do. And so, if the judges tend to be liberal leftist, in favor of raw, judicial authority, and so on, they will then go on to choose judges that have the same outlook.

And so you have a court that over many decades, continually cloned itself with very little possibility of bringing in judges of other philosophies and other outlooks and other value systems. And so, you have this perfect storm where you have a court that doesn't represent the majority, the value of the value system of the majority of Israel which is becoming ever more traditional, ever more right, ever more religious. You have a court that holds a different value system and that has taken for itself a great deal of power. So the fundamental idea that's being pushed forward in the suggested reform is to limit the ability of the court to cancel laws, not to take it away entirely, but to say that not just any old Supreme Court, you know panel, could be able to cancel a law. It would have to be a broad panel of all of the judges with an extra large majority, like 70 or 80% of the judges saying that this law is an infringement of Human Rights. And it's also been floated, this idea of an override clause, to say that in extenuating circumstances, the Knesset could temporarily override the Supreme Court if they see that is needed, with a majority of 61.

And so, that's the essentially, you know, the most controversial part of the reform. In addition, you have the idea of changing the judicial selection committee such that public representatives, people that are accountable to voters, people are accountable to the public and represent the public, would be the majority of the selection committee, rather than unelected judges. Not to say the judges wouldn't be part of the committee, but they would not have an automatic majority on the committee. And the idea is in doing so, that you'll have a court that is more representative of a broad range of ideas of all of the people in Israel, not just a slim kind of particular outlook. And that you would have a limited ability to override the will of the people as expressed in the Knesset by needing a very special majority of the Supreme Court to override a Knesset law.

How do I know that all of this talk of the end of democracy and the end of Human Rights is not sincere? Because if you look at Israel, you see who is in favor of the reform. If the reform was really about human rights and civil rights and individual rights, one would think that the people screaming against the reform would be the weakest elements of society that need the court to protect them. But if you look, in fact, it's quiet the opposite. In Israel, the poorest, lowest socioeconomic strata, the people who are most often at risk of having their rights taken away, are dramatically, overwhelmingly in favor of this reform. Whereas if you look at the people who have the most power, the Shin Bet, the military, you know a lot of the academics, professors, businessmen, the wealthy are by and large very vocal opponents of the reform.

So I would say to take with a grain of salt the idea that this is really about individual rights and liberties. Because the people who are most at risk to having their liberties taken away are saying, "We really want this reform, we don't feel like our liberties have been traditionally protected by the Supreme Court. We don't feel that our voices have been heard." Whereas the people who are the closest, let's say to the power centers, the people who are high up in the military, high up in the universities, high up in the media. The people who have the power are saying, "We want to keep this court strong." Meaning perhaps we need to take with a grain of salt the idea that the court is really doing a great job at protecting individual rights. So I would rethink that point.

And I think it's also important to bear in mind that a lot of this discussion has to do with maintain power and wanting to stay close to a control that is not dependent on the will of the voters. And so you know, certain groups that feel that perhaps their opinions are not popular, they're not going to be voted in, are trying to maintain a power base. And they're taking a very dangerous tactic because what they're doing is essentially saying, "Let's besmirch Israel internationally. Let's tell all the other nations how terrible you know, all the other world leaders, how terrible this reform is." And then when the world leaders say "Oh no, no, this is terrible, don't do it," they say, "Well, we shouldn't do it because of all this international pressure." They create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The same is true with certain wealthy individuals in Israel saying, "Well, we're going to pull our money out of Israel." And then the shekel drops out of concern that they're going to all pull their money out of Israel. And they say, "Look, the reform is hurting the economy." They're playing dirty tactics, which is unfortunate, because the reality is, that if everyone is playing fairly, it is a good idea to have a conversation about these things. To sit down. The reform is not perfect by any means, and at a different opportunity, we can talk about the details. But the ideal would really be to have both the left and the right, the religious and the secular, sit down together and talk about this.

But unfortunately, that's not happening because people are not playing with fair tactics. And the level of vitriol and violence and you know, violent words being used are really out of

control. So my hope and prayer is that people are able to calm down and actually sit and talk about this because there's a lot that needs to be done. But there's a way to do it in a balanced way. Bye, guys!