

Session 223

Shemini – In the Silence the Redemption Burns

27 April 2025

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

Ari

Shalom my friends, shalom, can you hear me? Give me a thumbs up if you can hear me. Great, great. It is so good to see all of you. Really big time. Feels like it's been a very long time. I've missed you a lot over the past number of weeks in which we've been apart. And you know I want to thank you, Ardelle, for sharing again the prayer requests as you always do. They are so inspiring and deeply touching. Some of them almost seem like Psalms or prayers. I was going to read one of them, there were actually a couple that I wanted to read, but I don't want to start choosing this one or that one. But just so powerful. And I feel like praying for each other and with each other keeps us close, even during the days in which we don't necessarily see each other very much.

Now before I launch in, I want to start with a prayer.

HaShem, Master of the Universe, Source of all wisdom and kindness. We're gathering here before You today with grateful hearts, ready to build and to learn and to grow together. Plant in each of us a spirit of unity and love and strengthen our bond with You. Our bond with each other and with the Land that you promised to our forefathers. Bless this Fellowship to be a vessel for Your light. That through our words and our prayers and our learning, we may bring healing to ourselves and to the entire world. Infuse our hearts with courage and resilience. Open our eyes to the miracles in every moment. Give us the strength to carry Your truth into the world with humility and with passion and joy. May every session we share draw us closer to the redemption you've promised. May our gathering today be a small step in the great story of Your people's return and renewal and triumph. We dedicate this Fellowship to Your Name and to Your Torah, to Your Land and to Your people. May it be Your will HaShem that the work we begin today will be blessed and protected and guided by You and that we will merit to see the fruits of our efforts speedily in our days. Amen.

Ok, so here we are. This is the first Fellowship following the holiday of Passover. And for me, it was a powerful one, lot of tears shed, tears of joy and gratitude. But at the end of the day, we're still here. I know I told you that the redemption was imminent, even this past Pesach. And I wasn't alone in feeling that. But you know the great day that the prophet Malachi spoke about when he said:

Behold, I send you Eliyahu
the prophet before the
coming of the great and
awesome day of G-d....

-Malachi 3:23

Well, that day has not yet come. And while I know that I have said that if that day doesn't come this Passover, I'm going to retire from the business of expecting redemption at any moment, particularly on these great, auspicious days that are charged with the energy of redemption. I know I said that. But I also know myself well enough to know that I probably won't stop eagerly anticipating. Most likely I'll continue to just await and expect that great day of redemption with all of my heart. That's just the way my soul is wired at this point. And I feel like on some level, a part of me just perpetually holding my breath, waiting for redemption all the time.

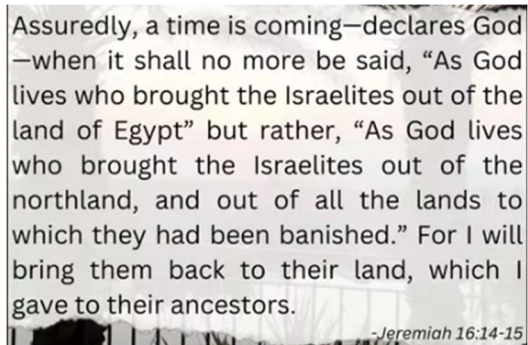
I think I remember telling you that I'm actually making a mini-series documentary about redemption. I think I told you that, right? I've already started grilling some of the greatest rabbis and spiritual leaders that I know on the subject. And I feel like perhaps I'm doing it more for myself than anyone else because at the end of the day it's giving me the opportunity to take a deep dive into that which is the greatest on my heart. That's what's in my mind, that's what's in my consciousness.

And as I've been conducting these interviews, like I've said, I've seen that one of the questions that's the most prominent is this. You know I start by laying out where we are in history. I say that on the one hand we see that the redemption will come. Everybody and I mean EVERYBODY agrees with that. But right now, we find ourselves in a world of great violence and evil and injustice. A world of tremendous division, where it feels like everybody is at war with everybody. And even the alliances that we do see, it's so clear that they're just merely alliances between nations that simply hate each other less than they hate their mutual enemies. Alliances that aren't based on shared values or ideologies, but just on degrees of conflicting or aligning interests. I mean is there any real love between Russia and China and Iran and North Korea? Of course not. They just hate the West more than they hate each other.

And so, in this war riddled by smaller, regional wars and on the brink of a global world war, we know that a day is coming in which this world of ours that is currently in an arms race, will find itself in a race to deconstruct our weapons, beat our swords into plow shares. The lion will lie down with the lamb. And learning the art of warfare will be a relic of the past. We know that's going to happen.

But these two visions of the world, the vision of the world that is and the vision of the world that will be could not be more different. And so, what I'm asking is what will happen between this day and that to bring this complete and total reversal. In my mind, it will have to be

miraculous. Some sort of great Divine intervention, great Divine revelation, something that will change not only the entire structure of the outside world, but the nature of mankind within our hearts. So what, I ask, will happen between this day that we're in right now and that day in the future which will so radically change the fabric of our very reality, so fundamentally? Right? It's a good question. Will there be some sort of great revelation? Will there be a Divine intervention? Anything unlike anything mankind has ever seen? A revelation of such unfathomable dimension that as the prophet Jeremiah said in chapter 16, it will eclipse the miracle of the parting of the sea. Right? We read chapter 16:



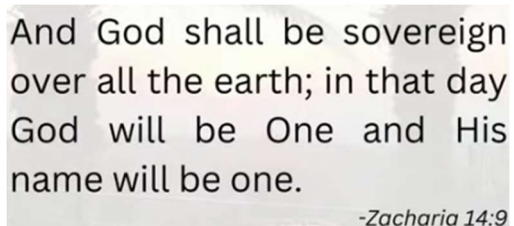
Assuredly, a time is coming—declares God—when it shall no more be said, “As God lives who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt” but rather, “As God lives who brought the Israelites out of the northland, and out of all the lands to which they had been banished.” For I will bring them back to their land, which I gave to their ancestors.

-Jeremiah 16:14-15

What will happen to bring about this unimaginable, redemptive transformation? And interestingly, the answers that I've been receiving vary greatly. Some say that there will not necessarily be a nature defying transcendent revelation, but rather our redemption will continue to arrive as these thinly veiled miracles that we see today with Israel surviving and even winning wars waged against us in which we're greatly

outnumbered. They say that the redemption will come in a seemingly natural way without necessarily great miracles.

And I'll be honest. These answers, they disappoint me. I'm not saying they're wrong. They just disappoint me and they dishearten me somewhat. Because part of what I'm yearning for is not just my personal redemption obviously, or even a redemption for the Jewish people, even for all of mankind. But redemption for God's Name so that all who defy Him and mock Him will be humbled and shamed for their evil. As the prophet Zecharia said:



And God shall be sovereign over all the earth; in that day God will be One and His name will be one.

-Zacharia 14:9

I mean, what does that even mean? Is there not one God right now? Is His Name not one at this very moment? Of course it is. It clearly means that on that day, the whole world will recognize this truth. That's what I'm yearning for. For His Name to be elevated and exalted and sanctified.

And it's hard for me, albeit in my very limited intellect and imagination, it's hard for me to imagine that happening without some sort of powerful, miraculous, supernatural revelation. And no matter how many people may suggest that there may not be any sort of great revelation, it doesn't really matter. You know what you know in your heart and I just can't let it

go. I yearn for it, I anticipate it, I expect it. Again, not for myself, but for God's great Name, for God, Himself.

And that's what I want to talk about on this here Fellowship. I want to dive deeper into that desire and what it's all about. I want to dive deeper into redemption. But before I do, it is my great honor to introduce my beloved friend, Jeremy, to share his heart about our days, particularly about this coming Wednesday night and Thursday, Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day. So let me hand this over to, Jeremy.

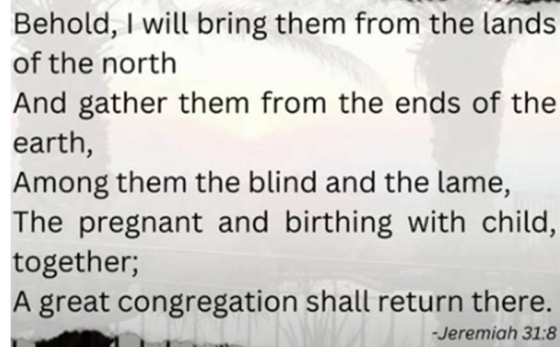
Jeremy

Shalom everybody, how are you? Oh, it's so good to see all of your faces here. It's just been too long, and we are upon great days. We've lived through Passover, we've lived through the Holocaust Memorial Day. And this week, Israel will be celebrating Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day. And you know, you can't think about it, but what it looks like is that everything that's happening in Israel is happening in perfect timing. And there's a transition we're all going through right now. Whether the world is ready to or not, whether the world wants to or not, we are entering into a new era. Ari feels it, Ari talks about it all the time, Ari's ready. But it's slowly but surely happening and this week when we celebrate Israel's Independence Day, it's a milestone.

We are entering into a post-religion era. The great religions of the Middle East and the Western world as we know it today, were built after the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people across the world. Before that destruction, there was no religion as we think of it today. There was a living dynamic, a relationship with God, based on the Torah, rooted in the Land of Israel. It wasn't a theory, it wasn't a ritual, it wasn't a theology, it was an experience.

And when the exile came, religion as we know it today became the vessel, a way to capture that living relationship, preserve it, protect it, until the day that we would finally return home. And there's no question that that day is now. Throughout the Bible, the restoration of Israel is prophesied with unbelievable clarity. From Moses to Malachi, every single prophet except for Jonah speaks of the great one event. It's not like an obscure sidenote. It's the most discussed promise in the entire Bible. It's an international spectacle for the world to see and everyone around the world will recognize it. It marks the beginning of the end of history as we know it. And the birth of this era. And in many ways the whole Bible revolves around this one promise. The Jewish people will return to their ancestral, God-given homeland, and the world will never be the same.

Let's just look at one prophecy from the book of Jeremiah. Chapter 38, verse 8:

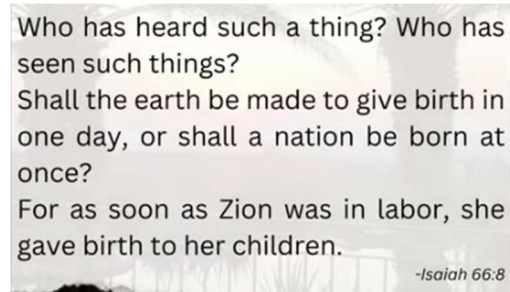


Behold, I will bring them from the lands
of the north
And gather them from the ends of the
earth,
Among them the blind and the lame,
The pregnant and birthing with child,
together;
A great congregation shall return there.
-Jeremiah 31:8

Who does Jeremiah say is going to come back? The blind, the lame, the broken, mothers without fathers, wives without husbands. A people shattered. Is there a better description of the Jewish people in 1948, emerging from the ashes of the Holocaust than the blind, and the lame, and the broken? I mean every Jew, every Christian, every Buddhist, every WOKE liberal, every atheist needs

to pick up the Bible, read these promises mentioned in every single book, and then ride on a random bus in Jerusalem and look around. Brown Jews from Morocco and brown Jews from Iraq. Blonde, blue eyed Jews from Russia, black Jews from Ethiopia, American Jews with baseball hats. Is all of this happening in Jerusalem just a coincidence? I mean people like to relegate Israel to politics, but the sudden rebirth of Israel on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, on Israel's Independence Day, in a single day is not just a political event, it's the manifestation of a Divine reality.

Isaiah chapter 66, verse 8 says it like this:



Who has heard such a thing? Who has
seen such things?
Shall the earth be made to give birth in
one day, or shall a nation be born at
once?
For as soon as Zion was in labor, she
gave birth to her children.
-Isaiah 66:8

A nation born in a day. Yom Ha'Atzmaut is the day we celebrate the tangible, the undeniable proof that God's promises are not relics of the past. They're living realities unfolding before our very eyes. Every Jew celebrates Chanukkah. And to commemorate the past. And the words that we say in our prayers, could they be more relevant in any other historic moment than,

"Thank You, God, for You delivered the many into the hands of the few. The strong into the hands of the weak."

In 1948, organized, massive Arab armies against a tiny congregation of Jews, refugees and Holocaust survivors, who most of them didn't speak the same language as each other. And Israel was born in a day? That is a greater miracle than the miracle of Chanukkah. And today, we're not just commemorating history. That's what makes Israel's Independence Day so beautiful. We are living the holiday in an era that's just drowning in skepticism, secularism. Israel's rebirth is an open invitation to wake up. History is not random, it is the tapestry of the living God. It's no longer about a religion, it's about a living relationship with the God of Israel, through the people of Israel, in the Land of Israel.

And this moment in history is an invitation to every believer to find their place in God's unfolding story. To wake up, to wake up to the reality that this is happening now. To wake up to the truth that Divine action isn't locked away in ancient times. It's here right now, moving powerfully, intimately in the world, and in our own personal lives. That's the real invitation to Israel Independence Day. It's to recognize the living God of Israel in the lives of everyone that has a heart for Israel.

And indeed, that's why I'm launching my brand new course. Right now, the week of Israel Independence Day. It's called, "Waking Up, the Ancient Judean Way to Live with Biblical Faith." Because waking up is a path for every believer. To transcend religion, to enter in to this new era, to reconnect to the foundations of emunah, of true biblical faith. Just like Abraham and the prophets lived. A life that is alive with the Presence of HaShem. A life that walks hand-in-hand with the living God.

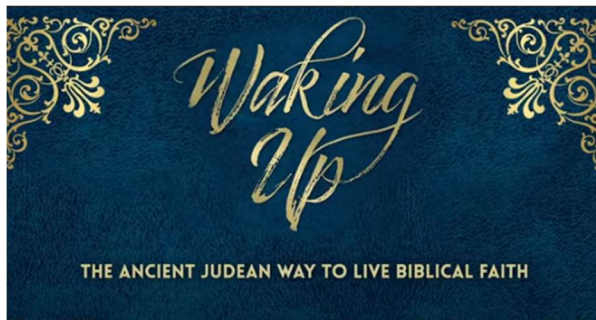
And I just want to share a short excerpt from the course. First views here on the Fellowship. And I was filmed in front of a live audience in Jerusalem. In fact, in front of Yeshiva students who are now in the army. But this was right before they were entering into the army and I thought that there's no better way that I could deliver this message to the world than give it to soon-to-be IDF soldiers going into combat right now. So check this out:



We have to ask the most important question. What is the natural state of man? Is it happy? Is it sad? Is it concern? Is it anxious? There's actually an emotional guidance system. There's like a GPS of our soul to let us know when we are in our natural state. What is that state? And the answer is, gratitude. Gratitude is the natural state of man and woman.

What does that mean? Let's say that you're asleep and you wake up. Before you have this to do, and you have to get into this university, and you got to go train for the army and you have this problem and that problem...you open your eyes and before the world assaults you with all that the world has, you're like...I'm alive, I have another day, thank You, God. Just to be grateful to be alive. That's the natural state. Everything else is something that has come on top of that. Something made you happy, ok. Something made you happy, something made you sad. Ok, something made you sad. All of that is secondary to the immediate state that everyone naturally should wake up to. I'm alive, thank you. That's why we're called Jews, Yehudah. Because when Leah had Yehudah, she said, this time I will give thanks to God.

Because Yehudah and todah are the same word. Lehodot, and yehudi are the same word. So what is it to be a Jew? It means to be a guy that is living in gratitude.



All right. That's just a short clip of all the fundamentals that we need to share with the world now. And delivering this course to a group of students, as they're about to enlist in combat units in the Israeli army. You know, they asked me. How can we strengthen our emunah before going into battle? And there's no greater honor, no greater purpose, there's no greater way that I could share the Torah with the world, than share it through a message to soon-to-be IDF soldiers. Because they've transcended religion. There's no ritual of going into battle. They are living with God as their protection, they are entering into the armies of Israel, the first organized Jewish army since the times of King David. They are the models of emunah today.

And so many people nowadays, "You know, I really need to strengthen my faith." But the question is how? How do you actually strengthen your faith? And this course is my answer. It's like a personal trainer for your soul. A step-by-step work out plan to build your spiritual muscles through Torah and prayer and living with HaShem's Presence in your life.

And Israel right now is alive and this week it's a calling for all of us. It's a calling for us to enter into a living relationship with God and His plan for the world. Now more than ever, it's like we have to wake up from whatever religion that we're sort of walking through the motions in. I want to share something very concerning that I've been noticing lately. There's Jew-hatred, anti-Semitism, and it's no longer just confined to the WOKE left. It's now emerging on the right, too. Among voices that once stood with Israel and stood strong with the Jewish people. Names like Tucker Carlson, Joe Rogan, Candance Owens. I keep on seeing comedians turning on Israel, huge thought leaders with massive followings are drifting toward this ancient hatred and bringing their following along for the ride.

And today the Jewish people outside of Israel, they have no political party to rely on. No ideological movement to protect them, only God and His covenant and only the Land of Israel. And this is not a left thing and it's not a right thing, it's a God thing. And now more than ever,

we have to spread the living message of emunah, of biblical faith in God's active Presence in today's world. Israel's Independence Day isn't just about celebrating political freedom. It's the celebration that we are living the Bible. That prophecy is alive, that God is alive, that destiny is unfolding. It's a celebration of life as a believer in the Bible. Not believing in the past, but believing in the now.

And so, with that, I want to wish all of you a happy Yom Ha'Atzmaut, a joyous Israel Independence Day. And I warmly invite you to join the Land of Israel Network's newest course, Waking Up - the Ancient Judean Way to live with Biblical Faith. You can find it at www.thelandofisrael.com, you can reach out to Tabitha for any help and of course our Fellowship members get VIP access. If you're a Yeshiva member, or a founder, you get all of our courses, Waking Up, the Women of Valor, the Judean Diet, and all future courses absolutely free. So it's obviously worth upgrading if you haven't already.

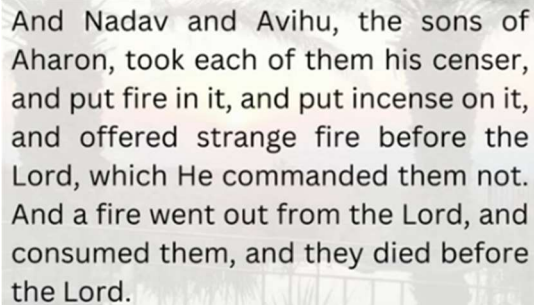
And remember, for our Fellowship here, I am here for you always. We are here for you always. Reach out to me anytime, for questions, for prayers, challenges, for anything. And know that Ari and I and Tehila, we love this Fellowship so much and we are just excited to see how we're evolving together and growing together and we look forward to celebrating Israel's Independence Day together with you. Shalom everybody and may we continue waking up together.

Ari

Hey, Jeremy, thank you so much. Ok, so here we are. What did you think about that? I'm actually really wanting to do the Wake Up thing. I'm into it. Jeremy has always sort of been that guy...they say you want to have people around you that are living sort of the life that you want to live and you'll sort of get it through osmosis. He's always been the guy that's doing cold plunges and running and exercising and that. So I'm eager to do that because that is a material, physical outcropping of a spiritual reality.

And that's what I wanted to talk about also now. I think the best place to begin what I want to share with you is with this week's Torah portion as usual, Parashat Shemini. And I want to share how I'm reading this Torah portion, now, at this point in my life's journey. Because as we progress in our lives, the Torah is progressing with us as well. That's why I feel so bad for people who stop learning in grade school and think that their understanding of the Torah then is just what it is, like it's static. It was, it is, and it always will be. But it's a living Torah. That's why we don't really call it the Bible. The Bible is a book, the Torah is a teaching, it's speaking to us and guiding us anew throughout our life's journey, every day, every moment.

And I want to share what happened in my heart this past Shabbat. This year when I'm encountering the unimaginably, painful episode in which after great anticipation and preparation as the greatest national project in the history of the nation of Israel is completed, in the entire world. That's the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, the mobile home of the Divine Presence in the world is inaugurated. And what happens? So let's look inside, Leviticus chapter 10:



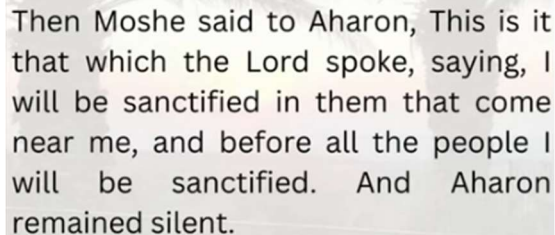
And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, took each of them his censer, and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. And a fire went out from the Lord, and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

-Leviticus 10:1-2

Now in past Fellowships we've taken deep dives into what actually happened here. What the motivations of the truly righteous Nadav and Avihu were and what if anything, did they actually do wrong? Cause some people say that they didn't do anything wrong. That it was just simply a consequence of their actions, but it wasn't like they did something wrong. On some level, it was just an act of passionate love

for God. But I'm not even here to address any of that right now.

No, what's been on my mind this year has been Aaron's response. We see the very next verse, after the death of Nadav and Avihu:



Then Moshe said to Aharon, This is it that which the Lord spoke, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come near me, and before all the people I will be sanctified. And Aharon remained silent.

-Leviticus 10:3

Now as you can imagine, there is much discussion and many approaches to what this actually means, that Aaron remained silent. There are those like Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, who argue that v'yidom, which is related to the word, domem, meaning like inanimate or still, it indicates an absence of any desire to question God's decree.

Unlike like say the word, v'yistok, which implies mere abstention from speech. Aaron's silence reflects total inner peace and acceptance. Meaning that Aaron's response is one of complete submission with no emotional resistance, portraying him as a saintly figure who transcends human grief.

Or the Chofetz Chaim, who connects v'yidom, also to domem, suggesting that Aaron's face was expressionless, like a rock, showing no hint of protest or negative emotion. Implying that Aaron sort of had a stoic faith where even his nonverbal expressions aligned with his acceptance of Divine will. But at this point in my life, at this point on my journey, I don't really relate to this approach that Aaron was stoic. Right? Or totally unyielding or just above it all. To tell you the truth, with all of my heart, I hope that is not the case. Because if it is the case, then I really can't

relate to Aaron that much. At least not in this situation. Because knowing Aaron's heart, that he was a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace, that he was a people person.

You know, I'm the kind of guy, I'm an extrovert, and I actually get my energy from other people. I love people. And I think he was the same. He just loved humans, much more than me. I mean we could tell stories and stories about the lengths he went to try to bring peace between a husband and a wife, between a man and his fellow. He just loved all people. Well you can only imagine the degree of love he had for his beloved righteous sons who he hoped would carry the torch of his priesthood forward for the nation. A man who could witness his sons consumed by fire. I don't care if it's Divine fire from heaven. A man who could witness his beloved sons going up in flames and not feel...I just can't relate to that at all.

Fortunately, the majority of the sages see it differently. Rashi, he explains that Aaron's silence was an act of tremendous restraint and acceptance of God's decree. The Talmud states that Aaron was rewarded for his silence, suggesting that it reflected his faith and submission to the Divine will, despite his immense, personal loss. Meaning that he wasn't just passively accepting, but rather his silence was a virtuous act of proactively controlling his grief to honor God's judgment. The Ba'al Haturim notes that v'yidom appears with the same spelling only once elsewhere in the entire Tanakh. I didn't even realize this. In Joshua 10, it says:

The sun stood still.

He connects this to the teaching that we've shared in past Fellowships, comparing Moses to the sun and Aaron to the moon. Meaning the sun is the source of light and energy and the moon reflects that. And that was sort of the dynamic between Moses and Aaron. Suggesting that Aaron's silence elevated him temporarily to the sun level, to Moses's spiritual level, like a Divine revelation. Meaning that Aaron's silence is a moment of spiritual transcendence and growth, aligning him with prophetic greatness.

Chatam Sofer even takes it a step further, contrasting Aaron's silence to Job, Iyov, Job's response to his children's death, as we see in chapter 1, where Job is informed of their death:

This one was still speaking when another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother when suddenly a mighty wind came from the wilderness. It struck the four corners of the house so that it collapsed upon the young people and they died; I alone have escaped to tell you." Then Job arose, tore his robe, cut off his hair, and threw himself on the ground and worshiped....

-Job 1:17-19

And in the next verse we see what that worship means, what that looked like. He said:

Job 1:21 And he said; naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Such powerful words that they're actually said in the cemeteries, in the rituals today in the funerals. He said:

He said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

-Job 1:20

Meaning, I'm just thinking about that. Naked I came out of my mother's womb, naked shall I return. All of these things that You've given me, God, these children, I came here naked and I'm going to return without that. And he just sublimated himself to God's will.

You see, Job, Iyov, was devastated, beyond devastated. But nonetheless, he responded by blessing God, and sanctifying His Name. You see this is really important to me in my life right now in a very practical and real way. I'd like to believe in some ways, I think I NEED to believe, that Aaron was in great pain, beyond great pain. That he was in absolute, indescribable devastation, because that's where I would be. But nonetheless, due to his love of God, his reverence of Moshe, and his understanding that the entire nation was looking to him and relying on him for guidance and understanding of these crazy things that were happening, he overcame that pain and he transcended it. And his silence WAS that transcendence.

Because since October 7th, I've been contending with an altogether new world of emotions. I've shared that definitely before I was married, I thought I was really a courageous guy. I was in in Lebanon, in Gaza, in Chevron, I was in...I never felt any fear. That was not courage. That was just me being fearless. That wasn't courage. Courage is when you have fear.

I remember the early difficult days after October 7th when we were being pressured to leave our home and abandon these beautiful, prophetic, holy mountains on the Judean frontier, when we were being really strongly encouraged to retreat to a more fortified and more protected and defended area due to the army's inability to really provide us with adequate protection at that

time, they were just stretched too thin. We were told it would be better if we temporarily moved to a nearby settlement that had at least a semblance of military protection. But that would of course leave our mountain empty and it would have just been overrun. You know as you could imagine, we refused such suggestions, but to say it was an easy decision, would not be honest. The vicious, the brutal massacres of the men and the women and the children and the babies, they were still fresh in our minds. We all saw more than we would have ever wanted to. Lot of times we didn't even know what video we were clicking on, just to have something burned into our souls for all eternity from seeing the horrors of what happened. And we were really exposed to that.

And now, to be looking at my wife and my children, to the very real threat of sharing that fate, well the thought of it was unimaginable. But still imaginable. I'll never forget that feeling of dread in my heart when I was filling sandbags to create a fortified position in the safe room of our home, which if it came down to it, I'd put my wife and children into that room and defend it with my life until the very end. And my wife and I had very difficult conversations about what we would do if it came to that final showdown. You know conversations which no loving father should ever have to have. But conversations which our people have unfortunately been forced to contend with many times throughout our history.

I remember filling the sandbags and seeing the ancient fortification of Masada in the distance on the horizon, realizing that it was right there, on that mountain top that the entire community of survivors from the Roman massacre and destruction decided to take their own lives and the lives of their children rather than fall victim to the dehumanizing, vicious activity that awaited them, from the rapidly ascending Romans. And there's no hiding from it. By making the decision to stay in my heart, I was ultimately accepting that our fate could, God forbid, be the same as theirs was.

And those were, I think I could say they were the hardest days of my life. It was not an easy decision. It was ultimately a decision which in some ways, I felt like I was offering up the lives of my wife and children, my life if need be, I was offering it up to God. But if historians were to ever to discuss our decision to stay during those fateful days, it would be both inaccurate and misleading if I was positioned as a fearless Judean warrior, staring potential annihilation in the eye with unwavering, unshakeable determination and fearlessness. That's not how it was. I was scared, I was more scared than I've ever been.

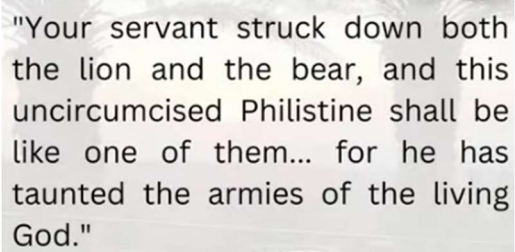
Which is why I spent much of this Shabbat discussing with just about everybody that I came in contact with. Shaena says it all the time. When something is on my mind, everybody I meet, that's the question that I ask. And I was talking to them, discussing the question of King David.

As I told you, Shaena and I have been recently, we completed our first TV series in our marriage. We never made it through any series before. We just couldn't find the time and it's hard watching anything in less than four-minute installments before falling asleep or before SHE falls asleep. But we made it through the eight part mini series called The House of David on Amazon Prime. Have any of you seen it? Raise your hands if you've seen it. Ok, some of you have seen it and watched it. I'd love to talk to you about it. We didn't even think we had Amazon Prime. I have no idea how we were watching it.

But while I did enjoy it, I'm not recommending that you watch it or not watch it. Because there's just enough elements that they use that creative license that didn't align with the story at all in any way that I would endorse. But all in all, I was really impressed with how they brought certain elements of the whole thing to life. And there was a dialogue in the last episode that initially rubbed me the wrong way. But upon further reflection, I think it revealed to me that there was a critical facet of the entire battle between David and Goliath which I've reviewed and reviewed and reviewed a thousand times and perhaps I didn't sufficiently reflect on that. Maybe it wasn't a time in my life yet to reflect on it.

But the time it arrived and so basically in the final episode, after David had volunteered to fight the giant and King Saul agreed to his request, David collected the rocks in the stream and was approaching the battle and his brother...I think it was Eliyav, asked him, "David, how could you not be afraid?" To which David responded by turning to him, looking him in the eye and saying, "I'm terrified."

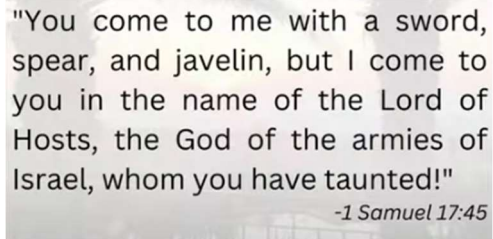
And so, my initial reaction was, "No, no he wasn't. That is creative license, that's just them editorializing." It was always so clear to me that he was always so filled with rage and righteous indignation at this uncircumcised Philistine, mocking the armies of the living God of Israel, that he just had no room for fear. He wasn't afraid. But then I thought again. Was he really not afraid? How could he not have been afraid? In the end of the day, he was a mortal. He was a man of flesh and blood. On the other hand, he had been anointed by the prophet, Samuel, already. And he had established credibility, at least in his own mind. Right? As he declared to Saul:



"Your servant struck down both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them... for he has taunted the armies of the living God."

-1 Samuel 17:36

And when he faced Goliath, what did he say then?

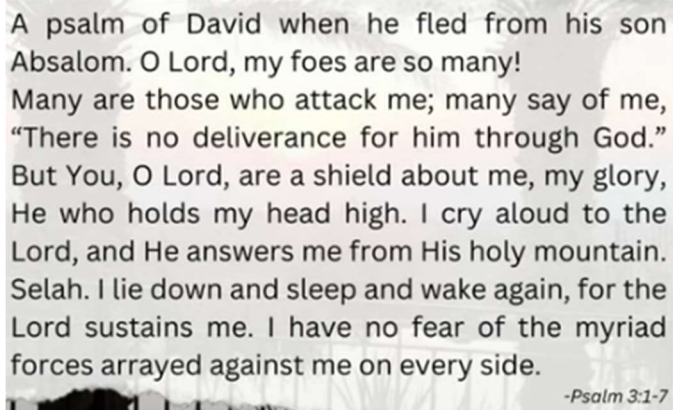


"You come to me with a sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted!"

-1 Samuel 17:45

There is no mention of fear there. But there also wasn't a mention of fearlessness. It doesn't say he felt no fear. So I had discussions with friends, a little bit during synagogue, mostly after synagogue. I had long and passionate discussions with Jeremy's family, with Jeremy's children about it. You have to talk to Jeremy's kids. Those are some well thought-out, deeply philosophical kids. Even to the youngest.

And I was thinking about it all of Shabbat and interestingly enough, most people started by saying instinctively that David had no fear. But in the end, I saw they were coming around with an open mind that perhaps he did. Because for me, while the actual narrative in the 1st book of Samuel does not mention fear, King David's own journal of his heart's prayers and desires written throughout his life's journey, which is the book of Psalms, David talks about fear all the time. There's Psalm 3, which David writes as he's fleeing from the seemingly successful rebellion led by his son, Absalom. Let's start reading inside:

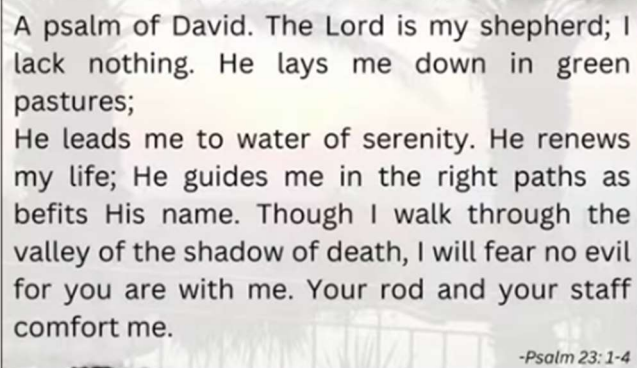


A psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom. O Lord, my foes are so many! Many are those who attack me; many say of me, "There is no deliverance for him through God." But You, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, He who holds my head high. I cry aloud to the Lord, and He answers me from His holy mountain. Selah. I lie down and sleep and wake again, for the Lord sustains me. I have no fear of the myriad forces arrayed against me on every side.

-Psalm 3:1-7

So when you look at that, on the one hand, it seems at the beginning that he cries out, he feels fear, but then he has no fear. Ok, so it's true, he says he has no fear of the multitudes of the enemies surrounding him. But on the other hand, if he has no fear, why is he crying out to HaShem? What is that about?

Now let's look at the famous Psalm 23. That's actually the first one that came to mind, but I just sort of wanted to go through chronological order for some reason, or order of numbers:



A psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing. He lays me down in green pastures; He leads me to water of serenity. He renews my life; He guides me in the right paths as befits His name. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me.

-Psalm 23:1-4

So he's talking about fear there and NOT having fear. Psalm 27:

Of David. The Lord is my light and my help; whom should I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, whom should I dread? When evil men assail me to devour my flesh—a— it is they, my foes and my enemies, who stumble and fall. Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war beset me, still would I be confident.

-Psalm 27:1-3

We're going to go back, but I just want to move forward for a second. Psalm 34, which he composed as he fled from Saul, when he feigned insanity with Achish. You remember that episode:

Of David, when he feigned madness in the presence of Achish, who turned him out, and he left. I bless the Lord at all times; praise of Him is ever in my mouth. I glory in the Lord; let the lowly hear it and rejoice. Exalt the Lord with me; let us extol His name together. I turned to the Lord, and He answered me; He saved me from all my fears.

-Psalm 34:5

We could go on and on, but I'm going to stop here I think because I think that the answer to the questions of whether David felt fear, is really in some ways beautifully expressed right there. He saved me from all my fears. Meaning that HaShem saved him, not just from his enemies, but HaShem saved him from his fears themselves. Meaning that he did

have fears.

We've discussed this in Fellowships before. It is one of the concepts that is most precious to my heart. The idea of fear. Because I spent a lot of my life trying to neutralize it through faith and trust, and I see every bit of fear in my heart as sort of an opportunity to fill a void of God's Presence right there. Fear is a big thing. We've discussed it before. But the Malbim discussed on this Psalm, that fear itself can become a trap. That fear can be worse than the actual danger. David praises God not only for saving him from danger, but for saving him from being paralyzed by fear. David is admitting that he's afraid and he's thanking God for saving him from the fear itself. Ok, I know that was the last one, but just one more. Psalm 56:

For the leader; on *yonath elem rehokim*.— Of David. A *michtam*; when the Philistines seized him in Gath. Have mercy on me, O God, for men persecute me; all day long my adversary oppresses me. My watchful foes persecute me all day long; many are my adversaries, O Exalted One. When I am afraid, I trust in You, in God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I am not afraid; what can mortals do to me?

-Psalm 56:1-5

Ok, so I guess that would put it to rest, right? We see the answer right there. When I am afraid, David says, I trust in You. Here David is showing the key to his courage. Yes, fear is strong, but his trust is stronger. And I think by diving deep into these portions, we can see that King David wasn't fearless like a machine. After all, if he didn't have any fear, why does he write

so much about it? Why does he pray so much about it? Why is it such a central theme in the

deepest prayers from his heart. And the answer is, that he was fearful like a human. But faithful like a king. He teaches us that fear is not a sin, but letting your fear rule you, is. Instead fear becomes the doorway to a deeper trust and a more exalted prayer. And real growth. As King David was afraid, King David was afraid. Aaron was overwhelmed with grief.

We learn that Aaron felt the pain of searing loss, a grief so deep, it could have broken him. But instead of collapsing, he stood in silent strength. And Aaron was silent, teaches us that true greatness is not denying the sorrow, but holding it, honoring it, and rising above it. In his silence, Aaron transcended the grief. Not by escaping it, but by carrying it with faith, transforming unbearable pain into quiet, holy acceptance and resilience. David transcending his fear and Aaron transcending his grief, each of those great spiritual feats became another note of a song that will one day blossom into redemption. I really believe that of them and I believe that of us. For our own ability to transcend.

I think that this has been weighing on me with such urgency because just as in some ways I need to believe that Aaron was truly broken and devastated and transcended that grief out of love of God. I feel like I need to believe that David, too, felt real fear and transcended that fear out of love for God. Because Aaron wasn't grieved and David wasn't afraid...if that was the case, then I don't know if there's anything I could learn from them. I don't know if there is a way that I can truly relate to them at this point in my life when I need them so much. If they didn't feel that grief and fear, I don't know if they're even within reach, that I can grow in my love for HaShem by tapping into their strength and their faith and their love.

So in the end, both Aaron the priest and King David were both flesh and blood. That's what makes the Torah so beautiful. Our forefathers, our ancestors, our heroes, they weren't infallible, invincible, Zeus-like, god-like figures. No, they were human, very human. They had short-comings and flaws and they sinned. But in the end, through their love for HaShem, through their trust in God, they were able to transcend those natural human reactions through their deep passionate desire to serve God and exalt Him and sanctify His Name.

Which brings us back to the very beginning of the Fellowship, the yearning for redemption. Will it come through nature or will it come through transcendence? So this week's Torah portion, what's it called? Parashat Shemini. Shemini means 8th, the 8th. And we know the number the number 8 is symbolic of transcendence, of going beyond nature, entering the higher realm. The first seven days of the dedication of the Tabernacle led to this moment. Just like the 6th Millenia of struggle will lead to the 7th Millenia, the Shabbat S'batot. And then the 8th, which is eternity, but that's a little abstract and macro. But it is all connected.

The Land of Israel is the only place where the 8th dimension can be fully revealed. The Torah of eretz Yisrael is not just about Halacha, about Jewish law. It's about harmonizing heaven and earth, lifting nature into the supernatural, transcending the natural realm. The Mishkan was the beginning. The redemption of eretz Yisrael and the end...that's the end of that same journey.

When Aaron hears that his sons had died, he was silent. And it wasn't a passive silence. He was not defeated or dead inside. On the contrary, he was silent, like the Land of Israel itself right now. Holding pain while waiting for redemption. Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel has absorbed our cries and our blood and yet, like Aaron, it remains faithful. It doesn't turn bitter. It waits. The ultimate redemption, like Aaron's reward for his silence is forged in that restraint. And that restraint is transcendence. The strange fire of the exile is being extinguished and the holy fire of Zion is being rekindled. We're the generation of Shemini. We live in the 8th Day. And our task is to bring the transcendent fire of heaven into the soil of the Land of Israel.

But we must remember that fire requires purity and intention and humility and readiness for the long silence before the ultimate song begins. And that's why I have to be ready. Again and again I'm expecting Him, awaiting...ok, it didn't happen. We're in this for the long journey. That transcendent fire from above is requiring a transcendent fire from us below. In the end of the day, my friends, we're not stoics. We're not emotionally removed from the world. I know there's sort of a pull and a lure to that. There's a lot of videos on the Internet, the Daily Stoic, the idea of stoicism, of not being affected by the emotional pain of this world is really appealing. But there's a flip side to it, and that's that you don't feel the joy. But that's not us, that's not the Torah, that's not the life that God desires for us. We are deeply immersed in every moment of it. Just as we feel the love and the joy and the gratitude, we also fully embrace the pain and the tears and the grief. We don't avoid these emotions, we embrace them with every fiber of our being and when necessary, we transcend them.

And that's why I believe the redemption will be miraculous and transcendent. Because that is who we are. You know on Shabbat, Jeremy's daughter, Eden, read to us a letter composed by a soldier named Gadi Ezra. He wrote it to his fiancée, Galit Meislik, from the frontlines of the war in Gaza. And even though it wasn't short, I couldn't cut any of it out, I didn't have thechutzpah to edit any of it out. I just wanted to share the whole thing with you. He wrote:

Dear Galiti,
If you receive this letter, it is a sign that something has happened to me. This morning we received the news that the military operation that was planned for yesterday will take place, with God's help, today. I told you that the operation had changed, and that it was different than the one originally planned - I told you this, dearest, because I did not want to worry you. It was very hard for me to not tell you the truth, but I preferred this than to cause you worry. (The Gemara says one may distort the facts for the sake of peace - "Meshanin mipnei hashalom," also the inner peace of someone you love more than anything on earth.)

My beloved, on one hand I feel that there is nothing more that I want than to be with you—to love you and to establish with you a home and a family. But on the other hand, there isn't anything that I would want more than to participate in this military operation and strike those terrorists a blow so strong they will never again even consider carrying out a terrorist attack. To do this there is a price that we must pay—and I am willing to be this price.

Don't be angry with me, my love, but at moments like this your feelings for Klal Yisrael are supposed to guide you—and you must relate to this evil as if your private life does not exist. "Men in King David's army divorced their wives before going off to war" (See L'emunat Iteinu—Part 4).

My beautiful one, my only distress is that you will be sorry; and that I will not be the one who will make you happy. Because there isn't anything in the world you deserve more. I therefore request, my beloved, that you should be happy! That you will be joyful, that you will love and that you will blossom—because that is what you deserve. I will always watch over you—and I will make sure that you will meet the man who will give you more happiness than I have given you.

My darling, everything that happens is ultimately for the best, and if this is the will of the Almighty, then that's the way it has to be. What is left for us is to accept it with love.

I want you to know that you will be my last thought at that moment when [what] will happen to me takes place. And I will leave this world with the knowledge that I was the happiest person I possibly could be—due to you. [It is] you who brought me to the highest summit of joy and happiness; and it is you who [helped] me to reach accomplishments that I only dreamed about.

I thank you for all the good and happiness you have inspired me with when we were together. It is not that we were together, but we are always together—we were together before we came into this world, and we are also together when we separate from it. Remember this, my dearest, we are always, always together, because the root of our souls is one.

'Kol ma d'avid Rahmana l'tav avid.' Everything is for the best, even this. I promise you that wherever I am, it is the most wonderful place. I am not suffering and I am not regretful. My only sorrow is the sorrow caused to those who are left behind—to you, the family and friends.

Please spread this message, my dearest, "Don't despair—be always happy." This is what I request of you, even if it is difficult. I know that I am able to ask this of you, because I know the natural happiness and joy that shines from within you always. It is your joy and happiness which I so much love in you.

Was Gadi Ezra afraid? I can answer that. Absolutely he was afraid. He didn't even get to start his life with his beloved, Galit yet. He stood to lose everything. He was absolutely afraid. But he transcended that fear for God. Every parent who stood over their freshly buried child on Mt. Hertzl Cemetery, military cemetery, recites the kaddish prayer and blesses God through their tears of grief and

devastation and sanctifies His Name. Were each and every one of them not broken into a thousand irreparable pieces? Absolutely they were. But they transcended that brokenness and they blessed His great Name.

In the Name of God, the prophet Malachi proclaims:

Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you—said God of Hosts.

-Malachi 3:7

Sometimes I feel like I don't know what more we could do. As a nation, as a people, we are transcending ourselves and turning back to God. And so, how can I not eagerly anticipate His transcendent redemption and return? I think that's why I believe it's going to be so transcendent. Because it will just match our return to Him.

So it didn't happen this last Pesach, I know that, but it will happen. It will happen. I believe it will happen soon, but I know that it will happen as well.

And now my friends, before I open up to the Fellowship Connection because I would like to do that, I would like to connect with you and hear from you, any questions, anything you have to say, any thoughts, your identification with what I've said here. Maximum invitation, minimum pressure. I just want to create a space here. But before we open up to that. Let me bless all of us, both with the words from my heart, as well as the words recited for thousands of years by Aaron, himself and the children of Aaron to the nation of Israel.

First from my heart – Master of the Universe, faithful and compassionate Father, You have gathered us here today across mountains and valleys, across oceans and borders as one family with one heart, with one soul, united in love for You, for Your people and Your Land. Thank You for the gift of this Fellowship. Thank You for the words that strengthen, the prayers that uplift, and the tears that purify. HaShem, seal upon our hearts the lessons of today, the lessons of Aaron, that true greatness is not the absence of grief, but the choice to sanctify You through it. The lesson of David, that courage is not born of fearlessness, but of trust that is stronger than fear. The lesson of Gadi Ezra, and all of the heroes of Israel, that true love is sacrifice. And true joy is found in serving something greater than ourselves. Serving God. Plant within us, HaShem, the spirit of transcendence, the courage to feel deeply, the strength to stand upright, the humility to wait with hope, the passion to keep building, the fire to keep believing, the faith to keep yearning for Your full redemption with all of our hearts. May we live as Aaron lived, brokenhearted, yet faithful. May we walk as David walked, fearful yet triumphant. May we fight as Gadi fought, afraid and undefeated. And may we merit speedily in our days to witness the Great Day, when Your Name will be one and Your people will be home. Bless every soul gathered here today, bless all of our friends whose prayers weave this Fellowship together. Bless their families, bless their homes, bless their dreams, bless their courage. And may it be Your will HaShem, that the seeds planted in today's gathering will blossom into songs of joy and redemption. And may we merit to greet Mashiach soon in joy together. Amen.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

May HaShem bless and protect you. May HaShem make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May HaShem lift up His Face toward you and grant you peace. Amen.