

Session 225
Acherei Mot/Kedoshim – Rising from the Ashes
11 May 2025
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Je6JifNhSi0>

Ari

Shalom everybody, can you see me? Give me a thumbs up. Ok, great, fantastic. It is so good to see all of you big time. It feels like it's really been a long time. I guess it's because I wasn't on live on the last Fellowship. So, it's so good to see all of you live again. There is just so much to talk about, so much to cover, so much that I want to share with you on this Fellowship. I pray that my voice holds out. I've been losing it on and off. But I also want to leave room for the Fellowship Connection. If any of you want to connect to share your thoughts and what you're going through and blessings or questions or anything. I just love the connection part. There's little I love more than a Fellowship Connection when it sort of lights up.

Because that connection is a huge part of what this Fellowship is really about. A connection to each other, a connection to HaShem, a connection to Israel. That's what the Fellowship is about. Rav Biederman was actually sharing this week, the Chasidic saying, "One can be close and far, and one can be far and close." Have you heard that before? I mean, it makes intuitive sense, you know, meaning that we may be physically distant from each other, but in the world of truth, we're actually close to each other if our hearts and our minds and desires are together. Someone says, "Are you close with your father?" They're not saying, "Is he around the corner?" "Are you close with him?" Meaning emotionally, spiritually.

The analogy he gives is to a house standing right next to a powerful energy plant, yet it remains dark. Why? Because it's not connected. No cables are linking it to the source. Meanwhile, homes far away shine brightly. Not because of proximity, but because they're plugged in. The same is true with spiritual connection. It's not about how close you stand, but whether you're truly connected. And I really think that this Fellowship is a testimony to that.

And so, I want to start with a prayer, a prayer for our Fellowship and a prayer for each other. And again, thank you, Ardelle, for compiling and organizing and aggregating these prayer packets. They really do keep us connected in prayer together. And so, I want to try to bring it all together, you know, because I always pray sort of like individually, but I thought I would bring it a little bit together here.

HaShem, Master of the Universe, we gather as one voice from many corners of the world, lifting up the praises and the pleas of our Fellowship family before You, the praises of Israel before

You, even the praises of mankind before You. We thank You for every healing already unfolding from Ray's growing strength, Wendy's improving oxygen, Levi's progress, constantly thinking about and praying for Levi as well, for Chelsy's son's recovering tcells, and for answering prayers of sustenance. From insurance miracles, to safe getaways, and moments of peace. Thank You for all the victories, both great and small. And now we ask for continuing mercy and healing for Wendy who is still in critical condition. That You should breathe life and strength into her body. What a painful story that is. For Samuel's bladder to function fully. For Phoenix's young heart to heal from trauma. For Seth and Rich and all veterans suffering from PTSD. We are here in Israel. You know, we know what PTSD is. Please, HaShem, heal all the traumas and the brokenness. We ask for healing for Colleen's shoulder, for Gabriel's immune system, and for clarity in all medical tests. Especially for Ken, Kathy, Harald, Cal, and all those that are undergoing cancer evaluations. We pray for emotional and mental healing, for Joselyn, and for Erin, and for Brandon, and for all who feel worn down by life's pain. May they feel Your Presence in their confusion and Your love in their isolation. We ask for guidance for big decisions, for big decisions facing so many of us who stand at crossroads right now. Please HaShem, provide clarity and courage and the confidence that You are leading us in every step.

Please HaShem, bring protection over every soldier and every citizen of Israel. Strengthen the warriors on the front lines and in the homes, return the hostages, heal the Land and its people. Unite us under Your Name. Bless the children of this Fellowship, their futures, their families, their faith. Restore broken relationships, bring job opportunities, and provide every financial burden with healing. Give traveling blessings, blessings of traveling to those on the road or in the air, safety in surgeries, peace in caregiving, joy in gardens, wisdom in every medical decision and spiritual journey. And most of all, HaShem, let every obstacle become a miracle, and let this Fellowship be a sanctuary of connection between each other, to Israel, and most importantly to You. Amen.

Ok, now before I go on, allow me to bring in Jeremy, my beloved friend who inspires me all the time, every day. Jeremy, here you are.

Jeremy

Shalom friends, thank you so much. I love seeing you. This is about as...I don't know what the word is, kind of wild as I'm going to get. My hair is all over the place, my beard is unkept, I'm sure you've noticed. But we are now toward the end of the last days of the Omer counting where we don't cut our hair, we don't shave unless it's a special holiday, unless it's Yom Ha'Atzmaut. We are just really attaching ourselves to the history of our people and mourning the destruction really of the Temple and the final rebellion of Bar Kochba and Rebbe Akiva and his students that all died and really left the Torah almost to be lost.

And so, it's amazing that in 2025 we are still practically living that mourning as best as we can. But I feel like we are entering into a time where the mourning is coming to an end. I see it right around the horizon. I can just tell, they have enrolled now or enlisted as many reservists as they did at the beginning of the war. And there was 100% of the reservists that came through. Meaning every single Israeli that was called up for duty has arrived. And that is astounding because they've all been called up so many times. But something big is going down in Gaza. We are going to see a new light very soon.

And with that new light, I would like to remind everyone that Ari and I are coming to the United States for a Fellowship gathering at the Israel Summit June 9th. Everyone that can should absolutely come and be with us. There're going to be special breakout sessions that are just for our Fellowship. We'll have time to meet in person, time to schmooze, time to really connect with each other. And not only that, but the Shabbat before the Israel Summit, we're going to be hosting a Shabbaton right next to Dallas, Texas on June 6th and 7th. I would absolutely invite every single one of you to attend that Shabbat. That's going to be amazing. The only challenge is there's actually only room for 100 people. And so, it's really first come, first serve. And I know that the places are being taken up quickly. I wanted to make sure that I announced it here on the Fellowship to make sure that everyone that wants to, everyone that's going to be at the Israel Summit, the Shabbat right before the Israel Summit, we're going to be hosting a Shabbaton. And it really is like a dream come true. One day we'll be able to host hopefully a Shabbaton here in Judea. But in the meantime, we'll be able to host a Shabbaton in Texas, and that's almost as good.

So, I want to tell you about a Shabbaton that I just had here in the Farm in Israel. And it happened this Shabbat. And you know, I have a small guest house that's here. And there are already enough people in Israel that have heard about the Arugot Farm, that most of the Shabbats, my guest house is taken. But this last Shabbat, it was reserved by one of the most remarkable families in Israel, the Raz family.



Noam Raz, of blessed memory, the father of the home, was killed exactly two years ago in a special operation in Samaria. And he was a part of an elite unit, a professional soldier, one of the most elite units in the country, called the Yamam. The best of the best of the commandos in Israel. When they finish their military service and they want to continue in the top tier of the army, they all try to get into the Yamam, and only a select few actually get in. And he was in.

And he stayed until his mid 40's. And he was more than just a warrior. He was really a hero of Israel. And the more I read about him and the more I hear about him, the more I saw his marvelous family, his wonderful wife, the more just astounded I was at how pure he was. And I'll tell you a story that his wife said just in passing. It was his birthday, a few days before he was killed. And she asked him what he wanted to do for his birthday. He was off from his military service. He packed a little bag with a portable gas stove, you know, you can make some coffee with it. He threw in a Bible to his bag and then took his wife off on a hike, just around Samaria.

And he was just so good. Just goodness covered in goodness. He was pure, integral. He was what it really means to be holy. And so remarkable that they came to the Farm on the Torah portion called Kedoshim, being holy. And they gave me a book about him and just...it was just so inspiring. There was one sentence that really stuck out to me. And he said, "If you have an empty glass, you still have a glass." And that's kind of a playoff, you know, "If the glass is half empty glass, if the glass is half full. If you have an empty glass, there is still a glass. There's even what to think positively when the glass is totally empty.

And aside from him doing daily physical training to stay in the most elite unit in Israel, he learned Daf Yomi, he learned a couple of chapters of the Bible every single day. And when he was off duty, he planted over a 1,000 olive trees that he tended to by himself. His own orchard in Samaria. He made his own olive oil. He was the picture of just an ideal, biblical Jew. It was like...I don't know what else to say. He was a warrior, a poet, a scholar, a man of the Land, a man of the spirit. It's hard to imagine that Jews like this really exist. And yet, some of them have been taken away from us so painfully.

But the truth is, we would never have known that there're Jews like this that really exist. Softspoken, they're not on Instagram, they're not on Facebook posting their life. They're just living their life connected to God, connected to this Land. And Friday was his Yahrzeit. Friday was the year anniversary of his passing. And his family went to the military cemetery in Jerusalem, Har Herzl, and then came directly to the Farm. And when Tehila saw his widowed wife, his five boys, and his little girl, she said they looked devastated from their trip at the cemetery. They were just so down. And she welcomed them and tried to love on them and she showed them around and showed them our guest house.

And then a few minutes later, while she was talking with the wife, she noticed that the boys were laughing and splashing around in the pool next to the guest house. She looked over and they all looked so happy, just playing in the pool before Shabbat. She came to me with a little bit of tears in her eyes. And she said that she was just so happy that we dedicated our life to building this place in the Arugot Farm, a place that can literally transform people's sadness into

joy. And people come to see the beauty of the Arugot Farm and sense the spirit that's here. And they love seeing the desert become beautiful. And it was then that I really recognized a prophecy in the book of Jeremiah in chapter 31, verse 2. And here's what it says:

Thus says the Lord: "The people who survived the sword found grace and beauty in the desert and Israel will go and renew and rest."

-Jeremiah 31:2

So, a people who survived the sword, that's like a way of saying, the survivors of the war, meaning the people that are going to come back to Israel are going to go through a war and there's going to be survivors. And what are these survivors of the sword? The survivors of the war going to do? They're going to come to the desert and they're going to find grace, they're going to find grace and beauty in the desert, and they're just going to renew and relax and rejuvenate.

And what can I say? I would never describe the nation of Israel in the Land of Israel as a nation of survivors. The survivors of the war, the survivors of the sword. But right now, after October 7th and after this war that never ends, this is a country that should be called the survivors of the war. And what will happen? Exactly what happened right now with these survivors who lost their father. But the survivors came to the desert, found grace and beauty here, and they just enjoyed themselves as they were renewing their souls and chilling out by the pool, laughing and having a good time. And the Land itself was healing for them.

And it's beautiful to see because even in the midst of this war, we can see prophecy come to pass. We can see the destiny of Israel unfold. We're entering into a new era where old ideas, how we used to see things are going to be transformed forever. And I keep on thinking about Noam Raz, this amazing man. And as we're learning the Torah portion all around the world about Kedoshim, about holy. So God says, "You should be holy because I'm holy." And I think most of the people read the word holy and they think, well, that must mean you have to be separated because God is separated. You have to be special because God is special.

But this Shabbat, it hit me. When we say, "Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh..." When we say that holy, holy, holy, the whole world is filled with God's glory. It means something different. It doesn't mean that we're just separate. It means holiness is wholeness. W H O L E. It means complete. When you are living a life that's a loving father, a loving husband, a paramedic and a sniper, a scholar and a warrior, a man of the spirit and a man of the Land, you are holy because holiness is godliness and godliness is one. And the more whole you are, the more at one you are, the more complete you are, the holier you are.

And entering into this new era, we're going to start changing the way the world lives, the way the world sees HaShem, the way the world experiences emunah. And I'm feeling it here in the Land of Israel. And my only hope is to broadcast that change to the world. And it's the reason why I made the new course on the Land of Israel network, www.thelandofisrael.com, which is really made for the people of the Fellowship here. And I would encourage all of you who have not yet enrolled to sign up. Now for Yeshiva members and founders, it's totally free. For Fellowship members, it's not \$200 like it's advertised for the world. It's \$10. It's absolutely for you. And let's take our emunah, the ancient way to live with biblical faith. Wake up to the time that we're living in, and really take it to the next level together.

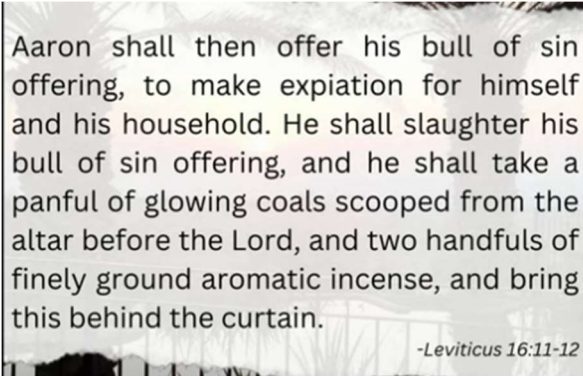
And so, with that, my friends, I wish you a shavua tov. I love to see you. Have a beautiful week, and I can't wait to see you at the Shabbaton before the Israel Summit and at the Israel Summit itself. Shalom.

Ari

Ok, everybody, shalom to all of you. Let me just get my bearings here. Jeremy, you're leaving? How could you? I'm just kidding, I'm just kidding. I'm sure you have a calling. Thank you for that. Actually the truth is, that the Shabbaton that Jeremy was talking about, I'm getting increasingly excited about it. Because it really is an opportunity for an authentic, real Shabbat. We just had such a special Shabbat here at the Farm, and it's just a time when I can reflect on the fact that like we're all sitting in the room and we're not like lost in our phones, and we're not distracted. We're just fully present with each other. Time just slows down and we can really Fellowship, even in a way that we can't fellowship here right now in this Fellowship. It's just another level and we can spend that together in the Shabbaton. So you can turn to Tabitha, she can connect you with how you can sign up and be a part of it. We'd love to have you as a part of that and the Israel Summit.

Forgive my constant clearing of my throat. Anyways, you know when I reflected upon the packet of prayers and prayer requests, when I think about what we're going through here in Israel, an idea that Rav Biederman shares from this week's Torah portion, it just like rushes into my heart.

He quotes chapter 16, which speaks about Aaron's service as the High Priest in the holy Temple on Yom Kippur on the Day of Atonement. The Torah calls for ketoret, right, the sacred incense to be dakah, finally ground. Let's look inside, chapter 16, verses 11 and 12:



Aaron shall then offer his bull of sin offering, to make expiation for himself and his household. He shall slaughter his bull of sin offering, and he shall take a panful of glowing coals scooped from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of finely ground aromatic incense, and bring this behind the curtain.

-Leviticus 16:11-12

Rashi wonders, why say this again? Isn't all the ketoret, dakah? It's already ground fine. Why does it need to say it again? And the answer holds a secret. Get ready for this because it really affected me. For Yom Kippur, it wasn't enough for it to be dak. And it wasn't enough for it to be ground fine, this fine grounding of the ketoret. It had to be finer than fine.

On the eve of that holy day, the incense was returned to the mortar. You know the mortar where it's crushed, it was crushed again. Pounded more, refined beyond all of the rest of the incense. Now let's imagine for a second that those sacred spices of the ketoret could speak, right? You can imagine that they would protest, right? They would say, "What? Why us? Why are we being ground again? Why are we being ground more than all the others? Why all of this pain and this grinding and this...haven't we gone through enough? That's what they would say.

But the next day, they would understand. Their extra breaking was not a burden. It was a blessing. They were being prepared for the holiest mission of all, to rise and smoke within the Kodesh Ha'kodeshim, the Holy of Holies, the most intimate place between heaven and earth. They were chosen to be the deepest offering to HaShem on the most sacred day of the year. Right? There was a purpose to it. And I know that it's hard to stomach sometimes. I know that while we're going through these pains of our life, words just don't provide any solace very often, at least for me.

But the truth is, that it's the same with us. We are that ketoret, we are that incense. When life is grinding us down again and again, when we are returned to the mortar again and again, we ask, "Why?" Why more suffering, more pressure, more breaking? But one day we will see that each hardship was shaping us and refining us and elevating us to enter a place that others cannot. A place that's unique for us, that we needed to be grounded exactly the way that we were ground. That we are here to bring light where others cannot reach, to offer something to the world and to HaShem that only comes from a soul that has been made finer than fine. Dakh min hadakah.

And again, my friends, we don't need to understand it all. Most often, we cannot understand it all. And by the way we're not supposed to understand it all. Because if we did, it would stifle the growth and it would negate our need to flex our trust and our faith in God. It would undermine the whole enterprise. If the Israelites knew that the sea would part, then what's the deal? It's not even a challenge, it's not a miracle, there's nothing special there.

That's why in the portion, when it says that we should be holy, kedoshim, we should be holy, one of the examples is that we're not to seek palm readers or fortune tellers or necromancers. Remember Saul did that to reach Samuel and that was a horrible, terrible thing that he did, right? We're not supposed to do that. Our future and our hopes are in God's Hands. And we do not seek to undermine our relationship with Him by peeking to the end. Because for us, the words of even the best and most authentic fortune teller doesn't even apply to us. Our destiny is in HaShem's Hands and no other.

And that brings me to what may be the greatest challenge and the greatest gift of all, right? Emunah, faith. We live in a generation that craves clarity and explanation and certainty. But the truth is, the holiest moments in life don't come from understanding. They come from trusting, from walking into the sea like Nachshon ben Abinadav. That prince from the tribe of Judah went so deep into the waters that he was on the verge of drowning. Only then did the water part. The holiest moments in our lives come from letting ourselves be returned to the mortar again. And still whispering, "HaShem, I trust You."

Because my friends, as a nation, it feels like we are currently being ground and ground in the mortar without end. Right? We may be taken out for a moment, but it's hard for many of us to even appreciate or enjoy those moments of reprieve because we're just wincing and recoiling from anticipation of being thrust back into it again. Any moment those sirens could go off, any moment the news could come, soldiers, any moment we're back into the mortar.

You know, it just happened again. This past Thursday, we lost another two precious gems, diamonds. Two holy soldiers of Israel that were killed during a military operation in Gaza on Thursday.



There is Staff Sergeant Yam Frid, from Golani, my unit that I was in. Just 21 years old. He was known by all as just the best son to his parents. He was filled with love and light and his whole life was ahead of him, just ripped away viciously.



And then there was Sergeant Yishai Elyakim Urbach, just married, just two, three months ago now. Yuval is Yishai's widow who married him, you know as I said, three months ago. And she said, "I told him something that I knew would make him happy. I told him that I had ironed his Shabbat shirts for him. I was at home and suddenly I had a very strong feeling of Divine inspiration, the uplifting feeling that is always said to exist in the home of a husband and a wife. And I had the great privilege of being Yishai's wife. He had an infectious love for God and fear of God. He knew how to love the Torah and God, the Almighty over everyone he met. I learned everything from him and especially to love every person in the Jewish nation. It's a strange and heavy feeling, but I'm thankful that I had the opportunity to mourn him properly and observe our traditions of grief. Especially here in Israel where he's buried in our homeland, protected by our military. As painful as it is, I find a measure of peace knowing that if he had to die, it happened this way. There's dignity in it. He died in service, surrounded by the symbols of our nation. It feels right that his death holds meaning, not just personally, but for our people, our country. And what we see as a larger story of national and spiritual renewal or redemption."

I mean his commander spoke about him, just so beautifully, you know, he said "In this war, Yishai's generation has proved to all of us that this is the generation of victory. Throughout the war in Lebanon and Gaza, Yishai was the one at the forefront of every maneuver. Ahead of the current tour in Gaza, the company commander was also wounded in the incident, said that he needs someone who totally excels in his military skills, who will know what to do without having to explain everything to him. In short, bring me Yishai. Yishai was on the cutting edge, not only of his professionalism, but in his heart. He loved his country and he fought and he fell for it. Thank you for the privilege of fighting by your side."

I'm just sharing this with all of you because I was just so touched by all of it. I'm sure if I dove as deeply into Yam's life, it would have been the same thing. It's always the most precious gems. I even found this video. I didn't have the time to translate it, I just found it about an hour ago. But I just wanted you to be able to see his holy face and hear his beautiful voice, singing praises to HaShem. He's singing the song, like an eagle will awaken his nest and draws its inspiration from Deuteronomy 32:11 where Moshe compares God's care for Israel to an eagle tending to it's young:

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest
and hovers over its young,
spreading its wings to catch them
and carrying them on its pinions.

-Deuteronomy 32:11

It's just so crazy, it's crazy that the message here in this song that he's singing, that you're about to hear, is really about God's nurturing and protective essence being like an eagle that stirs its nest and urges its young to take flight, right? Disrupting their comfort to cause

them to grow, right? God, too, unsettles us to help us grow and to help us rise. But just as the eagle soars close, ready to catch its babies if they fall, God stays near, faithfully supporting and lifting us through every challenge. This is what he's singing here right now:



I mean, he's just an angel. I found another video of him speaking. I was going to play that again, just so you could see his face and see him speaking and see just what unbelievable like grace, chen. He found favor, just favor. This is a video from his funeral. Look at this video from his funeral:



I mean, it's everybody singing, "Please, HaShem, have mercy on your nation, on Your nation Israel, Your chosen people. Have mercy on us, have mercy, have mercy."

And then I look at that funeral, and I look at the funerals that I've been at, the countless funerals. And then I just compare it to Chamas and the hate and the rage and vitriol and the vile, and I'm just like, you know, if people are looking at this world and they fall on that side, at this point, they can't plead ignorance. You see, your eyes see what they see. There's light and blessing and spirituality and darkness and evil and hate. That's what we're dealing with.

Anyway, so Yishai was tragically killed when he and his fellow soldiers entered a building in Gaza that was connected to a Chamas terror tunnel. You know, Chamas terrorists fired an RPG at the structure and caused it to collapse. Yishai lost his life there, but many others were wounded. Some were seriously wounded. One of the injured soldiers was so determined to attend Yishai's funeral that when the hospital said no, he just refused to take no for an answer. And they had

no choice but to honor his request, bringing him to the funeral in his bed, in his hospital bed, wearing his hospital gown.



This is the connection between the soldiers of Israel. That's the connection of the nation of Israel. That's the connection for those who love the people and the nation of Israel. Our connection is forged in fire. And there's no wound and there's no grief and no shattered bone can sever it. Oey. May HaShem bless that soldier, along with all the wounded soldiers of Israel with complete health and healing and lives of strength, peace, and joy. Amen.

And as we were burying these two soldiers, we were woken up this morning with news that the body of the missing soldier Tzvi Feldman, who was killed in the Battle of Sultan Yacoub in 1982 during the first Lebanon War was recovered on a mission that we don't know about. It was complicated, it was covert, it was a secretive mission. We don't know much about it, but he was brought back home. How many of you have heard this? Raise your hand if you have heard this. Most of you have heard this.

Anyways, you have to understand. I was raised praying for Tzvi Feldman. His name came along with the names Zachary Baumel and Yehuda Katz and Ron Arad, I mean these were heroic legends who were captured or killed in battle. We never really knew what happened to them, but little seven-year-old Ari in Houston, Texas, along with seven-year-olds all around the world, Jews all over the world were praying for them all the time, at the very least every Sabbath. Well Tzvi was killed in the Battle of Sultan Yacoub in 1982 during the first Lebanon War.



This is a picture of Prime Minister Netanyahu informing the Feldman family of the news. It's the siblings, the parents have already passed away. I actually want you to read the statement of the Prime Minister.

"In a special Mossad and IDF operation, we have returned home the body of Sgt. First Class Tzvi Feldman, who fell in the Battle of Sultan Yacob in June 1982 during the First Lebanon War. For decades Tzvika has been missing and the efforts to locate him, as well as the other MIAs from the same battle, have not ceased. Approximately six years ago, we returned for a Jewish burial, Sgt. First Class Zecharia Baumel; today we have returned Tzvika, of blessed memory. We will not cease our efforts to return Sgt. First Class Yehuda Katz, who is also an MIA from the same battle. For many years, I have approved many secret operations to locate the MIAs from Sultan Yacoub, and I promised the Feldman family that I would not stop taking action to bring Tzvi back home. The dear parents, Pnina and Avraham did not cease their efforts on the issue; unfortunately they have passed on. We return dear Tzvika to you – Itzik, Shlomo and Anat – to you and to the soil of the Land of Israel the he so loved. I would like to thank the Mossad, the IDF, the ISA and Coordinator for the Hostages and the Missing, Brig.-Gen. (Res.) Gal Hirsch, for decades of determined and courageous efforts of the highest order to return Tzvika and all of our missing and our hostages, the living and the deceased alike. The State of Israel and the Government of Israel under my leadership are fully committed to this." In the words of the prophet Jeremiah: 'There is hope for the future says the Lord, and your children shall return to their own border.'"

You know, I remember personally, I remember very clearly attending the burial of the remains of Zachary Baumel and seeing the grief on the face of his family, not having seen him or heard from him for decades. There's a certain closure that comes with burial that is just hard to explain, that you just don't have without it. Forty-three years he's been gone, yet you can still see the grief and the tears in their eyes.

I always think of the 22 years of heartbreak and grief that Jacob endured when Joseph disappeared. He was so overcome with sadness that he experienced not a moment of prophecy in all of those 22 years. Because as we know, you don't have prophecy when you're grieved. That's why Saul needed David so much. He was so grieved and so tormented. Because when we are denied that closure of seeing the body and burying it in the warm embrace of the Holy Land, there's no peace. No matter how much time goes by.

And to have his body returned during the same portion as Yishai and Yam were killed in Gaza this past Thursday, well these events though separated by time and circumstance, they weave this tapestry together of devotion and of loss and of sacrifice and of holiness. From our Torah portion of Acharei Mot/Kedoshim. Because you there are weeks in which the Torah portion doesn't just align with current events. It always does align with current events, but sometimes it just cries out from within the current events. And this is one of those weeks.

I'm sure that I'm not the only one here in this Fellowship, the only one in Israel that was comforted, not even from the portion itself, but from the very name of the portion. Acharei Mot/Kedoshim. Its very name feels like a whisper from heaven to a grieving nation. Acharei Mot, after the death. Kedoshim, to you, you shall be holy. It begins with death, right? The tragic sudden death of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, and it continues with a roadmap to holiness. And the message is directly to us. That even in the face of devastating loss, our response cannot be despair. It must be transformation, it must be elevation, it must be sanctification. We cannot let the darkness consume us and overtake us, and that is not an easy ask. Sometimes the darkness is so powerful that it's not clear it'll ever end. It feels like it's everlasting while you're in the depths of it. But no matter how tangible and congealed and paralyzing the darkness may be, we must bring forth light from it. That's what we're here for. It's for this that we were created, right?

And this week, Israel walks this very path. Again. As we bury our sweet holy soldiers, soldiers of light...you know, it's as if the heavens wanted to close a circle. We received back the body of Tzvi Feldman, missing since 1982, 43 years, he lay beyond our grasp. Beyond our physical grasp...but not beyond our love and not beyond our prayers. Because we are a people who do not forget. Not a name, not a soul, not a body. What nation treats its fallen this way? As far as I know, only am Yisrael. Because we know a soldier's body is not a casualty. It's a vessel of holiness. And holiness must be returned to its place.

It's no coincidence that this parsha, which begins with the death, quickly shifts to instructions about the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur and the holiest place in the world, the Kodesh ha'Kodeshim, the Holy of Holies. And so, why is this the order? The Torah is teaching us something that I think is radical. Kedusha, holiness, often begins after loss. When death threatens to crush us, that is precisely when we must rise and sanctify life.

I've heard it taught that the term, Acharei Mot, Kedoshim, after death there is holiness, is referring to the death of the ego. That's just another dimension of it. Acharei Mot opens with the aftermath of the death of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, and their mysterious death when they came close before HaShem with a strange fire. It's often interpreted as a cautionary tale of spiritual overreach. But also a moment of intense yearning for transcendence.

But what did they do? They weren't able to fully nullify themselves. Their own desire to come so close to HaShem was their own desire, their own egos. They couldn't fully overcome it. And although they loved HaShem in ways that perhaps are difficult for us to even imagine, they still came before HaShem as THEY wanted to, and not as HaShem wanted them to. Right?

To truly approach God, one must let go of self. The very next verses command Aaron to enter the Holy of Holies only in the prescribed way that HaShem expressed that He wants to be approached. Aharon submitted his will to God and his ego to the Divine order. One doesn't burst into holiness. One surrenders to it. One nullifies to it.

And that's why the core of the portion is the Yom Kippur service, the Day of Atonement, the day when the High Priest becomes a vessel, shedding all of the titles and the garments, entering the inner sanctum alone and barefoot. The ego is stripped, layer by layer. This is a day where all Israel undergoes symbolic ego death. No food, no comfort, no dominance, just the soul and the source.

And then comes Parashat Kedoshim. Parashat Kedoshim, the Torah portion:

"Kedoshim tihyu" –
"You shall be holy, for
I, Hashem your God,
am holy."
–Leviticus 19:2

But what does this holiness look like? It's not mystical ascension or ecstatic prayer, but acts of humility and kindness. Don't take revenge, don't bear a grudge, leave food for the poor, don't gossip, love your neighbor as yourself. What do all of these things have in common?

These are all achievable by the person who is able to sublimate their own ego and their own need for revenge and their own need to understand. A person whose life is not centered on ME, but on WE, right? On HaShem, on the truth, on the spiritual high of Yom Kippur, that leads us to grounded ethical other-focused life.

This is the legacy of Yishai and of Yam and of Tzvi, the legacy of the heroes of Israel that have sacrificed everything for their God and their nation. Their deaths are not just tragedies, they are calls for us to live differently, to live higher. They're calls for each and every one of us to put more of ourselves and more of our egos and more of our own personal desires on the altar.

You know, I've been thinking about the last Fellowship that we had together here live in person. I think it was about two weeks ago where we were talking about how we're all really from Adam and Eve and we're all fractals, right? We all have Esau in us and Pharaoh in us and Moses and Abraham. We all have a little bit of everything within us. And so, there's something to gain and to learn and to grow from everyone. And so, when we look at these selfless soldiers that are going to the front lines, we can really take that in us as well. We can absorb that. And by doing that, by adding something to our lives that is more selfless, where we sublimate our own ego for them, they're continuing to live through us. And as we're doing that in their merit, right?

Calls for us to accept the darkness and the pain of our lives. Not only to accept it, but if we can, to thank HaShem for it. For within that darkness lies our greatest opportunity to sanctify His

Name and shine His light to the world. Our response cannot be to harden, but to soften because it's really one of those two directions. Things like this, you don't remain the same. It's up to us to determine which way we go. Are we going to become harder or softer? Are we going to make our homes warmer and more open? Our learning deeper, our prayers more urgent, our wallets more open, our generosity amplified? Our unity more real? We have the opportunity to become people for whom kedoshim to you is not just a slogan, but it's a path, it's a way of life, it is our essence. Not despite our grief, but because of it.

And that's really what we have the opportunity to take the memories of Yishai Urbach and Yam Frid, and Tzvi Feldman and to really help bind them together in the eternal bond of life with our own. These young men, I mean, they're in the prime of their lives. They entered the perilous Holy of Holies of battle, offering their lives to protect their people. And their sacrifice reflects what the parsha is all about, right? Atonement, not from sin, but from the ultimate act of selflessness for the nation's survival.

You know, I actually received a beautiful question from Kaz, in our Fellowship. Here's what she said. She said, "Ari, I was just reading the beginning of Leviticus 16. Isn't it interesting that He chose to dwell in the midst of their uncleanness? I mean, He could have stayed away, stayed distant. I wonder why and even how He came so close?" And that question was just in my head. It was really resonating with me because it really gets to the core of everything. It's such a great question because it strikes at the heart of this whole thing that we're talking about. About the mystery of Acharei Mot/Kedoshim.

Leviticus 16 opens with a shocking tension, right? The holy, infinite God not only chose to dwell amongst a sinful fragile people, but in our very midst, in the center of the camp, near our uncleanness, near our failings, amongst our fears. In verse 16, it explicitly says:

Thus he shall purge the Shrine of the impurity and transgression of the Israelites, whatever their sins; and he shall do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which abides with them in the midst of their impurity.

-Leviticus 16:16

Why would HaShem dwell there? Why not above the mountain, beyond the veil, far removed, keeping His purity untarnished by our impurity?" And the answer is because...I believe that the answer is because love doesn't keep its distance. The entire Torah from the Garden of Eden to Sinai to the Mishkan is a story of a God who

moves closer. Even after the death of Nadav and Avihu, even after sin and stumbling, He wants to dwell with us. Not because we're pure, but because we're His!

Rashi comments that the phrase, “dwells in their uncleanness,” teaches that God’s Presence remains with Israel even when they are impure. That’s almost unthinkable that the holiness would remain and not recoil from the degree of impurity that we have.

Rav Kook writes something profound. He says that the closer one is to God, the more they’re able to lift up even the darkest places. HaShem enters the midst of our uncleanness, not to validate it or to justify it, but to redeem it and help us transform it from within. That’s the power of Yom Kippur. Not a retreat from the world, but a renewal from within it.”

And this is also why the Cohen Gadol enters the Holy of Holies, once a year on Yom Kippur because on that day we glimpse the deepest truth. That even in our mess, God is not absent. He’s hidden, but right there in the center, waiting to cleanse and to renew. Waiting for our hearts to desire it with all that we have. It’s like a parent who doesn’t wait for their child to clean themselves up before embracing him. They run to them, mess and all, because love always chooses closeness over perfection.

You know, until I had my own children, I could never have really begun to fully understand the overwhelming, unimaginable love that HaShem has for us. And if even for a moment, we could feel the longing from Him to us, we would spend every moment of our lives seeking to come closer and closer to Him. That’s the invitation of this life. That’s I think what we’re trying to come to together in this Fellowship. It’s not just about learning, it’s not just about Israel, it’s not even just about prayer. It’s about building a sanctuary of emunah. Of faith, of faithfulness between us. A space where we remind each other that you’re not alone, you’re not forgotten, you are not broken beyond repair, you’re being refined and you’re being prepared, and you’re being drawn closer.

And so, that’s why tonight, let’s not you know, rush away and finish the Fellowship. Let’s dwell for a second together. If you can, if you want. There’s always maximum invitation, minimum pressure. But let’s sit with our questions, with our prayers, with our faith. And if anyone would like to share a personal word, a praise, a struggle, a connection, this is the moment. Right after the blessings, I’m going to open up to the Fellowship Connection. I would really love for someone to dig deeply if you can. No pressure, of course, I just want to create the space.

But you know just as much as the Torah portion speaks through us, so too does our own voice, your voices, your hearts, and your journey... So before we open up to that, let me end with a bracha, with a blessing for all of us.

HaShem, we come before You as one people with many hearts, each beating with longing for connection, for healing, and for meaning amidst the storm of our lives and the storm of this world. You Who dwell, not above us, but amongst us, HaShem, even in the midst of our impurity, You who choose nearness over distance and love over judgment and Presence over perfection, please HaShem, bless us in this Fellowship. Bless us with deeper connection to You and to each other and to the Land. And let our hearts that are stretched across continents be bound by a cable of faith stronger than geography. Make our prayers a current of light flowing back from its source.

HaShem, transform our grinding into greatness. Like the ketoret, we've been returned again and again to the mortar, crushed by sorrow, refined through suffering. But let our breaking not be in vain. Make it holy, make us worthy to rise as incense in the Kodesh ha'Kodeshim, in Your innermost sanctum. Strengthen us with the faith of Yishai Urbach, whose love for You lit up every room. With the courage of Yam Frid, who stood at the front lines as a guardian of our people, with the perseverance of those who never ceased to cry out for the holy, brave Tzvi Feldman's return, even across decades of silence. Hashem, bless the souls of these fallen sons of Israel. Bind them in the bond of eternal life. May their memory sanctify our lives. May their sacrifice inspire us not to despair, but to transform, to choose holiness and kindness and humility and unity.

Strip away our egos as the Cohen Gadol stripped his garments. Teach us to walk barefoot into the sacred spaces of our lives with awe and surrender and truth. And may this Fellowship be more than just a gathering. May it be a Mishkan, may it be a dwelling place for Your Presence. May it be a holy fire that unites distant souls and a testimony that even in the darkest moments You are here, calling us to rise.

And may we merit together to see fulfillment of Your promise Acharei Mot/Kedoshim, to You. That after death, after pain, after breaking comes holiness and redemption and return.

And with that my friends, it is my greatest honor to bless all of you with the blessing of Aaron the High Priest. And although as you know, I am not a descendant of Aaron, I am of the nation of Israel, an am Kohanim, a nation of priests. And so, with that:

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

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