

Session 101
Korach – The Seeds of Conflict
26 June 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q73ghO9pmY0>

Ari

Shalom, shalom! I hope you are all doing well. It is so good to see your faces. And yes, I can see your faces right now. It's a crazy week. It's a crazy week. My head is discombobulated. That may very well come out in this Fellowship, and I'm grateful for your patience if that does happen. That's the comforting thing that this is the long haul that we're together. And sometimes I can go out on a limb and really try to articulate a message that myself I don't know if I have fully grasped...put myself out there, but we'll see how it goes. I'm going to try. But anyways, it's really good to see you. And I want you to know that someone in the Fellowship. I didn't get their permission to say their name, they're working on creating this platform to connect us all in deeper ways than we've been connected to before. Because I think out of all things that can take this Fellowship up a level, a deeper connection to each other is really very high up there.

But before we dive in, I want to vent. Can I vent? Is that ok? I'm looking at your faces, your heads. Because Jeremy and Tehila and their family, they've left. And somehow, they got me very excited to take their cat. This cat. And they dropped him off at our house last night. And we were happy about it. We were excited about it. And within 12 hours, I have come to harbor a very deep dislike and resentment against all things that are cat-related. She drew blood almost immediately. You see that? She jumped on little baby, Shiloh's stroller. And she insists on climbing on my face at every moment. It's like a terror. And I realized, Jeremy was like, "Oh, it's the best cat ever. You'll love it, you'll love it." And in his heart he's like, "Oh, this is going to be good! Ari's going to be stuck with my cat!" And so now they're gone. And so if anyone has cat advice, please let me know.

And this is actually compounded by the most unusual chicken scenario that I find myself in right now. We're building this petting zoo thing next to our house. It's a long story, but we wanted to have some sheep in there every night. D'vash is like telling me stories about the baby sheep...baby sheep, that's all she talks about is baby sheep. And chickens, that's what we were going to get. Somehow, did you know that there are chickens that are not kosher? Chickens that are not kosher! I never knew that. And their eggs are not kosher either! If I thought ahead that I was going to share this with you, I would have taken a picture of this special chicken that's not kosher because out of all the thousands of different species of chickens in the world, that's the one that I first get as my first chicken in my first chicken coop. So I had the first non-kosher chicken. It's called meshi in Hebrew. I don't know if it's called meshi in English. But I guess I'm just having some animal issues.

Anyways, so Jeremy and Tehila and their family are off to America for two months. And they will be sorely missed here at the farm. And they're either going to come on live in the future or they're going to send in videos. And I'm going to try to keep it real and keep it exciting and have a lot of different videos and updates showing what's going on at the Farm. Because I'm a little bit intimidated of the Fellowship that we have in front of us. It could be GREAT! And it may not be. We'll see, we'll see. But they're going through America right now and really our loss here in Judea is America's gain. Because I just picture a mini-van cruising through the U.S., just glowing with light from Judea. So I want to start...I thought maybe we'd start joining together to bless Jeremy and Tehila on their trip.

So HaShem, right now, Jeremy and Tehila they are in the air. They are in the air. Please bless them in their journey. Bless their family on their trip to America. Allow them to bring the holiness of Judea with them and to share the love for You and the love for Your Land and the love for Your people with everybody that they encounter. And really allow them to inspire everybody that they meet. And to be inspired by those that they meet as well. Please let them shine Your light on a country that needs light very much right now. On a world that needs light very much right now. Amen.

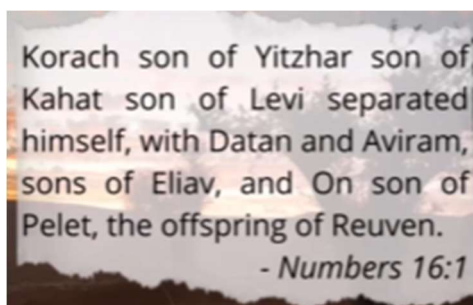
Ok, now before we launch in, I want to say I thought we would try something sort of new. I don't know if it's going to work, if it's a good idea. But maybe if you have questions, raise your hand on that little hand-raising thing. And maybe if you have questions and a lot of you feel like there's a question to ask, just ask and I'll ask Tabitha. Tabitha, I know you're listening. By the way, I always forget. Tabitha is an angel that is so unbelievable that without her Jeremy and I, there's no chance we would have gotten this far. And she's such a blessing to us and she's so selfless. And so, thank you, Tabitha. And so Tabitha, if people are raising their hand, then say like if I say, "Hey, Tabitha, call on them, then let them speak." We'll see how that goes. I don't want to put you guys on the spot.

But anyways, this Torah portion, it is about an argumentative Jew, which seems redundant. Right? You know the saying, "Two Jews, three opinions." And you know at the Farm, the joke was that we got here and first when I was living here all alone. And I built two synagogues. One that I pray in and one that I would never step foot in. I don't know if that makes sense to you, but it's a Jewish joke that there's always arguments. And there's always a synagogue that you'll never go to. So, even if you say that it's an exaggerated stereotype, well where there's smoke, there's fire. And we have an entire compendium called the Talmud that its core essence is debate and argumentation. So much so that it would really make your head spin. I don't know if any of you have tried to delve into the Talmud, I have. I'm not a Talmud guy. I'm not a Gemara guy. My brain isn't built for it. I revere it, I respect it, but you know when I go to a lawyer...I hire a lawyer because I haven't read through the books of law. I think that nowadays especially, there is a disproportionate amount of time in American Jewish Institutions that is spent on the Talmud to the exclusion of the Tanakh. You know and I understand that

throughout history, because it was difficult to connect to King David, the warrior/poet. And so we sort of got immersed in the legal Jewish law. But now, it's a different story.

Anyways, I used to take exams in which I filled up two white boards with the argumentational flow of just half a page of the Talmud. And very often there was no clear victory, there was no solution. The conclusion was called taku, which means...we don't know which opinion is correct. We will just have to wait for the prophet, Elijah to come and issue a definitive ruling. There is one word for that, it's called taku, let's wait for Elijah to come. So...what was it about Korach that made him such a sinister character of every Jew, so argumentative. What was it about him that made his very name synonymous with the unnecessary and disingenuous dispute to the degree that the Torah actually tells us in chapter 17, verse 5, do not be like Korach and his congregation! His very name has come to define conflict and dispute. It's like, "Don't Korach me. Let's just have an honest discussion." That's what it's like.

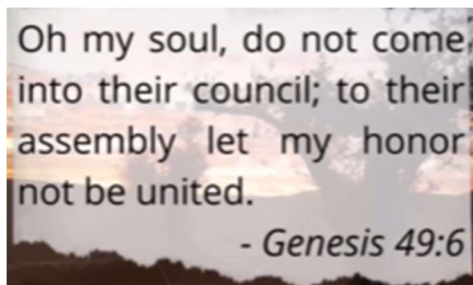
Alright, so let's dive in because I think the answer to these questions will shine some light. Not only on our lives, but really on a world that's growing more divided and more polarized by the day. Do you guys feel like that? Like the whole world is just so constantly, perpetually, disagreeing with each other. I even made the mistake...sometimes I go on Facebook to just see what's up. You know, I don't spend too much time there, but I saw there was a woman that posted...she was talking about this group called "The Proud Boys." And how they stormed the library to disrupt what's called Drag Queen Story Hour. Have you heard of this? It's so crazy, I don't even know what to do with it. Where these like transgender drag queens are reading to little kids in the library. And she said, "Me and my daughter, Hadassah, we love drag queens. These people should be ashamed of themselves. Baruch HaShem." It's like, this is like a religious God-fearing woman, at least by the way she's talking, by the words she's saying. And so I made the mistake of trying to positively, honestly open up a discussion and a dialogue, and it just became so ugly. People were just throwing names at me and accusations. I was like, wow. I was actually going to bring the whole discussion, but I couldn't find it. Fortunately, I guess. But it's just...things are getting ugly. Anyways, let's go to the beginning of the parsha, right? Numbers chapter 16, verse 1:



Ok, so that's the first verse. I really am trying to get back in and just dive in and go verse by verse and go through and just talk about it in a chronological order. I have a feeling we're not going to get that deep into it this time. But anyways, we'll give it a shot. So in the first verse, the scene is set and we are meeting these main characters, the rebels themselves. Korach's lineage is given all the way back to Levi. But interestingly enough, it stops right there. Just one generation short of taking it all the way back to Ya'acov. And in my mind, it would have been just too jarring. To have his genealogy, Ya'acov's genealogy traced all the way

back. Or not Ya'acov's, Korach's genealogy traced all the way back to Ya'acov, the father of the tribes of Israel, remember Ya'acov, the Tzadik, the righteous man who witnessed the angels ascending and descending the ladder of heaven? And for Ya'acov's name to be even mentioned in the verse introducing this character, Korach, it would have been sad and like not a wonderful legacy for him. And now I'm remembering in the Tanakh, there's another place where there was an idolater and it was Gershom, ben Manasseh (Judges 18:30). And the nun in the word Manasseh was very, very small because it was actually Moshe. But the authors put in the small nun to cover up that it was Moshe, exactly for the same reason, to protect his honor in a way that he didn't deserve to be defamed in that way.

And so the sages say actually that his lack of inclusion in that verse was the fulfillment of his prayer from Genesis, chapter 49, verse 6 in which he was talking about Shimon and Levi clearly from the previous verse. And he says:



He didn't want to be dragged down and in that way, it stopped right there with Levi and his name wasn't added. He didn't want...bottom line is, out of respect for Ya'acov, we didn't go there.

And so here we have the characters and their lineage which is really relevant. Because each of them have their grievances. They were the Levites who felt that they were overlooked from being Cohanim, from priests, which they considered even more prestigious positions than they already had. Because let's remember, they were already the bearers of the holy Tabernacle, they were entrusted with high level honors and responsibilities. Yet they felt surpassed in the hierarchy of holiness by the nepotistic family-favoring Moshe who appointed his brother, Aaron as the High Priest. And keep in mind, I don't think they thought this. I think that the idea was inceptionated into their brain. There was one-man Korach that just through and drove it through and very persuasive.

And then there were Natan and Aviram, the descendants of Reuben, of Reuben, who clearly were still bearing a resentful grudge that they lost their birthright because of their forefather's indiscretion with his father's concubine. You remember that story? He lost his birthright. And the 250 leaders that we'll read about in a moment, the sages teach us that those were the firstborn who lost their collective status due to the golden calf. And they were replaced by the Levites. So anyways, it's a coalition of grievances. Everyone is just upset and feels that...what do they say in America? That they aren't privileged, right? And so, even you know, in the family of Israel, there's a lot of baggage, there's a lot of resentment. So at the very least, we can look at that dysfunction and remember that the dysfunction that we have in our own

families, well we're not alone. Even in the nation of Israel, even in the Jewish families today, it's something that we all face. And I realize that a lot of people when they realize that there's dysfunction within other families and not just them. Even the families, and sometimes particularly the families that look most harmonious and smoothest, there's a lot. It's part of just the way that we are built as families and as tribes. Anyways, I hope that's comforting in some way. So as you know, we talk about this a lot. The events in our personal and our national lives are very often, always reflected in the Torah portion. It's always true, we don't always have the eyes to see it, but it's always true. But I remember the last year when the parking lot...do you remember the parking lot event that happened in the Shaare Zedek hospital? It was a crazy thing. Tabitha, if you could play this while I'm talking.



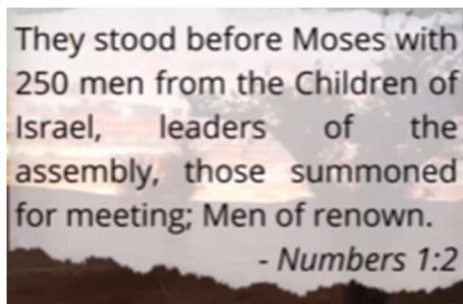
There was this sinkhole that appeared out of nowhere in the Shaare Zedek parking lot that just opened up and swallowed a bunch of cars that just fell into the earth. They just fell...look at that! It just opened up and swallowed them. So...that happened in the week of the Torah portion of Korach! That's what happened. Ok, you can stop playing.

That seemed pretty loud. But I wasn't sure exactly what the message was there, but it felt like it had something to do with the most insane and aberrant government we'd ever seen in Israel that was formed right then during that very week. It seemed like the same coalition, I actually think I spoke about this last year, this same coalition of malcontents that we saw in the portion. Right? Bringing together these characters that would otherwise have been at serious odds with each other, they came together with one explicit purpose. Which was to overthrow Bibi Netanyahu. Now I don't want to get political here too much, but just for a minute. When I think of Netanyahu, he's done a lot of good things for Israel, but he's also done a lot of negative things for Israel. So I'm not comparing him to Moshe, to Moses by any means. I'm simply saying that to have supposedly right-wing, Israel loving, Judea defending Jews, supposedly, form a coalition with the far-left parties that are bent on surrendering huge parts of our homeland to our enemies. It definitely seems to parallel in a pretty extreme way to Korach's coalition. Right? The government, a year ago, they brought in the party named Ra'am. It's ok that I share this with you, it's like current events in Israel. You want to know what's happening in the country, in Israel today. So this party called, Ra'am, which by all accounts is a treasonous, Israel-hating Arab party whose leaders celebrate, like literally publicly celebrate and advocate the destruction of Israel. And what brought them all together? It was this hatred and desire for power. And this crazy coalition, it happened last year, during the reading of Korach. I

remember there were these memes going around that showed this new government together. And it said, Korach and his assembly.

And why do I bring this up? Because this past week on the week of the Torah portion of Korach, one year later, the government fell apart. We see this at the tower of Babel, when we're brought together through hatred, it's not true unity. Everybody came together to build this high tower, but it wasn't out of a place of love or desire. It was a place of fear, and they wanted to be able to be evil and not be destroyed. Anyways, something like that is destined to fall apart in an ugly way and that's finally what happened. They couldn't keep it together anymore. The leader, Naftali Bennet was deposed. And Jeremy he was sharing this idea with me and put it all together. He thought it was important to say that Korach comes from kire'ach. And Korach was supposedly bald and Naftali Bennett is bald and the most bald politician in Israel. I don't think it's necessary to go there, but Jeremy thought that's another interesting connection. But the rebellion that we saw playing out in Israel was birthed during the portion of Korach. And it came to a similar end that we see during the portion of Korach. So that's interesting you know, and it was definitely worth mentioning. Anyways, it was just a coalition of angry, resentful and aggrieved people.

So let's go on to verse two:



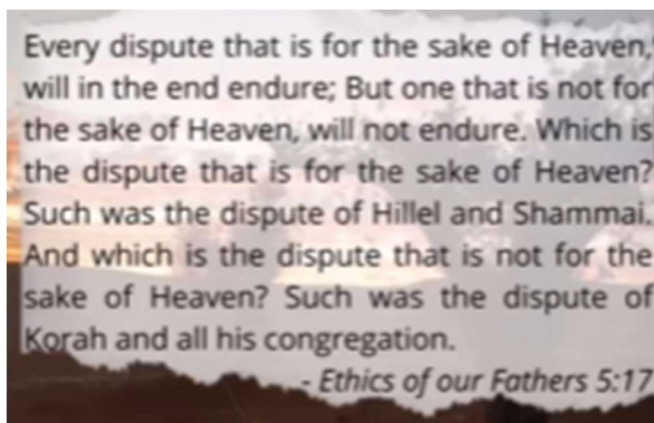
So "men of renown," what does that remind you of? For me it automatically summons the very first words of last week's Torah portion that we learned together. Shelach lecha anashim. Prestigious men, men of renown. These were not simpletons. Nor were they inherently evil people. Something was going on here and we would miss out on a lot if we just wrote them off as ambitious, evil rebels. You know just as each of has a voice of the spies within us, that voice of fear and doubt, well we also...perhaps we have a voice of the rebels within us also. You know it's definitely worth looking deeper with open minds and open hearts.

And we really do need to look at the entire episode with last week's Torah portion in mind. The Torah portion of Shelach with the spies. Because this rebellion didn't happen in a vacuum. The tragic and traumatizing episode of the spies definitely laid the groundwork for this attempted coup, and that's what it was. Right? After all, Korach, the ring-leader was aggrieved and resentful for some time. Ever since Aaron became the High Priest or they also say when his cousin, Elizaphan the son of Uzziel was appointed the head of the Levites, which he thought should have been his. Either way, he said nothing all of that time because Moshe and Aaron were just so beloved. But after the sin of the spies, well there's just a lot of grief and confusion and pain and discontent and resentment. And Korach saw that the conditions were ripe to launch his coup.

And that's what it was by the way. It was a coup. Right? In the past, there was complaining about issues. They had issues. Like food or water or things like that. But this was the first time that there was actually an attempt to overthrow the leadership altogether. It never became this personal. It was never so foundational. It was never to depose Moshe and Aaron from leadership.

So before we get into the substance of their grievances and their arguments, meaning like what they were actually trying to say...let's take a look for a moment at the motivation of the rebellion itself. Because very often we can lie to others about our real motivations for why we do what we do. Even more often we can lie to ourselves about it. And that's clearly what was happening in this case. On the most revealed, superficial level, there was an argument being made. But under the surface, lurked the real reasons. Now Rabbi Fohrman actually suggests that part of the underlying reason that brought all of these rebels together was the desire to maintain some type of control. They felt like on some level that if they could reveal that Moshe was usurping authority and that he was fabricating decrees in order to facilitate his own power, then they could expose Moshe as a fraud. And then perhaps the decree that they would all perish in the desert would also be undermined and they could actually enter the Promised Land. It sounds a little bit crazy, but as we will see, it was actually a sophisticated and nuanced argument. And when you want to believe something enough, there is little that can stay in your way from deluding yourself with intellectual acrobatics to extreme self-deception. Now again, if anyone has anything they want to say or share, just raise the hand. I want to sort of work that in there. No pressure. Just let me know, remind me. It's an offer.

So there's a lot of self-deception going on. Because they were sad and they were grieved and they were scared and they didn't want to drop dead like flies in the desert. They wanted to go into the Promised Land. And their arguments were not for the sake of truth. They were not for the sake of heaven. They were so disingenuous that as we said, they've come to define the very idea of needless conflict and division. So the most famous lesson regarding this is from Ethics of Our Fathers. I actually found it so beautiful that I memorized it many years ago.



And notice, it doesn't say, "Korach and Moshe," because that means there's two sides to it. It wasn't really between Korach and Moshe. It was between Korach and his group and himself. Anyways, so there's really a lot to unpack here. The first verse that we often gloss over is that if there's a dispute for the sake of heaven, it will endure. If you really think about it, that's a strange way to say it. You'd think it would

say "if the dispute of the argument is for the sake of heaven, it's a holy dispute." Or it will be

peacefully resolved, or HaShem loves it. But it doesn't say that. It says that the dispute itself will endure. That the clash of two perspectives for the sake of truth, for the sake of coming closer to HaShem in truth, that that encounter of ideas is beautiful in and of itself. Which explains why the Talmud is so filled with all of these unresolved disputes. Because it isn't about the conclusion or the destination. The dispute itself is a thing of beauty and inspiration. And even when a Talmudic dispute is resolved, the dissenting opinion always remains. They study it no less than they study the accepted solution.

I don't know if any of you have that in your lives, people that you just talk about God with and Bible and you often debate and you just love it. And you just feel so close to this person even though you disagree with them on almost everything. And so, that's why the paradigm example that's given of an argument for the sake of heaven is between Hillel and Shammai, because those two parties they're arguing...have you heard of Hillel and Shammai, you know what I'm talking about? The sages that were like these two camps and anyways, we'll talk about that another time. I have a feeling that we're going to go over time anyways, so I can't get lost in that.

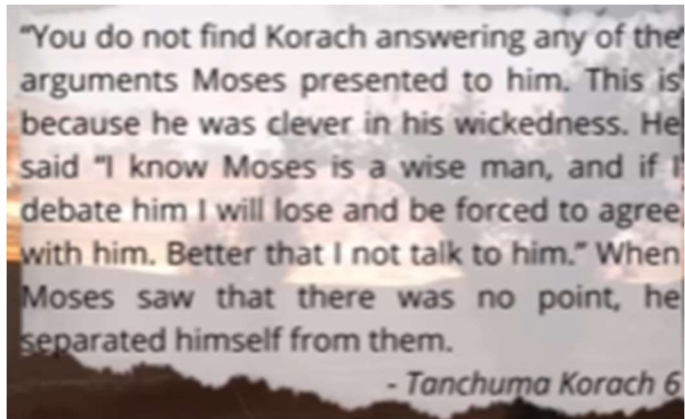
But their arguments got very intense. But it never got personal, it never divided them. If anything, it brought them closer together. Hillel's daughters married Shammai's sons. And Shammai's daughters married Hillel's sons, even though they had these eternal, vociferous debates. And that's one of the signs that is brought by Rabbi Shifman who quotes Rabbi Doctor Kaminsky's book. This book is called Fundamentals of Jewish Conflict. And in this book he spells out how to identify healthy disputes that are for the sake of heaven and how to identify unhealthy disputes that are not for the sake of heaven. And he spells out these criteria. One of the criteria is just the general tone. If it gets vicious and personal and has an adversarial tone, well that's quite obviously a sign of ego and of insincerity. Those who cannot debate defame. A very beloved Rabbi of mine once said. Someone that was constantly attacked on a personal level, even though he was just talking ideas. Unfortunately now, this approach is so common place of defaming rather than actually debating and discussing that you could almost say that it's just the way arguments happen now. At least on social media. When you see two people in different camps sitting together respectfully discussing issues, nobody even weighs in on the argument.

I remember I saw that, there was a guy Russell Brand that had a debate with Ben Shapiro. He was on the left and he's on the right. And Bill Maher, they were just respectful of each other. And nobody even commented, "I'm on this guy's side, I'm on that." Everyone was just, "Wow, it's so great to see that two different people can talk and not cancel each other and throw each other out of the Overton window. You know that window of what is acceptable and what is not. So anyways, you know the tone of the argument, that's one of the criteria.

Another criteria that indicates a lack of sincerity is that one or both of the parties don't display intellectual integrity, or intellectual honesty. Meaning that they aren't really desiring to enter into any sort of dialogue, to arrive at a truth at all. They say that what they want is to get a truth, but really they just personally attack you and call you names and defame you. We see this today really more than ever and I think we've all experienced it at some point. And by the way, that's the exact opposite of every experience I've had with any of you. You've reached out with questions and challenges and it's always respectful and loving and so obviously with a desire to arrive at a higher level of truth than before. And really it's interesting because quite a few of you have reached out to me after these sort of clashes that we have and you apologize for it. This has happened a lot. You know who you are. You apologize for it. And to me, I feel like the opposite. To me, it's a sign of closeness and trust and friendship.

You know, I remember hearing this story about this renowned atheist debating Rabbi Gerald Schroeder, he wrote Genesis and the Big Bang. Anyways, after hours of debate, he fell silent in deep contemplation for some time and then he said something to the tune of, "you know, you're right. There must have been a Creator." And there was just silence. And he was attacked and like everyone was like, "How could you betray us?" But to me, when I heard that story, I mean I was just so inspired. I mean talk about intellectual honesty and intellectual courage. In my mind, in my understanding, such honesty which directly contradicts years of advocating, an investment of your life, just investing time and effort and your ego with exactly the opposite. With atheism. Well that retroactively renders all of those years of that scientist teaching atheism as actually teaching truth. At least in my mind and in HaShem's eyes. Because it shows that for him, each step of the way, he was teaching the greatest level of truth that had been revealed to him up until that point. And it didn't render those years a waste. That's what the rational, secular mind would think. Well you've wasted your whole life advocating for atheism. On the contrary, it redeemed and it elevated all of those years in the eyes of HaShem. Do you hear what I'm saying? That someone could be teaching something that's obviously false and as heretically as atheism, but due to their honesty to denounce it when confronted with the truth, it would be considered a lifetime of merit. Does that make sense to you? Please tell me that that makes sense to you because I feel pretty strongly about it and I want to hear from you if it doesn't. I see people clapping, thank you. Anyways, I hope I would have that sort of courage when confronted with my errors.

Back to Korach, ok, there's a famous midrash that goes like this. It's from Midrash Tanchuma. It says:



And when Moses saw that there was no point, he separated himself from them. So Korach's fear, what do we see there? That his fear was being convinced that he was wrong because then he wouldn't be able to pursue his real goal of taking power. You know there's time that like, I don't know, I'm struggling with my evil inclination one way or the other and I'm really hungry and I want to have a slice of

pizza. And I'm just convincing myself. And I don't want to hear...in my heart, I know it's not true. But I just want to be convinced by the argument that I'm making so I can eat that pizza. Maybe that's just oversimplified, but that's what this felt like to me. And this actually brings us to the last indicator of sincerity.

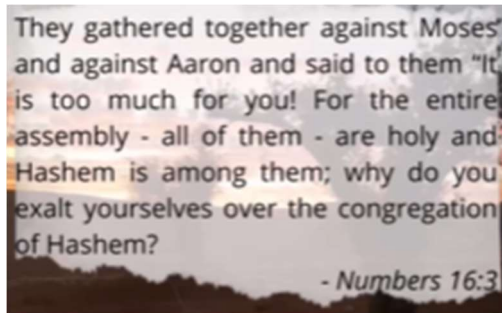
If the dispute is centered around achieving a compromise or achieving a sense of peace and brotherhood, then it's quite likely an argument for the sake of heaven. But if it's centered around destroying one person while aggrandizing the other, then it's not for the sake of heaven at all. And we can see that Korach's mean-spirited personal attack fulfills all the criteria of what renders an argument NOT for the sake of heaven. But really, I don't think we really needed any of these criteria. I think if you have a listening heart, you can just tell whether you're with a person who thrives on conflict and discord. Or whether you're around a peace-maker.

And I think that the main criteria is like this – How do they make you feel? Do they make you feel valued and loved? Do they make you feel a sense of good-will and acceptance and compassion for others? How do they make you feel about other people? Or do you walk away from them feeling anger and resentment and animosity? It's sort of the heart's test. And so Rav Kook actually reminded me of a story, he's the first chief rabbi of Israel and he was known to be a lover of peace and a hater of conflict. And due to his embrace of so many of the founders of Israel, who were secular atheists, he was often vilified and publicly attacked by his fellow religious Jews in the most personal and vicious ways. Like nowadays, we know Rav Kook, like who would have the audacity to attack him, but they attacked him viciously. There were times that they burned his books and there were times where his students and his followers, they were ready to rumble to defend him in any way they needed to. And he would tell them, "If you love me, then do not even respond to these attacks. Don't engage. Don't even engage in them no matter how vicious the attack may be. If you love me, then love them. Love the attackers. They think that they're doing God's work. Don't even pull down the posters that they're hanging that are defaming me." That's what Rav Kook said. Now that's a lover of peace and a hater of conflict. That's the difference between Rav Kook and Korach, right?

And can I tell you guys a story that just happened to me this past week? So I know it's maybe a little bit off topic, but maybe not. I think I told you about the crazy thing that happened to me when Shiloh was born, that I returned from the hospital and really just wanted a hot meal and so I threw a steak on the grill and I bit into it. You remember this? And I actually split my tooth in half! Like half of it fell out of my mouth. Anyways, I shared then that I was so grateful that everyone was healthy and happy that it didn't even upset me. But I still had to go to the dentist who put in a crown. Have any of you ever had a crown before, put on your tooth? So if you've needed one, I don't know how it is in America, how dentist procedures compare, but it's an expensive proposition. And it turned out that the crown didn't even take. And I was in all this pain and the dentist said, 20 to 30% of crowns, they end up in root canals. You need a root canal.

So he referred me to this specialist who quoted the price of the root canal. And it was a lot of money on top of the crown. It was like, who in the world could ever afford such a thing? I should have just pulled the whole thing out and just called it a day. It was a lot of money. And so I asked the dentist if there was an alternative for the root canal because it would just be so expensive. And he said, "No, you need to get the root canal. It's going to come to get you sooner or later." But when he told the specialist of my situation after I asked him that question about there being an alternative, he told me that the specialist offered to do it for 60% off. Which is crazy! That's a lot of money! And when I went to the specialist root canal doctor, he just gave off such a righteous feel to him. He sat me down and he started speaking about the Torah portion and talking to me and saying sweet things. And after the procedure, I had this suspicion, and I asked him if it was really him that offered this generous discount like the dentist said, or if it was actually my dentist who offered to pay the 60% of the bill himself. Because my dentist is also...he's a famous guy. He's really righteous, righteous guy. He told me, "No, the dentist is a tzadek. He's paying. I'm not giving you any sort of discount. I don't know why he said it was me." And I asked the dentist and he said, "No! The root canal guy, he's the one that's giving you the discount." And so each of them refused to take credit. And so, that the other guy was the righteous one.

So, while yes, this is technically a dispute, it's so significant to me that it was during the portion of Korach where we learn what kind of dispute it was. That this was a dispute for the sake of heaven. And it was also just another one of those "only in Jerusalem stories" that I just love to share. So anyways, now considering the criteria we just reviewed of what qualifies an argument for the sake of heaven, let's go to the substance of the argument. And this is where it gets really interesting. Are you guys still with me? Ok, Numbers, chapter 16, verse 3. I'm still going through the verses. I'm still going through one by one. I'm gonna get better at this. I'm telling you we're going to get through the whole parsha soon. But here it is:



Now although we've determined that Korach was insincere in his motivations for the attack, it doesn't mean that we should ignore his argument because clearly it was powerful enough and it was compelling enough to convince the first-borns and the Reubenites, and really most likely Korach, himself as to the validity and the justice of the claims. And the more I was thinking about this and going on and what I'm about to

say, I realized it's almost proven that he was authentically convinced by his own arguments. And we'll go into why in a second.

But what's he saying here? He's saying that Moshe has created this entire hierarchy of holiness in which there were ordinary Israelites at the bottom, you know people who would be farmers or craftsmen or carpenters or soldiers or whatever. And then there were Levites that were one tier above, and then there were Cohanim that were one tier above them and then there was the Cohen Gadol. The High Priest that was on the highest level. So clearly not everyone had the same mission and the same level of holiness. And Korach, in his desire to seize power asserted that this whole tiered hierarchy was just Moshe's invention to seize power for himself.

So Korach was essentially saying, Ok, you know the spies, right? There's a reason this came after the portion of the spies. The spies wanted to stay in the desert and to be immersed in a disconnected, spiritual cocoon. Right? Of manna, and fire pillars and other miracles. But that was wrong, right? God wants us to immerse ourselves in the physical. In the physical world. Because spirituality is most powerfully expressed through the physical world. The physical world is holy. All of it equally! This was what Korach was saying. So why is the High Priest at the top and the normal Israelite at the bottom rung? The farmer serves God no less than the Cohen Gadol. Why create this whole tiered system?

And so, Rabbi Simon Jacobson, I don't know if you've heard of him. He posts some on Chabad, he's really powerful. He explains it really succinctly, although I think I may have...we'll see, we'll see. So he explains it. So here's Aaron, and he's transcending the material into the spiritual. He's the High Priest. He's in the spiritual realm, while the simple farmer is utilizing the lowest material realm to serve God with his efforts. With his tithes and his offerings, first fruits. So what makes the work of the Cohen holier...not only holier, more important than the work of the farmer? So do you hear what he's saying there? Each rung is holy and each one is doing his own thing. You know they're all equally holy, just expressing itself in a different way. It's actually really quite a nuanced and advanced argument if you think about it.

Just last week we were talking about how it's God's greatest desire to dwell in the lowest, most physical, mundane realms. We're supposed to go into the Land and we're supposed to fight with our swords. But knowing that God is fighting through us and we're supposed to plant the

crops and know that the bread is growing, but not because of our own hands, but because of God. And that's the highest level of sanctifying His Name. So isn't that where the least holy farmer is? He's much more immersed in physicality than the High Priest. To tier them up is false and wrong, that's what Korach was saying. Everyone is holy. Don't start playing favorites, and if you do, probably it's the farmer that's the holiest. It makes, right? There's a point there. You can follow that. You know, even now as I'm saying this I'm like, "That's a reasonable argument. What is the refutation of that...where do we go with that?"

So, what was he doing? He was taking the argument of the spies to the opposite extreme. They were saying that spiritual life is the ideal and the more spiritual, the better. The less materialism and immersion in the physical world, the better. But Korach said, "No! Material life is the ideal. The more materialism, the better." I want you to know I am still working this through myself. We're doing this together here. Rabbi Jacobson, he summarizes it like this. He says that the spies rejected the mundane, but Korach and his followers denied that there was anything mundane about the mundane. That the mundane is no less holy than the holy. I'm trying to explain this. I hope that it's coming out clear. I feel like I'm getting it. But that's not what the important thing is here, I want us all to get it. But anyways, let me try this just one last time.

So Rabbi Jacobson brings the wisdom of the Chasidic masters. Now it's going to get a little abstract here, but forgive me. This is just the way I can explain myself. They explain why Moshe was right. Why indeed there is a spiritual hierarchy. That the material realm is lower on the rung of the spiritual hierarchy than that which is holy and exalted. Right? He explains why the average Israelite is lower on the spiritual hierarchy than the High Priest. And the reason is, that the ultimate truth, we've discussed this so many times in this Fellowship. You know there's three words...what are my favorite three words? My favorite three words, you know my mantra. It calms me and it comforts me more than anything else. The words from Deuteronomy, that's right Suzanne, thank you! Ain ode milvado! Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 35. Those are the words. There's nothing other than Him. Scientist has taught this to be true. That everything is energy, but the scientists don't really know what to do with...they don't know what to conclude from that, but it's already irrefutable, scientific truth. At the deepest core, there is nothing other than HaShem. That's Torah 101. But it's just so hard to believe sometimes that we don't really think about it like we should.

So if there's nothing other than HaShem's oneness, then the more physical and material an object, the more it conceals the ultimate reality that everything is ultimately one within HaShem's undifferentiated unity. So while it's true that on the lowest of realms, that's where God's purpose is most realized. That doesn't make it the most holy. Maybe it comes with the most potential for raising up the sparks of light, but that doesn't make it the most holy. If you didn't follow that, it's ok. Sorry, just bear with me. So what Korach didn't understand is that the hierarchy is the chain through which the mundane is elevated to the sacred. The first

shearings, and the first-fruits, and the Temple sacrifices that the farmers bring from their crops. They're elevated from the lowest realm to the highest realm from the Israelite to the Levite to the Cohen, to the Cohen Gadol. Without being able to make these distinctions of holiness, everybody exists just sort of side by side as theoretically they're totally equal, but without any of these harmonious cooperation and interconnectedness and beauty with which HaShem created the world. Everyone would be on the same plane, but they'd be sort of isolated and divided as Rabbi Jacobson teaches. This always devolves into conflict and factions and divisions. That's what we see in the West today. Everybody's the same, everything's the same, nobody's better than anyone else. There's no specific roles that anyone has, no gender roles, no missions, no purpose. Nothing and we see what's happening. How the rapid deterioration of the entire culture, the entire country from exactly this Korach idea.

Ok, so Korach misunderstood, but still, why is he considered the prototype of conflict and dispute? Ok, he misunderstood and his argument does sound at face-value like right, it's like a call to equality or equity, right? As they say in America today, it was a call to equity. So he explains that in essence, Korach is saying, "I do my thing and you do yours. But it's all equally good. There's no higher, there's no lower, and so therefore, there's neither a need nor a responsibility that anyone has to anyone else." And it's exactly that philosophy that is the source of the greatest and deepest conflicts in the world, putting everybody pantheism. Everybody is equal. That's why Korach is the prototype of conflict. Because that's where his philosophy leads.

So, alright. Let me try to bring it all together here, right now, one final time, because these seemingly nuanced theological differences. It may sound abstract and irrelevant, but these differences in like world view and understanding of Hashem could have the most profound consequences in our relationship with HaShem, our service of HaShem, our behavior in the world. Our whole journey is very much influenced by just these sort of nuanced...let me explain.

So on Thursday, there were these two young, 20 something year old guys from the Netherlands. They came by to the Farm, and while it was this brief window that I was really planning on preparing for the Fellowship, we sat down and for nearly five hours they barraged me with questions and arguments. But unlike Korach, it was crystal clear that these arguments and challenges were from the deepest thirst for truth. There was not a drop of ego in them. And so I said, "Ok, HaShem. I want to prepare for the Fellowship, but this is what You want me to do right now." And I'm happy that I did because their questions were just so beautiful. You just don't get questions like this from Jews. I mean, you get beautiful questions, but it's a whole different prism and perception and you know some of them were just so simple that they were among the deepest that I've ever encountered.

And one of the questions that they had was regarding what are the practical differences between Judaism and Christianity in a real way. And this question is just so important and we were working through it together and discovering insights and truths together. And you know, no one was trying to defend a position or win an argument. Both of us were just seeking truth. You know, the one idea about the satan. That's one of the arguments that I find...it may seem like just sort of a side tangential argument, but when I get into this discussion with conventional Christians, they believe that satan was banished and a rebellious angel against God and that he's some sort of force outside of God and it's God versus satan. And you could just say it's a theoretical argument in theology and very often I say, "Theology, we can sort of put it aside in some way because it's about our relationship with God." So we can both love God. But this point about whether satan is a power outside and other than God and in conflict with God is so fundamental that it would change everything. And so I often go to that. And with some of you in this Fellowship I've actually discussed that. Because when you overlook these fundamental questions, you can end up with Korach.

Because what was Korach? He was advocating for pantheism. Have you guys heard the word pantheism? That's the idea that the world is God. That there's nothing more or less holy than everything else. There can't be anything more or less holy because everything is God. And this by the way is strikingly similar to the exact philosophy and ideas of many idolaters. It leads you to that place of worshipping rocks and trees because I've met people like this personally. Really in the world today, that worship everything because they believe that God is within everything. And it's true, God is within everything. Right? So where are they wrong? It's complicated. There are nuances here. So pantheism is the belief that God is fully imminent throughout all of reality. That God is the Creator of the physical universe, but that alone right there...there are no boundaries at all.

And on the other extreme were the spies who were monotheists. You may say, "Wait a minute, monotheists? Aren't we monotheists? Isn't the Torah and Judaism, monotheism?" So the spies were monotheists. They believed in one God. One completely transcendent God, transcendent of space and time. For all practical purposes really, detached from the physical world. I spent much of my life being a monotheist. Really. Up until meeting Rabbi David Aaron who I spent an entire year, morning until late afternoon learning with. I was reeling without knowing that I was a monotheist. I thought Judaism was monotheism. And on some level, I pictured God as this man with a long beard in the sky. Not literally, but that's sort of the image. Like when I was a little boy, I had this Rabbi, his name was Rabbi Radinsky and he was 6'6" and he was massive and he had this long beard and he was so sweet and loving. God had Rabbi Radinsky's face. So I spent a lot of my life with this monotheistic idea. And so I thought Judaism was monotheism and I pictured God as Rabbi Radinsky.

So Rabbi Aaron taught me that Judaism is not monotheism and not pantheism, but panentheism, being a panentheist. Why are we getting into these theological words? What are we in, a philosophy course? I don't know how else to approach it.

But panentheism is the synthesis of the two. HaShem is indeed imminent and everything is an expression of Him as in pantheism but at the same time, HaShem is transcendent as in monotheism. Meaning that this distinction is so critical because on the one hand, it expresses the truth that there's nothing other than HaShem and everything is an expression of HaShem. But on the other hand, HaShem is ultimately transcendent and therefore reveals and expresses His holiness in the world in a tiered way. Like just let's look at geography as an example. God created the whole world, but His eyes are always upon the Land of Israel. And within Israel is the holy city of Jerusalem. And within Jerusalem is the Temple Mount. I think it says that the world is the eye and the cornea is Israel and the pupil is Jerusalem. That's the analogy that the sages give. And the Temple Mount, that is the Holy of Holies. Because holiness is revealed and expressed in this way, right? On the Temple Mount, more than any other place. God is everywhere and created everything, but the revelation of His holiness is different in different places and in different people and in different times. And so, it's expressed in this way because it also gives us the opportunity to play our role in raising up the mundane to the spiritual in cooperation and in harmony with each other.

Ok, so I want to go on, but I don't want to go on too much without calling on Andreas, because I did have this whole thing about asking questions and if I'd just go on, that would be silly. So, Andreas, please, I would love to hear from you. Hello, thank-you!



I'm Ruth, sorry Andreas he's not today here.

Ari

Oh, Ruth!

Ruth

Yes, it's because sometimes I'm here with my husband, but he's not present today. I'm the one

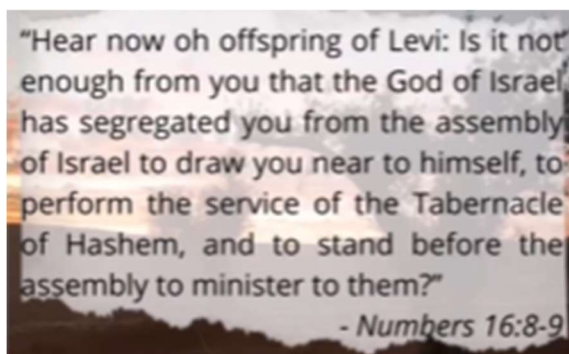
who asked the question, and I mean we were kind of discussing the nature of this rebellion, Korach. And also, as I was studying the portion, I was asking myself if kind of like what happened with the discontentment of the Israelites when they enter the Land...if the root wasn't a discontentment direct with God and not being happy with the call that He has in your life. Not being happy about what He has said that you should be. I mean, I think they knew God had appointed the Priests, God had appointed the Levites, and Moses. But in a way, I was asking myself, is it really maybe this discontentment with God and he just comes up rebelling against the authority that God has given you? I mean, this is my question.

Ari

So that is a beautiful question. I could not have engineered a better question because that's exactly what I want to discuss right now. How this discontentment that they had, in my opinion, and I could be wrong, and I want to hear from all of you, is actually an outcropping of their misunderstanding of God, Himself. Meaning, I think actually Korach convinced himself he was actually authentically a pantheist or he convinced himself that he was in order to be able to make this argument. And so, it does breed this discontent because as we said, with God being transcendent and at the same time, imminent, it creates this sort of tiered level of revelation of His holiness in the world.

Which by the way, Ruth, that's why each week when I bless the fellowship with the blessing of Aaron the High Priest, right? My favorite part of the Fellowship? I try to give the same explanation. I explain that I'm not a descendant of Aaron, I'm not a Cohen, and so what business do I have to bless any of you? Well in the Temple and even in synagogues today, the Kohanim bless the nation of Israel. So does that mean that they're better than me? I'm an Israelite, I believe I'm from the tribe of Judah, but I have no proof of that. But I'm an Israelite. So are the Cohanim better than me? No, they're not better than me, obviously not. It means that they are...they're one rung or two rungs higher on the ladder of holiness than I am. But that's not better, that's just different, right? They're there for a reason, they're there in order to raise me up. That's their purpose. And by allowing them to raise me up, I'm raising them up as well. That's their mission, to bless me and uplift me. And just as a priest is not better than an Israelite, an Israelite is not better than a non-Jew from the nations of the world. We simply have a purpose and that purpose is to uplift and bless.

And I'm going to get to your question. So this is why Korach's desire to become a Cohen, like you said was really from just discontent. It was just so sad and silly and tragic because everyone knows that that's what it was all about. That was his issue. It was that that discontent, that envy...remember Korach asked Moshe, the most humble man in the world, "Why Moshe do you elevate yourself above everyone else?" The most humble man of the world, he accuses of being arrogant, right? And so he says everyone's holy and how does Moshe respond? He sees right through it. He proclaims to Korach:



Ruth, that's exactly what Moshe was saying. It's that discontent, meaning Moshe saw what was really happening and he addressed the real issue. But if Korach really understood the nature of HaShem, then he truly wouldn't have been envious or ambitious of a position of power other than his own. He would have known in his head and internalized in his heart that HaShem is transcendent as well as imminent. And that

Korach's limited intellect may not be able to grasp the unfathomable wisdom of a transcendent Creator who created him in exactly the situation in which he would best be able to serve HaShem.

Rav Moshe Bryski, he explains that the reason HaShem created man as an individual and not as a species, like the animal kingdom...birds were created, animals were created...the reason man was created as an individual is to teach that each man equals the world and each man is his own world, uniquely picked for a specific mission that only that one person can perform. Each person has a mission to perfect the world in the way that only he or she can. And what is this world? What is this world that each person is sent with precise, perfect orchestration to perfect? It's whatever you wake up with in the morning. Your family, your job, your friends, your adversaries, your strength, your weaknesses, your personality. The circumstances of your life. That's what Rav Bryski explains. That it's your world and that's where the deepest purpose that you have can be found. That is your distinctive mission.

And Korach had so much going for him, right? He was really prominent, and he was super prestigious, and he was very wealthy. He had so much, but it just...it wasn't enough for him. And so Rav Bryski actually brings the story, it's a famous Chasidic story, but it's just brief. The Rav Zusha, have you heard of Zusha? He once shared the following idea with his students. He said, "If I were offered a deal where I could trade places with Abraham, Avraham Avinu, so that he would be Zusha and I would be Abraham, I wouldn't take it. For although I would benefit by being Abraham, what gain would there be for the Almighty? What gain would there be for HaShem? He would still have one Abraham and one Zusha." It's worth really reflecting on that. It's just so simple and so beautiful, right? Korach demonstrated the truth that when you try to take someone else's place in the world, you end up losing your own. When you try to take someone else's place and you're envying your neighbor and what he has or his wife or his possessions or his status, his situation, you're losing your own place. You're gonna just get swallowed up.

Ok, so we're a little bit overtime, but I know I said this week that I was going to launch my new thing that I'm really excited about, but it's going to have to wait until next week. It just wasn't fully ready yet, but when it is, I think you're really going to like it. But let me leave for the moment by blessing you. But the way, right now, during the blessing, before the blessing, if anyone has a question, you can raise now, and then when I bless you and we say goodbye, if anyone wants to ask questions, to stay on, let's do that. Tabitha, if it's ok with you, that's ok. Ok.

And it's exciting, I'm giving that blessing, explaining why I as an Israelite are giving the blessing. That's what the entire Fellowship was about. So let's please God, HaShem allow us to fully and completely embrace and elevate and perfect our worlds, what You have given each of us. Allow us to internalize from our head into our hearts that You have orchestrated our lives perfectly

and that the opportunity that we have to serve You is unparalleled. There's no other situation we would ever find ourselves in where we could serve You like we can serve You right now. Please, HaShem, help us realize that and allow us to uplift each other in the way that You, HaShem want us to. May we be sources of healing and love and unity and not argumentation and division and strife. And HaShem, may each of us play our role in bringing about the great redemption for which we have all been praying since the beginning of time. We all feel it in our hearts that it's coming up any day, any moment now. Please, HaShem, let us be a part of that.

So now allow me to bless you the blessing of the High Priest:

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

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

Thank you, my friends.

Tabitha

Hold on. Before we sign off, we have another question.

Ari

Yes, great. Everybody, you're free to sign off. The Fellowship's over, but if you have questions, if you want to hear other people's questions, let's do this. I'm really excited about this and in truth, this would really be my favorite part. So Dinu...

Tabitha

I've asked you to unmute yourself.

Dinu



Hi, hello, I'm happy to be with all of you....

Sophie



My question was with the different roles that are played. I know there's kind of a stair step of the Levites to the Israelites and then Israelites to the nations, Israelite's role being that of teaching the nations. What is the nation's role? Is it just to learn, or is there something more?

Ari

Ok, so that's a great question, and you know Rav Kook actually does explain and teach about what the different roles are for the nations. It's almost like, imagine a piece of art where the whole art is just the same color. It's just a canvas with the same color versus art where there's varied, different colors and designs that come together to create something beautiful. Or the human body, right? That the human body is, you know, has arms and legs and a soul and a head and a brain. And these different parts. And so that, all of humanity is like that human body. And different nations come to the table with different skills and strengths. And when Mashiach comes, it will be clear to each nation what their skills are that they have to offer, to contribute to the building of the Temple, to redemption, to bring a perfected world of peace and love and everybody will be consumed, not with what they have coming their way. And you know, their resentments. But rather, they will be consumed...what can I do to contribute to that?

So, on some level, we were talking about you know, the holiness factor. And so, the nation of Israel compared to the Levite to the priest or the High Priest, are on the lowest level of holiness. But on the other hand, they have such a great overwhelming opportunity and responsibility because by being on the lowest level of holiness, they have the opportunity to serve God the most and to raise those sparks of light from the mundane into the holy. That's why you know, why do I make a blessing when I drink water? Because it would otherwise be just a physical experience, a mundane, physical experience that my body needs. But rather, I'm now saying, "No, this is not a mundane, physical experience. This water is from You, HaShem, and every part of it is a miracle. And by drinking this water, I will better be able to serve You and I'm transforming what would otherwise be a mundane experience into a spiritual experience.

After we use the restroom, it could just be, oh, use the restroom, that's a physiological, lowest of the low. But no. If you see a religious Jew walk out of the restroom, they stop, they close their eyes and they thank God for the miracle of what happened and they have gratitude that everything is working exactly as it should in that way. So the lowest of the levels have the opportunity to serve God the most. And so, in that way, just as the Israelites have this

opportunity that the priests don't, the nations of the world one could deduce, have an even greater opportunity also. To raise those sparks and bring that light and raise the mundane and the physical to the spiritual and the transcendent. So everybody has their own way of doing that. I don't think we could say everybody, the whole world of non-Jews, that's such a Jewish thing, you know. Jews are like, "Yeah, we're Jews, and then there's the nations, the goyim. Goyim means the nations of the world. Ninety-nine point nine percent of humanity is like everybody else? And then like there's the Jews? But no, we're all actually in this together, and that Temple that we're praying for isn't just a Jewish Temple, right? My House is a House of Prayer for all Nations. And when we're praying there, we're praying for... it would not be the Temple it's supposed to be if the nations weren't there handing over the sacrifices to the nation of Israel who were in the courtyard. Who then the Israelites would hand that over to the priests and we're all there bringing this sort of tiered journey of physicality and animalism and mundane to the spiritual and the holy.

So as specifically, you know, Sophie, what is your mission? I don't know, I think you probably know that more than me, and I have little doubt that you're doing it. But also, on national levels, we all have the ability to contribute our unique skills to that. So anyways, this was fun. This was fun, let's do this again. And it brings me a lot of joy. Sophie, thank you for that and Dinu, thank you for that and I would encourage all of you to try to bring your questions in the future. People don't have to hang around for it, but I think it's really great and I like the connection. And I love to see all your faces, and so that's really wonderful. So anyways, HaShem should bless and protect you and I love you guys so much and please reach out to me. I love hearing from you! It's such a highlight of my week. And Tabitha, thank you so, so much. Thank you, Tabitha. So, shalom, shalom. We'll see each other soon.