

Session 141
Behalotcha - The Long Short Road to Redemption
4 June 2023
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Rb290hSgd4>

Jeremy

Shalom everybody, welcome to the Land of Israel Fellowship. It's so good to see your faces and I don't know if you can see, the most beautiful face of all – Tehila Gimpel is with us here today, live on the Fellowship. That is very unique because this is usually prime time, children putting to bed time, children cooking dinner time. And Tehila has made the effort to come out and be with us today. That is exciting. And not only that, Tehila has also made the effort to stay alone for about ten days this summer. And what does that mean? That means I'm coming to America this summer and I'm only going to be there for about 9 days, 10 days I guess if you include the travel. And there's so much going on on the Arugot Farm now that I really can't leave for very long periods of time anymore. But...I will be leaving and I wanted to make that announcement.

And I'm trying to like hit key areas and hopefully give you guys enough time to be able to come together in those areas as best as we possibly can. So July 7th and July 8th, I'm starting off my tour in Manhattan. I was invited by the Manhattan Jewish Experience by Rabbi Mark Wiles to host a weekend Shabbaton there July 7th and 8th. So I'm going to be in New York on the 7th and 8th of July. Then I am flying to Dallas, Texas, on Sunday July 9th. And I'm putting together...that's probably going to be the biggest Fellowship gathering. And I'm getting people beyond the Fellowship. We're going to put on something really beautiful there. That's July 9th. And then Greeley, Colorado, Wednesday July 12th, and then I'm hoping to get people from Wyoming and people from Silt and people from Denver, from all around that area to try to pull us together. Then I'm going to be in Miami for Shabbat the 14th and 15th. And then I'm speaking Sunday evening, my last event July 16th and then Monday I'm already flying back to Israel. So those are the big events, and I'm hoping that the next trip, this I try like Middle America, northeast, southeast, and then next trip, we'll try to hit West Coast, Europe maybe, there's just...I wish that I could meet more people at the same time. Because we have Fellowship members all over the world. I mean we are in Africa now where I'm doing my best to try to keep it as real and in person as possible. And this is what has unfolded, that's where we're going to be, and of course I'm waiting for all of you to come to Judea, and so is Tehila.

And actually that was a story that happened this last Shabbat. You know I'm constantly juggling about 17 things up in the air, and when you juggle so many balls up in the air, many of them, thank God, they're not eggs. They would splatter on the floor, they would sort of fall around. And all of a sudden, Friday afternoon a young couple with three children, who we've been friends with for I don't know how many years. They've been on a spiritual journey unparalleled. Finally, they've made Aliyah. They're living just beautiful Torah observing lives. They moved to Bat Ayin, one of the most beautiful settlements in Judea. They come Friday afternoon, and I'm

getting all excited, I'm going to give them a whole tour. They made Aliyah, we were a small part of their spiritual journey bringing them to make Aliyah. Excellent! And then at the end of my tour, they're like, ok, so where are we staying for Shabbat? And I'm like, "Dang! For Shabbat. What do you mean?" And they're like, "Well, I Whatsapped you if you host for Shabbat." And I'm like, "You said come on Friday," and I'm like, "I must have missed that one. I thought it would just come for Friday, just come for a day tour." And then Shabbat we had sort of other things planned, so quickly I'm like, "Don't worry. We'll figure this out." And I run to Tehila and I'm like, "Tehila, guess what?" So we had five people shopping for Shabbat, aside from all the other guests that we had invited. And then of course, in perfect Tehila fashion, somehow she pulls off the most amazing Shabbat foods, pulls it all together, puts them in the places, the beds are made. I don't know how she did it, but I think that that actually is a theme that is going to come throughout this whole Fellowship is that as many times as I mess up along the way, it is Tehila's patience and her forgiveness that allows us to continue on our journey to the Promised Land. So that is the update.

So I love to see people the most on the Farm, but if I can't see them on the Farm, then I'm going to see them live in the United States and hopefully soon enough, we're going to make it full circle. And there's few things that I find more thrilling than coming together every week here, and then meeting those people face to face, giving them hugs, seeing their children, watching them grow. And so in this chance, I would like to bring everyone together as we kick off the Fellowship. And this is a very unique time for me because we get to pray together with Tehila and that is usually not the case. So I mean people are here, I don't know if you Tehila are following the chats, but from Norway, from Montana, from Mexico, from Germany, from all across, I mean, it's just like it's a global movement and we all get to come together. I mean, it's just like from all over the world. For a few moments we bring our hearts together through this Land, through this place, and then offer up this global prayer to HaShem, unlike anything that exists that I know of. It's just so unique and so remarkable. One day, maybe our grandchildren will write doctorates about this movement that started this whole thing that ultimately culminated in a House of Prayer for all Nations in Jerusalem. So until that House of Prayer for all Nations is built in Jerusalem, we have this virtual one that happens here on the Fellowship.

So, HaShem, Master of the Universe, oey, we know we're walking through the desert. We have to trust that Your light is guiding us. We have to trust that You will provide for us. We have to trust that You will shield us from the snakes and the scorpions and the people that want to harm us. HaShem, give us strength to march on, to march forward, no matter how many times we fall and stumble. Give us the strength to get back up with all the ups and the downs. Help us stay grounded when we get too high and when we splatter on our face. Lift us up so we don't stumble. We come here every week, and we take out our compass, and we try to align ourselves with Your will, with the ultimate good in the world. We try to align ourselves with Your vision. We try to focus our hearts toward Yerushalyim. Bless this Fellowship, bless everyone that's here live today, bless everyone that's listening to this afterwards, from Asia, to

Africa, across Europe, and America, and Canada, from South America, to Australia. All of us have been drawn together, to learn together. To live as an example of what this world could look like if we judged everyone, not only with the benefit of the doubt, but with the benefit of merit. To see that everyone is striving for the good, that everyone here is striving to draw closer to You. We are all so different, but in this Fellowship, we're one family with one earth and with one God. May we merit to continue to bring Your light into the world and build Your Kingdom of light here in the Land of Israel. And may Your light spread to the ends of the earth and banish the darkness forever. Amen.

So I want to introduce Tehila, but first I want to tell you or ask a question. What is true in the world? And I've thought of an interesting insight. That true, it only reveals itself in hard times. I mean, especially in relationships, friendships, in marriage. When things are hunky-dory, well it's easy to be friends. It's like, "We're going out for a drink, we're going out for a party, hey it's a wedding." Everyone is happy. It's like when times are hard, that's when the truth of that relationship is revealed. It's like a judgment day. In the hard times, it's like, now we know where we're holding.

And each time I constantly discover that I don't know who I'm married to because each time I think that I know, I push her past the limits. And I discover that she's even stronger than I expected. And so that is a proper way, I think, to see the challenges that we have in marriage. Because I am usually the source of the challenges in our marriage, but with that, I see that it's like swords that are sharpening each other. That if we see it right, the hard times and the challenges and the arguments, it's just sharpening us and making us better. Making us stronger. And so, you don't know how strong something is until it's pushed to its limits. And I can tell you that I have pushed Tehila beyond her limits. Just this Shabbat. And she somehow emerges stronger and better and more beautiful. And so, as man is the chokmah, the initial inspiration, you need a woman that is the binah, to sort of take that inspiration and then bring it down into the world. And sometimes I guess, in that process of taking a very big vision and then breaking it down into the details of practical, what is that going to look like? If we take that as like...ahhh, she's being annoying or he's being crazy...and we sort of realize, no that's the harmony of relationship. That there's two forces that work together, then we can really kind of come to a shlemut. And so, with that introduction, I would like to invite Tehila to kick off the Fellowship with the Torah for the week.

Tehila

Hi guys. So this week's portion was so rich that it was hard to decide what really perplexed me the most and what I should dive into. In the end the winner was the story of the Israelites complaining about the meat. The story is weird for a lot of reasons. First of all, why is it so bad? In the past Israel complained for food when they were hungry and HaShem brought them food. Is it so wacky to ask for a little bit more protein? The manna we're told by the Torah tastes like

honey cakes. You know, imagine having a Tabernacle that's now built and running. There's sacrifices going all day long, and they smell barbecue from morning until night. And it's like living in a steak restaurant. And they have these honey cakes, not so bad. But it's not so great either. Is it so terrible for them to say, "Hey, can I have a side of chicken?" And it's even weirder considering the last time they asked for meat, it wasn't so bad at all. In Shemot/Exodus chapter 16, it says very clearly that in verse 2 the entire community of Israel complained against Moses and against Aaron in the desert. And they said, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the pots of meat and ate bread to our fill. And they say, "Why didn't we just die already? We're so hungry. At least in Egypt we had food."

And what does HaShem say? Does HaShem strike them down? No, it says in verse 11, the Lord spoke to Moses saying, "I've heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them saying, 'In the afternoon, you shall eat meat, and in the morning, you shall be sated with bread, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" And it came to pass in the evening that the quails went up and covered the camp. In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp, and the layer of dew went up and behold, on the surface of the desert, a fine bare substance, as fine as frost on the ground. And meaning, HaShem's original dietary plan included both quail meat and manna. It seems that over time, the quail was scaled back, and they were just left with manna. So is it so bad? They're like, "Oh, HaShem, remember the quail? That was really nice."

HaShem was fine giving them quail last time, why is HaShem's response so different here? Why is HaShem so upset? And besides for HaShem's different response, look at Moshe's different response. He seems to have a complete, excuse me, I'm sorry for saying this, but a meltdown. He was certainly constantly upset in the past with the complaining, but here Moshe actually gets so upset that he asked God to kill him. He says, "What are these my children? Did I carry them in my womb? Did I give birth to them that I need to have this miserable responsibility? Why is this particular thing making Moshe so upset? He didn't even seem to be this upset at much worse sins both in the past and in the future.

And then there's HaShem's solution to Moshe's upsetness which isn't even any more clear than the problems, than the original problem. HaShem says to him to take 70 elders and they're going to carry the burden with you. That seems like a reasonable solution to me, right? Except if you're us, and you've read the rest of the Torah and we know what happens after this, Moshe has endless problems. The spies, and Korah, and Balaam, and wars, and written sins and problems, and I've checked this out. These same 70 elders are never mentioned again in the rest of the Torah, meaning they're brought there to help Moshe carry this burden, but at no point does it ever tell us in the Torah that any such burden was shared with them. It doesn't ever say that the elders actually help Moshe with any of his future problems. So, if the whole scheme didn't work, why would HaShem suggest a solution that's not even a solution for the problem that Moshe is bringing up?

So I'm banging my head against my Torah all Shabbat long, trying to figure out these conundrums. After a lot of thought, I feel like this portion is actually really speaking a very timely lesson to us in our particular generation, the challenges that we face. What is essentially going on here? Let's go back to the actual story. What's happening here for Israel that's different than their previous complaints? In their other complaints, they usually had an objective, actual need. Like they were legitimately hungry, or they were legitimately thirsty, or they were legitimately terrified. Could they have found a better way than complaining? Sure. Sure, hindsight's 20/20. Maybe they should have just had faith. Maybe they should have prayed in a positive way, praised HaShem for all that He's given. And said like, "Oh, you know, HaShem, could You also help us with that?" Complaining isn't like really great, but nonetheless, we kind of feel for them. We have a heart for them because they were in a hard situation and it's not so easy to think straight when you're hungry and thirsty, right? We don't make great decisions when we're, you know, in those types of hardships.

And so maybe Moshe was a little bit upset. In the end HaShem provided for them that which they were complaining about. And the complaints were basically dealt with mercifully. Here the situation is different. They had everything they need they've left slavery, they've gotten the Torah, they've built their Tabernacle, they have abundant water, and HaShem gives them a perfect portion of miraculous manna that falls for them every day in the exact amount that they need. They're not hungry, they're living in utopia, and what happens to them? They are bored. They say, "Our souls are dry from this manna." They're not just hungry, it's like this emptiness.

And who can understand this better than us in our generation? Like in the thousands of years since then, when people had to be struggling just to put anything on the table, could anyone actually relate with this story of having so much abundance that their biggest concern is lack of variety? That would have seemed insane, even just to our great grandparents, right? Like you're bored from having all of your needs provided for you? Seriously? And yet in our generation, it's what we constantly are coping with. Boredom. It's essentially what drives our entire modern culture. You need the newest car, the newest iPhone, the newest fashion, because the old car, the old one, the old clothes they're not broken or unusable, but our culture trains us to loathe boredom and always seek the newest, hottest, most advanced thing.

And how many marriages fall apart from boredom? The same cultural ethos seeps into like our most intimate relationships. You know, I'm a family lawyer and people tell me, they just get tired of the same old person, the same conversation. They need excitement, they need something new. They need variety. I know everything about you, I want somebody more interesting. And this constant search for variety essentially drives our culture. New equals good, and with kids don't even get me started. The Israelites are like modern children because they have all their needs met. In the past, children had to be working in the homestead. Today children have everything they need. Which parent doesn't go crazy hearing their kids saying, "Oh, I'm so bored, I'm so bored!" For me, like when my kids say that, it's like nails on the

chalkboard. I'm just like, "Really? You can't think of anything to do?" I'm like looking at the laundry pile, and the unmatched socks. Nothing to do is coming up in mind? But it's not really their fault, that's the culture we live in. Everything is so abundant and so much less work is needed to create that abundance that would have been needed in the past. And so it creates boredom. And the situation is not going to get any better, it's going to get worse because with artificial intelligence, so many people are predicting that more and more things that we even do today will be done for us by AI. And we'll just be able to sit back and enjoy. But that enjoyment comes with boredom that's sure to follow. And the desire for more and more variety all the time.

So the Torah is like speaking to us, to our generation. What is the Torah telling us through the story of Israel's boredom? Israel says we're sick of this same old manna. We want something new. There are two messages that we get here. First of all, what's interesting is what HaShem says. He teaches them something so deep. He doesn't say, "No, you guys are wrong." He says, "Yes, but He gives it to them in excess." It says in verse 20, "You shall eat it, not one day, not two days, not five days, not ten days, not twenty days, but for a full month until it comes out of your nose and nauseates you because you have despised the Lord who was amongst you, and you've cried out before Him saying, 'Why did we ever leave Egypt?'"

Just this lesson alone is really valuable. What is HaShem saying? He says, "I'm going to give you what you think you need, what you think will solve your problem. You think that you're bored and therefore you need variety. You need the newest food, the most titillating new experience, but it's not going to satisfy you. Here's the secret. I'm going to give you literally an endless amount of what you're asking for. And not only will you not be happy it will actually come out of your nose and nauseate you." Meaning, that which you think is what you want most, is actually going to disgust you. And then, HaShem hints to us what is the real problem. He says, "You think your problem is lack of variety, some physical need that you want, you know, have the next best model and that you'll be happy. But no, it's because you despise the Lord who is among you and cried before Him, 'Why did we ever leave Egypt?'"

Meaning, HaShem is hyperlinking us back to the real problem. There are two things that the Israelites said. If you look carefully, they ask for meat, yeah that's true, but that might not have been so bad alone had they said, "HaShem, please give us a side dish." Fair enough, but look carefully what they said. Go back to verse five. They say, "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge, the cucumbers, the watermelons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic. Here we're at the crux of the problem. They're not hungry, but even with everything that they have, they're willing to go back to Egypt of all places to soothe their boredom. What does that mean? They've gotten the Torah, they've built a Tabernacle for the sole purpose of what? Of going to the Land of Israel and creating a Kingdom of HaShem, being a light unto the nation.

Now remember, this is before the sin of the spies. It's not like they're facing 40 years of boredom. They know or think or believe this is a temporary problem. And yet, still for that small period of lack of variety that they're willing to give up the entire mission of Israel and go back to Egypt. They've lost the meaning, the purpose of their existence. It has nothing to do with the meat! Egypt of all places, the center of the evil empire that is willing to enslave and kill just to keep the pyramid machine moving. Now you can understand why Moshe's response was so different. He has and will face crises and hardships and he's ok with that, but his entire life's mission was to take them out of Egypt and bring them to the Land. And after everything they've been through, they're willing to throw it away for a smorgasbord. That's like the cyborg of being a slave in Egypt. There's literally no point to his entire life. Can you imagine the failure that Moshe feels right now?

Rabbi Sacks explains it so beautifully. He says, "They experience the twin peaks of revelation at Mount Sinai, they constructed the Tabernacle, they'd come closer to God than any nation ever before, and they weren't starving. Their complaint was not that they had no food. They had manna, but their complaint was that it was boring." He says, "They reached the spiritual heights, but they remained the same small-minded people they had been before, and that is what made Moshe feel that his entire mission had failed and would continue to fail because his mission was to help them create a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, that would liberate instead of oppress, that would dignify instead of enslave. But the people had not changed, worse they had taken refuge in the most absurd nostalgia for Egypt that they had left. Memories of fish and cucumbers and garlic. Moshe discovered it was easier to take the Israelites out of Egypt than to take Egypt out of the Israelites."

So now, if we understand that that's the problem, we can also understand HaShem's solution. Moshe was just saying, "GRRRR, I can't take these annoying people anymore." It would have been reasonable for HaShem to give him some people to share the burden. But then, why don't we ever see them sharing the burden in the rest of the Torah? Hashem wouldn't offer a ridiculous solution to a serious problem. But if we understand that Moshe's breakdown was not because he was tired of taking care of us, but it was a breakdown of meaning saying, "How am I supposed to give these people meaning if everything I've done hasn't given them a connection to their life's mission?"

Then maybe these 70 people are the right solution. Look carefully at who was chosen for these 70. Because remember, in Yitro, when Moshe was technically, physically exhausted from taking care of judging the people all day long. Then they chose middle management whose qualities were like integrity, leadership, honesty. They didn't even have spiritual epiphany, they were like bureaucrats. But here at the main inauguration for these 70 leaders is prophecy, meaning what HaShem was looking for in these leaders was a spiritual quality, not to be good managers. And that's why we don't hear about them in the future crises and wars because they weren't managers, they weren't bureaucrats, they weren't there to solve problems. The solution wasn't

bureaucratic, but to be ongoing, day-to-day spiritual guides, down on the ground with the nation. Moshe feels like a failure, but HaShem is essentially saying that even with all the revelation that you brought, and the Tabernacle that you built, and the exodus that you took them out of, that wears off. The only way to maintain a real connection with HaShem and the meaning of your life is constant upkeep of study and being strengthened by good teachers, spiritual role models. There's no sound and light show that's going to do the trick. One charismatic leader can't do it alone. You need to take some of your inspiration and create communities of study and growth.

And how do I know that I'm right? Because it is true that these elders were never mentioned again in the Torah, but they are mentioned in the prophets twice. They appear in a period in Joshua and Judges. In Joshua 24:31, and later in Judges it says, "that Israel served the Lord in the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua who had known all the works of the Lord that He had done for Israel." Meaning it actually worked, even without Moshe, and without Joshua the system of having teacher spread among the tribes who had spiritual experiences, real connection with HaShem and would see what HaShem did for Israel and understood the mission of the Jewish people. He could share that with these communities. And that was the way, the only way to keep everyone plugged in.

And you know, and nursing from that spiritual source. So what is the Torah teaching us? That boredom is not fixed by variety, but rather by finding meaning. You can do the same job again and again if you are invigorated and inspired by the purpose. How many of us mothers know what it's like to do the same laundry and the same dishes every day? But if you're tapped into the purpose and the meaning of your life's mission, then you'll never get bored of that.

And what is the secret to solving, to keeping that connection to the mission? The Torah is showing us. It's to create study communities, spiritual communities. Communities where we come together and we're reminding one another, strengthening one another, learning together. There's no escape, there's no one great experience that can give that to us. It's only through the slow, specific, consistent, day-to-day work on ourselves in community together that can keep us plugged in and fend off that constant boredom that the Israelites faced in Egypt and that we as a modern society today have to cope with so much.

So with that, I wish everybody an inspired, beautiful and amazing week. Bye guys.

Jeremy

Thank you, Tehila, thank you, Tehila. That was beautiful. And not only that, it is exactly connected to what I wanted to talk about. And we didn't exactly coordinate this. And so it was the loss of vision, a loss of mission, a loss of their purpose. There's like...they want to go back to Egypt. They say that. We're going to learn that in just a little bit. They're like, "Ahh, they're like

nostalgic about the times where they had cucumbers and onions in Egypt. It's like what's going on there?

And before we get deep into that, I want to tell you guys a story. My son, Lavi, came up to me some time ago. And he's a very scientific young man, very logical, very reasonable. He's a mathematician, and an engineer, and a physicist in his core, at his heart. That's the kind of person that he is. He's also a very brilliant guy and very smart. And a while ago, he came to me and he was pretty distraught. This is a while ago. And he said, that from the science that he's been learning, the universe was either going to end in a heat death or a big freeze. Or the universe is going to collapse on itself, or it's going to rip itself apart. And he was just so upset with knowing this. And I wanted to try to you know talk him through this existential crisis. And I asked him, I said, "When do you think that this is going to happen?" He seemed stressed, and he said, "Well, it's a billion, two billion years from now." So I'm like, "Lavi, it's ok, so why are you so nervous about that? Like it's not like it's about to happen right now. We're not all going to suffer heat death tomorrow. We're talking about billions of years from now, and you're not going to live to be a billion years old."

He said, "No, it's not really about that. It's gonna, it's just going to end. And so, what is all of this for? What is all this for if it's just gonna end in some sort of heat death or some freeze or some collapse. Like what are we doing all here?"

And it threw him into like a tizzy, and I saw that he was in a real existential crisis. And I said, "You know, Lavi, that's really a great question. It's so interesting. I really, I haven't really thought about that because I never studied scientific theories about the end of the universe. And of course, they are just theories, so no one really knows what's going to happen. I mean a few hundred years ago, the whole reality, people thought the world was flat. Then they thought the world was eternal. No one ever thought that there was creation. I mean from Aristotle until about 70 years ago, every scientist in the world thought the Bible got it wrong from the very first verse, 'In the beginning God created.' There was no creation, the world was just always here. So science may think that right now there's a collapse or it'll be a freeze over or whatever, but that's not necessarily true. But let me really think about it, and I wanna pray on that. I want to think about it, I want to come back to you with some ideas because if it is true, then there probably is something very deep we can learn from this."

And so, you know, taking a few days, and I don't feel like stressed to give them an answer immediately. I think that's probably a good way when children come with questions. Parents don't always need to have an immediate answer. They don't need to have the answer to everything and it's ok to say like, "Listen that's a great question. Let me think about it." And they feel like you're taking them seriously. And then, as I was kind of praying my morning prayers day after day, I noticed that in the beginning of the prayers, there's a prayer called Adon Olam, and a part of that prayer says, "And after all is destroyed, He will reign by Himself in

awesome meekness.” And I was like, “Ok, right there already at the beginning of the morning prayers, the sages of Israel tell us that even in Jewish thought, there is an idea that yeah, this world isn’t eternal. That it could be that this whole world will come to an end and HaShem will do something even more marvelous afterwards.” That’s interesting and I said, “You know, that’s really interesting. If it’s true that the universe is going to end, either it will burn up, freeze over, collapse, or rip apart. It’s deep. Either you can say, “Well this whole thing is meaningless anyway. It’s just slip into nihilism and hopelessness.”

Or you can say the exact opposite. You can say, “The universe itself is structured in a way to teach us that the only thing that matters is our journey through this universe. The process itself is the ultimate purpose. That’s why the Israelites leave Egypt and they don’t make it to the destination. They don’t enter into Israel. The Torah is teaching us it’s not about crossing the finish line. It’s not about the goal that’s being achieved. The only thing that matters in life is how we journey through the desert on our way to the Promise. And the universe itself is structured in a way that if you think that no, no, ultimately there is some goal that we’re trying to build. No, no, no. At the end, when all of this disappears, HaShem will reign alone in awesomeness.

And so, I thought that that was really powerful because here we are, now studying the journey Bemidbar. That’s what we’re talking about. The journey from Egypt to eretz Yisrael, to the Land of Israel. And so, what are we talking about? I mean, we are talking about every one of our own personal journeys in the world. And that’s how I want to learn this parsha right now. We are where we are now. And we are where we came from. So, we’ve all broken out of Egypt, but right now we’re also in Egypt. Right now, all of us are in our own Egypt’s, and we’re all trying to break out of our Egypt, and we’re all trying to kind of venture and journey towards our promise. And then, here on the way something happens. It’s like a breakdown. The children of Israel break down. They want to go back to Egypt. Moshe breaks down. What going on here? What is that teaching us about our own personal journeys through life?

So let’s start off with Numbers, chapter 11, verse 14. Here’s what it says:

Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: “Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!”

-Number 14:1

And so, Tehila said, “Oh, they’ve just lost it, they’ve lost it.” But listen to what’s happening here. They’re sort of getting nostalgic about the past. Like, “Oh, if only I could go back to that.” But it’s crazy. Their children were being thrown into the Nile. They had no freedom. The task masters would kill them at will and their children were being annihilated in the Nile.

And yet, somehow, they still have some sort of nostalgic vision about what’s going on here.

Think about what happens. So often, we like start on a new trend. We're like, all right, I'm going healthy. I'm going on a diet, I'm gonna be good with my wife, I'm gonna be good with my husband, I'm doing a new thing with my kids, I'm starting a new chart. Do you know how many charts Tehila and I have put on our refrigerator trying to get our kids to be right and be good? Fifty thousand charts. We have so many different charts. So, ok, this time we're gonna structure it this way. This time we're gonna put stars. Ten points to the stars. Each point is a thing. I mean, charts after charts. And at some point, it's like, ok, I've tried this diet thing. Akhh...we start getting nostalgic, you know. I just don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to do this anymore. And Moshe here, Moshe actually says, "Kill me. I can't lead here anymore."

But then, if we continue into this week's parsha, it's not just nostalgia. Look at what happens at Numbers 14, verses one and three. Numbers chapter 14 reads like this:

And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness... Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."
-Numbers 14:1-3

It's like, what?! I mean, here it's a total breakdown. So in this process of the last two parshas, what do we have? We have the people of Israel being nostalgic about the past. Then we have the leader of Israel saying, "I'm done. Just kill me. I don't want to lead anymore." Then we have the children of Israel saying, "We don't want you to lead either. We want a new leader, and we want to go back to Egypt."

And it's like, what is going on here? What is happening, all of this is a spiritual map of our own personal journeys. And then this week's parsha opens up and it says in Numbers chapter 8, verse 2:

When you **raise up** the candles, the seven candles shall illuminate the face of the Menorah.
-Number 8:2

So the lights on the menorah, that symbolizes God's Presence, God's Presence in the Temple, that's the story of the Maccabees, the story of Chanukkah. When the candles are lit and they last for eight days, it's like God has brought His Presence, He is dwelling among us right now. That light of the candle, the light, but it's not only God's light on the nation, it's God's light in our own life.

Proverbs chapter 20 verse 27:

"The soul of man is the candle of God."
-Proverbs 20:27

And so those candles in the Temple represent our soul. And so the candle in life, that's the question of emunah. It's like not having the answers to theological questions or philosophical conundrums, it's a question you ask yourself. Is HaShem a living

Presence in my life now? Do you sense that? Which is like, you have to rise the candle up. What does that mean? In English, they don't ever translate it right in any of the translations. Be'ha'alotecha et ha'nerot isn't light the candles, it doesn't fix the candles, it is to raise the candles up. It's teaching us, you have to raise it up. Meaning, you have to like put the antenna on the roof of the building. That means, there's a roof. This candle is under something. This soul is under klipot. It's under these layers, and in order to get reception, you have to raise them up and break through that roof. What are the roofs? The roofs might be fears, the roofs might be addictions, the roof might be laziness, it might be scars of the past, it might be your body pulling you in different directions. Our souls are covered with these klipot, with these layers. And then what does it say? Raise your soul up to break through the barriers. And how do we do that? Well, God could have taken us out of Egypt, and He could have said, "Listen, we're out of Egypt, it's a three-day walk to the Land of Israel."

And just this last week, a dear close student of mine came up, and he just finished studying in the army. And he's like, "Listen, Jeremy. I'm out of the army now. I just want it. I want it as quick as possible. How do I become successful. I want it quick, and I want it easy." In so many words, that's really what he said. And I was like, "I'm sorry brother, the only path is not the quick and easy, the only path is the long and hard. That is the only path. There is no quick and easy path. There is no quick and easy path. There is no quick and easy path to success. The only path to success in life, and that's on every level of life – financially, emotionally, physically, in relationships. It's long and it's hard. And unhappiness in life is the gap that you have between the expectations and your reality. So when you expect life to be quick and easy, and then you bump up into reality that's long and hard, that's going to create an unhappiness in your life because unhappiness exists in the gap between expectations and reality. So come down with your expectations to the reality of living.

And the reality of living is that life is a long, hard path. And that's the path that am Yisrael are on right now. And on that path, you know what happens? It's like you want to give up. I want to go back to Egypt. I'll start making my own insane delusions. I just want the onions. I miss the onions and the cucumbers. It's like it can't be more silly. It's like what do you really want? That life when you were just watching Netflix, bumming around, drinking a beer after work. And just kind of No! It's like wake up! Bring the soul up, raise the candle up. Don't go back to falling asleep. It's like wake up and light up.

And then sometimes that highest part in you, that's what that candle is. The highest part inside us. Even it sometimes wants to give up. And it's like saying, "You know what? I've had enough. I'm done." And the rest of you, all the other spirits that dwell within you are like, "I don't want that guy to be the leader anymore. I want sugar, I want the easy way." All right, and then at some point, it's like we want to go back, we want to go back.

And the Baal haTonyah, the Elder Master, the founder of the Chabad Chassidut, in his Manifesto called 'The Tanya,' was the first writings of Kabbalah and Chassidut that were brought to the masses. At the beginning of the book, in his introduction, he says, "And here I introduce you to the long road, which is the short road." I could try to show you the short road, but believe me, if you try to go down the short road, it's going to be much longer. I'm going to show you the long road, but that long road is the short road.

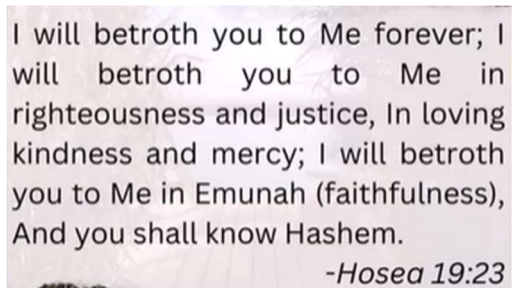
And as I was thinking about that, you know, I go now to minyan every single day. It's something that I haven't done since moving to the Farm four years ago. But in order to ensure that Ari has 10 men with him, so he can say the prayer for his father at the end of prayers, I go there every single morning.

Ari

Can I just interject, Jeremy? With your permission. It's true, and I appreciate that, but there were a number of days that I wrote to you and I said, "Jeremy, we have a minyan, you are not needed, and you came anyways. So while I know you want to have your cake and eat it too and capitalize on it by saying you're doing it for me, so I'll feel forever indebted to you, the truth is you're doing it for HaShem because you come even when you know that there's a minyan. Go on.

Jeremy

Well what has happened is, because I just blocked off that time in my day, there's no shortcuts. I'm there anyway, and I've sort of like come to appreciate that process, and so I'm just committed to coming now. Whether it is for God, for Ari, I'll leave that up for grabs, I'm going. And as I was there, you know, when we put on our tefillin, there are verses from the prophets that we say. And there are specific verses from the book of Hosea, in chapter 19, specifically verse 23. And it's one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. It's really talking God to Israel saying, "I want you to know, I'm going to marry you, Israel, and I'm going to marry you forever no matter what." And here's what it says:



I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, In loving kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in Emunah (faithfulness), And you shall know Hashem.
-Hosea 19:23

And so, you say that verse specifically when you wrap the tefillin around your finger. And I couldn't help but feel like I'm just wrapping this wedding ring around my finger. And I'm like, "Yeah, I am married." And what is that marriage? That marriage is that commitment every single day. Sometimes I feel it, sometimes I don't. Sometimes, I don't want to say anything at all.

But showing up, and then wrapping that tefillin is saying, "No, no. I am committed to this, no matter what." Every day you say that verse. Sometimes I like it, sometimes I don't. Sometimes I just want to go back to Egypt, and I just want to go back to bed. Sometimes I don't want to do anything.

But that daily discipline, and that daily commitment, no matter what my feelings are, doing that IS my freedom from Egypt. And it's like, the discipline to continue on the journey to our Promised Land is what forges our bond with HaShem. That discipline to be endlessly compassionate and endlessly patient with our spouse, with our children, that's what forges the Divine relationship that we have with our loved ones. Without discipline, you're just a slave. You're a slave to your emotions, you're a slave to your impulses, you're a slave to your body. It's the discipline of never giving up and committing yourself to the Torah. That is the only freedom, and that's the holy bond between us and the Divine. That's why we were brought out of slavery from Pharaoh, and then we went directly to Sinai to receive a whole new rules and regulations. Like we went from one slavery to another. Why not just let us wander around the desert. We were freed from slavery, wandering the desert. But that's not freedom. Wandering around the desert isn't freedom. That's just another form of slavery, like a leaf blowing in the wind. A leaf is not free.

Choosing to align your life with the ultimate good in you and around you, that's the freedom that our soul wants. That's our soul totally unshackled from all of the klipot and all of the layers. And it's hard, and I was training with my coach this Friday like I do every Friday morning. And my coach actually filmed a video from behind me. And after the session he sent it to me. And as soon as I watched it, I was like, "Oh, I have to show this to my boys, Akiva and Lavi." And I showed it to them, and I told them, "I think I'm going to show this video on the Fellowship this Sunday."

"Achhh, Abba, don't do that! Why would you show them this video? It's embarrassing. I mean, look at you. You're like...achhh, are you able to show that in public? I mean, that's crazy. Abba, don't do that, don't do that!" And I'm like, "I think that I need to. I think that it is a parable for life. And there is no better way to explain what I'm trying to say than actually seeing it with your own eyes. Because sometimes we can live out a truth that's not just truth as you're lifting weights, but it's true as existence itself."

And so, this is a short video that I wanted to show you guys. Check this out:



AHHHH! One, two, three...Nine...ahhhh



OHHH!

I'm sorry, I hope it wasn't too embarrassing for my future children generations to see that's what we're airing on our Fellowship. But, at the end, my coach wrote me, his name's Jerry, he's like, "How much are you willing to endure to achieve what you want?" And you know, at the end of that video, when I'm just kind of a puddle on the floor? That's what life is going to give you whether you like it or not. It's like we're all going to find ourselves, thank you, Tabitha, on the floor, out of breath, and absolutely spent. That is life, and maybe it's going to hit us at a funeral. Maybe it's going to hit us at a shiva, maybe it's going to hit us when we lose our job. Maybe it's going to hit us when God forbid, the floods come. That's going to happen whether we like it or not.

And it's like, you know, that is existence. That is the *asia* of this world. You know, God, He can't really struggle. He's God. God can't overcome. God can't work hard, God can't strive, He can't break through or persevere. God created *olam h'asia*, this world that we exist in. In this world, this is God's doing through us. We are His *asia*, that is the essence of His doing, and when we're pushed to our limits, that's actually when the growth happens. This world was created for everything in it to grow and to flourish into our Divine potential.

And I learned something amazing. Our grapes in the Arugot Farm are some of the best wine in Israel. And an expert told me, it's arguably one of the best wines in the world. He actually said these words – It is the most fun wine he's ever tasted. Now not the most complex and the most sophisticated, but this is an expert wine taster that's a judge in international events. And he said, "The Arugot Farm is the most fun wine he's ever tasted." And I'm like, "Wow, that is a huge compliment. I will absolutely take that." But you know what it takes to make the best wine? You have to turn off the watering system. I didn't know that. You have to stress the vine almost until you starve it or make it so thirsty and the vine responds by coming back even sweeter and more flavorful. And we're no different. And the Torah calls man, "the tree of the field."

And Ari hosted, I think 20 Yeshiva students this last Shabbat. And they have to make a choice. They're gonna have to make a choice soon. Are they going to stay in New York or going to go back to LA? Are they going to stay in Israel, join the IDF? Are they going to stay one more year in Israel? Are they going to go to university?

And I know, that's why Ari does it. Ari's doing it because this is probably the most important intersection of their life. And Ari's trying his best to bring as much Judean light into their life so when they make that choice maybe they're going to make a right turn to Israel instead of a left turn to Los Angeles. And you know, like a pineapple, they grow best in Hawaii. And mangoes, they grow amazing in Thailand. Do you know where Jews grow best? Jews grow best in the Land of Israel. That's what I told them. And it may not be the easiest place to live. I mean, we have a lot of challenges ahead of us. But it's specifically this environment that is divinely orchestrated with the amount of natural resources, the enemies that we have, the political

challenges, the social challenges. Everything that we have to deal with here is actually created in order for the Jewish people to become who we were chosen to be. That's true on a national level and that's true on an individual level.

And so all of us have found ourselves in our places and lives...believe me, you are there because it is in that exact environment that you are growing in. And I read this beautiful quote from Frederick Nietzsche. And he says, "I know no better life purpose than to perish attempting the great and the impossible." And I was like, that is just excellent. There is no better purpose in life than to perish attempting the great and the impossible. What would be greater than fulfilling our life's destiny. God created you to become someone. He had a dream for your life. It's like, I think about that dream. We really have to try to imagine it. It's like, the journey from Egypt, where we are now, and where we could be. It's like, we really have to pray for that dream and then get a glimpse of the truth. And all we need is just enough light, just a pillar of fire, way off in the distance. To start walking in that direction, we just need enough light to take the next few steps away from Egypt and toward the Land of Israel.

And that path, it's long and it's hard, and sometimes you're going to want to quit. And sometimes, the leader, the highest part in you, is also going to want to quit. And there'll be all these rationales that seem to come from the highest place within you is saying, "No, no, no, really it's not good." Moshe himself is saying, "Kill me, I'm done." Even that's a part of the process. And overcoming that, when you're splattered on the floor and you're just totally spent. It's getting back up and saying, "No, no, no. I do want the highest part in me guiding my life. I don't want to switch the captain of my ship."

And when you find yourself just a puddle on the floor, know that that's when the growth is actually happening. That's exactly where you're supposed to be. And sometimes you can choose to put that stress on you, you can choose the challenge, but we are going to be challenged, HaShem is going to turn off the waters on our grapevines whether we like it or not because the fruit are destined to be as sweet as possible. And those challenges are going to make our fruit sweet.

And so, when we fall, get back up, put the tefillin back on, every day. Recommit, and that discipline of falling getting back up, getting frustrated, and then becoming just like, compassionate, living with patience, believe me. I test Tehila's patience all the time. I test Ari's patience all the time. That's my job. I'm making everyone better. That's the way I see it. I'm just testing everyone's patience and making everyone better. You see that, Ari? I'm here for you. So, I'm not bothering you, I'm helping you.

Ari

That's a lot of truth. We have actually a WhatsApp support group all about you. And we're very grateful that you make us such better people.

Jeremy

Well with that, I would love to say, it's important to never give up. That's really the message of the Torah, even when Moshe Rabbenu, himself, they want to go back. It's all over. It's like, "No," it's like get back up. Dust yourself off, face Yerushalyim and pray to come home. That's what the Jewish people manifested and embodied for 2,000 years. Whatever happened the night before, Nazis, Inquisitions, Crusades, Muslim oppression, the Communists. The Jew woke up in the morning, dusted himself off, hopeless and yet still, he turned to Yerushalyim and he prayed to come home. That is the betrothal. That's where the commitment is made. That's where the Divine bond is forged. That is emunah. Because emunah is faithfulness, loyalty in action. That's what emunah is. And so, we should be blessed with emunah.

And before we say goodbye, now that Ari is here, I would like to let him sort of send us off to our week with a holy Torah. So, Ari, you are now on. Thank you for coming on today, I know that was not easy to make the time schedules work. So we appreciate you. And so, I hope you like that. That was good stuff, right?

Ari

Jeremy, that was very good stuff, and you have been on a roll in authentically inspiring me lately. I give you enough grief, and I'm brutal enough with you all the time for nearly 20 years, that when you step up and you truly inspire me deeply, I gotta say it. And you've been doing it on a regular basis.

Jeremy

That's just really nice to hear.

Ari

I've been saying, I could say that I could send videos of myself working out and putting your video to shame, but I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't do that, partially also because I can credit you to a very large degree with the fact that I'm doing that workout. Because you've inspired me to do it.

Jeremy

Wait, now that we're just all here, together as a Fellowship and no one else is watching, was that a mistake to show that video? Was that embarrassing?

Ari

Oh stop it, it's fine. Yeah.

Jeremy

It was ok? Very good.

Ari

No, so I want to share my thoughts with you, but as I'm listening to Jeremy, I should give a few disclaimers. Number one, it is not as deep, profound, or articulate as Jeremy's idea is. It's just a thought that I sort of wanted to share with you. Sometimes they're greater sometimes they're less. But also, I just wanted to tell you why I was late. There's this group that came out, of Jewish kids from all of these like, I think it's Canada and Australia and America. And they're on campuses, and they were like so left wing. They so...they were so like blaming, you know, like that I just needed...I know that you would have wanted me to be with them. And I saw that the time was encroaching upon the Fellowship. I knew that you would want me to be there with them and to continue the time. And I think it was a very profound, life-changing experience for them because that's where I thrive for some reason.

But anyways, it really is so good to see all of you, and so I'll just dive into it. As Jeremy said, it was a big week for my family out here at the Farm. Shaena and I, we both felt like we were skidding in sideways to Shabbat without having a moment to breathe. We had groups and action and demands, my energy was low. I don't know if I told you, I was actually diagnosed with shingles. Have you heard of shingles? You know what shingles is? Yeah, it's unpleasant, but it's what I was diagnosed with. So, I hope that that is some sort of spiritual rectification, low energy, very unpleasant. But anyways, Shaena has been incredible, stepping up to the plate. And Dvash has been challenging us, she's waking up and crying what felt like every hour on the hour, every night for weeks. I don't know what's going on. She has these night terrors. I don't know, but anyway, Shiloh of course is like chiming in on the half hour intervals between Dvash, so it's been challenging. You know our water is being shut off to our vineyard, as Jeremy would say, but anyways...Jeremy, you listening to me? I listen to you! Anyways...

Jeremy

I'm right here. I'm reading the chats.

Ari

Ok, yeah, the chats are fun. I love the chats. But anyways so we're approaching Shabbat, and it became clear that I had accidentally not double-booked, but triple-booked students on Shabbat. And it's because their year is ending and all of these students...I'm talking about, it feels like hundreds are reaching out and begging, begging. They're saying, we only have two more Shabbats, so please let us come out. So I said yes to this, I forgot about that. And so here we were going in and we're gonna have 20 people at our Shabbat table, which is a lot. And I'm not going to act like Shaena and I didn't like utter a word of complaint like, what did we get ourselves into? We're so exhausted anyways. But I'll say that much more frequently we would look at each other as Dvash is going nuts and Shiloh and the guests and we were just like looked at each other, and we're like, this is exactly what we've been praying for.

And that perspective, that is the gift of yearning. That's the gift of praying. That's the gift of perspective. But you know, no matter what you've been through, having the proper perspective is not something that you could just assume and take for granted. In a lot of different ways, I've been put through the ringer, in ways that nobody I know has, and I still find myself not appreciating things I should obviously appreciate.

And so, we see in this week's Torah portion that there's nothing automatic about perspective and appreciation. Even hundreds of years of slavery doesn't guarantee that you'll have an appreciation of freedom that you'd think that you would. I have stuff to share, do I have your blessing to go a little bit over-time guys? Give me a thumbs up if it's ok. You can log off if you want. I just want to see if it's all right. Anyways, ok, so thank you for that. I was reading through this week's portion and even starting the next week's portion which we do during the prayer services on Shabbat afternoon. You know, in the Shabbat morning, we read the entire Torah portion of the week, and then in the afternoon service, we read the beginning of the next week's portion. And the stories we encounter, you know, I was starting to weave the together into this sort of thematic pattern which I'd never considered before, and I'm eager to share it with you and see if you agree with me.

So the first piece of this series, we see in the first verse of this week's portion, chapter 11:

The people took to seeking complaints; it was evil in the ears of Hashem, and Hashem heard and his wrath flared, and a fire of Hashem burned against them and it consumed the edge of the camp.
-Numbers 11:1

Now what that means, the edge of the camp is up for debate, but it's talking about maybe the leaders because the leaders didn't curtail or control them. But either way, it starts by telling us that the people were complaining. It doesn't necessarily say what they were complaining about. That becomes a bit more clear a little bit later. But it just starts by telling us that they

were just complaining.

And I think that the Torah may be conveying to us a deeper truth that quite often, if not always, the subject of a complaint is not the real problem. The deeper issue is the fundamental prism of ingratitude which is distorting the prism of reality. Causing what is usually a barrage of complaints to rise to the surface all at once. And I think by the way, you know, when I look at Dvash, I think sometimes HaShem sends us children into our lives to see these truths in their most extreme, obvious, basic forms. And I see with Dvash, particularly when Dvash gets tired, and everything turns into a complain, no matter how inane and ridiculous it is. Simply opening up the wrapper of a date bar incorrectly, can cause a meltdown of historic proportions. I think it's adorable when she does that, Shaena doesn't. We agree to disagree. But anyways, we hear the nature of their complaints, and it was coming from a craving. Right? Here's the verse. The erev rav, the rabble, we could talk about that another time...

The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the children of Israel wept once more and said "Who will give us meat? We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge; the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now our life is parched; there is nothing. We have nothing to anticipate but the manna!"

-Numbers 11:4-6

It's like nothing to anticipate but the manna is like cringe-worthy. Who could say that? Can you even imagine the audacity? The chutzpah? The chutzpah is so extreme that it's almost inspiring to have that level of chutzpah. You know, complaining to the Creator of the world who rescued you from Egypt, gave you the Torah, sustaining you through the desert, complaining to Him that the food that He is personally

preparing for you as your private chef...then saying it's not as good as the food that was given to you by the genocidal taskmasters who enslaved you and murdered your children? It's more than chutzpah, it actually seems crazy. It actually seems crazy. Ok, but let's look at the next pieces.

So Miriam and Aaron, they come together for a little juicy sibling gossip. Anyone who has more than one sibling knows that this is very easy to fall into. You know, when it's your sibling who you both love, you both love them, something about gossiping about them just feels a little bit more harmless about it. Almost like it's your right to do it. Like it's not that bad. You know, and maybe it's not. That is, unless your sibling is Moshe Rabbeinu, right? Unless your sibling is Moses, the greatest prophet in the world, the most humble man in history. Then maybe it's a problem. So here are the verses inside:

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the Cushite woman that he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. They said "was it only to Moses that Hashem spoke? Did he not speak to us as well?" And Hashem heard.

-Numbers 12:1-2

Of course He heard! Of course He heard! He hears everything. And we don't need to go into all the details here. I am an expert into going into all sorts of side points and forgetting where I was to begin with. But the point here is that these two spiritual giants, the first High Priest of Israel, right? Aaron. And Miriam, the prophetess who saved Moshe from certain death, despite their unparalleled greatness, they were able to

lose perspective to such a degree that they actually slandered their brother with a hint of the accusation that he may have some sort of ego problem. So crazy was this accusation, Jeremy's talked about it before. We're always attacked on our greatest strength. So crazy was this accusation that the truth that the Torah assures us in the very next verse, that not only was Moshe very humble, but that he was the most humble person on the face of the earth.

Ok, and then the next piece that I want to weave into this dark and shameful episode of the spies. Because the portions of the Torah are sort of a later differentiation. So you know, we've spoken about this in the past. That's the next portion, the beginning of the next portion. We'll

talk about it next week. Moshe sent the spies into the Land they were not supposed to be spies at all. What were they supposed to be? What were they supposed to be? Tourists! They were supposed to be tourists. They were supposed to tour the Land. Here's the verses, chapter 13, verses 1 and 2:

Hashem spoke to Moses saying: Send forth men, if you please, *VAYITURU* the land of Canaan that I give to the children of Israel, one man each from his fathers tribe shall you send, every one a leader among them".

-Numbers 13:1-2

Men meaning men of dignity, men of leadership. So *vayituru* is often translated as they should spy out the Land. But that's really not...I don't know why it's translated that way. *Vayituru*, they were sent to be tourists, from tour. And what do tourists do? They go to Trip Advisor, to see all the beautiful places in the Land, to get inspired to enjoy

themselves, they want to come back with good pictures and things to brag about, things to share about. They want to say good things!

But these appointed leaders took the directive in a very entirely different direction, the opposite direction. Instead of having the eyes to see the beauty and the holiness and the light, they saw fear and danger and threats and darkness. And the more I was reflecting back on these three back-to-back narratives, the complainers – Miriam and Aaron, with the gossip about Moshe, and the whole thing with the spies, it became clear that the underlying blemish was not in the specific subject they were contending with or complaining about. It wasn't about the food, it wasn't about Moshe, it wasn't about the Land. I think the blemish was much more basic than that. It was about the eyes through which they were seeing things. It was about the fundamental prism through which everything in their lives, everything in their world was being perceived and received.

And the more I reflected on it, the more deeply I identified with all of them. The complainers and Miriam and Aaron and the spies. I was just...you know, just going through the different parts of my life in my head because I have this whiteboard, Jeremy knows how many hundred of white boards I have and the feudal attempt to make sense of what is inside my brain. And one of my whiteboards has every single category of my life from, you know, nutrition to exercise, spiritual study, Torah study, meditation, exercise, marriage, children... Anyways, it could go on and on and on. I was going through all of these different parts of my life, and I was painfully realizing that if I was going to be honest about it, despite the overwhelming, unimaginable myriad of blessings that has been showered upon me, in nearly every facet of my life there was something that I wish was different in some way. And I felt bad about this, and while at first I was really judging myself really harshly about it, the more I was reflecting on it in light of the portion, you know, that critical self-judgment started softening as I realized what great biblical company I was in. We're all in. You know, because you know, to us, to us here in this Fellowship, well these three stories may make you, you know think about these characters and

Miriam, Moshe and the nation of Israel and the spies...they sound like complainers. And just people of little faith, totally lacking faith.

When you are in it, when I'm in it, when I'm in that place, when my head is spinning and all I see is anger and rage, when you're swept away in this compelling narrative of grievance and victimhood, it seems to you that it's so true. The way you're seeing it, that there's simply no other way that you can look at it. There's no other way that it can be seen. Obviously, it's true. It actually seems like, you know, in some ways our eyes are the most vulnerable organs in our bodies. They're the most susceptible to being warped and twisted with distortions and illusions.

Which got me to think about a debate that I recently heard that I was deeply troubled by. Jeremy, I haven't discussed with you, but I wanted to. It left me feeling very uneasy. And it was a debate featuring Dennis Prager...do you guys know what I'm talking about? Did you hear about this? Dennis Prager, and it was about pornography. And I'm going on too long here, so I'm not going to share the clips that I wanted to share that he said. But I'll summarize his points. Basically he was saying that according to Judaism, we are judged by our actions and not our thoughts. And that somehow pornography isn't inherently that evil. That's what I took from what he was saying. That it can somehow be used to bolster a marriage and not necessarily damage the marriage. He was saying that pornography is not necessarily so evil, that most theologians say that a lot of the...I think he was debating a Christian guy, also. And I was so deeply disturbed by this because it felt like it was a chilul HaShem, a desecration of Hashem's Name because you know, from everything I understand, and you know, even more from everything I understand, everything I deeply and intuitively know. That's just wrong, it's not true what he's saying. Not only is it incorrect, it's just wrong.

And here was Dennis Prager, someone who I really, really respected, and you know what? I still respect him. I don't have to like him, throw the baby out with the bathwater. I'm sure he says good things that he says. But he's someone that I really, really...and a lot of people respect and look to him as the source of understanding Judaism. And here he was, you know, sharing a perspective that I felt honestly, it probably said more about him and his viewing habits, than it did about Torah or Judaism. I was so disturbed that I actually commented on the YouTube video which I don't think I've ever done before. Who like comments on YouTube videos? And my comment was really quoting one verse. I tried to find the comment, but I couldn't find it. But I remember the verse that I quoted, which quite perfectly is positioned in this next week's Torah portion, after the story of the spies. Chronologically right after the three stories that we've been talking about. Here's the verse. It's part of the verse, it's not the whole verse:

You shall not stray after
your heart and after your
eyes which lead you astray."

-Numbers 15:39

Jeremy

Not only that, Ari, but I do want to point out that the word
in Hebrew – stray

Ari

Yeah, I'm about to say that.

Jeremy

Oh, you're about to say that? Ok, good. It's clear in the Hebrew.

Ari

Well it's ok, no it's ok, you go ahead. Yeah, so what I was going to say is it says that the word that is used means "you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes which you prostitute after." It's like you know, harlotry, that your eyes lead you to harlotry. That's the word that's used. And to me, this version is conveying the deepest truth. This version is telling us that Dennis Prager couldn't be more wrong. That it all starts with the eyes. We need to guard our eyes with the vigilance. Because if we don't, if we glance at things that we shouldn't be looking at. If we focus on things that are not our business or our domain, we are fundamentally compromising our spiritual immune system, and opening it up to be infiltrated by foreign, distorted, perverse thoughts which can lead to these fantasies that we then start comparing our actual, beautiful life compared to these fantasies. And it can be so overwhelming and compelling that it can lead us to act in a way that if we were to see it happening to someone else, we would judge them as insane. Which is actually what it is. You know, if we allow our eyes to obsessively see and focus on that which we shouldn't, it can actually lead us to momentary psychosis, to temporary insanity.

It's an idea in Torah Judaism, which is one of the reasons by the way that someone that commits suicide, God forbid, is able to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Because the sages of Israel say that we assume that in that moment, right as it's happening, before it happens, they were in this moment of total temporary insanity that they can't even be judged for that. And so it leads us to temporary insanity and to act in ways that are so...that the dissonance between our values and our self-perception and who we perceive ourselves, to that action, causes us to feel irreconcilably dark in a world of shame and regret. It's somewhere that I've been. You know, it's numerous times in my life. All because we were looking at things and focusing upon things which we shouldn't.

And this is why we cover our eyes every morning and every night and pronounce the deepest truth. Shema Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad. Hear O Israel, HaShem is our God, HaShem is one. We recite that so that we can remember that Hashem is Oneness. He's behind everything and everything HaShem does is good. Everything that happens is good.

And how can we make sure to see it that way? The next verse tells us. We say it every day, twice a day at least. The next verse tells us as we read in the Shema. V'ahavta et Adonai Elohecha. B'chol l'avcha, uv'chol nafshecha uv'chol me'odecha. You shall love the Lord your God with all your hearts and all your soul and all of your might. With love. Love is the only way. Love is the only way we can defeat this. Love is the only way we can really embrace and rise to this occasion.

Which you know, why am I happy when Dvash wakes me up five times throughout the night? Why do I think that the tantrums that she throws, about the color of her spoon are so adorable? The answer is because I just love her so much that by extension, I love everything about her. I'll discipline her, I'll discipline her strongly, but my love for her never ever wavers. You know, this world can be very compelling. And the masks and the illusions of duality in this world can be so convincing, which is why we need to be constantly immersed in Torah and in prayer and in acts of holiness. Because boredom and squandering time on silliness and emptiness can carry more of a price than we think.

You know, I've been praying with some of these ultra-orthodox Jews, and I go early and I watch them learning the Talmud with each other. And they are screaming and fighting and into it for hours and hours and immersed in it. And it's not my thing, but you know what? I get why they do it. Because at least it is giving very serious, hard focus on Torah on HaShem's laws and HaShem's words. And that is a better place to be than just letting your mind wander anywhere at the very least.

So anyway, before I end this message to you, because I know I'm way over time here, I just want to say, you know, that I struggle with this stuff like I'm sure all of you do. Actually probably many of you don't. but I struggle with it, just as much, as if not more. And there are times that I have fallen on my face. But I want to bless us that we judge ourselves with the knowledge that the nation of Israel fell on their faces right after the giving of the Torah, that they complained to God right after the great revelation of the Torah, that Miriam the prophetess and Aaron the High Priest fell on their faces when talking about Moses, the most humble man ever. And that the princes of the tribes of Israel fell on their faces so magnificently that we're still paying the price of the slander they spoke about the Land of Israel. All because they saw it through the wrong prism. And we're gonna fall into it again. So we're in good company in our failures.

But the key to staying strong, the key to staying in that good company that we just spoke about is rising up again and again, even stronger. Having learned from our mistakes and internalizing those lessons to see the world through a prism of goodness and blessing and only words of blessing and praise and positivity should emerge from our mouths. Amen.

Love you, my friends, thank you for holding on with me there. I'd love to hear from you. I know Jeremy would love to hear from you also and we'll see each other next week. Shalom, shalom, Jeremy it's all yours.

Jeremy

We'll just end here with a quick bracha from Israel. That you should know that we love you all, we bless you all, we strengthen you all.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

Shalom my friends, we'll see you again next week!