

Session 187
Nasso – Anatomy of a Blessing
16 June 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Skx1Mfml4zl>

Ari

Shalom my friend, shalom, shalom! It is so good to see all of you. For some reason, the first second we start, I don't see all of you and then I have to go back and now I see all of you again. I see your faces, Ed and Julie, oh you're wearing matching pink shirts. Oh I love it. Luci, shalom, shalom. Oh it's good to see all of you, I really, really love it. It's so good. Every week, you know we start off every week saying what a blessing it is, but it is. That's just the way it is. And not just to see you, but to see you in this context of this Fellowship. Sometimes I sort of envision, you know I look at how many people are here every now and then, and I'm told later how many. And I'm like sort of picturing a synagogue, filled with all of us together in it. And I just visualize that and how strangely beautiful that would be. How uniquely special. I don't know!

It's a special thing because while I hear from so many of you what a great blessing this Fellowship is in your life, I often find myself feeling that it simply has to be a greater blessing to have this Fellowship and to have all of you in my life. But knowing you as I do, I'm sure that many of you would debate that point and say that WE'RE the greater blessing for you than you are for us. And then the whole...my mother with her friends at the restaurant... "No, I'm going to pay"...that whole thing starts. No, you're the bigger blessing, no you're the bigger blessing.

And then I always come back to the same truth. That a true blessing, a true bracha, comes from above. And it emanates from HaShem. And when it emanates from God, Himself, who is infinite, that's one of the reasons why a bracha, blessing, comes from the word brecha, pool, because it's the unlimited, abundance of living water flowing down from above on all of us, through all of us, to each other. And so, it's not connected to the illusion of the world of scarcity because this world of scarcity that we're in, it's an illusion. This zero-sum game that the world believes so strongly that everything is at everybody else's expense, that there's only so much...it appears that way, but it's really not true. You know we're all receiving unbelievably limitless flow of blessings from HaShem and through each other.

And it's exactly this idea that I wanted to focus on for this Fellowship. You know it turns out this Fellowship...it doesn't really, I don't really have so many clips and soundbites in this...it's just...you know, I just want to share from my heart. And what I wanted to talk about, I want to focus upon the idea of blessing. I want to focus on this idea through which, I believe the Kohanic blessing is actually the most ancient blessing in the world that is still alive and in use today. I would challenge anyone to show me a more ancient blessing that is used to this very day. Or even I think, a more ancient blessing at all, the Kohanic blessing.

Not only because this blessing is first articulated by HaShem, Himself in this week's Torah portion of Nasso, the 2nd portion in the book of Numbers, but also because we've always ended this Fellowship, I believe since the very beginning with the blessing of the Kohanic prayer in which I give the exact same preface...it's almost like a private joke at this point, exact same preface every single Fellowship. And while I'm not a descendant of Aaron, I am a Jew. And we're entrusted to be a nation of priests, and I bless.

And one of the great blessings of living in the Land is that here, in Israel, we receive this blessing every day directly from the descendants of Aaron here in Judea, every morning. In the exile, in the diaspora communities, it's only on the high holidays, it's only on the feasts – Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. The Feast of Tabernacles, and Pentecost...I'm a little bit distracted because I come here to Efrat because there's a guaranteed, wonderful internet connection here. But Shaena's mother has acquired herself two Burmese, they're Siamese cats that are just all over me. And I'm trying to exude a lack of friendship energy to them, but they're just spooking me. They're like right here, right now.

Anyways, so you know, for me when I get to receive this blessing in the morning, it's just one of the greatest highlights of the morning prayers. And when I'm receiving it, I always open my arms wide, from side to side, so that the light that the Kohanim are channeling and I'm receiving its full surface area exposure. But I don't think that I've ever taken as deep a dive as I really would like to have taken, as deep a dive as a blessing of such magnitude and consequences which is such a significant part of my life, this blessing. It really deserves a deep dive, I think. A look within. So I'm excited to do that with all of you. And I really hope we have a chance to talk and to connect afterwards – questions about this, that and the other thing, whatever it is.

But anyways, this is part of the reason that just a couple of days ago, I purchased this book. I don't remember if I brought it here to show it to you. It's called "The Book of Yearning," by one of my rabbis, Rav Daniel Cohen who is the chief rabbi of the nearby settlement of Bat Ayin. And he just published it. And it's actually, as I'm reading it now, it's quite advanced. And I pray for the wisdom and discipline to really immerse myself in it. But what is it? It's a deep explanation and explication of the morning prayers, of the liturgy that Jews say every single day, which many of us, myself included, simply haven't even scratched the surface on the depth and the beauty and just the great potential lying within each and every word of each and every prayer.

And sometimes I just...sometimes I just pray and say the words when I'm just too distracted, there's just too much going on. And I just say, "These are the words that my fathers, and my father's fathers, going back thousands of years who prayed. And just that in and of itself, is enough reason for me to give meaning and purpose to it. But anyways, there's a lot of things that we do every day that we don't really look deep enough in to. Because here's the thing, I do believe that if I were to say all of the morning prayers without any concentration or intention, which still happens every now and then in my life, probably more than I'd like to admit, even if I

say the blessings with zero intention, it has power to it. It really does, just saying these words is so great, is the power of our speech, that even if we don't know what we're saying, it still has an effect. But it's obviously less of a meaningful and uplifting experience if we're just mumbling words by rote that we don't understand, or we really understand it. So while I love to receive the Kohanic blessing, because I know that I'm being blessed by HaShem through these Kohanim, these priests of Israel, the experience of receiving that blessing can't compare to the deeper understanding of the beauty and the dimension of these words, which were scripted directly from the God of Israel. Meaning it wasn't the words of Aaron the prophet. God, Himself told Moses these words to tell Aaron and his descendants.

So I'm eager to swim through these ideas together today. But allow me to say now, I just want to give this... every now and then I give this disclaimer I guess it would be called. And so I want to say it now because it's an ancient Torah principle, that when you give the proper credit to an idea that you share, it brings perfection to the world. When you quote the person who it originated with, who it came down through. So I often find myself concerned, a little paranoid that I may have inadvertently neglected to do so, even though I really try to do it and to be strict about it. Particularly on Shabbat when I'm absorbing so much from so many places and I can't write it down, I'm not doing any writing.

So please, just consider how powerfully influenced I've been on these ideas by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Rabbi Kahane, Rav Kook, Rav Goldman, and so many others. So if there's some great novel insight that you hear from me, it's just often safe to assume that it isn't mine. That's not true with Tehila Gimpel. I mean, I think she is a prophetess in some capacity. Shaena and I talk about it all the time. So anyways, I'm here to simply share my experience and my understanding and my journey with you.

But before I do that, it is my great joy to introduce my beloved friend, Jeremy, to share his heart with you. I'm so excited to hear what he has to say.

Jeremy

Hi, shalom everybody. Great to see you all, shalom Fellowship. Ari, I'm just really happy that this Fellowship we're going to be diving into the ancient blessing of Israel. Because today is our 4th anniversary as a Fellowship. Four years together. And as we saw in the Nashville Israel conference, our Fellowship is quite literally changing the world and I just have this inner intuition that this kind of darkness that I've kind of been in for the last month or so, is just about to burst forth with absolute light. And so, happy anniversary everyone, it's lovely to see all your beautiful faces, of course. It's wonderful to be together, what a journey we have gone on together.

And I would say that the last month or so, I've been hobbling on our journey, we've been hobbling together. But if there's one word that sums up my life right now, it would be recovery.

That's really what I'm doing, it's like a full-time job. And usually, I say every day I'm getting ever so slightly stronger, every day I'm feeling better, until today. Today I had one of the toughest days since the accident. I could not get out of bed this morning until the afternoon. I had things to do, I had people to meet, my 14-year-old daughter Eden's class came out to the Farm, I had to ask Ari to cover for me because my body just shut down and there was no negotiating. There was no way to get me out of bed, I was just shut off, the off button – you're gone for the day. And I didn't know if I was even going to be able to make it to the Fellowship.

And then right about 1:00, I kind of like brighten up. I don't know, I started doing good again. And I've kind of had to surrender to myself and just say, "Ok, well I guess this is what I was supposed to do today. I'm just supposed to stay in bed." And I got up and I've been up now for a few hours, but for the first time in a really long time, my foot actually feels really better. So maybe it was like my body telling me, "Jeremy, we just need to rest a little bit more. We're busy here, we need to heal your foot." And so maybe as I was just knocked out, my body was busy with all the little gnomes and elves, chipping away and fixing things. And my foot is really feeling much, much better. But who knows what tomorrow will bring. Every day is a new adventure here.

But as I was recovering, I got an email last week from a member of the Fellowship, and of course I answered her privately, but I asked her and I told her that I wanted to address this question to everyone, because it was very much connected to our last Fellowship and to what I said about recovering. And think it was also very much connected to this Fellowship about blessing. It's like how do we extract the blessings of this world?

And so, the question is as follows. I'll keep her anonymous just to protect her privacy here. Every week on the Fellowship, Jeremy says life is happening for you, not to you. And Ari says, "Ain ode milvado," there's nothing other than Him, everything is from God. These sayings have hugely been helpful in my life to shift my mindset, to put me in a grateful head space, opening up the possibilities of how God will use this situation. However, what about really horrific things done by other people? What about October 7th? What about someone taking advantage of someone weaker than them? How do you reconcile these things? I fear that at the hands of the wrong person, a line like, everything happens for you, can be used justify any kind of abuse. I can understand how it helps your mindset when you fall off a horse, or you don't get the job, or your best friend moves away...but what about truly horrific things that happen at the hands of other people? There must be a line where you can say, 'This is evil and should not have happened.'"

That was the question. It was actually a much longer email, but that's kind of the crux of the question. And it's a great question. And I would say that first, the answer is, "Yes, when evil is done, it is right to say, 'This is evil and should not have happened.' But we need to understand that probably the biggest distinction between Western Biblical faith and Jewish faith...the

difference there is much less about eschatology or about the end of days, it's actually about this issue."

It would be a lot easier to make boxes. "God, You are in the good box. Devil, you are in the bad box. Everything good is from God, everything bad is from the devil." That's just a lot cleaner. It's a lot cleaner way to see God, it's a lot easier way to understand like good is from God, bad is from the devil, but that's really not the Jewish way.

I want you to see this in Scripture itself, in the book of Isaiah in chapter 45, verse 7:

I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I Hashem, do all these things.

-Isaiah 45:7

First it's interesting to note that light and dark, those are opposites. Peace and evil are also in this context, kind of opposites. It's like, anything that's disrupting the peace, a peace within marriage, a peace within people, a peace within yourself...just peace in the world, that's already border lining on evil. But what does it say there? It says, "I, God created evil." He created evil.

So before creation, there was only God, He is One, everything is from Him. In the world of truth, not necessarily from our perspective, everything is from God and everything ultimately is for the good. Now obviously, if evil happened, it's against the Torah, it's against the will of God, it's against the desire of what HaShem would want to be in the world. People can use their free choice to do good and they can use their free choice to do evil. And when evil is done, it needs to be called out as absolute evil. But nothing happens outside of HaShem. Ain ode milvado. There is nothing other than Him.

And it's a conundrum. Even for God. When He first created man, He had to bring a flood in the time of Noah. Because all of humanity, their hearts were wrong, their actions were wrong, evil everywhere. And He really reconsidered making man... "Oh, I really kind of regret this whole free-will, man, human thing." And even there, there's a conundrum there, it's a real challenge. Because evil can really be done, but everything is within the oneness.

And so, it's important to know, that there is only One, there is no person, there is no entity, no devil, no other gods who can act against HaShem or outside of His domain. That's why the idea that the devil is doing something. There's like two gods that are at war with each other, it's like it borders on idolatry. It's against HaShem echad, it's against the oneness of God.

Now, looking at my life now...ok, so I've experienced my own pain and my own suffering, and I'm trying to like learn from my surroundings. And the truth is, we have hundreds of olive trees on the Arugot Farm. Every year, volunteers come and they prune the olive trees. Last year...two years ago, excuse me, we had a group of Germans from the Fellowship that came to our Farm and they were pruning the olive trees. And I'm looking at our olive trees, and we planted them

at Lavi's bar mitzvah, seven years ago. And they were little and they've grown into these big, beautiful olive trees with thousands of olives now. And I look at that and I'm like, "Sometimes we have to like prune the olive trees, we have to cut off their branches that spread out from the bottom of the trunk at the beginning of the year, during the winter time. Then we have to trim back the olive tree. Now the olive tree experiences that as a trauma. Her branches are being cut off. But as a result of cutting off those live branches, the energy that would have gone to those branches now goes to the roots to grow deeper, strengthening the other branches and ultimately makes the olive tree grow back better and produce more fruit.

And I said, that is exactly how we need to approach set-backs, failures, pain, injuries, accidents...what seems like misfortune in our life. And I think that that analogy really explains the heart of the verse at the end of the curses in the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 28. At the end of the curses, God gives a reason why all of these curses came upon Israel. And it says:

Because you did not serve the Lord your God with happiness and with a joyful heart, for the abundance of everything.

-Deuteronomy 28:47

And that's a really interesting kind of reason to put at the end of all of these disasters. Curses, what? Because you didn't serve God with happiness? And I think that's not actually about happiness or laughing or giggling. It's not that. Simcha is the same letters as the word Mashiach. It's

a deep happiness, it's a God-happiness. It's almost like we had a misunderstanding of how we're supposed to exist in the world. How the relationship we're supposed to have. And if we engage with reality in the wrong way, reality will respond. If you lie, then believe me, reality itself will snap back on you. Just like Jordan Peterson says, "There's a way that you have to respond." And if you don't come from a place of simcha, that means we have to have some kind of life-line to happiness. Despair, that's just out of the question. Because on our deepest level we know that everything that happens is ultimately for the good. Every cloud has a silver lining. You can be sad, you can mourn, but on the deepest level, you have to know that it's all from HaShem. And good will ultimately come from it.

Now if you don't live life with that simcha, with that happiness, then you've cut off the lifeline. It means that you're just experiencing the world, either happenstance or other gods that hurt you. It's like, "Oh, no. Those are the curses that are going to come." But, in every difficult situation, even if something evil happens to you at the hands of someone else, maybe a part of the healing process is to realize, "Oh, all of this ultimately was somehow for me. This is somehow part of the journey that I needed to go on."

And when I think about that, I've been thinking a lot about our Fellowship. Our four year anniversary of being on the Land of Israel Network. And although this accident has just knocked me out, it's woken me up. And I know that I'm being built back better right now, even as we speak, I know that it's coming. I know that out of this darkness, a new light is about to come. And it's going to affect everything. It's going to affect the Arugot Farm, it's going to affect the

Fellowship, it's going to affect the impact and the light that comes out of our work. Our olive tree has been trimmed, but our roots are growing deeper right now. And our good branches are growing stronger.

And so, I've decided, coming up, I'm going to work on our roots together. The roots of our faith, the root spiritually of what it is to be Israel in the world, the roots of what it is to live with HaShem in our lives. And so, starting next week, I'm going to start a new series. A series that I've been thinking about for years and it's just now time to launch it into the world as we begin our fourth year together. And so, the next Fellowship, we will begin a new series called, "To Live a Guided Life." And I'll absolutely explain more, but for now, I am excited to say that I will see you all next week as we go on a new adventure together. And I believe that we can actually have different understandings, different theologies, different backgrounds, different cultures, but if all of us are aligned in how we live a guided life, we will be guided together all the way to a new Jerusalem. And I think that's our goal now. And so, Ari, I'm going to pass it off to you, I'll see you all next week. Have a blessing.

Ari

Thank you, Jeremy, it is so good to hear that message from you. And I can testify that Jeremy is indeed different. I don't know if it's a difference that he'll shake or he'll lose, but I don't think so. And it's hard for me to exactly put my finger on it, but there's something more sentimental, you know? Something more emotional. Like, maybe back in the day he would say something like, a little bit of a quip, like a little bit of a stab. And it was sort of like a sort of jokey sentimentality. And now there's no joke to it. He's just really, I think, a little bit more kind and sentimental. Do you agree with that, Jeremy, are you feeling that at all? Have you gotten that feedback from anyone else?

Jeremy

I know I have a lot more hearts in my WhatsApps that I'm sending like...like I got an email from my plumber. And I wrote back, "Thank you for writing me and checking up on me ❤️." Like, what did I send my plumber? A heart emoji. But that's just what I feel. I'm just being honest. I'm expressing that. So I have a lot more hearts that are coming out of me right now.

Ari

Yeah, that's what it is. Anyways, and in a lot of ways, it makes it a lot more pleasant to hang out with you. I always love hanging out with you, but this last Shabbat, we were blessed with the opportunity to go the beach town of Ashkelon, which you know, we don't take that many vacations, especially because I feel like we live in such a beautiful place just to take a vacation. But you know, just to get a difference of scenery. Especially for the kids. So we went to Ashkelon, which is a beach city which has had a rough ride as of late with the attacks from Gaza. And we of course went to spend the Shabbat with, yes, you guessed it, Jeremy and Tehila.

People laugh at us. We're neighbors alone on a mountain-top together, and rather than understandably, taking vacations FROM each other, we go on vacations WITH each other. Which, you know, it's a cute thing. Anyways, in the morning on Shabbat, Shaena and I took the kids to the playground because we don't actually go to the beach itself on Shabbat for a bunch of reasons, we could go into another time. But we don't go to the beach on Shabbat. And in the playground, we met a bunch of people because I just talk to everybody. I'm like...I'm actually becoming more and more like my father every day. It's a strange thing to see and sort of exciting and sentimental and sweet for me, also. But he was like that and I've always been like that, too, but it's even more so. That's just the way I roll, that's just the way HaShem made me. It's something in our genes.

Anyways, we were talking to this older Russian couple and they've been in Israel for at least 30 years. And we were talking about life, a little politics, about the war, and the man said that he felt that Israel should have missiles. He pointed out that Chamas and Chezbollah have arsenals of hundreds of thousands of missiles. Latest estimate to actually come out said that Chezbollah has stock-piled over a million missiles, which is not hard to imagine because all of the money they get from all over the world and from Iran and all the weapons. What is it all for? They have one job. One job! And that's to destroy Israel. So they're going to amass a million missiles, many of which we're already seeing now are far more advanced than we thought.

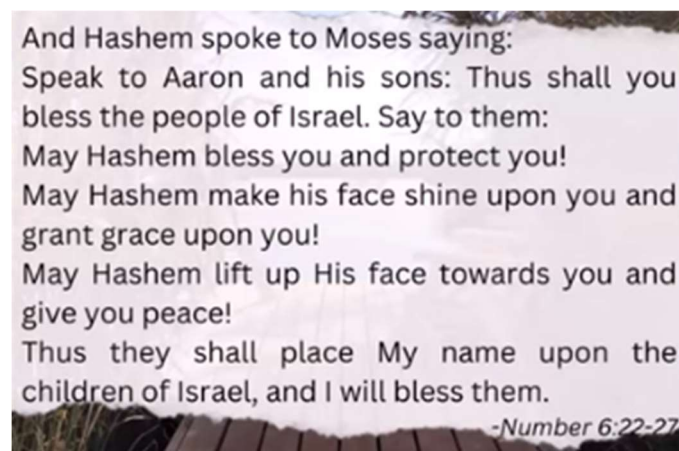
And this man said that Israel only has fighter jets that drop missiles. And so, therefore, it endangers our precious pilots, and it limits the amount of missiles that we can shoot. We just don't have an arsenal like that. And he said, it's simply not in our culture to shoot these missile barrages and that weakens us that we don't have stockpiles. That was his point. To which I responded, "You know, that may be true. But you know, what we do have that they don't?" He said, "What's that?" I said, "We have a kadosh barachu, we have the Holy One, blessed be He protecting us, and they don't." To which he said, "Neeah." That was sort of his response. Like, "Neeah." Sort of with that Russian sort of neeah. And there was sort of moment of silence.

And then he went on and he said, "We were raised in the Soviet Union, where we were taught that there is nothing, nothing. No God, no religion, nothing. That is what we were taught our entire lives. And so that's what I believe" and he said to his wife, "That's what we believe." But he said, "But my father, went to chedar, meaning a Yeshiva day school for children." And he knew...he was saying it with some pride, I felt like it was pride. "He knew how to pray and to read the Torah, but we don't believe in anything." And then he went on. He went on to say, you can ask Shaena this, he said, "But in our home, we do light Shabbat candles and we do make kiddush on wine, and we do bless the people of Israel and bless the people in the world." Yes, he really said that. Literally in the same sentence in which he basically claimed to be an atheist, he said that he lights Shabbat candles, and makes kiddush, and blesses the people of Israel...in the same sentence. I needed to tell that story, I told Jeremy that story, he said, "You need to tell it on the Fellowship." Because that sums up so many of the secular Jews.

I recently heard an interview about Israel by a very prominent pastor in America saying, that while he did believe that Israel has a special place in God's heart, he was bemoaning the fact that we are, after all, a secular country. And a statement like that, that we are a secular country, to define us that way, can only be made by someone studying Israel from the outside, or reading about Israel from magazines, someone that does not really have any true or real connection with the collective parts of the nation of Israel. Because if he did have that connection, and he dug just a little bit deeper, he would see that the words of the sages of Israel are true. That we are believers, the children of believers. And despite all of the reasons we've been given throughout history not to believe, as a nation, our faith has never wavered. Never.

That actually reminds me of a funny story, I think it's like a joke about the group of rabbis who convened in Auschwitz to put God on trial for the horrors that the Jewish people were experiencing. And after briefly deliberating, they decided to convict and they declared, "We have concluded that God doesn't exist. And now we must adjourn this trial because it's time for mincha, for the afternoon prayers." And now proceeded to do the afternoon prayers. Like, that story is funny because that is, that says something about the Jewish journey, the heart of the nation of Israel.

And you know, I'm sharing this you because prayer and its sister service of the heart, which is blessing, are hard-wired into the soul of the nation of Israel, to the degree that this Soviet educated atheist couple blesses the entire world next to their Shabbat candles every week, while believing that they're atheist. And so, I'm glad that they do that, I'm glad they do because I don't remember a time when the world needed prayer and blessing as much as right now. Particularly the Kohanic blessing which we find in the book of Bemidbar, Numbers, chapter 6, verses 22 to 27. This is our Torah portion. Let's look inside and give the intro and then the conclusion verses as well because they're relevant here and what I want to share with you:



So Rabbi Sacks actually pointed out a very interesting thing that I never realized. He pointed out that the first of the three verses of the blessing had three words, the second has five words and the third has seven words. And the first verse has 15 letters, which is 3 times 5. And the second has 20 letters, which is 4 times 5. And the third has 25 letters which is 5 times 5. And I'm not sure what any of that means, but I wanted to share it with

you because I thought it was cool and I'm sure it means something. And just because I don't know what it means, doesn't mean I shouldn't share it because it's just cool. It's divinely inspired, not divinely inspired... it was actually divinely authored prayer, so it would be natural

that there are many, many, many unfathomable dimensions to this blessing. So here we see that Moshe is told to instruct Aaron and his children and all of their descendants after them that they are to bless the tribes of Israel in exactly this way.

He starts – May HaShem bless you and protect. Now as we've discussed in the past, when you're blessed with a bracha, it means a material blessing, which is counter-intuitive because you would think that a blessing would grant us spiritual gifts being that it's in the spiritual realm. But you know, Jeremy shared this about the idea of multiplicity and duality. You know there is no real just two different, totally different realms. It's one, it's all one, and they're just reflections of each other. But I think it's our intuitive impulse to think that it has to be a spiritual blessing if it's a blessing...it must be a spiritual gift because of Western influence in which we very much been taught to believe that there's something inherently bad about this worldly material things. That we're supposed to disconnect from this world to connect with God. That the spiritual, material realms are just two distinctly realms together.

Whereas the Judaic Torah understanding is that we're here exactly NOT for that reason. We're here to infuse Godliness and holiness into each and every element of this world. And the more mundane and base it appears and it seems, the greater the light emerges from the infusing HaShem within it. Right? We're here to infuse godliness and holiness into each and every element of this world and to channel everything back to Him. That's why we make sure to recite blessings after even the most mundane things of like using the restroom, or drinking a cup of water, in order to elevate even the most mundane experiences to an opportunity for connection with the Divine.

So the first two words of this blessing are that you should be blessed with material abundance. But knowing the truth of human nature in general, and I have to think, Israel's nature even more so in specific, is that we have a tendency, a predisposition to become arrogant and complacent when we are faced with the challenge of material wealth. That blessing of material wealth, is curbed by the very next word – you should be protected. Protected from what? Protected from the material abundance you were just blessed with.

You know, it brings to mind verses 13-15 in the 32nd chapter of the book of Deuteronomy:

God set them atop the highlands,
To feast on the yield of the earth;
Nursing them with honey from the crag,
And oil from the flinty rock,
Curd of kine and milk of flocks;
With the best of lambs,
And rams of Bashan, and he-goats;
With the very finest wheat—
And foaming grape-blood was your drink.
So Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—
You grew fat and gross and coarse —
They forsook the God who made them
And spurned the Rock of their support.

-Deuteronomy 32: 13-15

Jeshurun, that's another name for Israel, Yashar, the straight one, that's what we're supposed to be. He grew fat and gross and coarse. What I'm trying to say is that we have this tendency to call out to HaShem from a place that we perceive as constraints. Like Psalm 130 – Solomon says, out of the depths, I called to You, HaShem, or Psalm 120 – A song of ascents. In my distress, I called out to HaShem, and He

answered me.

You know, distress, and constraints, the valley of the shadow of death. There are just so many. How many times do we hear from the treasures, from the riches, from the abundance, I call out to You, HaShem! We don't hear that so much. Right? We have a tendency to call out to HaShem from distress and not call out when we're in a place of abundance. Which seems, it seems to be a fundamental character flaw and the lack of gratitude which the nation of Israel, really I think, we are supposed to be rectifying throughout our long exile. That's like, "Go to your room, I want you to think about what you've done." We're supposed to be thinking about this all of these years.

And it's not only a lack of gratitude, it really seems to me, and I'm just working through this idea now. It feels like we're putting HaShem in a very difficult position. Because we know that He wants more than anything. What does He want more than anything? He wants our hearts. He wants a relationship with us. But He also wants to bless with revealed goodness, not the gam zu la'tovah – this too is for the good. But also just revealed goodness. But because of this danger of arrogance and complacency and the belief that this has been "Our strength and the power of our hands that has brought this abundance," we're really placing the limitations and the restraints upon ourselves by distancing ourselves from HaShem when things are good.

And so, that explains the last word, and to protect us. The protection referred to in the third word of this blessing is the protection from the first word of the blessings. That we should be protected from the potential pitfalls of the material blessings, just bestowed upon us in the very first word of the blessing. How many of you knew that? How many of you had that insight into those three powerful first words of that blessing? I feel like it's going to be different for me, you know, moving forward.

Which brings us to the second verse within the blessing – May HaShem shine His Face upon you and grant grace upon you. Now the truth is, that you know, when I bless you, usually I have a

definition, a translation, that sort of just comes to mind naturally. But for this, I really looked at each word very carefully and tried to define and translate each word with a lot of precision. And the truth is, that I was going to use the word favor instead of the word grace for chen, because I know that the word grace may have different connotations for many of you who may be Christians or coming from Christian backgrounds. So I didn't want to confuse things or conflate things, or trigger things, or you know bring up a whole world of things about grace. Grace is a thing for the Christians out there, I'm seeing some of you that I know are Christians. Grace is like a big thing. And so, you know, it doesn't mean that. But ultimately I decided not to use the word favor instead of grace because I kept trying on both words for size. And the word grace just tended to feel right and fit better and it didn't seem right to not use the right word because I was afraid of the connotations that it would bring up. So if it brings up connotations, let's just work it through, let's talk about it, that's fine.

So, I'll tell you what I mean when I say, "Grace," which in Hebrew is the word, chen. You know every time chen comes up in any prayers or in the Torah, my daughter Dvash always says, "Chen!" Because Jeremy's youngest daughter, her best friend is Chen, and so she just loves the name, Chen. But you know, in my mind, chen, does include the word favor. Meaning that if someone has the divine gift of chen, they do tend to find favor in people's eyes. And people tend to just like them and want to be around them and do good to them, even if those people themselves don't quite know why.

But the word, favor to define chen in my mind is incomplete. Because the word grace in my mind, summons the visualization of graciousness. Which makes me think of my mother, who in my mind defines the word, gracious. Because grace and graciousness is not just about the way someone is looked at, but about the way they view and therefore behave toward other people. Right? Grace implies a certain kindness, a compassion, a sensitivity, a seeing the goodness in others, a seeing the divine spark within others. You know, that's sort of this loving approach to others, I think of this gentle posturing toward one fellow human being that is reflected back to the person themselves. And that to me what the word grace is. That's deeper than just favor.

You know, it brings up in my mind verse 19 of chapter 27 in the book of Mishlei.

As in water a face reflects a face, so the heart of a man to his fellow .

-Proverbs 27:19

Chen, grace, is something that is bestowed upon someone as a consequence of their own hearts. It's not an intellectual decision, it isn't a decision of the mind, it's a decision of the heart. Which is why the blessing that you be granted grace is immediately

following the blessing that HaShem shine His Face upon you. Because I think the word I was going to use was illuminate, because HaShem illuminates His Face upon you, but also through you. Because when you channel God's attributes of love and kindness and compassion and mercy to the world to such a degree that His Face, His Face is upon your Face, and His light is

shining from your countenance, well the simple outcome of that is that you're granted, as chapter 3 in the book of Proverbs said, you are granted grace both in the eyes of God and men. That's one of the ways, by the way, that I've come to believe that you can sort of know on some level how you stand with HaShem, in how you stand with others, with those around you, with those that you encounter, day in and day out in your life, in your family. It's not a true day, meaning there could be deep flaws within them, that they are responding to your love and kindness in that way. But as a general rule, I find that to be a good gauge, at least in my life. That's just my experiential belief. Anyways, in my mind, and in my experience, there's a general rule that I've found, one of the secrets that I've found, that's a wonderful habit and a joy to embody. It's a secret to manifesting this blessing in your life. And it's the words in chapter one of Ethics of our Fathers.

Shammai used to say: make your (study of the) Torah a fixed practice; speak little, but do much; and receive all men with a pleasant countenance.

-Ethics of our fathers 1:19

... a fixed practice, meaning the same time every day, but that's not what I'm talking about. Speak little, but do much. That's not what I'm referring to, my father said that our family does exactly the opposite of that. This is what I'm talking about, this part of the verse – And receive all men, or all people with a pleasant countenance.

A pleasant countenance. That's it. When you pass another person on the street, whether you know them or not, if your eyes meet, then at the very least, simply share a smile. And a little nod. It goes such a long ways, you have no idea. You know many people in the southern states in the U.S., they do this already, maybe that's part of where I got it from. Not just from Ethics of our Fathers, but from Texas. But you know, this Shabbat I was greeting everyone with a smiling, "Boker tov, Shabbat Shalom!" You know, good morning, shabbat shalom, have a peaceful Sabbath. I just love it! It brings light to me. I find also, just on a very basic level, things get monotonous and boring sometimes, especially if I'm alone. But it just brings excitement and adventure and happiness and joy and light. And you know, it's just what I do now.

And often what happens is that I say those words, I greet them, and it sparks a conversation. And Shaena takes over as I get either distracted by the kids or I greet the next person, and so this Shabbat was there in the playground talking to this one couple who I had just greeted. And the couple and their cute little baby boy, turns out they lived in Sderot and spent the last eight months since October 7th as refugees living in hotels. And as I was talking to other people, I heard them say to Shaena about me, "What a special person," he's referring to me. And I thought that Shaena must have told them about the Farm, which particularly nowadays, more Israelis at least than ever, see the tremendous value farms like ours have for Israel's safety and security and just in general, good and holy. And so many people have heard about the Farm. And so, when I heard that said about me, I responded...I thought that's what they were talking

about. So I said, “No, no, no.” I said, “You guys are the real heroes for staying so strong during this whole ordeal.” And for being in Sderot to begin with, right? They’re on the border.

To which Shaena said, “No, Ari. They’re actually saying you’re such a special person because you greet every single person you see and they were watching me do that.” And it was one of those moments that I had this realization that indeed many people don’t do this. They don’t greet those whose paths they cross. Which is just hard to believe because it’s just so easy and so much fun. And maybe by the way, in their defense, when you live in a big city, you get jaded, or it’s just hard to keep that up as opposed to a farm like ours. But either way, we have this power of speech, this Divine power of speech at our disposal and we don’t need to be spokesman or orators, we don’t need to have some crazy vocabulary or eloquence. All we have to do is just smile and say a good word and share a short blessing.

Because again, that is our power as human beings, the power of the word, the power of the spoken word. We are created in His image and what image is that? He created the world with words, he brought everything into existence with speech. And we share that creative power of words. Creative. That’s one of the primary distinctions between us and animals. Human beings are called medaber, you know we form meaningful relationship through speech. Medaber means to speak. And that is a product of our divine soul. Animals have instinctive, animal souls called the nefesh. We have that as well, we have a nefesh, but we are medaber. We are gifted with the created faculty and the power of speech. That is what makes us human and that is what makes us in the image of HaShem.

Which brings us to the third verse of the blessing. May HaShem lift up His Face towards you and give you peace. The first word of that verse shares the root of the first word of our Torah portion. Which I only just realized just minutes before the Fellowship. Nasso is our Torah portion. Yisah, nasso, to raise up, to lift. HaShem doesn’t only shine the light of His Face upon ours and through ours, but by doing so, He lifts us up, He raises our heads. He sees through our calloused walls that we’ve erected around our hearts to protect ourselves. And He sees right through that, more than even we see through it. He sees to the depths of our hearts and He sees our greatest fears and our insecurities. And from that place of seeing all those deep, dark secrets, He lifts us up by truly loving us. Truly loving us. Not despite those things, but in many ways because of them. He removes our shame with nothing other than His great, unimaginable love for us, a love beyond anything that we could ever imagine.

And my capacity for understanding love and experiencing love has expanded almost more than I can bear in the past five, six years of my life, since God has blessed me with this family and these children. And still beyond anything that I can possibly experience, is HaShem’s love for us. And from that place of being loved in that way, and having our heads raised high...not with unholy pride or arrogance, but from the pure recognition that we are the children of the most High God. Because HaShem loves us unconditionally, due to nothing more than our very

existence. That is unconditional love, and that unconditional love alone, only that can really give us true peace. Only that can really give us true shalom.

I always tell that this realization, you know many years ago when I was sort of counseling a good friend whose daughter had told him that she was marrying out of the Jewish people. I think she was marrying a Catholic guy that she met in college and he was a broken and devastated at this commitment that she made and this declaration that she made. And we spoke about it for hours. And I really did feel his pain. I really truly did. And he told me that he told her that if she did follow through with this declaration, that he would cut her off and never speak to her again. You know back in the day, back in the shtetl, even today, there are many families that would just sit shiva. You know what shiva is. When a family member passes away and you sit shiva, those seven days of mourning. They would sit mourning for their child that had married out. That may seem very harsh, but try not to judge it. There's a long history here, a long chain that has been kept alive from the days of Abraham. And that in the minds of many is just such a radical severing that it's beyond anything that they can tolerate or imagine. In many ways, it hurts many parents more. I don't know if I could say that, I don't know.

But he said it would be as if she was not his daughter at all. And as I reflected on his pain, I tried not to think, like, what is the right thing to do? What is the thing I should say and do according to all of the things that are said are right to do and whatever. I just try to go from a deep and intuitive place. And as I reflected on his pain and on his words, this very deep truth revealed itself in my heart. And I realized that without realizing it, my friend was forcing his daughter into this man's arms. Or at least doing everything in his power to maximize the chances that she would marry this man. Right? Unintentionally of course. But on some level he was coercing this very outcome that he was so afraid of manifesting itself in the world. He was coercing it into existence. And it doesn't matter whether he was doing it intentionally or not. That was the result of his actions.

And I told him that. I screamed it at him from the rooftops. Because I really believe that deep down in the heart of every person, is a child who wants more than anything, for their parents to love them. But not just any love. They don't want to be just loved. They want their parents to unconditionally love them. And you know, if a parent communicates in any way that their love is conditional on a certain action or behavior on the part of the child, I came to believe this deep in my heart, the child will distinctively and intuitively rebel against that very condition because if they don't, if my friend's daughter yielded to her father's cutting her off, and she didn't marry the guy, and she stayed his daughter, and he kept loving her, she would never know whether her father's love for her is only because she gave into his threats of excommunication or if he indeed loves her unconditionally. She would never know if he truly does love her, no matter what. Which I believe is, with the deepest part of every soul, of every child, every child of every age by the way, meaning every single one of us, no matter how old we are, that child within us, desires more than anything to be unconditionally loved by our parents.

And so, placing conditions upon his love for her, she was now facing a love deficit, a vacuum of love that was endangering everything that she once considered to be true love in her heart, and at this most dangerous and vulnerable moment of her life. The only place that she would see open arms of love and acceptance, at least at that moment, would be in the arms of her Catholic fiancée and his family who were more than fine with the marriage. And believe me, I'm not trying to paint the fiancée or his family in any kind of negative light at all. I'm sure they were wonderful people, that's not what I'm talking about. You know, but what my friend did, I don't know...he just couldn't back down. I don't know if it was an issue of ego, or he just didn't really understand or was able to hear what I'm saying. But, you know, despite it all, he really believed that that hard hearted approach was his religious imperative, that that's what he owed HaShem to do, that's what he really believed. To sever that relationship.

You know, again, like I grew up believing that also. That that's what you do. If a child marries out, if a sibling marries out, that you sit shiva for them, that you mourn for them as if they're dead. That's not like a new idea. So I can understand where he got that from. But just where I'm at in my journey in the world, it just became so clear to me. First of all, that whether he did that or not, don't do that, or even say that or even say that until the time comes. And I don't believe that it's the right thing to do ever, ever!

Either way, in the end, my friend stood by his word and he didn't back down and his daughter followed through and she married this man. And it was just so sad to see what was a healthy and beautiful father/daughter relationship, it was just dashed against the rocks. It was just so brutally severed. Anyways, a few years later, his daughter divorced her new husband and which wasn't exactly surprising because she wasn't able to have the serenity of mind, the clarity of mind, the peace of mind to actually look at the relationship for what it was. Because the situation was so chaotically stormy because of what was going on with her father. At least that's what I think. So I wasn't surprised that they got divorced.

And having no where to go, her father took her back in because that's what a father does. But it was just painful to see. And it's something that I've never forgotten because I really believe that it could have been avoided. And I pray that their relationship was healed, but it's hard to imagine, coming back from something like that without a clear, divine revelation of the fundamental basis of why that mistake happened and what the misunderstanding was there.

And I've seen this again and again...a friend of mine was just talking to me and he was just saying, his son was having all of these behavioral issues and he was just saying, "If my son would only stop acting up in school and being such a discipline problem, we would have such a close relationship. That's just what's standing in between our relationship. It's hard to have a relationship with him when he's constantly being suspended and expelled and thrown out of this and thrown out of that, constantly disciplining him."

And I tried to tell him that what he didn't realize is that on the deepest subconscious level of his son's senses...that his father would only love him if he changes in this way or that way. He just won't change. I'm saying this again in a different way because it's such a precious truth that came into my heart, so I really want to share it with you. The son will simply never change, he can't change, because he'll never know if his father's love was real. And what I told the father he should do, is whenever he feels this disapproval and this anger and this resentment against his son, he should dig very deep and look his son in the eye and say, "I just love you so much and I'm so proud of you. Because I see that you're trying so hard, I see that you're trying so hard to be the best that you can be. And I believe in you. And I just love you so much."

That's what to say, that's it. It's not rocket-science, it's not super complicated. Convey to your child, unconditional love. It's not even a relationship of a husband to a wife. That doesn't necessarily need to be unconditional love. There're certain responsibilities that a husband has to a wife and that a wife has to a husband. And I don't know about what's in certain strains of Christianity, but in Judaism, there is divorce for a reason, because that love is not unconditional. But a parent to a child? That's unconditional. And only unconditional love can provide true peace.

And while many of us were put in situations where our parents, despite doing their very best, didn't understand this truth...perhaps because they didn't receive unconditional love themselves from their parents, or I don't know what other reason, it is what it is. We've experienced experiences growing up. Thank God, I have to admit, I have just to say this is one of the greatest blessings in my life. I do feel like from both of my parents, I just had constant flow of unconditional love. And I think that is what created the vessel and the capacity that I have for that very thing.

But all have the potential for that capacity. We can rectify this spiritual blemish of being unable to express and have unconditional love for our children that we haven't received from our parents. We can rectify it at its spiritual root and we can end the cycle of conditional love by opening our hearts to HaShem's unconditional love for us. A divine love to which this beautiful, ancient, godly blessing that we're talking about right now from Aaron the High Priest. This blessing opens our hearts to HaShem's love for our entire lives. And far beyond. Particularly if we have that motivation, that connection, that kavannah, that intent. Which brings us to the final verse following the blessing itself.

Thus they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

-Number 6:22-27

So Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum points out that there's something ambiguous in this verse. It says that the Kohanim will place HaShem's Name upon the children of Israel and quote...and I will bless them, HaShem says.

Who is the "them" HaShem is referring to? Is the them HaShem referring to that He will bless the Jews? Or that He will bless the Kohanim? Meaning

that is it that the Kohanim will bless the nation of Israel and therefore HaShem will bless them? Or is it that the Kohanim will bless the nation of Israel and then God will bless the Kohanim? Is it the priests themselves that will receive that blessing? Do you understand the question? Are the objects of the blessing, meaning the nation of Israel, themselves, those that will be blessed, or is it the Kohanim? Is it the blessers that will be blessed? And the answer that's given which rings beautifully true at least in my heart is that it's both. Both the blessees and the blessers will be blessed by HaShem as a result of this blessing. I don't know if in the history of the world there's ever been a sentence with the word blessing in it more times.

But that very act of serving as a humble, loving vehicle of HaShem's love to His people, is at least as much of a blessing to the Kohanim, themselves, as it is to the nation that they're blessing. Which brings us back to the very beginning of our Fellowship. When we discussed...who's the bigger blessing to who? The answer as we said, the answer is both. And that's the nature of blessing.

You know, and I know that we're going long here and we're already a little bit over. But I sort of wanted to share this idea that I was working through a little bit. And sort of bring it all together here. Because Rabbi Sacks articulated this point, that really spoke to my heart. He said, "If you seek to understand a people, look at its prayers." Look at its prayers, look at its aspirations, and you'll understand the people. As opposed to our enemies, who's prayers consist of wishes for power, domination, eradication, annihilation, victory, riches, virgins, whatever it is. It's the culmination of the Kohanic prayer, the central prayer for the nation of Israel. And so many of our other prayers as well.

What is our deepest, national yearning, and our deepest aspirations? The answer is shalom, I saw so many of you are saying that word with me, shalom. And of course, we know that the peace that this blessing confers upon us, confers upon the world, is not the conventional Western understanding of peace, which is like the lack of war. That's peace in the West. No war, you're at peace. That's not what real shalom is. Shalom is the harmonious coexistence of that which appears to be diametrical opposites. Shalom as the great Abarbanel explains, is one of HaShem's Name. You know you go into a bathroom, or a mikvah, or a bathhouse, you cannot say, "Shabbat Shalom" to someone. You cannot say, "Shalom" to someone. Because the Name Shalom is one of God's Names we're taught. Why is it one of God's Names? Because quote, "It is He who binds the world together and orders all things according to their particular character and posture. For when things are in proper order, peace, shalom will reign. That is why, (as we spoke in one of our last Fellowships), Mashiach can be likened to a conductor who brings each instrument into a beautiful harmony. Harnessing the unique beauty of each instrument to create a philharmonic orchestra of music unlike anything that the world has ever heard. A true shir Chadash. A true new song."

Right? We have seven chords – do re mi fa so la ti ...that's at least, I'm not a musical guy as you know, but an 8th chord, I've been told, will be revealed. That 8th, number 8 transcends the natural world. It will be a new song. And that is the shalom that we are yearning for. That is the shalom that we are praying for. And that is the shalom that I'm about to bless all of you with. That is the shalom only the Mashiach can bring. The shalom that emanates from none other than HaShem, Himself. A shalom, a shlemut. Shlemut means a wholeness, a completion that will be so unfathomable, all encompassing, that nations will not lift up swords against each other anymore. War will be a thing of the past, studied in museums. A shalom that is so great that death itself will be over-ruled. And the sweet, holy soldiers that the entire nation is reeling from, that we lost over Shabbat, that we've lost in this war and all the wars of Israel – all those righteous, holy people, unjustly killed since the beginning of time, basically the resurrection of the dead. I don't claim to know fully what that means. But I can tell you that I believe in it with all of my heart. This is a shalom that is so great a shalom between man and HaShem, between man and God, between man and his fellow man, between heaven and earth that will reveal a light and a godliness and a goodness which will dry up every single tear and heal every broken heart.

You know, I know right now, the world we live in, even if we're believers, even some part of me, possibly. It could sound like a fantasy. Like an opiate, it could sound like a dream, but it is not. It's not. The real dream, the real dream state is the reality and the consciousness that we're in right now. That's the dream-state. The shalom of Mashiach is more real and more clear and more true than anything we could ever imagine. So don't allow your faith to waver, my friends. We're just too close right now. We're just too close. We have to stay strong. I bless us we should stay strong and courageous and resolute.

And so with that, it is my great honor to bless you with the blessing of Aaron the High Priest, who although I am not descended from him, the Torah tells us that we are a nation of priests, entrusted with the holy mission of blessing all of mankind. And so, it's my great blessing to bless all of you with this, and I hope that Tabitha has ready to roll after this, the blessing of hundreds of priests of Israel that blessed the nation from the Western Wall, itself. I thought that would be a meaningful way to bring this all together after I bless you, myself. And then hopefully, with Tabitha's permission, we can do a Fellowship Connection. Anyways, it's my great joy, one of the highlights of this Fellowship every time, to be able to bless all of you.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

May HaShem bless and protect you. May He shine His light and His countenance upon you. May He grant you peace. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOIUJ3yPdQI>

