

Session 57
Ekev – The Covenant of Love
1 August 2021

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

Ari

Shalom, my friends. It is so good to see all of you. I have to tell you, I really, I love Jeremy's music. I really do. But I sort of wish I had my own music to play when leading up to the fellowship. A guy can always dream. I mean, you guys have heard me sing, so it would literally break the internet for me to be having my own songs there. But anyways, we gotta think about that. Now I see all of you. I love this! I get to see so many more of your faces now. I expanded it. Like I know Ed Burns is wearing a pink shirt right now. That's exciting. Hi, Nina. Anyways, so it's good to see your faces. It's my favorite part of the entire fellowship. It really is. And I think since we've started stressing, or I've started stressing how important it is to hold each other up, not only with words of encouragement, but also with prayer. And I've been stressing how great my privilege is, my Jewish privilege here in Judea...my joy to be able to pray for you in your times of darkness and loss and pain and struggles, but also for your hopes and your dreams and your joys and your selling of your home and all of the things that we're able to connect and pray for. So many of you have been sending me your prayer requests as I've requested and I'm grateful for and I know that so many of you are praying for me because you tell me and because I feel it. And I guess that my approach has been just to stop right there on the spot and pray. I've also set up another WhatsApp group with Jeremy, we call it "Fellowship Prayer Requests." Literally, I don't think there's any two friends in the entire world that share more of the same WhatsApp groups. We're in, I'm not kidding, 229 of the same WhatsApp groups, which is insane, which makes me want to log off from WhatsApp for the rest of my life. But without a doubt, our newest one, Fellowship Prayer Request, it's the most important and I share so many of your messages with Shaena and I'm sure Jeremy does with Tehila as well.

And actually, a special prayer request that I received this past week from guess who? From my father. He wrote to me saying as a member of the fellowship, from the heart of Judea, please pray for me that my son, my only son, Ari, whom I love will visit his father often in the region of Moriah. He's talking about Jerusalem and come with his household including his daughter whom he loves, D'vash. And the truth is, that he doesn't really care if I come, he wants D'vash. That's what this is all rally about. And that, my friend, is called Jewish guilt and it works. Anyways, I'm saying all of this to encourage you that we're with you, we're praying for you, and we're all together in this beautiful rocky journey through the world called life. And we're experiencing it together and I'm thankful for HaShem that He brought us all together in this way.

Ok, so this has been a very special week or should I say a special Shabbat. The week was special, every day is special, but this Shabbat was a very special Shabbat on the Arugot Farm.

And as always, the Torah portion of the week illuminated it with beauty and with meaning and I'm eager to share it with all of you. But first, as we have been accustomed to do, I'm going to introduce my Rebbe, my friend...why am I going to do that? Why is it the right thing to do? To introduce him first? Why? Because a student doesn't speak before his rebbe. And Jeremy is definitely one of my great rebbes in this world. But today I just found out that we get two rebbes for the price of one. That's right. Jeremy and Tehila together. They were so close to being able to go live online, but they had this prior commitment. When you're traveling, it's just so hard to synchronize and to work it out. They had a prior commitment they couldn't change, so they just recorded this message and sent it in. So with no further delay, I mean, this is brand new, they barely even got it in in time. Let me introduce my Rebbe, my dear friend, Jeremy Gimpel and his holy wife, Tehila.

Jeremy

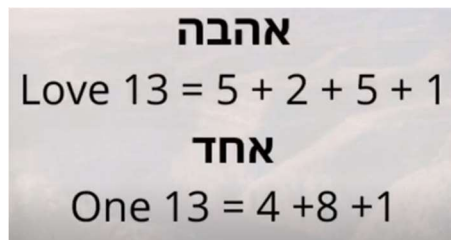
Hey fellowship. It's Sunday morning here. We're on our way down to Orlando for one of our last events of this trip. I can't go live, so Tehila and I are going to be recording early this morning. And this trip has just been magical, unbelievable beyond any expectations that we had. My children have been put through a blender. I think that's the only way to describe it. It's like every day we've woken up in a different city, gone to bed in a different night, in a different hotel, just waking up and going and moving and coming and going. Here's this picture that I took. This is my favorite picture of the whole trip and it really sums up my children's experience here.



I just love that picture. So, I think that's the number one, that's the keeper, that's the picture of this trip.

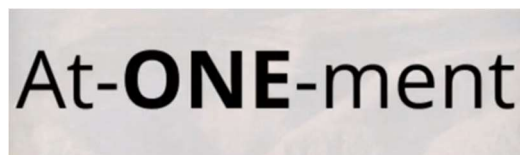
Anyway, I just wanted to share this idea that's really come to me over the last couple of weeks traveling all across the United States. We know we finished Tisha B'Av, and now we're on a journey toward the new year, toward the Day of Atonement, towards Sukkot, the day of happiness. And you know, we've just experienced so much light from people, some that we've known, but so many of them we had just discovered through the fellowship and they were just icons on a WhatsApp, or a name on an email address and maybe a face on a Zoom call. And then all of a sudden, we got to meet them live and in person. And you know, there's eight billion people in the whole planet and some people are busy doing who knows what. But every person that we've met so far is like an agent of light, an ambassador for Israel, just bringing goodness into the world, spreading light into the world, bringing a new unity into the world, each in their own different way. But just like such beautiful souls, and we're so lucky that

somehow out of 8 billion people, all of us have been intertwined into one move. And I've experienced now in America, but I know that on the fellowship right now there's people from Holland and Africa and all over the world. And you know, I cringe at the word, love, because of what America has done, but real love, you know ahava, it has the numeric value of 13 in the aleph bet letters. And echad has the numeric value of 13.



And that's just a deep message of what it is to spread love, what is it to feel love. You know when you love someone, whether it be your wife, you feel at one with her. Your children, it's like a oneness, even if it's, even if it's your hat that you like, it's like a part of you. It's like, oh, I just feel a little more at one with that.

And seeing now that after all the isolation of Covid and the separation and the borders being locked, going out and really experiencing a oneness that we have, like one heart, just like one movement, one people, friends. It's just in this world that's so filled with like chaos and darkness and fear and there's just so much out there. And yet, there's these like sparks of light all over that are now interconnected. That went from virtual to the real and to experience that oneness.



And you know, I remember Rabbi David Aaron once taught us that atonement is literally the word at-one-ment. It's like the same word, what it is to atone for the sins of the past. It's to just bring it together, a real

love, a real fixing, a real oneness. And just think that we're doing that in our small way here at the fellowship. And somehow, it's a small way, but on the other hand it's something that's all happening all around the globe and literally who knows where this might take us?

So far, it's taken my family on this great adventure and my instinct is that when I get back to Israel, Ari and I need to sit down and we need to plan. We need to plan a mass pilgrimage of the fellowship to the Land of Israel. I mean, invite everyone, as many people as we can, as many congregations as we can, as many of the home fellowships as we can, members that we can, people.... Like, it's amazing to meet here, in Georgia, or in Florida, or in Colorado, but imagine if we bring everyone all together to the Land of Israel, to inaugurate our center, to build it together, to be in it together. I think that's just where this is going – from the virtual to the absolute real, to the building that will be an eternal monument in the Land of Israel. I think that would really be something marvelous to do in our lifetime.

And the truth is, after spending so much time here on the road, I can't imagine being involved in something more worthwhile than what we're doing, more beautiful. What else would I dedicate my time to, then building this beautiful fellowship that's centered around the

mountains of Judea, centered around a growing, becoming better people, becoming agents of light in the world, bringing more oneness and atonement to the world. We are just the most fortunate people.

And so, we're at the very last leg of our trip now and we'll be speaking tonight at Fellowship Church in Florida, right outside Orlando. So, of course everyone's invited to that. I imagine that they'll be streaming live and it'll be recorded, but thank you all for making this trip such a revolutionary, life-changing trip for us, that we see that we're just now, we're just piercing through, we're just getting started and it's already been so beautiful. So thank you all so much. Now to bring in some real Torah, I'm going to invite Tehila on and then together, we'll bring this new light from northern Florida for you. So, here's Tehila.

Tehila

Hey guys, so Jeremy and I are in Florida now and we've been on the road for three weeks. It's been an absolutely humbling experience to meet so many of you and to be inspired by your stories and your dedication. And we're so grateful for that. And as we've been driving from city to city, at least four hours a day, I think on average, we've had time to marvel and reflect on the differences between the Land of Israel and the place where we are now in the United States. So, on the one hand, we miss Israel so much and the Land is always in our hearts and it's where we belong and we especially miss the farm and Ari and Shaena and most of all, D'vash. But it's hard not to notice the tremendous abundance that characterizes this land.

And I said to Jeremy, I was like, if we lived here and we didn't keep kosher, would we even have a kitchen? Like when we look around, there are just so many places to eat everywhere. Again, any random city, you could literally eat at a different restaurant every single night and never repeat for like a year. And then there's this natural abundance of trees and rivers and lakes everywhere. And in the beginning when we got here, we'd pass a river and be like, "guys look, it's a river." By the end we passed over the Mississippi River, the kids were like, "oh, another river," right? It's like they're a dime a dozen. And the shopping, don't get me started on the shopping.

But as you guys know by now, the Torah portion is always speaking to us directly. Like wherever we are. So as I was reading the Torah portion, it jumped out at me that while I'm doing this kind of comparison, Moshe, Moses, is also teaching us about the Land by comparing it to other places. In the beginning of the portion, Moshe compares the Land to the desert, and says that the Land you're coming to is going to be nothing like the desert. He says, you should remember what the desert was like, where HaShem took you for 40 years with no water and no food and He gave you food and gave you water from a rock, right? Because it says that HaShem was testing us.

But now, the Land that He's bringing us to is going to be a Land of oil and honey and the seven species and mountains that we can make into copper and all these amazing things. It's not going to be like the desert. Now, it's interesting that the desert is presented as kind of torturous even though HaShem did give us everything we needed. There was manna and water and rocks, but we didn't have to do anything for it, so it's described as kind of this horrible experience. HaShem says, now I'm bringing you to a place, it's nothing like that. You're going to be able to make a bread out of your wheat, you're going to be able to hew copper from the mountains. It seems in some ways that that would be harder than being in the desert, but it's portrayed as preferable to the desert.

And now in the end of the portion, HaShem compares the Land of Israel to Egypt. It says, for the Land you're coming to possess is not like the land of Egypt out of which you came where you sowed your seed and watered by foot like a vegetable garden. But the Land that you pass to possess is a Land of mountains and valleys that absorb water from the rain. It's a Land that the Lord your God looks after. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. So HaShem is telling us the Land of Israel is nothing like Egypt. It's the opposite of Egypt. It's totally different than Egypt. Because in Egypt you're going to water things totally differently.

And now, I'm a nerd, so I looked this up. And agriculture in Egypt turns out, was just amazing. There wasn't rain in Egypt, but the Nile worked like a clock. In the springtime the Nile would rise and flood and then the water would recede after a few months leaving all of these nutrients from the river on the field. So the field was wet and fertilized, you literally didn't have to do anything. And if you didn't live right next to the Nile, what they did was they made these canals that would capture the flood water and carry it over to whatever field you want it to go to.

So, historically, it's exactly like the verse is saying. I was kind of wondering, what does that mean that you just water your field with your foot? You could literally take like some earth that was blocking up a canal and kind of kick it over with your foot and bring water to your garden your field. There was zero dependence on rain. You could literally just take water from the Nile whenever you wanted and that was that. So HaShem says, the Land of Israel is going to be nothing like the desert. It's the opposite of the desert. And then it says, well, Egypt, oh Egypt, it's going to be nothing like Egypt, it's going to be the opposite of Egypt. But wait a minute, the desert and Egypt are nothing like each other. How can Israel be the opposite of Egypt and be the opposite of the desert? It's a little bit funny, right?

But there's something in common between what seemed like totally different places, Egypt and the desert. What's in common between them is their predictability. Egypt is predictably fertile all the time and the desert is predictably barren all the time. You just know what you're getting when you're there. The Land of Israel, totally different animal. Israel is a relationship. And just

like in a relationship, things are always changing and they're always in flux because we have feelings. Our relationship with the Land is also always developing and changing. I remember when we first got married, Jeremy one time got me sushi and washed the dishes. And I was so happy with him, I was so pleased. And he was like, ok, note to self – remember sushi and dishes. That's what makes her happy. And then one day I was upset about something and he got me sushi and did the dishes and he was like, why aren't you happy? And I'm like, "hello, I'm a person, not a computer. There's not a formula that you can just press a button and know what to expect. You need to ask me what I need today." This is when we were first married.

So the land of Israel is a real relationship. You can know where you're holding because HaShem has constant providence over the Land and the abundance that HaShem rains on the Land is always a test for us, where we're holding in our relationship.

I'm sure you're familiar with all the stories of how Israel laid desolate for so many years until we came back to the Land. In Leviticus 26, HaShem promises that any enemy that comes to the Land, HaShem will keep the Land barren. Because it's a relationship, there's like a loyalty between us and the Land. And it's amazing that until we came back to the Land of Israel, the Land was truly desolate. Now, I think that beyond what the verses are teaching us about our relationship with the actual Land of Israel, I think there's another level where this is also a symbolic blueprint teaching us how to have a proper spiritual balance in our life.

The different Lands that are described in the Portion, I think are emblematic of different ways that we can exist in the world in our relationship with HaShem. Because abundance and lack of abundance can place certain types of obstacles that can make it harder to have a proper spiritual life. Like in some ways, the desert would seem to be the perfect place to have the ideal relationship with HaShem because in the desert, you have nothing. And so, there's nothing you can do but pray that HaShem help you. And so the existence in the desert is kind of childlike, but it's this complete dependence on HaShem. And HaShem says, that's not good. I was doing that the way a parent trains a child, but it was hard for you because you did nothing. There's a certain kind of spiritual existence where you could become so high and so like outside of the physical world that it becomes hard to exist as a regular, functioning person. And I've seen this happen to people, maybe you guys know people like this. There are people that are so spiritual that it's hard for them to actually be.

I have to share this story, Jeremy, forgive me, but there was a time that Jeremy got really into studying the mystical, Chasidic teaching of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, who teaches very much about finding God in every single thing in your life. And he became impossible to have a relationship with. I had to hide the Rabbi Nachman books. Because I'd be like, oh, Jeremy, could you take out the garbage? And he'd be thinking to himself, hmmm...what is HaShem trying to teach me? Maybe I have internal garbage that I need to take out. I should be contemplating.... No, you shouldn't be contemplating! You should actually be taking out the

garbage because it smells bad and it's dripping on the floor, right? So there's a way to become in the world where you're only in a relationship with HaShem that you're not able to just take out the garbage.

And then, there's the opposite danger which is Egypt. In Egypt you have so much abundance that's so consistent. It's so reliably good that you lose that daily feeling of gratitude and needing of HaShem in your life because you always have everything that you need. And HaShem chose for us a Land that would symbolize for us and give us the model of a correct and properly aligned spiritual life. Just like life, our Land has the potential to be beautiful and abundant, but it doesn't happen on its own. There's this balance between the blessing that HaShem brings on the Land and what you do to work for it, working on yourself and following the commandments. But also, actually working. He says you have to hew the copper, you have to bake the bread. At any point in life, there's always this danger of falling off of a properly aligned path. Like you could fall into an Egyptian mentality. When things are good, you could just forget about HaShem, your heart can become haughty.

And sometimes, when things are hard, you could fall into a desert mentality where it's just like, oh, this world, I can't be in this world. Look at what's happening. There's wars, there's suffering, things are just too hard. There's suffering in my life. I'm just with HaShem. You know, I'm just living in a spiritual world and the Kingdom of Heaven, right? And you can lose track of what needs to actually be done in the here and now. What HaShem teaches us, is the Land of Israel, it's a place where you're not in the desert, you're not purely spiritual and you're not in Egypt where everything is just abundant. There's a Land of Israel mentality where you do everything that you can, but you continue to exist in the spiritual world and put in your effort, dedicating yourself to a proper life, but knowing that HaShem will give us what we need, when we need it, as a result of our actions.

So, you know, it's not always going to be what you want when you want it, but it's going to be what you need when you need it. Just like the well that we've talking about so many times. That you have to dig. It's not a coincidence that all of our forefathers worked in the well-digging business. Because you dig, but only if HaShem meets you with His abundance will those efforts bear fruit. So with that, I will leave you guys and I have to go do some...Jeremy, hide the credit card, I have to go do some shopping before we leave all this abundance and go back to Israel. Bye guys!

Ari

That was beautiful. That was truly beautiful. I think there's a song that goes like that. Right? You can't always get what you want.... right? That's a song. I'm going to stop singing. I was actually told by someone that it's painful to hear me sing. And you think, who would possibly say that to Ari? Well, it was one of my immediate family members who can just tell the honest truth.

Anyways, Jeremy he spoke about love, which is wild because that's really what this fellowship at its core is about. What it's going to be about, and I don't think he knew that. He's on the road, we're not like consulting with each other. And Tehila, well she talked about restaurants. And I remember, it's a little bit of a torment over there. Thousands of restaurants, but kosher ones? Most cities, they are in probably have no more than one kosher restaurant. And that's usually the local Chabad. No, but really, what Tehila said was just so beautiful. It was so beautiful, comparing the spiritual qualities of Israel to Egypt and honestly, it's not just the Land and the geography, it's every part of life in Israel. And I could speak for myself when I say I'd rather have the spiritual dependence of Israel, the unpredictability of the Holy Land to the spiritual complacency of Egypt. And to that illusion of dependability that you see in Egypt.

But anyways, I was pulling my hair out trying to think of where to dive in and really, I didn't even get to scratch the surface of what I wanted to talk about on this fellowship because I really prepared a lot of thoughts and rarely have I felt like I needed to do a full two hours. But I decided that we simply have to begin this fellowship, but for my part, after Jeremy and Tehila talking about this past Shabbat. Because it was very special. It felt like something new. Our dear friend, Yishai Fleisher, he coined a term that's become a central part of our mission. And what's that term? Have you heard it before? It's "keep making aliyah." Have you heard us say that before?

Now, friends, Baruch HaShem, thank God, we have new members joining us all the time. Holy people who will hopefully, they'll become like friends to us and even family to us like we are to each other. And we're so eager to have them. But that means that sometimes we'll need to repeat and review things from the past that some of you who have been with us from the beginning, you may know. But these terms, they're unfamiliar to the new people. And also, it's just important for us to review it for ourselves. Right? The Torah is all about reviewing and reminding ourselves of the truth again and again and again.

So, you know, by the time you're 20 years old, you've already said the Shema 10,000 times by the time you're 20 years old. So by the time you're 40, I've said it well over 20,000 times at the very least and we need to say it all the time to continuously remember and remember. So what does Yishai mean when he says, keep making aliyah? Well, aliyah means to ascend, to rise, to go up. And so, when a Jew makes aliyah, it means he or she is ascending, possibly the greatest ascension one can make in their lifetime. That the great grandchildren of this Jew will look back at their family tree and say, here, right there. This is when my family left the exile and planted our roots in the Land of our fathers and the Land of Israel, and the Land where, as the Torah tells us this week – the eyes of the Lord are upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

And so, Jeremy and I had this television show called Tuesday Night Live in Jerusalem. We've mentioned it before. If you have a chance and you want to have fun and just sort of laugh with

us or at us, you can watch it on YouTube. We actually have a playlist of a lot of them on our YouTube channel. If you want a link, I'll send you a link. You can just send me a message and ask me.

Anyways our audience in the theater, hundreds of people were mostly olim. Olim, people that made aliyah from the west. They came to celebrate their lives in Israel. And it was here that I first remember Yishai explaining to the whole audience, you've made aliyah, but you have to keep making aliyah. Our ascension doesn't end once we step foot on the Promised Land. That's where it begins. But we have to keep making aliyah. We have to keep going higher and higher. And that has been the driving force for me and Jeremy. Not only in our message to the world and to our fellow Jews. But I think we both try to live lives where we keep making aliyah. And moving out here to the Judean frontier, it was a definite leap of ascension for us. It was a further aliyah. Even within the Land itself.

And to get to the point, this Shabbat was a Shabbat of even further aliyah. On this Shabbat, we reached new heights. So, let me give a little bit of background how this came about. Jeremy and I have a friend from Ephrath, which is a city in Judea just northwest of us and his name is Toby Kram. Toby and Chayah is his wife's name, Chayah. They made aliyah with their family from Boston, I don't remember how many years ago. When he heard that Jeremy was leaving on a speaking tour, he asked Jeremy to let him rent his house when he was gone and of course Jeremy and Tehila agreed to it joyfully. So Toby and his family came out to the farm and they haven't left since. He thought he was going to come for one Shabbat, I could describe his experience, but he just sent me this message, so I like putting other things in here, so I'll just play it for you directly.

Audio from Toby



Ari, I just want you to know something which is, as you know, we're living in the Gimpel's house while they're on the speaking tour in the U.S. And, for the few weeks they're away. And I thought, you know, we live in Ephrath, we'll go back and forth and we'll have access to the house and be able to bring friends and go swimming and use it like a vacation getaway. I don't want to push the family too hard you know.



It's a big lifestyle change to move from Ephrath to the farm. And I thought we'd be going back and forth. We have not spent a night away from the farm since we got there. It's now been a week and a half. I am so sad about the day that's coming in about a week

when we have to leave. The Gimpel's come back. I'm happy they're coming back, but I can't believe that we're not going to be living up there. It's just been an incredible experience of just seeing the brachot of the Torah come alive and to have such a quiet place to be able to be free with our thoughts and to breathe the air of the farm and of the growth and the people. It's a very special place as you know. But I'm just telling you as an outsider so to speak, it's such an amazing, amazing thing that you're building and I hope for many years to continue to be a part of it and partner with it. Thank you for the privilege. (end of Toby's audio)

Ari

So, you know, I'm 41 years old and it's not often that like a 41-year-old man sees his friends cry. But it's a regular thing at the Arugot Farm. Just seeing this place touch the hearts of our friends and our family and strangers that come from out of nowhere. I cannot wait till all of you are there. Jeremy said, we're going to sit down and plan it when he's back. I'm really excited about that.

But anyways, they were here, Toby and his family this past Shabbat, and at the same time my partner, Yossi, I've told you about him. His daughter was recently engaged. And he had a bunch of guests to his family's home on the farm, which you know, you go into his house and there's just like mattresses strewn about. Everywhere there are people sleeping in the hay with the chickens, with the goats. And everybody's just so happy there. Anyways, he had a bunch of guests and leading up to Shabbat, we realized that not only would we have a minyan, but we would have much more, like what's a minyan? Ten Jewish men over the age of bar mitzvah, which as many of you know, is the minimal prerequisite to have our own full-fledged prayer that you needed a real synagogue. You need those ten men. If you have only nine men together, well then you have nine men praying alone together. But if you have ten, well then you're good to go. You have a minyan. A minyan. So not only would we have a minyan, which we've squeaked by with before, but we're going to have a real crowd.

And so, you know, I remember when we just started building our House of Prayer as the early stages. I was the only one living at the farm and my closest neighbor was like a mile away. And you remember who that was. That was Michelle, the French guy. Anyways, that's a different story. But, people would ask me, incredulously, if we would ever get a minyan. And I would tell them that I would stand at the entrance of our House of Prayer and I would scream out, "mincha, mincha!" That's the afternoon service. And you usually go outside the synagogue and

scream that and then people just converge together and they come together. So, I told them I would go outside and I'd scream, "mincha, mincha!" And then I would just hear, ma'aah, ma'aah...because there's nothing but sheep anywhere near. Anyways, that always got a laugh.

And you know, it was hard for me to picture that there ever would be a minyan of people at the farm. And only this past year, have we started just at times, if we were hosting enough people, we'd have a minyan. But only just and only for Friday night services called kabbalah Shabbat in which we greet the Sabbath. But for the primary service, which is that on Shabbat morning, we never had a minyan, because we never had an actual kosher Torah, which is a very big deal. They're really expensive and they take about a year to write and they're super holy. And without a Torah, which is the heart of the Sabbath morning service, you really can't have a minyan. You can't have the service. But this Shabbat, Toby brought with him his family Torah. I think maybe next week I'll tell you the story about that Torah. It's a crazy story in and of itself. It's a special story. But we had for the first time ever, we had Shabbat services, all of them, with the Torah, on the very summit of our holy mountain in our synagogue House of Prayer. And we were all very excited and at the same time, it was sad that Jeremy and his family couldn't be there to experience it with us, but everyone is where they're supposed to be when they're supposed to be there.

So, Friday night service arrived and we all entered the shul. There must have been 35 to 40 men there between the ages of 13 and 90. And perhaps six or seven of the women were there. It was beautiful. It's never been so full anywhere near it on a Friday night. And we all came together and we sang and we prayed and we sang and I handed out candy. As I always do. Because in nearly...and just a little synagogue politics, synagogue background. In early every synagogue in the world, there's a self-appointed candy man. Sometimes there are two and then it gets really competitive, things can get ugly. But, I'm from many generations of candy men. And it's something I deeply enjoy because when you give a small little organic candy to a kid, it generates the same amount of excitement that giving an adult a new Lexus does, or a thousand dollars. They're just so happy. So the return on the investment is great. And I also feel like it's holy in and of itself because it creates an association from such a young age of the Sabbath services, of the Sabbath prayers, of synagogue. It creates an association of joy and with sweetness.

It's similar to the custom that Jews have which is called an upsherin. Have any of you heard of an upsherin? It's a ceremony in which when a little Jewish boy turns three years old, we cut his hair for the first time. Until then, I remember my mother told me she cut my long, golden locks and she just wept. She would miss them so much. And at the ceremony, you teach him the aleph bet. You take a sheet out with each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet printed on it. It looks like this. Tabitha, could you pull up the sheet?



Ok, there we go. And you see each of those letters of the aleph bet, over each one of the letters, you put a little drop of honey. So, when the child learns the letter, he dips the finger in the honey and will associate these letters with which God created the world, and with which the Holy Torah is written, they'll always be sweet in his mouth.

Anyways, I'm totally distractible, and I'm getting all sorts of rabbit holes, but that's why I give out candy. But, I do it differently. I may be the only one in the world that gives out candy not just to kids, but I had this brilliant realization years ago that grown-ups like it too. So, I give it out to everyone. But this is a revolutionary idea, hasn't taken traction yet. Maybe someday, maybe in the Holy Temple, everyone will get candy, all the nations of the world. But until then, it's just at the Arugot Farm.

Anyways, we came together and we prayed and we sang and I think everybody felt something special was happening. But these people weren't on the whole journey to us. They couldn't have known how unique it was. So, in the pause between the beautiful songs of welcoming the Sabbath and the actual evening service, usually the Rabbi, someone gets up. I often do it because nobody else volunteers. And I stood up to speak. And I started by saying like this, I said, "atem margishim et zeh? Atem margishim et zeh b'avir? Do you feel that? Can you feel it in the air?"

And I posed that question and I just let it sit. And then I said, that feeling, of course in Hebrew, I said that feeling, that the Shechinah. Do you guys know what the Shechinah is? The Divine Presence. To get actually into the depths of what it is, it would take a lot more time. But if you want, we could do another fellowship about that. By the way, I want to hear from you guys. Your thoughts, your questions, what to do more of, what to do less of. Anyways, I'm talking to these guys and to all these people. There were also eight women there. And I explained that for thousands of years when the Jewish people were in exile, the Shechinah, was there with us. The Shechinah was there in the exile with us. Feeling our pain, feeling our disconnection. And now that we're returning, the Shechinah is returning with us. And looking around at the majority of men there, these indigenous Judean types that I was telling you about last week with the peyote and the Hebrew garments, just unadulterated by Western civilization, I reminded them that something very holy and very sacred happened in these mountains. We don't believe it, we know it. We know that it was the wilderness of Zif where King David fled from King Saul who was seeking his life. And in the caves all around the farm, in which he hid, he composed most of the book of Tehilim.

So, from our synagogue, you can literally look out directly into the caves where the Psalms were most likely written. But for thousands of years, our mountain was bereft, was mourning the loss of her children who were dispersed around the world. And now, we've returned, I was telling them. And the Shechinah, the Divine Presence has returned with us. And these holy stones, these stones which were hewn from the mountain itself, the stones with which our House of Prayer was built, are absorbing our prayers. Are drinking them in with thirst. And that after thousands of years, our prayers are finally upon this mountain. And not only that, but that this Shabbat would be the first Shabbat that we'd actually have a Torah with us. That a Torah would be read on this mountain. I want all of you to see what it looked like. I want your eyes to behold what the Torah looked like, within the aron kodesh, within the holy ark, that is new, it's still under construction.



Here it is, can you see that? It was like the Torah would just fit in perfectly like a glove into this holy, holy ark. It's so beautiful. Anyways, when you see it in person, I can show you the stones that we've hand selected from the four holy cities of Israel. Right? We've gone through what they are. They are Tiberius, there's Tzfat, there's Hebron and there's Jerusalem. It's earth, water, wind and fire.

Tiberius is water, Tzfat is air, Hebron is earth and Jerusalem is fire. And we wanted prominent stones from each of these cities within the ark, itself. I'm really excited for all of you to see it. Anyways, I looked around at the faces of these indigenous Judeans and I didn't know what to expect. I really, when I speak to them, I never know what to expect. I feel like I have a certain message to every demographic, but to them I always struggle. Because I feel like I sound like an old man talking about the way things were in the old country and how unbelievable the miracles of Israel are. I don't know how they would receive it or if it was just too foreign to them. But when I looked around, I looked in their eyes and I saw eyes filled with tears. And I don't think it was just my words, I think it was that my words gave a form and a substance to this transcendent feeling that everyone was experiencing. Everyone could feel it, but you can't always put words to it. And I was really blessed to be able to articulate those words.

But my words came nowhere near to the words that HaShem revealed in the Torah itself and this parsha that we read together the very next morning. And only when I was hearing them, when I was hearing them being read from the Torah in that holy place did I understand that perhaps one of the reasons HaShem may have chosen this Shabbat for such an auspicious occasion was because it was this Torah portion. Now there's so much to say for the Torah and the Haftarah, I'm not even going to scratch the surface as I said. But, they were both brimming with meaning and with beauty and with consolation. It was another Haftarah of consolation.

But as we sat there reading these words together, chapter 8 verses 7 and 8 stood out with particular power and drama. So here it is, Deuteronomy, chapter 8:

"For the Lord your G-d is bringing you into a good land - a land with streams and pools of water coming forth in valleys and mountains, a land of wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey. A Land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing."
- Deuteronomy 8:7-8

And as I was reading these verses, I realized that word for word, it was a description of our farm. Word for word! It was unbelievable – wheat, barley, vineyards, fig trees, pomegranates, olives, and honey. And not only the boring sweet honey that you eat, but D’vash! Right? My daughter, my little yummy D’vash. Her name means, honey. And the truth is, we eat her too, all the time.

Anyways, the most striking part stood out to me were the words, a land with streams and pools of water coming forth in the valley and in the mountain. Because while the rest of those verses were a perfect description of our farm, God’s blessed much of Judea and Samaria, really all of Israel with wheat and barley and figs and pomegranates and olives and honey and so much more. I mean, prophecies are being manifested everywhere you look. The ingathering of the exiles, the Hebrew language is being revived, etc. But as far as I know, that verse, a land with streams and pools of water coming forth in valley and mountain, has manifested nowhere, or if anywhere, nowhere near as dramatically as it has in our ecological oasis pool at the farm.

So here are a few pictures of the Garden of Eden like desert oasis pool.

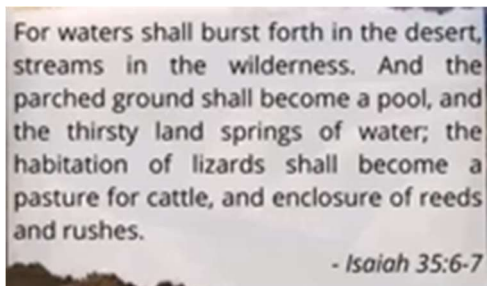


Is it beautiful? These are not photoshopped. There's no touchups. This is just the way it looks. And as beautiful as it is, the experience within those waters, they're just...it's healing. I cannot wait for all of you to experience it. Please God, may it be soon. Anyways, it's just such a dramatic prophecy.



That's the pool at night.

Because it's one thing to have pools in the water in the desert, perhaps in the valleys. But coming forth from the desert mountains? Well, I know we've shared this with you before, it wasn't only these words that described our pool, but the first seven verses of the 35th chapter of Isaiah. I'm saying this for so many of our new fellowship members who haven't heard about this pool. So reading them and all going into will just take too much time. But I want to spotlight verses six and seven:



First of all, nowhere in the world have you seen more lizards than at our farm. We love them, I love them, I think of this prophecy every time I see them everywhere. But you know, nearly all the pools in the world have something to keep the water clean, whether it's chlorine or salt water, but our pool is Israeli technology that was developed by marine biologists who chose very specific fish and very specific plants which when pumped through the system, bubbles up from throughout the rocks, exactly as the prophecy said. And the entire ecosystem keeps the water perfectly fresh and pristine and clean for a swimming experience unlike anything you can imagine.

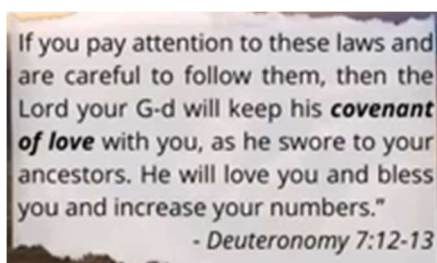
Now out of all the plants that these secular marine biologists could have chosen which keep the water total fresh, guess which two plants they chose which were so perfect to purify the water that they filled the whole pool with them. That's right – reeds and rushes. Exactly the two plants that Isaiah said would be in this pool in the middle of the desert.

Now the reason I'm bringing this up and focusing our precious time on this is because when we threw not only ourselves, but everything we had into this farm, particularly into building our desert oasis pool, we didn't do so in order to fulfill the words of Deuteronomy or Isaiah. We

didn't even think of that Isaiah prophecy when we did it. We didn't even read it. I didn't put it together until after we had already built the pool and Yossi showed it to me. We couldn't have known.

Everything we did, we did from this place of pure, natural, flowing, unadulterated love. A love for God and love for the Land and the desire to beautify it, and to bring majesty to it, and thereby to bring majesty and glory to HaShem, Himself. It's very similar to our mission to ingather the exiles which has been a fundamental part of our message from the very beginning as far as I can ever remember, that was what my message was. My friends and my family can't hear it from me anymore. But it does make an impact. Because I'm not driven by the multitudes of prophecies that talk about the kibbutz galilot, the ingathering of the exiles to the Land of Israel and Messianic times and how it would be a harbinger of Messiah and salvation. That really doesn't make me tick. I can speak for myself, I also believe I'm speaking for Jeremy as well when I say that what drives us, at least for the ingathering of the exiles, is our love for our Jewish brothers and sisters and our concern for their welfare, both physically and spiritually. For our desire for them to live lives of enhanced purpose and joy and vitality. That just doesn't come close when you're out in the exile. I'm just being honest. It's our desire for them to come home because we're a family and this is our home. It's not some combination of theological eschatology, but our love is our deepest drive and our motivation.

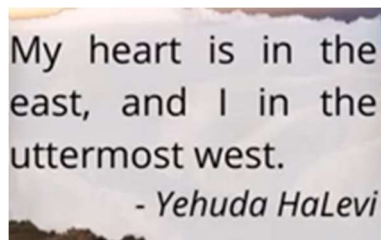
And it's the same with every piece of this farm. So to hear the words of the Torah describing every last detail of the farm in this first Shabbat where we had the Torah at the farm, and knowing that God was true to His Word, that He upheld His covenant, not only with us, but through our hands, often without us even knowing exactly what He was using us for. I don't know, to me it makes it even more beautiful. Because there's no ulterior motivation. It wasn't a means to achieve an abstract, theological end. One hundred percent of it was just from a place of love. And I think that's what the prophet saw. They saw what would happen in our hearts and what we would do and they described that. So to just do it because they said it, would almost be missing the point. So, really, the secret of what's unfolding out here on the Judean frontier was revealed in the very first verse of the Torah portion. Of course, it just had to be this way, right? The first verse, Deuteronomy chapter 7, verses 12 through 13. And this is how Rabbi Sacks defined them:



A lot of love there, right? And what does that mean? Covenant of love. Habrit v'hachesed. When you bring them together, it's really covenant of love. There's no other way to look at it. If you ask me, at least part of its meaning is that for so long we have been exiled from our Land and we've been exiled from ourselves, from our true essence, from our deepest desires. And we've started relating to our Judaism, merely as one aspect of ourselves, as our religion. And not as our deepest essence

and identity. Not as our religion, but as our relationship with God. And our deepest mission, it wasn't integrated, it was disintegrated, it was fragmented.

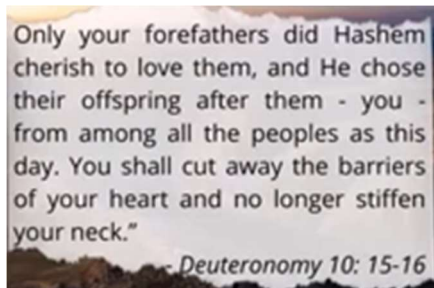
And so, our commandments often became ritualized and very often shells of what were once filled with passion and with love and now that we're returning to the Land, our hearts are being filled with that passion of love. We don't even have to try. It's just a natural consequence of breathing the air and walking on the Land. It's happening to us. And when I say, us, I'm looking at all of your faces, I'm scrolling through. And I really mean, all of us. Because to some degree, in a real way, we're going through this together. Because while we're geographically separate, where we are geographically does not define where we are spiritually. And the love and the yearning that I hear from so many of you...the passion for Israel, the thirst to walk on its ground and to eat its fruit and to connect with it in any way possible, it's just so obvious that the words of the famous sage of Israel, Yehuda HaLevi, these words are on the wall of Jews throughout the exile. He said them nearly 900 years ago. He said –



Libi b'mizrach. Our heart is in the east. And in a very real way, you're all here with us. You pray with us, you learn with us, you support us. You're a beautiful part of this return. Perhaps the greatest proof is that you're here with us right now. Your faces...I'm looking at your faces, manifesting on my screen right now in Jerusalem! Meaning you have a presence here in the

Holy Land at this very moment! I don't know if you ever thought about it. You're here! Your physical body may there, but your hearts are here in Jerusalem. And so your bodies, yes, they're in the diaspora and your bodies they should be blessed with vibrance and health, HaShem, please bless them. But while you're in various nations, you're here in Jerusalem in the deepest way. And so, when you take a moment to breathe and let that sink in, what God is doing in our hearts, I mean, really, really let it sink in. Well, I know for me, my eyes fill with tears. It's almost inevitable, if you take down the barriers of skepticism and cynicism and the overabundance of cerebral thoughts which fill our mind all the time. And believe me, I'm more guilty of this than any of you. We all have it, even if trace amounts. When those come down and we're able to silence that and hear that still small voice and see what HaShem is doing in our hearts, there's just nothing to do, but have a good, holy cry.

And this Torah portion, later in the Torah portion, chapter 10, verses 15 and 16:



You know, for me when I read that, this holy mountain and all that has unfolded here and continues to unfold here, all of it, the blood, the sweat, the tears, all of it is a direct testimony to HaShem circumcising our hearts. And really when we're not even looking. That's when it really happens. When I'm not even aware that it's happening. Sometimes I believe HaShem is doing it most in those times of pain and

confusion, where we're thoroughly distracted and consumed, that's when He brings them together – our heads and our hearts.

And that's why it's a covenant of love. Because what's love? In Hebrew the word for love, Jeremy said it beautifully. It comes to one, both God and love. But in Hebrew, the word for love, ahavah, means to give. Comes from hav, which means to give. Because when you really love somebody, you just want to give to them. Not what you want them to have, but what they most need. You don't seek to take from them, but you seek to give to them. So to me, the fact that this magnificent miracle came through our hands and fulfilled these prophecies, not because we were trying to achieve a specific end, however holy it may be, but purely because we wanted the beauty of the Land to be a source of regal glory for all of Israel. And therefore, for HaShem, Himself. Because we love HaShem so much and in the simplest way we just wanted to give to Him and to love Him. And all of this helped me to understand, if only in retrospect that the covenant of love which we read about in the first Torah portion in the first verse in our House of Prayer, is what we see manifesting before our eyes today.

Now here's a question I have. I didn't know what was going to happen with Jeremy and Tehila and I prepared a little bit more. It may take us over time. Should I continue? I'm looking at your heads. Yes, I should? Ok. You guys are just being nice.

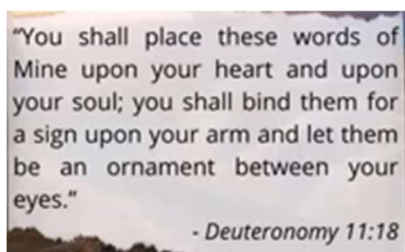
Anyways, you know there's an aspect of our mission which is intellectual, which is education, which is in the head. But the deepest truth is that it's in the heart. And that's why I wanted to talk about the mitzvah of tefillin with you. So, like I said, I wasn't sure how the fellowship was going to play out, but this morning during the prayers, I just had this thought as I put tefillin on, that I wanted to talk to you about the commandment of tefillin because it's in the Torah portion and because it's such an integral part of who we are. And I was conflicted about it because I know that many of you don't observe this commandment. It may seem strange to you, which is ok, and it's understandable. But nonetheless, a lot of you have told me that the one of the reasons you're here is your desire to authentically connect and understand the heart of a Jew. And tefillin, the phylacteries, is such a central part of our lives and of our service. Which by the way, you can see in this picture from my prayers this morning. That's me with my tefillin on.



The tefillin of the head you can see and the tefillin of the arm is right next to my sleeve. You can see the box and it goes all the way to my finger. And so the tefillin is placed on the head and the arm, right opposite the heart is where it's on the arm. And in ancient times, many Jews would wear them all day long. There's still a few people that do, but they're holding at a very high level. Because now we wear them during prayers primarily because we're not confident

that we can maintain the mental and spiritual purity throughout the duration of the day which we need to really maintain while wearing tefillin.

So, our Torah portion actually introduces the commandment of tefillin like this, Deuteronomy chapter 11:18:



Now within the actual box of tefillin, contain four verses on four separate parchments that are four foundational aspects of Judaism. Belief in a single God, HaShem's love for us, commitment to keep the mitzvot, and the memory of the exodus from Egypt.

So Rav Ya'akov Nagin, I've spoken about him before. He's a Rabbi of ours from Othniel, near Hebron. He recalls the story of this young boy who left home for a number of years to study Torah in the Yeshiva of this famous Chasidic Rebbe. And upon his return, after many years, his father said, "So nu, what did you learn in Yeshiva? What did you learn from the Rebbe?"

And the son waited for a moment and said, "That the Lord is our God." Which in English sounds a little redundant and doesn't make sense perhaps, but in Hebrew, that HaShem, Hu ha'Elohim. And the father said, "but everybody believes that. You needed to go to Yeshiva for all those years just to learn that?" And the son responded, "Everyone may believe it, but I know it."

What was the boy saying? That he internalized that truth. That he brought it from his head to his heart. And that is the connection of what the spiritual, tefillin power helps us to achieve. That there's something profoundly transcendent about tefillin. That's why Chabad Jews....you guys know Chabad. You've heard of Chabad, I imagine you have. Maybe on another time, I could get into Chabad and their history and what they're about. But they're just like the elite, elite unit of the Jewish people. And they go all around the world and they make it a mission to get tefillin on the arm and on the head of every Jew in the world. It doesn't matter who – religious or not, it doesn't matter. Here are just a few pictures of what that looks like.



This is one of the pride parades, oy va'vov, they're there, it doesn't matter.



Military personnel



Rastas, it doesn't matter.

This is what Chabad is about. If you've been to Jerusalem, it's not a strange sight. I mean they're so good at it. Sometimes you walk by their little table stand set up in the street and before you even know it, you're all strapped up. I thought it was actually quite beautifully put by my friend, Rudy Rochman. Now, a lot of you have been writing, what's up with Rudy? Well, there's good news. He was released from Nigerian prison just a few days ago. I've been in touch with him. And you'd think he would just be unwinding and saying, "oh my God, oh, I just, I'm never going to leave again." But he has just been praying and fighting to be back some of the Igbo Jews from the tribe of Jews that he was there to help support. Because one of them, the mother of the tribe is like still in jail right now. And he's just fighting to get her delivered. Anyways, I wanted to share this video, even though we're over time of what Rudy said about tefillin. I thought I would just let you hear from himself.

Video with Rudy



These are called Tefillin. These are an ancient tradition that the Jewish people have been wearing for thousands of years. It's a form of meditation where you wrap one of these boxes on your arm, you usually use the arm that you're not writing with. So, if you're a rightie, you wrap on your left, if you're a leftie, you wrap on your right. The box is always supposed to point to your heart and you

wear another box on your head. And it's supposed to combine your body, heart, and soul, and mind.

It's unfortunate, today people try to categorize what it means to be a Jew. We've in a way Christianized sections of Judaism as if we were Orthodox, Conservative, Reform which comes straight from the church. There's no such thing as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform. A Jew is a Jew is a Jew. We're part of a family. And each Jew has their own way of practicing, based on the way that they grew up, based on their conclusions, based on the point in their life, based on the culture that they are descendants from. But they're just as equally a Jew and we should not have these division within our community. We're all one family.



(reciting of the Shema while wearing tefillin)

To me, this is Jewish meditation. Every morning, I put on tefillin, I focus on what I'm thankful for in life, what I should give gratitude towards. My focus on bringing positive energy to the people that matter to me, my family members, the Jewish people, the world, the environment, the universe. And I try to put out positive

energy towards all the things that I care about. And then, I focus the last portion of it on what I want to achieve. Whether it's what I want to achieve this day, what I want to achieve this week, what projects I have going on, or in general what my life goals are. And it's a perfect way for me to be really in tune and to be really grounded to what really matters in this world.

Someone who puts on tefillin or doesn't put on tefillin, it doesn't make a difference on if they're more or less Jewish. It's just the way that they connect to their culture. And every single Jew connects to their culture in a different way. And also that evolves. What worked for them 10 years ago, may not work for them the same way today or in 10 years.

So, some people just put on tefillin because they're told that they have to and that doesn't really do anything for you. What you need to do, is when you put on tefillin, have an intention, have a reason, understand why. And use this ancient practice, the sacred practices that we've been transmitting and passing down for thousands of years for a positive reason and in a

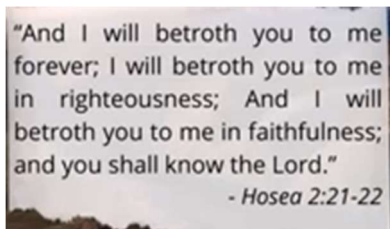
positive way. This is very important for our generation to understand that it's not just about putting on tefillin, it's about what it represents and how you can use it in order to make yourself a better person. (end of video)

Ari

So, I mean, what a beautiful Jew, what a beautiful Jew. Thank you, HaShem for rescuing him and his friends from Nigerian prison, for hearing our prayers. Thank you, for that.

You know the sages of Israel say, the Torah, the Jewish people, and the Holy One, blessed be He, are one. In some way, the tefillin are like miniature Torah scrolls. They're both written on ink with parchment and they contain portions of the Torah. So, in a tangible, physical way, the tefillin bind our body to the Torah itself. And the tefillin of the arm on the bicep, it's opposite the heart and the sages tell us to remind us that a person's actions should always be driven from the heart. So, the tefillin of the arm directs us towards the question, what am I doing? What am I doing? But the tefillin of the head, Rav Nagin explains, answers the question, not what am I doing, but who am I? It isn't an intellectual and it isn't spiritual, it's the synthesis of the mind and the soul and the heart.

And as we put tefillin on, ultimately, we remember that it's a sign of our betrothal to HaShem. I would say, maybe 27 years and I've only missed two days, possibly three of tefillin. And that's usually when I'm traveling and the hours and it's devastating to me. No matter how I'm feeling, whether I was just stabbed or burned or whatever, it was, no matter what, I never missed a day of tefillin. Because ultimately, it's a sign of our relationship with HaShem, our commitment with HaShem. Which is why as we're contemplating the tefillin and we're putting it on and we're wrapping the tefillin over our finger which is the furthest manifestation of our action into the world, we recite these words from the book of Hosea, chapter 2, verses 21 and 22:



The tefillin is an expression of that betrothal, the betrothal is to HaShem. And in this analogy, the tefillin is like the ring that you put on the finger, at least that's been my experience. Yet, it's important to remember that we, the Jewish people are an am Kohanim. We're a nation of priests. And just as the priests in the Temple did an entire world of things that every other

Israelite like myself didn't do, so too, we perform commandments that the nations don't do. But ultimately a commandment like tefillin, we observe so that we can bridge that gap between our heads and our hearts in order to be better vehicles and better servants to bless the rest of mankind that they should be able to do the same thing.

So let me wind down this fellowship with a prayer. HaShem, Abba, please allow us to internalize the truth of Your all-encompassing oneness from our heads into our hearts. We ask you this again and again, but bring it from our heads into our hearts and into our limbs. May

our actions be an expression of Your truth. May there be no disconnect, no hypocrisies. May our connection be pure and simple. You've returned us to the Land of Israel, Hashem, thank You for that. A thousand thank You for that, a million thank You's. Please HaShem, ingather the rest of the exiles so that we can unite here in the Promised Land and finally serve our mission to be a blessing to all of mankind and to bring the knowledge of You to the ends of the earth as water covers the sea. And please, HaShem, bless our friends here in this fellowship as they have been a blessing to us beyond what words can possibly describe. They've encouraged us, they've encouraged us so tremendously. They've encouraged us to rise to the calling of our generation, of all generations. And to help us usher in Your salvation and redemption for all of mankind. Bless them in every way as I bless them now with the priestly blessing.

Aaron blessing in Hebrew

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

Shalom my friends. Stay in touch. Stay connected. Love and blessings from Judea. Love you all.