

Session 64
Ha'azinu, Sukkot – Riding the Spiritual Roller Coaster
19 September 2021

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQyxBm9m_wU

Shalom, my friends! Good to see you, Jeremy, good to see you. Robin, good to see you. Ardelle, Judy, Brandon, Horoch, good to see you as well. Becky, it's good seeing you and we've been praying for your healing and for your heart. All of us are praying for your healing and you're really an inspiring warrior. Tar, it's good to see you, a little bit of a guardian angel. Mindy and Brett...Jeremy, did he buy a sheep? I think he did. Brett, I think you own a sheep. Eager for you to meet him. Maybe we'll sacrifice him together at the Temple. Anyways, it's just good to see all of you. Aaron, Suzanne. Suzanne just took a fall and she needs some healing. Jeremy, you are sideways and now you're straight. Anyways, I love seeing all of you guys. Many of you still keep your camera off, but at least I get to see your names. That means something, there is definitely a lot in a name.

Anyways, I have a little bit of exciting news, it's not like super exciting, but it's exciting for me and that is that I am broadcasting live from here at the farm. This is the first time so I really hope it works out. And the reception is strong enough because up until now, we leave the farm and broadcast from Jerusalem, from Jeremy's parents house where there's this thing called land-line, DSL, and WIFI, stuff that we don't have out here on the Judean frontier. But anyways, last week, I went live from our guest house here and I used a sim-card and a hotspot, basically just the internet package and it seems to be able to do it. I found the spot that works. And the funny part is that if the wall behind me were transparent, you would see exactly the same background image that you're seeing behind me right now. Literally, it's right behind me.

But anyways, that's exciting. And then, the next step is cutting the internet out and getting you here in person, but one step at a time. Anyways, there's a lot to cover today. Overwhelming. And it definitely feels like more than a week has transpired since I saw all of you. There were a few days leading up to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and then there was the Day of Atonement itself, and then we transitioned to the spiritual journey, bridging the Day of Atonement to the holiday of Sukkot that is right upon us. So we have a lot to talk about and I'm hopeful, but doubtful that we'll be able to make our way to the short, but powerful Torah portion of Ha'azinu because it's so beautiful, so powerful.

Jeremy, I'm actually going to try to twist your arm into doing a podcast this week from one of our sukkos, there's just so much to talk about. But anyways, before I dive in, and really try to get into it, I have to allow my beloved friend, my rebbe, Jeremy Gimpel to speak before me for he is the rebbe. Jeremy, go ahead.

Jeremy

Alright, thank you very much, Ari. You guys see my new background here. I have like the sheep in the background with the sun coming up over Judea. When Ari told me that the title of this week's fellowship was going to be about riding the roller coaster of faith in life, I just felt like that absolutely resonated with me. There is just...life is a journey. There's ups, there's downs, it's scary, it's thrilling, it's amazing. Just the entire spectrum of emotions are experienced through our lives. And there's this ancient spirit tradition, this 4,000-year-old tradition, of what it means to ride this, you know, ride of life, guided by the God of Israel, living in relationship with the God of Israel. And it's a wisdom of how to maximize our experience on this earth. How to live a blessed life, how to be a blessing to everyone around us.

And this is an amazing time of year, we're just right in the middle of this entire process. And that's what I want to talk about today. The process of going from Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur, into Sukkot. And it just makes everything very real. It's just not about rituals or things that need to be done, but it's an experience in time. But, before we get there, to really understand that, I'm going to take you out to the mountains of Judea, right as the sun was rising with our flock of sheep. Cause I could really only express it there in the mountains. And then we're going to take that video and then take it to the next level. So this is just a short clip with the sun rising over the mountains.

Video



Hey fellowship. Boker tov. It is Friday morning here, right after Yom Kippur. The sun literally just now came up over the mountains. And behind us, is our flock of sheep. And when we put out that request, I just had no idea how much love we have generated in this fellowship. And how deeply connected people are to Israel and how far it's spread beyond our

fellowship. But now, the Land of Israel is protected by our sheep and our flock is growing and there are new names now. There's Jaxon and Q-tip. I'm making orders for all of them. I'm going to give them all name tags, but if you could see behind us now, the sun is shining over the mountains of Moav, over the Dead Sea. And these sheep that so naturally blend into the mountains here, are once again treading on these holy terraces and it is thanks to you.

But imagine, I think Ed told us on the last fellowship on the chat, only God would use sheep and not guard dogs to protect His Land. But somehow these docile, sweet animals are the defenders of Judea. And I just can't thank you enough. This is the first morning after Yom Kippur that I'm taking them out to pasture. I've been here since about 3:30 in the morning. And now it's 6:30 in the morning and the sun is just really shining bright now. And so, I just wanted to thank you all. Our flock is your flock and this Land is our Land and the Arugot Farm

here behind us is our Farm. And how beautiful it is that we're doing this all together. So...getting ready for Sukkot now. (end of video)

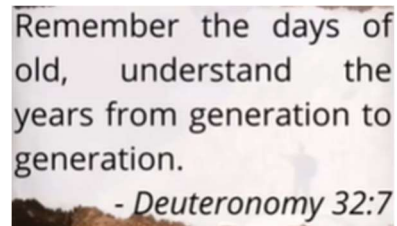
So, you know, just out in that mountains, it's hard to explain, but King David wrote most of the book of Psalms in our mountains. And of course, there's the most famous one of all, the Lord is my shepherd. So David in that Psalm, he's really imagining like he's a sheep. And I never really got that until here I am on the mountains with our sheep and God is our shepherd. And it connects so deeply to the Torah portion and to this time of year. Because what is Sukkot in the Biblical calendar? You know, Yom Kippur is the day that God gave us the second tablets. We were forgiven. And it was ok again. God's Presence came and rested again after it disappeared after the sin of the golden calf. And then, Sukkot, we're actually resting within the clouds of glory. Within God's Presence and that Presence guided us through the desert. And so, you know, these sheep, they just don't know where I'm going to take them. They can just see in front of them. It's amazing that they can just eat the brown, dry thorns and little pieces of dried-up grass, they just eat it. And it's amazing, but they don't really know where the next mountain is going to take them.

And I was thinking, well Sukkot is the holiday that we celebrate our journeying through the desert. And the sukkah represents the clouds of glory. The sukkah represents little booths that we made as we travelled through the desert, both the clouds of glory and those little booths. But I was thinking, the clouds of glory? Let's really think about that. In the night-time, we had a pillar of fire. And in the day-time, we had clouds of glory. And those were our two guiding lights by God. But, I mean, if I think about a guiding light at nighttime, there's a pillar of fire. I can't really see anything. I just, I have to walk towards that light into the distance. I don't really see much other than that light. And so, ok, I'm just walking as best as I can with a little bit of godly guidance that I'm given, but I don't really see around me, I can't really see that far ahead of me, I can't really see definitely not behind me. I'm just trying to walk in the light.

But in the daytime, where everything should be, I mean I should be able to see all the way to Moav. No, there's a cloud of glory that's guiding us. And I never thought of that, but that cloud of glory doesn't see very far either. I mean that cloud is something is something that distracts our vision, there's a block there. And so, even as we're walking in the daytime, we weren't able to see the next mountain over. And that really is the happiness of Sukkot, to recognize that we're never going to have all the answers, we're never going to know. I mean, could anyone have imagined that this global pandemic and this vaccine fiasco, and what is going on in the world today? Could anyone have even imagined that two years ago? There's just no way, but we have like a cloud of glory that's guiding us in the next step and then the next step and the next step. And we have no idea what will happen in a month from now.

But true happiness, Sukkot teaches us, is to just be with God where He is with you right now. Walking, one step at a time, following the light, following the cloud. And the cloud, even though it's obstructing our view, we're just walking in its direction.

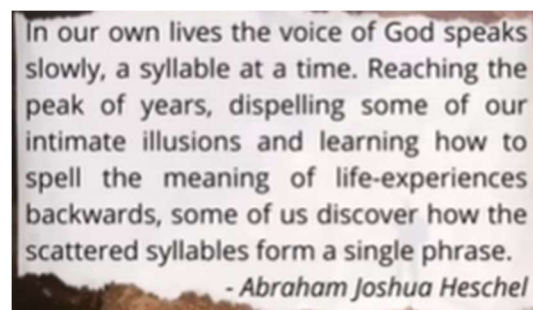
And here we are now, the last Torah portion that we read right before we go into Sukkot, it gives us a real guidance. It's one of the last commands in the Torah. And it's in Deuteronomy 32, verse 7. Can we get that up on the screen? Perfect. So here's what it says:



Remember the days of
old, understand the
years from generation to
generation.
- Deuteronomy 32:7

There's a Biblical mandate to know Biblical history. That's why the whole Bible in some way is His story. It's God's story of the unfolding relationship that He has with all of the people that believe, all of the people that walk in His light. There's a recorded history that starts with Adam and Eve and it goes all the way through until Ezra and Nehemiah. It's like a living story that is our history. And there's a Biblical command – know your history. Why do we need to know our history? What does that have to do with Sukkot? Well on Sukkot, we are celebrating our history, we're dramatizing our history, we're reliving our history. Where that history becomes our identity. It's how we live in the world. It's like we come out of our solid homes and we're just now out with the clouds of glory protecting us, not even seeing where we're going.

But there's something even deeper here. Because in order to really understand what our purpose is, what our mission is, what God is calling us to do with our life, it doesn't always happen in one flash moment of inspiration. On the contrary, you really need a lot of time. And God is communicating to all of humanity over time. And in our personal lives. This is a beautiful quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of my mentor/rabbis. And here's what it says:



In our own lives the voice of God speaks
slowly, a syllable at a time. Reaching the
peak of years, dispelling some of our
intimate illusions and learning how to
spell the meaning of life-experiences
backwards, some of us discover how the
scattered syllables form a single phrase.
- Abraham Joshua Heschel

It's like God is guiding us on our journeys for so many years. What it's taken to bring us to where we are today in our marriage, who we've married, our children, our upbringing, our discovery, our having to let go of some of our illusions, our grabbing onto new...I mean it's such a long journey. And we can really only understand it when we look backwards. And then, slowly but surely, watch spice cart after spice cart how God is communicating with us and guiding us throughout the journey. It's like a cloud of glory because it's impossible to see the entire sentence all at once.

And so, Sukkot is teaching us, walk with God in the clouds of glory. That's where happiness lies. It's the holiday of happiness because we're not looking for the whole phrase. Just one step at a

time. One walking with that pillar of fire, that cloud of smoke. It's just over the next horizon, just to the next mountain top. And we're walking one step at a time. And then when we look back, we can see, wow, look, our shepherd has guided us all throughout the mountains and up and down through the valleys. All just to bring us back to our safe home once again. And really all of us, we're just walking each other home. I think that's the goal of this fellowship, we're all just walking each other back to Jerusalem where we belong.

And so, I just want to bless you all with the most amazing Sukkot possible, that these flock of sheep are protecting our Land and protecting God's Land and protecting our farm. And you've been such a blessing to us. And now we see like, who would have imagined? Ari and I came out to this mountain and there was just nothing there. Who would have thought that we would have a vineyard that would be destroyed? That a flock of sheep, a fellowship from around the world? We just never could have known it. We just walk one step at a time following the light, following the cloud of glory, feeling God's Presence in our lives and trying to intuit, what is the next step? And walking with that intuition, that's chag ha'simcha, that is the holiday of happiness.

It's not about actually making it to the Land. We celebrate just the walking itself, without any clear vision, celebrating being in that reality where we don't know what the next year is going to bring us, but knowing that one step at a time, God is guiding us the entire time. And so, you should all be blessed beyond measure for all of your support and all of your love. We never knew, we didn't know. And now, it's like we've become so interconnected on a deeper level. And now, you should all be blessed as you have blessed us. So chag sameach and thank you.

Ari

Jeremy, that was beautiful. I think I'm going to put you at the end from now on. Because it's just hard to follow that, it's hard to follow you, you're just so good. It was so good and so inspiring. You're right, we are like connected in a deeper way. It's almost like we've had a kid together. You know, no pun intended. We have like little sheep that many of you were a part of. And we're so grateful for that, it's true, the overwhelming flood of support from all of you was just so encouraging going into Yom Kippur. We were literally as Yom Kippur was...like wow, such a flood of love and support cause like the whole sheep thing...although I really do try to wear my sheep socks. Shaena bought me these socks that have sheep on them and it helps me keep the sheep in mind for Yom Kippur. Never before have all the references and analogies and comparisons to sheep been so pronounced. I don't know if you thought about it, Jeremy, during the prayers of Yom Kippur. But the prayer tells, right... (Hebrew) all of you and all who have into this world, passed before you like sheep. As the shepherds searching gaze meets his flock as he passes every sheep beneath his rod, so you too pass yours, count and number and regard the soul of every living thing. There's also this famous song that we love to sing...(he sings a Hebrew song)...it's all the different relationships we have with God, but one of the main ones, for we are Your sheep and You are our Shepherd.

And there was all of this standing out to me during the Yom Kippur prayers with the sheep because as we're getting sheep, like acquiring sheep, we're HaShem's sheep as well. And it goes on and on, and that's the reason I think that our forefathers were shepherds. And that is the reason that HaShem is leading us in that direction as well. I don't know if you guys know it, but I have a MBA, a Masters in business and I was licensed Financial Advisor, although there's little in the world that interests me less and that is less suited for me than being a Financial Advisor. My dad really wanted me to be one and it sort of made my aliyah to Israel seem rational in his mind, and so I did it. And Jeremy got a law degree. And now we're being led to be shepherds, right? That has to be a God thing. But anyways, before I launch in and try my best to share my heart on these powerful holy times that we're in, I must yield the floor once again to one of the great super-stars of our fellowship, the wife of the sideways looking Jeremy Gimpel. Do you know you're sideways, Jeremy? Oh there you are, ok. Always insightful, always inspiring, Tehila Gimpel.

Tehila

Hey guys! I hope you all had a meaningful Yom Kippur and looking forward to starting Sukkot tomorrow night. First of all, I wanted to send out my huge thanks and gratitude for all the unbelievable support we've received towards building our flock here on the farm. It meant so much to us. We don't just learn together on the fellowship, but so many of our friends out there are such meaningful partners with us in our efforts to build the Land, this project and other projects. So we're just really, really grateful to have you guys, not just as study partners, but as partners in rebuilding Judea. -

So yesterday, on Shabbat, Jeremy and I were out shepherding the sheep. This is so beautiful, we brought our two little guys. Noam, who you guys met a few weeks ago when he joined me in the video and Chen, our baby. And, we took them out to the pasture, and we brought our little Torah books and found a rock to sit on and I was sitting on a rock studying the Torah portion with the kids while Jeremy was kind of stumbling over himself and making a lot of loud noises trying to untangle the sheep that were getting caught up in something and it's kind of a funny thing to watch because both of us grew up as city people and this is all still pretty new for us.

And so, I was standing watching the flock and watching Jeremy and the first thing that you notice when you look at these sheep is how hard it is to actually see them. Like if you're not looking right at them in the eye, they just kind of blend in so perfectly to the surrounding mountains. You really can't actually see them. And I was thinking how profound that it is because there are a lot of farmers in Israel that have sheep that were brought in from Europe. And they're cool, but they don't really look like they belong here. Our sheep are these authentic Judean sheep and you can just see how perfectly they camouflage into the backdrop of the Judean desert.

And then it struck me while I was watching Jeremy that maybe that's like a microcosm, or in some way, a symbolic representation of what's actually happening to us. Because just like our sheep, we're trying to adapt ourselves and fit in in a more real and authentic way with the Land. And, I know Israel is always known as the high-tech nation and the start-up nation and that's cool, that's important. But at the same time, you have to remember that there's something really profound about actually just going from a people that lived in exile, disconnected from our Land and coming back to the Land and being just Judean. And you know, the people who live here and the people who lived here before us in Biblical times lived off the Land. They lived off the Land and they were part of the Land. They blended in, they fit in. They might have done other things. I think about King David. He was a warrior, a leader, a poet, a scholar, a judge. But he was also a shepherd, just tied with every fiber of his being to the Land itself. And it's funny because I might just be the first lawyer/shepherdess taking out a Judean flock with my laptop working on my court documents. But that's cool, that's a new thing, it's like a new thing touching on an old thing and we're learning how to be more like the sheep fitting into the Land. They're teaching us to integrate ourselves with this holy place every single day.

And that thought kind of connected me to Sukkot because isn't that really what a sukkah is? We have all these technologies, and all these protections, these walls, these nice, comfy, sturdy houses. And the sukkah is like this rickety thing, just made of natural sticks and leaves basically. And we just sit there, like we go back to our old nature to realize how much we are actually just integrated, connected to the world, to the natural world that HaShem created. Even if mostly we just wall ourselves off and try to forget about that and stay comfortable. It's just a reminder of getting back to who we really are and to our connection to the earth and HaShem.

And I think it's just a cool fun fact that the first time the Torah mentions the word sukkot, it's not in the context of the Jews living in sukkot, after leaving Egypt. And it's not in the context of talking about the holiday of Sukkot, but it's actually in the book of Genesis when Ya'acov, Jacob, made sukkot, these little huts for his sheep. So to me, that seems like a hint, when I read that verse, it was like a spice cart for me and at Sukkot, we really are going back to that original connection with the natural world just like our forefathers were shepherding their sheep throughout the Land.

And so we're learning from that. We're learning and growing from that. And as we're out with our flock in the area where the prophet Amos lived, I was reminded of a prophecy of Amos. And I just wanted to share one other quick idea about Sukkot. In Amos, chapter 9, verse 11, he tells us something about redemption. He says, "on that day, I will raise up the fallen tabernacle of David and I will close up their breeches and I will raise up its ruins and build it up as in the days of old."

Now in all the English translations that I saw, “tabernacles,” but the Hebrew says something else. It says, “sukkah.” Isn’t that funny that Amos refers to the kingdom of David as a sukkah? Wouldn’t it be more respectful to call it “the house of David?” I will rebuild the “house of David.” Or even better, the “mansion of David,” the “castle of David.” The “sukkah of David,” doesn’t it sound kind of dinky? And this actually is the verse that we quote every time that we make the blessing after eating throughout all the holiday of sukkot, we say...may the Merciful One, rebuild the fallen sukkah of David.”

So the commentators, especially the Maharal, explains that this isn’t a coincidence. Amos was sharing something really profound about the redemption. When a house is destroyed, it’s destroyed. Like, even if you want to rebuild a house you first have to clear off all the rubble and you start building something new. It’s really just a new house. The destruction is a certain kind of finality. But the sukkah is something that’s easy to dismantle and we just kind of put it into storage every year and then we just pop it back up.

Amos is saying that we’re one day going to feel like we’re so far from the redemption, look how dark the world is, look at all the problems you can see. It can seem impossible to rebuild, look at other kingdoms that have fallen. And they are like houses that fell. They’re just broken, they’re gone, the Roman Emperor, the Greek Emperor, right? They’re gone. But Amos is telling us to remember that for HaShem, rebuilding the House of David is going to be like rebuilding a sukkah. The kingdom of David has this flexibility that, it was destroyed, but HaShem just put it in storage, and in the blink of an eye, you might not even see it coming,...just, whoof! There it is! HaShem can just rebuild it, He can pop it up like a sukkah. And that’s really a lesson for us, I think, from Sukkot for all of our lives. That the things that seem so bad and so messed up in the world around us, or in our lives, in our personal lives, in our communities, HaShem can just pop it up like a sukkah. You know, stand things up back in place where they’re supposed to be.

So, with that I bless all of us. May HaShem speedily rebuild the sukkah of David and rebuild all the sukkahs in our own lives that need to be reestablished and I wish you guys all a beautiful, happy and meaningful Sukkot.

Ari

That was beautiful. I think I have to put Tehila after Jeremy at the very end because do I follow that either? It’s just downhill from here. Believe me, you should log off right now. Don’t! Don’t log out. But you know, my whole life I remember reading (Hebrew from Amos), and thinking what does that mean? The tabernacle of David has fallen, never did I put together exactly why it’s called the “tabernacle of David.” And the sheep blending into the mountain, that is a really a fantastic point. Because I’ve thought of myself sometimes as a fish that’s flopping around on the river bank, gasping for air, slowly dying, having a short memory and thinking, “this is the life of a fish.” And then I came out to Judea and someone put me back into the water, it’s like, “oh, this is what it’s like to be a fish.” So I’ve identified with that, or

sometimes I feel like a lion that's been in the zoo my whole life. And then someone let's me go out in the Serengeti, or like a safari and I just feel so alive. That's sort of what it feels like. But the sheep also, there's something to that as well. There's so much to be said right now, there's so much to talk about.

I want to just sort of take a few steps back and talk about Yom Kippur because you know, leading up to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, I really tried to work on eliminating or diminishing my familial fears of anxiety, not like terrible anxiety, but that I didn't study enough, prepare enough, repent enough, you know me by now. It's a theme that I struggle with. So it just felt like so much was on the line. You know, standing before your Creator with nowhere to hide. I used the template that we discussed in our last fellowship, to go through the sins that I was able to identify, that I fell short on. I tried to enumerate them to HaShem in detail to confess before him, to regret the past, to feel shame in the present, and to resolve wholeheartedly not to do it again. And it doesn't matter even if we do fall again, on the same thing we've resolved not to, if we're totally sincere at that moment, that's what really matters. And that, of course, we're being honest with ourselves and that we've really tried, that we really give it our all.

But anyways, leading up to that that, I actually remember I received a call from a childhood friend from Texas who's now a Charedi ultra-orthodox Jew, living in Jerusalem. Haven't spoken to him for years. We grew up in Texas together. Anyways, he called me and it's a little bit of a tangent, but can I just tell you guys the story, is this cool? I don't know why I want to tell the story. So we were about 14, 15 years old, like the latest. And we had this job working together doing score boarding at the Jewish community center for the men's basketball league. Meaning that when they scored points, we would add it to the board and stop the clock when there was a time out and we got paid for it. Bottom line, we ran the scoreboard.

So there was a thing that we used to do, that when the men were on one side of the court and the other side of the court had the scoreboard on it, no one was looking there, we would immediately time it out, shave a minute or two off the clock and start it again, and really hope that no one would see it. There was like an adrenalin rush there. And that way we would get out earlier. So if we were caught, they would blow up at us. Some were actually fired for doing it and justifiably so. They were paying for those games and we were shaving time off of the clock to get out of there early. And there just didn't seem to be anything entertaining about watching middle-age Jewish men play basketball.

Anyways, I forgot about the whole thing, as you can imagine. But my friend, who's now a husband and a father, found my number and called me in hopes that I would have the contact information for the manager or the players so he could contact them and apologize personally for stealing their time. That's the degree to which we at least aspire to look back at our lives

and repent for our sins. Truth is, I really reach back further than the last year. Since last Yom Kippur, that's hard enough.

And so, I started my journey with the low-hanging fruit. I turned to my parents to ask them for forgiveness because little confession here, one of the issues that I'm perpetually plagued with is the feeling that I'm falling short when it comes to respecting my parents, at least in the way that they deserve. I mean, they were exceptional parents in every way, but it's also one of the ten commandments. Even if they weren't great parents. And so, I don't feel like I give them that respect. So, I sent them both a message and I called them afterwards, and with their permission, I want to just to share that message with you. I don't know why, I just wanted to let you in. So, here's that message.



Shalom mother and father,
I'm sending you this message, not instead of a call because I want to call you too, but in addition to it, because I want you to be able to relisten to it if you want to, and to reflect on it and not to feel under pressure because I'm actually on the other line. But I wanted to just let you know that I'm sitting here thinking here about who I wronged and who I slighted and literally there's no one else than the two of you where there is a bigger discrepancy between

the overwhelming amount that I should be honoring you and just groveling in love and gratitude to you. And the way that sometimes I speak disrespectfully or shortly or whatever. There's no one else with a greater discrepancy. So, I'm begging you to please forgive me and to really say the words out loud. Because one of the catches is that I know that you're going to forgive me because if you don't, I'll probably die and you love me and you don't want me to die, so you're sort of between a rock and a hard place, even if you are sort of upset with me.

So, I'm really grateful for your love and it's almost like understanding my relationship with HaShem, you know, like I'm nervous about my sins and my shortcomings and I'm standing before the greatest judge of the world, but I also need to remember that it's my Abba. Like HaShem is our Abba and He loves us. So, I'm turning to you both in the same way as my Abba and my Ima, begging for your forgiveness. You're the most wonderful parents in the world and I love you so much. (end)

Ok, I don't know why, I just had to go with my gut, I put that out there. I have to change the page of fellowship members because I can't look at Jeremy's face. He's like wincing, he's making me feel terrible. I can't do it. I can't do it, Jeremy. Turn your camera off. Anyways, of course you know, they forgave me immediately and they insist that I have nothing to apologize for, that they don't know what I'm talking about, but I know better. And it's a big one for me, it

usually works that way. We tend to wrong most the people whose love for us is the most unconditional. I don't know why that's the case. So I always go through that list – parents, siblings, partners, Jeremy I always talk to Jeremy and a serious apology. I really try to dig deep and apologize to Jeremy. He doesn't really try that hard to apologize to me, but that's because he's perfect. No I'm just kidding. He apologizes, too. But always in response to my apology. He never initiates the apology, anyways. We don't need to get into that right now.

But I was actually turned to by a friend who I felt really wronged me. And he came over to my house and sat me down and offered such a deep and heart-felt apology that it actually brought tears to my eyes and I really felt like I learned what a real apology, confession looks like. He started by telling me how much our relationship means to him. And then he clearly listed in detail that which he did that was wrong, how he wronged me. And then, and this is the clincher, he went on to explain the damage that he knows that he did and resolved to never go down that path again and he told me how he was going to prevent it from ever happening again. I just felt this sincerity there. And it was so heartfelt, and he had clearly given it so much thought and he was so vulnerable and self-aware. I really felt closer to him afterwards than I did before our falling out.

And it helped me understand experientially the idea that we discussed last week, how true repentance, repentance not out of fear, but repentance out of love. That true repentance can be used as a platform to achieve deeper levels of closeness than before this sin was committed. In a way, turning that sin, into a mitzvah, into a platform that we use to come even closer to God. Anyways, lots of repentance, and reflection and tshuva, lots of working on letting go of the expectations, and opening my heart just to be present in the moment. And as we discussed, the repentance, coming close to God, it's not in heaven or on the other side of the ocean. It's in your mouth, it's in your heart. V'atah, right? God says, "and now!" Now! This is where you can find HaShem in the "now" which is part of what we're going to get into as we approach talking about Sukkot, which is right before us.

Anyway, so for Yom Kippur, Shaena and I decided to leave the farm to a nearby community here in Judea called Ephrat. I don't know if you've been to Ephrat, but maybe we'll take you there when you come out for a couple weeks to our farm. And we could introduce you to all of Judea, that's part of my dream and aspiration for all of you guys. But I wanted Shaena and Dvash to be able to come and join me without having to walk up and down mountains to join me for prayers in Ibei HaNachal, you know the village that's right close to us. Usually, it's not such a big deal. Shaena can do it pretty easily, but in the heat, while fasting, it's not an easy ask.

And there's so many years where I would see my friends holding their babies and I never had them. I just always dreamt of being able to hold my little baby in prayers and now I could do that. So, we went to Ephrat and I was wearing all white, right? Purity. Special white pants that

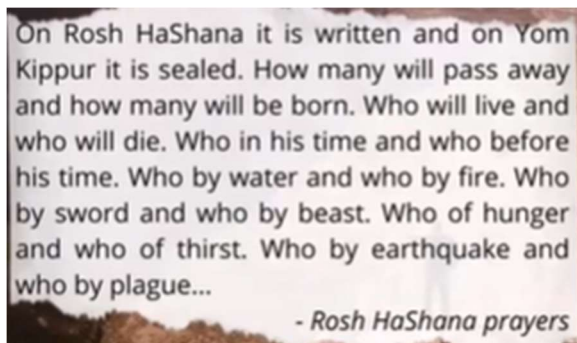
I only wear on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. A white shirt, a white kippah and a kittel. Many Jews do this just to feel the purity and that's sort of what the pure whiteness just sort of exudes. Anyways, I wore a kittel. Have any of you heard of a kittel? Wanda, have you heard of a kittel? It's a long robe that doesn't really have an equivalent anywhere else in the world. And there are two main times you wear this sort of long white, it's always white. You wear a kittel on your marriage day under the chuppa, Shaena bought it for me and that's the custom. And you wear it on your final day, you're buried in your kittel. So, it's simple, it's white, there are no pockets in it. After all, when you leave the world, you can't take anything with you, doesn't matter if you're Steve Jobs, or anyone else, you can't take it with you. And so, I wore it on my wedding day, please God, I'll be buried in it when the time comes. And then the other time we wear it is on Yom Kippur, as we're standing before our Creator in judgment. And there's a certain power in putting on the very garment that you know that you're going to be buried in. Right? It's sobering. You don't really slack off and space out.

And the prayers began and it started with the prayer of Kol Nidrei, the annulment of vows. And you could just feel the intensity in the room, not a whisper is heard. Rabbi YY Jacobson, I don't know if you've heard of him, he explained that Kol Nidrei is so emotional because it's not just the annulment of all the promises and the vows, but the annulment of the commitments and the attachments and the bonds that we've adopted, that just aren't serving us well. Right? We all have those. These things, these sort of habits that are binding us, the things that we don't want to be bound to. Ways of thinking and ways of acting. We want to break the chains that bind us to them. And truth is that all the prohibitions on Yom Kippur from eating and drinking, they're all divinely designed to maximize our disconnection from physicality and maximize our connection to spirituality, to our souls. To the degree where we can achieve one small rung under the angels themselves, the sages tell us.

So we begin by annulling all that bound us and restrained us and prevented us from truly experiencing the cleansing, that Yom Kippur offers. And the irony for me personally is that while I was trying to remove these bonds, I couldn't. I couldn't do something because during what's usually one of the most solemn and the most emotional parts of the service, I found myself removed and disconnected and I didn't really feel anything. And I was really distressed about it. The heart isn't something that you can just turn on and off at will. Even if you try to prepare well and get yourself in the right place and I wasn't feeling it. And the further into the service we went, the more distressed I became. And I was thinking and I was praying, I was almost like in an emergency. I was like scrambling. I wasn't even praying to be forgiven for my sins. I just started praying with increasing fervor that I should feel. That I should be able to pray, that I should feel something. That HaShem should pierce whatever callousness or protective casing was over my heart. That I would be able to feel His closeness to me. You know, I didn't even care whether it was painful or uplifting. I just wanted it to be real.

And I found myself praying so much just to feel that my eyes were filling with tears. And it was at that point that I was really in. I was like, “whoa, I’m actually praying now, this is happening now. I’m praying to pray and now it’s happening.” And more and less throughout the prayers. I mean, there’s ups and downs, but it really started there. It was an unexpected way to get connected, but the prayers really began to flow. And it’s hard to know what’s really happening, in the depth of our consciousness, but looking back, I was just afraid. Afraid in a deeper way than if I were called up to war in Gaza or Lebanon. I was afraid in a deeper way than that. Because, you know, I didn’t even know where to start. The magnitude of the moment was so great. I was intimidated that emotionally I didn’t know where to go from there. Because while we hopefully have time to discuss the different perspectives on what it means to be sealed in the Book of Life, on the simplest level, on Yom Kippur, it’s determined whether we will live or die. I’m not talking about spiritual life – physically, live or die.

We sing this powerful prayer – (Hebrew).



And the prayer continues. And as I sang these words, I thought of my personal friends that I know, who I know that left the world in these different ways. For some reason, my dear friend, Ari Fuld comes into my mind very regularly. I don’t know if you know the story of Ari Fuld. Maybe I’ll tell it again, I’ve told it before, but we have so many members joining, thank God. But you know, he was stabbed in the back at the grocery store, right before Rosh Hashana, three years ago. And it was three years ago. And I think maybe that was why he was on my mind because just a few years ago was his three year yahrzeit. A yahrzeit is the anniversary since he passed away. And you know, to our very name, we had so much in common and it could have just as easily been me murdered in front of the grocery store. I mean he was a real warrior! Like I was in the army, I was in the infantry, I know how to fight, but he was a warrior, he was like stabbed in the back, there was nothing he could have done. So, who by sword, right? Ari Fuld. And who by plague? Well many of us know many people, many of us...I know a number of people, but many of you may know people that have died from this plague of corona ravaging the world. And look at the rest of the world being ravaged by flood and by fire and hunger and so much else. The prayer is so real.

And I used to be really NOT afraid of death. I prided myself in not being afraid of death. I felt like when I would go through, walk through a cemetery, I felt in my heart a certain peace. And that always meant to me that I wasn’t afraid of ending there because I feel like I’m leading my life right. But I think now things are different for me. And you know, Jeremy said that they would be and I scoffed at him and I said, “no, no it’s not going to be different for me.” But he was right. Being married has changed me. I’m not only living for myself, and while I’m sure

that Shaena would be grieved, she would be ok. But how could I leave Shaena? And my little Dvash? Leaving her on the mountaintop on the Judean frontier without an Abba, who would throw her up in the air. Without an Abba that would smother her with love and kisses that I do every time that I see her. I'm like (Hebrew) love sick. Just thinking about leaving her behind, leaving Shaena behind, it's almost too much to bear. And so as the father of the house, I wasn't just praying for myself, I was praying for my entire household. I was standing before God and petitioning Him to seal us in the Book of Life and I just felt unworthy. And I knew that I'd fallen short and that I didn't really deserve another year. That's how I felt. That's not how I wanted to feel necessarily, but it's just the truth of how I felt. I felt like I'd fallen short compared to my potential, compared to what HaShem expected of me and no one could tell me otherwise. No one can say, "yes, but you've done this or that." I know, right? I know about my failures and my short-comings and my weaknesses, about how much precious time I wasted, about the moments of ingratitude and anger and jealousy. There's not many of them, but any of them are too many.

And me, feeling angry, the guy who is blessed beyond imagination. And I had the audacity to ever feel anger. I just felt like I'd fallen so short and so I began to pray. Not to be sealed in the Book of Life, there'd be time for that, but I prayed to feel. Right? Not only for myself but for the whole congregation. And then on I was sort of zooming out in my mind. And I prayed for all of Judea, all of Israel and all of the world. I prayed for all of you. I want you to know I prayed for all of you not only then, but I prayed for all of you throughout Yom Kippur again and again you'd come into my mind and I'd pray for you to be sealed in the Book of Life and health and happiness and goodness. And just every time I would pray for my family, it was like I prayed for my family of the fellowship as well. And I prayed to feel HaShem's closeness, to be in relationship again.

And unbelievably, there were times that my personal prayer coincided with that of the congregation. For literally I was praying for the world to be able to feel again. That's what I feel like. We're in these times where the world is so angry and so filled with so much hate. But when the spirit of God overtakes the world, there will just be overwhelming love. We will laugh and love each other and then we're just going to cry. I think we will just...the whole world is going to cry, that we could have so much hatred for each other when we're all brothers and we're all family. I was praying for this. And then I hear the congregation singing, (Hebrew) that all of mankind should come together to do HaShem's will. That HaShem would remove from us hearts of stone and place within us hearts of flesh. And I just prayed that the gates would be open. Those are actually in the liturgy of Yom Kippur. I mean there's a lot of liturgy there. There's a lot of time. Twenty-five hours, right? I mean synagogue started for me at 6 or 7 A.M., and we had a two-hour break until the end of the day. We were praying literally the entire day. And it went by very fast, but as the journey proceeded, we began as a congregation our confessions.

And during the actual liturgy, the prayers, we don't confess as individuals, but as a nation. And there's a sin for every letter of the Hebrew alphabet that we confess. (Hebrew) When as a kid, I remember thinking that I'm pretty sure that I didn't do a lot of these things. Right? And so why am I apologizing for them? But I've come to understand that the nation of Israel is tied in together. That we're judged together. And not just confessing our own sins, but that of the entire nation. So, unfortunately, I'm pretty sure that between all of us, we can check all of those boxes. But ironically, as we're chanting and even singing these sins that we've committed while striking our chests in contrition, there's a certain closeness that's felt. It's more than just a cleansing, it's like an intimacy. The Maharal of Prague, he explained that when one sins against their dearest friend, they're ashamed. And they may kneel before Him to appease Him, right? And to ask for forgiveness. And when he does this, the Maharal explains, the friend bends over to hear what his friend is saying. And their faces are very close. And this is the type of closeness that we have with HaShem. That as we're confessing our sins to Him, He leans in and His face is right above us, listening, compassionately and forgivingly to the words of our hearts.

There's a famous story, actually about that after Viduei, after the confession on Yom Kippur, the chazan, the prayer leader of Zazluff, he explains (Hebrew) he screams out in front of the congregation, "Master of the world, if the Jewish people hadn't sinned, then where would you hear such sweet ashamnu, such sweet confessions?" Right? We're saying ashamnu, I have sinned, I have betrayed, and then we're chanting it. I know that in the western mind, such a thought may be difficult to understand, sometimes even mine. But thinking of the words of this holy prayer leader actually brought tears to my eyes again. There was a lot of crying for me over this Yom Kippur. And not a lot, but it was there. And my rabbi said that whenever the gate of tears opens up for us, it's like a kiss from HaShem. We know that we're in direct communication with HaShem the minute those gates of the tears open up. And these words gave me comfort. And as I looked around at my friends, striking their chests with their heads down, singing their confessions with such love and so much humility and my words were joining theirs in songs before HaShem, I realized that no matter how flawed I am, HaShem created me this way like we came to together. And He doesn't want me to be filled with hopelessness and depression, but with gratitude that I have a Father in Heaven who will forgive my sins, despite the fact that I am unworthy.

And throughout the prayers, I just felt washed over again and again with this deep desire to serve HaShem with a full heart. For the year to start and I'm just going to show HaShem like never before. I'm going to serve HaShem like never before. Rabbi Nachman says we should wake up every day and we should say, "Hashem, give me the strength to serve You and come close to You like never before. Not out of desire for reward. And not out of a fear of punishment, but out of just pure love that I could be accepted again with all the blemishes and the obstacles and all the barriers that I've created in my own heart." And HaShem has removed them! I just felt so much gratitude.

And I remember wondering as a kid again, why the congregation would explode in dancing and celebration after Yom Kippur. The minute the fast ended, the shofar blew and we would start dancing in circles. After we don't know what fate was sealed for us. So that seemed a little presumptuous. So I used to think that we're just sort of assuming the best. We're assuming the sale. But now I believe that we sing and we dance and we celebrate not having to do with whether our fate will be one way or another, rather just because HaShem forgave us and brought us close again. And if our fate is to leave the world, well then, we trust HaShem that that's what's best. We don't need to understand it. Just being close to HaShem. Just cleaving to HaShem is enough reason to sing and dance. When we could just be going straight for the bagels and the orange juice that's waiting for us.

And it's that energy that takes us into Sukkot. There's so much to be said about these transitional days that we find ourselves in right now. Rav Kluger, he explains, he sort of compares the entire journey of the high holidays to this marriage ceremony, with Rosh Hashana being the erusin, the engagement where we commit in our hearts to the marriage between God and the nation of Israel and ourselves personally. And then, the days of repentance, are days of preparation and internal work, and then comes Yom Kippur which is the day of actual purification, the mikveh. The day itself is actually compared by the sages to a mikveh, the ritual cleansing bath that the bride goes into before the marriage. And then comes Sukkot, which is the wedding, in which the sukkah sheltering our heads is the chuppah, right? Is the chuppah with the wedding canopy. And the following days are the sheva brachot, the seven days of celebration that follow a marriage in which the couple is joined each night by new and different guests.

Actually by practice, there needs to be something called panim chadashot, each night a new face. I don't know if any of you have ever been to a Jewish wedding, but I invite you to come and stay with us at our farm in Judea and the next wedding that happens here because they're going to be happening here because this place is beautiful. You stay with us and you experience it. There's nothing like it. It's just so special. It's really like a Biblical thing.

Anyways, we have to have every night, after the wedding, we have sheva brachot and this panim chadashot, it's a new face, a new person every night. And in the sukkah, these are called the ushpizin. Raise your hand if you've heard the word, ushpizin. Ushpizin, we can say it together, ushpizin. It's not only the ancient name of the nightly guests that we spiritually greet each night in our sukkah, but it's also the title of my favorite movie of all time, called Ushpizin. Have you guys seen the movie, Ushpizin? Ed and Julie have. Annett has. Anyways, it's so good and I think I can find the link. (<https://sratim.video/movie/2835>) I remember that there's a link to a free viewing with English subtitles. So, if you want a link, send me a message. You guys remember my phone number. From America, it's 011-972-54-646-2082. Anyways, there's also my email where you can send me a message. I'll get that link to you. And if you can get that, I

would really suggest that you watch that. I think when you see, you'll understand why it's my favorite movie.

But the actual Ushpizin, the holy souls that we greet in our sukkah each night, as you can see in this beautiful picture, Ben if you could put up this picture.



These are the holy souls that we greet each night. As you can see, we have Abraham on the first night, then Isaac, then Jacob, then Joseph, Yosef, and then there's Moshe, and then there's Moshe's brother, Aharon, the High Priest. And then there's King David. So those are the guests. That's a pretty VIP list of guests to have

in our sukkah. And we welcome them in every night with special songs. And we learn about them and that night, they're with us.

And listen, they're many perspectives. But one element that they seem to include is the idea of integration. Right? These days between Yom Kippur and going into Sukkot, it's about integration. Rosh Hashana starts and we perceive God as our King, and then on Yom Kippur, we perceive God as our judge. Yet, both of the relationships, while true, they are somewhat distant. And in and of themselves, if they're isolated and alone, they're incomplete. When we enter Sukkot, we're able to integrate all of those relationships. Yes, He's our King, and yes, He's our judge, but He's also our Father that loves us. In some ways, it's difficult to sort of translate, like our groom, our husband that is yearning for us. And when we enter the sukkah, we're completely enveloped in His loving embrace. We feel this closeness. And particularly in the Land of Israel. And I was conflicted about whether to say this or ever to say this because you're not here in Israel with us and I don't want to make you feel bad. But I don't feel bad. Maybe it causes you to yearn a little bit more, to come and to join us and to be here. And we're so excited for that and the invitation is there.

And you know, my father, he told me that growing up in New York, that when Sukkot came, they often couldn't stay in the sukkah for too long because it was too cold. Then he married my mother and came to Houston, Texas where I can testify along with him that rarely did we stay in the sukkah for too long because the heat and this dang humidity and the mosquitoes. It was just so gross and disgusting. And now he says he understands that Sukkot was designed for the Land of Israel in which it falls out in exactly the perfect climate for being in the sukkah. Because that's what we do. We bring out our furniture. Our cooking supplies. Our beds. Many people endeavor, myself included, to just stay in the sukkah the whole time. A lot of people never even enter their homes at all during Sukkot. And when done that way, I can testify to the truth that there's this transformative beauty of Sukkot that enters your heart in a way that really you could bring with you into the entire year.

Now consider this. What is Sukkot called by? Meaning each holiday has its own theme. Shavuot is the time of the giving of the Torah. Passover is the time of the exodus from Egypt. So what is Sukkot? Tzman simcha teinu – it's the time of our joy. The Torah tells us in Deuteronomy, Devarim, chapter 16:

You shall rejoice on your festival. You shall celebrate for seven days for the Lord your G-d in the place which the Lord shall choose, for the Lord your G-d shall bless you in all of your produce and all that you do and you will be truly joyful.
- Deuteronomy 16:14-15

Tzman sincha teinu. There's something about living in the sukkah. Moving outside in this bamboo hut that for some reason, it results in joy. Because let me tell you, it's in the air. It's in the air in a crazy way that people in Jerusalem and Israel and Judea, they're just so happy. You feel it in the air, you can't miss it. Building their huts, you have to go through the streets of Jerusalem through Nachlaot. They're

building their sukkot, they're decorating them, they're picking out their lulav, and their etrog. Have you ever seen someone pick out an etrog? Ben, I just picked out a few pictures, but this is not an exaggeration. It's not a joke.



You know, people sometimes I remember people would laugh at that. At having Jews look through a magnifying glass, it's like, does God really care if this fruit is so perfect? I don't know if God really cares, but I think God really cares that we care. That we care so much that we want to beautify every element of celebrating this holiday and coming close to Him.

Because sometimes I take a step back and I look at it all through a foreigner's perspective. You know, rabbis, sages, they're looking at lemons through magnifying glasses and paying \$50 for a lemon. It's not a lemon, but it looks like one. There's throngs of Jews, circling the synagogue, shaking and waving palm fronds and other plants and fruits. It must look crazy. Have you ever seen it yourselves? Have you ever seen an actual Sukkot celebration and worship? And in the times of the Temple, forget about it. The greatest sages of Israel, along with everyone else, they would dance through Jerusalem, around the Temple. The great revered sage, Rav Shimon ben Gamliel, he was the nassi, the leader of the Sanhedrin. He was said to be an expert in juggling flaming torches. He would juggle flaming torches. The leader of the Sanhedrin! Can

you imagine such a thing?! The closest thing I can imagine today would be Purim. But this is a very different type of celebration. This was an exuberant, explosive, unbridled joy.

As Rabbi Sacks explains, that the sages became acrobats. Scholars did somersaults. They considered it the ultimate dignity, to sacrifice your dignity in the sacred cause of joy. You know, it reminds me of King David dancing and his wife Michal said, “how could you do such a thing?” Cause he’s dancing before the Lord our God. Where did this joy come from? What generates it? What’s it all about? And this is really the million-dollar question. Because the world we live in has more material abundance than ever before really. And joy seems to be at an all time low. Everybody is seeking happiness, whether pharmaceutically, or through wealth or fame or honor or distraction. Ironically though, the more people get these bench marks, the more people achieve them, the more happiness seems to elude them and at least it seems the more of these things you get, the more at risk from suicide you can become. I mean just look at Hollywood. It’s just filled with misery and depression.

So let me try to dig deep and share why Sukkot is a holiday that I cherish. I’m sorry, I’m going a little bit overtime. I tried to keep it short, I’m not even going to get to everything I really wanted to. But, listen, Sukkot for me, every day is precious. Every moment is precious. I just try to drag it out every moment. It’s just such a powerful holiday.

Many of you remember a couple of months ago, I was going through a pretty rough time. Right? We sort of went through it together, a lot of you really helped me through it and I tried to just be transparent and honest and it just helped me to do that. And I remember meeting with the rabbi/mentor/friend of mine. And he was helping me dig deep and he helped me realize I was in a state of DIS-integration. DIS-integration. Not disintegration, but DIS-integration, meaning that my heart and my mind weren’t aligned. That I believed one thing in my head, but my heart had somehow come on a different wave-length. And Sukkot is a time where the brain and the soul and the heart, the essence are able to integrate and align together.

And I believe that Sukkot really lays bare the reality of our existence in the world, the truth of our existence. Some people are afraid of the truth, I think we’ve all been afraid of it one time or another, I know I have. But if we know the truth is God’s seal, right? We spoke about this. Truth is the seal of God and God is good and truth is always good, no matter how scary or challenging it is. It’s always good. So, what is this fundamental truth that is so elusive, and so counter-intuitive that if we integrate it into our essence on Sukkot, that it can really set us free, at least in my case. What’s that truth? The truth is that our entire lives are a sukkah. That there is no such thing as true security. That our fate is totally out of our hands in the most extreme way. I just always think of someone I knew from Houston that just cut his finger on a little fence, and he got a staff infection and lost his arm and nearly died. Just like over

nothingness. That any attempt to take real control over our lives or the world around is meaningless and futile and will end up in frustration.

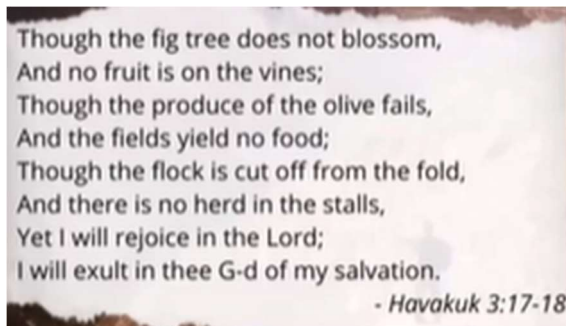
Which brings us to the book of Kohelet, which I have to say is one of my favorite books. Ecclesiastes, right? We read it on Sukkot. And Kohelet means literally vanity, emptiness. It's often described as futility, right? That's what King Solomon is saying. This is futile. Everything is futile. There's nothing new under the sun, it's all futile. And while it could seem depressing, if harnessed in the right way, it's extremely liberating. And if taken to the right place, it inevitably results in joy. Because the sukkah is a temporary dwelling, right? When the wind blows, the walls blow. When you look up, you don't just see the bamboo. According to Jewish law, you need to be able to see the stars. You're just so acutely aware of the temporariness. I don't know if that's a word. The vulnerability of our lives and just as the sukkah is a temporary dwelling, Kohelet really drives home the truth that the human body is a temporary dwelling as well.

To anyone who was just in Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, one of the greatest themes is that life is a fleeting dream, a gust of wind, this is taken from the liturgy, a withering flower. And that we're nothing but dust and ashes and food for the maggots and the worms. That's straight out of the prayers. It's just all so temporary. But we believe in it so much. When we're in our houses during the year, I know I start to really believe that these walls are protecting me and that the roof is protecting me. That this building is protecting me. That this body of mine, that I'm somehow going to live forever. But it's just all so fleeting and temporary. So why does that result in joy? You know particularly like now, the world, the illusions of security are really coming apart. Jeremy mentioned it, but there's this plague that is ravishing the world, the world economies are in flux and global power balances and alliances are shifting, especially after what happened in Afghanistan in fundamental ways that don't appear very good. And as far as security and predictability is concerned, we're at like an all time low.

And that's why, my friends, this sukkah, this year, can be so therapeutic if we really allow it to wash over us. That this global instability is exactly that. It's global. It's out of our hands. There's nothing we can do about it. Fully and completely trusting in HaShem. That's all we have to do. Just put our fears and our doubts exactly where they belong. Just hand it to HaShem. He can handle it. He wants us to hand it to Him. Just allowing us to relinquish our fears and hand off our worries and clear our minds and leave us just with one precious thing. All we're left with is now. Is this very moment. We're under the stars, it can blow away in an instant, which by the way here in Judea, it's happened. The people's sukkahs, not only the people's sukkahs, but people's houses, their caravans fly away. Almost every year it happens.

So, the joy, it lies in embracing that wind. And understanding that that wind comes from one source, from our Father in Heaven. And as Rabbi Sacks explains so beautifully, and I encourage you to read his words in your sukkah this year, if you have one, he brings the words of Havakuk,

perhaps it is in English, Habakkuk? To demonstrate that joy is not dependent on anything, it's not dependent on reason or calculation, here's what he says in Havakuk chapter 3, verse 17 and 18:



That's what Sukkot's about, it's about internalizing from our heads to our hearts. That while we need to do our best to accomplish in this world, to achieve and to do, ultimately, it's in HaShem's Hands. Everything is in HaShem's Hands. And if we have nothing, that doesn't need to stop us from truly rejoicing. Because all we have is this moment that we're totally consumed and

immersed in godliness. Wrapped in it.

I remember in the army, I always, always had my M-16 on me. But on Sukkot, I had something else slung over my shoulder, my lulav. I would hold my lulav in my right hand and the etrog in my left hand and it was like a sword and a shield, as funny as that sounds. And on a spiritual level, our sages tell us, that's exactly what they are. They're a sword and a shield. And I'll never forget my fellow soldiers joining me as we circled the Torah with our lulav and our etrogs. And it hit me. That these are our real weapons. These are our real strengths. For these armies, they may put their faith in chariots. And those armies? They may put their faith in horses, right? You know this Psalm that King David tells us – but we put our faith in the Name of HaShem. These are our weapons of faith and these are our weapons of trust and our battles are fought primarily in the spiritual world.

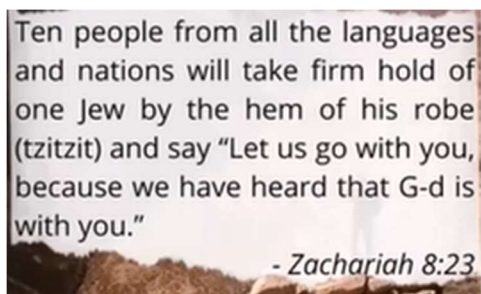
And these are the weapons of that dimension. The lowest dimension, that's the M-16's. And that's why Sukkot here in the Land of Israel is so meaningful and powerful because while it may not always feel like it, while we may be able to convince ourselves that we're mighty and powerful, strong, with a strong IDF. I was disabused of that belief when I actually joined the IDF and I saw what really goes on there. We're surrounded by 22 Arab countries and 45 Muslim countries. And even today, we're exponentially out-numbered and out-weaponed. And while we don't like to come to terms with it, every day that goes by since the creation of our little country, is a miracle of God. That He spreads His own sukkah of peace and protection over us.

And so, in my sukkah out here on the Judean frontier, I feel like I'm in a sukkah within a sukkah. I'll tell you what I mean by that. It's not a coincidence that these two holy commandments, the commandment to live in Israel and the commandment to build a sukkah are both unique in the very same way. Maybe it's even coming together for you right now.

Rav Naftali Ropshitz, he explained that some mitzvot are performed by the hands and some by the feet and some by the mouth. And when they're performed, they elevate and sanctify the

limb that's used to perform it. But the sukkah, it's the only mitzvah that depends on the entire body. Right? From head to toe. If we're not completely in the sukkah, then it doesn't count. We don't fulfill that mitzvah. And what other mitzvah is fulfilled with the entire body? The mitzvah of living in the Land of Israel. King David says in Psalm 76, verse 3, His sukkah is in Shalem, meaning in Yerushalyim. I encourage you to look up Psalm 76. His sukkah is in Shalem and His dwelling is in Zion. And on this verse, the Vilna Gaon, that these are both references because they are exactly fulfilled with our entire being – body and soul. The sukkah and dwelling in Zion.

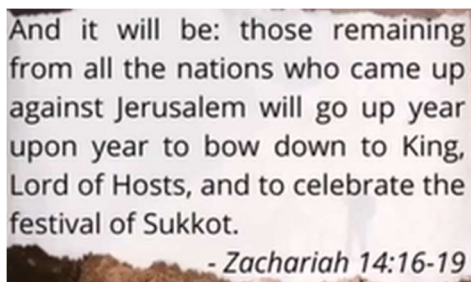
Alright my friends, I was afraid this would happen. I am way over time, like criminally over time. And I was afraid this would happen because I haven't even gotten the opportunity to scratch the surface of it. We didn't even get to the Torah portion and it's so beautiful and they're so many verses that are so precious to me that I really want to share. But I really think that the entire year there's no fellowship that there's more to cover than this one. So I'm going to try to convince Jeremy to come to my sukkah, like I said and put out a podcast together or a message together to share more. But it's just hard to imagine leaving like this. And please remember, by the way, remember to send us your thoughts and your questions and your prayer requests. Maybe you could send us a question, we can just film a little answer and send it out to you guys. But the truth is, that the very existence of this fellowship is a testimony to the power of Sukkot in our times. For Zecharia, right, Zechariah the prophet, he foretold in chapter 8, verse 23. He said,



Ten people from all the languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe (tzitzit) and say "Let us go with you, because we have heard that G-d is with you."
- Zachariah 8:23

That's actually happened to me a few times in my life, literally, but on some degree that's happening in this fellowship here.

But he also prophesied about Sukkot in chapter 14, verse 16:



And it will be: those remaining from all the nations who came up against Jerusalem will go up year upon year to bow down to King, Lord of Hosts, and to celebrate the festival of Sukkot.
- Zachariah 14:16-19

My friends, these days are already here. They're already coming into the world, the righteous of the nations, all of you. Many of you, I'm sure have already been to Israel on Sukkot. Now it's less which is painful because of corona, but the day will come when you will all come on a Sukkot pilgrimage and there will be joy and celebration that is difficult for us to imagine. But one thing I can tell you for sure, is that when those days come, and I believe they'll be very soon, there are two Judean families who are eagerly awaiting each and every one of you to join us in our sukkot and we can rejoice in HaShem's goodness together.

Alright, I love you all so much and I want to bless you with a Sukkot filled with joy and purpose and connection. And allow me to bless you as we enter this time of great joy.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

Shalom my friends!