

The Secret of Yisrael in Galus - Transcript

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Shiur Overview

Combined Argument Flow Summary: Fasting, Asceticism, Culture, Exile, and the Torah as Sword

1. Opening Context: The 17th of Tammuz Fast Day

The class takes place on Shabbos, the 17th of Tammuz, a Jewish fast day.

Side Digression: Historical Events of the 17th of Tammuz

A brief, somewhat humorous group attempt to recall the events associated with the 17th of Tammuz: the breach of Jerusalem's walls, the breaking of the Luchos, Apostomos burning the Torah, Pompey entering the Holy of Holies, etc. Some details listed in the Mishnah remain uncertain.

The Gemara states that the obligation to fast depends on whether it is wartime or peacetime; in peacetime it may only be a **minhag** (custom). There is a **machlokes** (dispute), and the Rambam's position seems inconsistent ("depending on which mood the Rambam is in"). The core question posed: What is the **pshat** (true meaning) of this custom of fasting?

2. Connecting to the Broader Sugya: Theories of Fasting and Asceticism

This ties into the ongoing course topic: eating and not eating, and specifically the reasons for **inui haguf** (mortification/affliction of the body). Different theories of fasting were discussed the previous week. The term **ta'anis** is linked to **inui** (affliction), and the verse speaks of **inui nefesh** (affliction of the soul), though the precise translation is left open.

Thesis announced: "The point of fasting is not to fast." This conforms to the theories of asceticism under discussion.

3. The Rambam's Theory of Asceticism: Focus and Time

3a. Core Argument

Asceticism — whether regarding food or sexuality — is primarily about **eliminating waste of time**. Excessive eating consumes time that could be devoted to higher pursuits.

3b. Yom Kippur as Paradigm

The Rambam explicitly says Yom Kippur is a day dedicated entirely to "things of the soul" / spiritual matters. Fasting is instrumental to freeing up time.

3c. Application to Ta'anis

The halacha states the most important time of a fast day is **the afternoon**, because that is when the freed-up time (normally spent on meals) becomes available for extended study or spiritual work. If fasting makes you weak, it defeats the purpose — the mechanism only works if the freed time is usable.

Side Digression: Freeing Money as Well as Time

A student asks whether the same logic extends to freeing up **money** (not just time). This is affirmed but deferred.

4. Deeper Philosophical Principle: Human Limitation and the Tragedy of Focus (Tzimtzum)

The Rambam's theory of asceticism is really a theory about **focus** (**havana**, **tzimtzum**), not about anything being inherently wrong with the physical. Humans, unlike God, are **finite**: they can only be in one place, do one thing at a time. Eating is not wrong, but for a limited human being, eating and deep thinking are practically incompatible — you must **choose**. This choice is described as **tragic**: human life involves tragic trade-offs precisely because we are not God. God can engage in the spiritual and physical simultaneously; humans cannot.

Side Digression / Polemic: Against Certain Modern/Chassidic Theories

Certain modern theorists (implicitly Chassidic and neo-Chassidic thinkers) claim one can "live in the world and still be with God" simultaneously, or "eat and fast at the same time." This reflects a **failure of humility** — a non-recognition of human limitations. From God's perspective, there is no conflict between physical and spiritual. But humans are not God. There is **a** point to wanting to see the world from God's perspective, but the importance of **humility in recognizing our need for limitations** must be insisted upon.

5. Practical Discussion: Does Fasting Actually Work as a Focus Strategy?

5a. Student Challenge

Eating only takes five minutes — is this really about time management?

5b. Response

Eating involves far more than five minutes — preparation, digestion, post-meal fatigue all consume time and energy. Digestion literally reduces mental focus. Personal practice shared: not eating (or limiting intake, avoiding coffee) until around 2 PM daily, finding that productive work stops once the fast is broken. Intellectual/spiritual work demands enormous **mental energy and focus**, and the body's digestive processes compete with that.

6. Parallel Practices in Judaism and Other Traditions

Side Digression: Pre-Prayer and Pre-Mitzvah Fasting

The custom of not eating before Shacharis (morning prayers); similar Catholic/Eastern Orthodox practice of fasting from midnight until receiving communion. Ashkenazi/Chassidic tradition of fasting before performing a mitzvah (before taking the lulav, before Shofar, etc.).

Side Digression: Marina Abramovic

The performance artist Marina Abramovic describes in her memoir fasting before performances as a technique to achieve intense focus ("be in the zone"). This is cited as secular corroboration that fasting enhances focus. Humorous asides

about her being "accused of being a witch," her appearance in Hillary Clinton's leaked emails, and a MoMA membership from working nearby.

7. Student Objection: Hunger as Counter-Productive Distraction

7a. Challenge

If you're hungry, that itself is a distraction — so fasting could be self-defeating.

7b. Response

This is an **implementation problem**, not a problem with the theory. Hunger is manageable; experienced fasters develop a "switch" where hunger subsides. Most bodily cues, if ignored briefly, stop being intrusive. A student suggests the ideal is to become so focused that you simply **forget to eat** — fasting as a byproduct of focus rather than its cause. Both directions work.

8. Defense of Asceticism Against Modern Aversion

Modern people have a strong aversion to asceticism, partly driven by consumer culture ("denying what advertisements want us to buy"). The Shulchan Aruch's caution against excessive fasting is acknowledged, but the pushback is firm: **fasting works, and every single spiritual tradition has used it**. It is "literally, scientifically, materialistic" — you don't need to believe in anything for fasting to produce results. The claim that we've "figured out you should never fast" is "really dumb." Moderation (e.g., liquid fasts) is fine, but dismissal is not.

9. Communal Fasting: The Core Purpose Is Gathering

Communal fasts are about **focusing the community**, not just individual affliction. The biblical word "**tzom**" may not even mean "fasting" — it may mean something like "**a gathering**." Proof: In Yoel, "call a fast" means "get the people together." The Shulchan Aruch emphasizes that **coming to shul is key on a fast day** — more so than on regular days. The scheduling of mincha gedola on fast days reflects this: the afternoon gathering (when you would have eaten) is the main event.

Side Digression: Modern Implementation Failures

Schools send kids home early on fast days, but nobody does anything meaningful with the time — this defeats the purpose. The point was supposed to be communal gathering and focus, not just an empty day.

10. Fasting and Tzedakah (Charity) — The Yeshayahu Connection

The main point of communal fasting, per Yeshayahu, is **giving tzedakah**. The question: what does not eating have to do with social justice? **Simple answer:** You save money by not buying food, and you give that money to the poor. Corollary: the "break-fast" meal shouldn't cost more than what you saved — otherwise you haven't actually saved anything. This connects fasting to **focusing financial energy, communal energy, and time** toward others.

11. The "Communal Solidarity" Theory of Fasting

Under this theory, fasting naturally connects to tzedakah and communal responsibility. Fasting helps you **remember those who genuinely lack food**, creating solidarity with the poor.

12. The "Protest/Beseeching" Theory of Fasting (Professor Lambert)

Professor Lambert (Bible scholar, author of *How Repentance Became Biblical*) argues that **fasting is a form of protest or display of distress directed at God**. The logic: The Tanakh repeatedly says God has compassion on the poor and broken. By ripping clothes, not eating, and making yourself look destitute, **you trigger God's rachamim (compassion)**. This is not mere manipulation — it draws on a genuine divine attribute (God loves the downtrodden). **Yeshayahu's critique** then becomes: Don't just play at being afflicted — actually help the truly afflicted. You can't fool God with performance; you must embody the middah (quality) for real.

Side Digression: Danger of Slipping into Baal Worship

A student raises the parallel to the **prophets of Baal** in the Eliyahu story, who also afflicted themselves to get divine response. The danger: self-affliction for divine manipulation can accidentally become idolatrous. Acknowledged as "good mussar."

Side Digression: Theology Caveat

"This is not a theology class. You can't manipulate God. But it turns out you can, somewhat." The mechanism must be explained — either prayer makes you a better person, or it works through some other means. Left deliberately unresolved.

13. Communal Teshuvah — A Historical Aside

A striking claim: **the last time the Jewish people did collective teshuvah (repentance) was in the time of Ezra and Nechemiah**. Since then, only individuals have done teshuvah, never the group as a whole. Presented somewhat tongue-in-cheek ("don't tell anyone") but underscores the difficulty of communal repentance — you first need to actually be a group.

14. Fasting as Anti-Consumerism / "Plastic Judaism" Critique

A personal interpretation: **fasting is a protest against consumerism**. A student coins the term "**plastic Judaism**" — Judaism that comes "pre-wrapped," commodified, and purchasable as a beautiful package. Acknowledged as a chiddush (novel interpretation) and somewhat anachronistic, but seen as relevant to the modern condition.

15. The Central Klippah of Our Era: Productivity, Busyness, Consumerism

15a. The Magical Principle of Naming Klippot

Key principle: Knowing the *name* of a klippah (spiritual husk/obstacle) gives you power over it. This is presented as a quasi-magical rule.

Supporting logic: Those who have power over you can call you by name, but you cannot call them by name (e.g., you don't call your father by his first name; you say "sir" to authority figures). The asymmetry of naming reflects power dynamics. **The modern problem:** Rationalists don't believe in klippot, so they refuse to name them — which is precisely how the klippot maintain their power. People are "already trapped," so ignoring them no longer works. The only remedy is to **name the klippah explicitly**.

15b. Naming the Klippah

The great klippah of our era: **productivity, busyness, and consumerism**, all interlinked. This explains: no real vacation time in America; "unlimited vacation" policies that effectively mean zero vacation; the life pattern of ruining yourself with work for 50 years, then being too addicted to stop; the endless daily obligations (work, family, WhatsApp notifications, etc.).

15c. "Savage Commands" (Mitzvot of the Klippah)

A borrowed term: **"savage commands"** — the primal, bodily, and social commands that society imposes. These are the unwritten obligations (answer texts, check notifications, respond to social demands) that people observe **far more strictly** than actual religious mitzvot.

16. The Smartphone as the Paradigmatic Klippah

16a. Hesech HaDa'at (Distraction) — From Tefillin to Phones

The Gemara says one must not have *hesech hada'at* (mental distraction) from tefillin. This was never practically understood — until smartphones arrived. **People have zero minutes of hesech hada'at from their phones per day.** A normal person unlocks their phone ~300 times daily (phones track this in settings). You're never more than ~4 minutes away from your phone mentally.

16b. The Social Mitzvah of Constant Availability

The compulsion to check your phone is experienced as a **social obligation** ("What if someone texts me?"). Humorous note: most phone use is checking if one's wife texted. People survived fine before cell phones without 30 daily spousal communications.

16c. The Shul Phone Ban as Naming the Klippah

"Evil Orthodox rabbis" who ban phones in shul are actually performing the act of **naming the klippah**. And it works: you go to shul for three hours, your wife doesn't need anything, nothing happens. This proves the "savage command" of constant availability is illusory.

Side Digression: Shabbat as the Same Idea

A student suggests Shabbat itself is exactly this — freeing from each generation's particular busyness. Agreed. "The car and the phone was a match made in hell."

17. Misidentification of the Real Problem

17a. Rabbis Focus on the Wrong Klippah

Most rabbinic discourse focuses on *arayot* (sexual prohibitions) as the great spiritual danger. But **this is not the real problem of our era**. The real problem is the constant compulsion of social/digital obligations. Pornography use is maybe half an hour a day and isn't fundamentally new. The **quantitatively dominant** spiritual problem is the phone-as-social-obligation.

Side Digression: Device Separation Theory

A personal theory: you should have a **different device for every activity** (e.g., a dedicated book reader by the bed). Phones are the worst format for doing anything substantive. The phone's unique "klippah quality" includes being held six inches from your face constantly.

17b. The Mitzvot Before the Aveirot

We must understand **what the "mitzvot" (commands) are** that we're obeying when we compulsively check our phones — before we can identify the aveirot (sins). Each phone check is experienced as a mitzvah: "Maybe someone needs help," "Maybe I should acknowledge their joke with an emoji." These are genuine social obligations. **But even a mitzvah, done to excess, becomes an aveirah.** Having *no* way to be contacted electronically might itself be a violation (perhaps *d'rabbanan*), implying total disconnection isn't the answer either — but the excess is the problem.

18. Fasting (Taanit) as a Deeper Form of Shabbos

18a. Opening Digression: Availability and Communication Norms

A humorous aside about modern expectations of instant communication. Being in the bathroom doesn't mean you hate someone. The **mitzvah of social obligation** (being available, responsive) is itself counterbalanced by other mitzvot that create space for withdrawal — such as fasting days.

18b. Fasting as Breaking the Cycle — A Stronger Shabbos

Core claim: Taanit serves a function similar to Shabbos but more radical. Shabbos provides weekly rest, but it becomes predictable and can be co-opted. **The problem with Shabbos:** Like capitalism (invoking Marx), the system absorbs its own opposition. Capitalism "sells you the rope to hang yourself with" — it commodifies even rest. Corporate wellness retreats are a kind of Shabbos designed to make you work *more*. You can "buy a Shabbos package." Therefore, Shabbos and Yom Tov can be "subsumed by the klippah." The rest becomes instrumentalized for productivity.

Taanit's unique role: It must be **unpredictable** — it breaks the cycle in a way Shabbos cannot. "Sometimes on Wednesday, I have to do Teshuvah." The fast cannot be anticipated and absorbed by the system. It creates genuine disruption.

18c. Self-Critique

The way fasting is typically practiced (just following halachos mechanically, dealing with children, etc.) often fails to achieve its purpose. **The real goal:** To create not just *time* but *emotional, physical, and existential space* — "a possibility" for something other than daily routine.

19. The Archetypal Fast vs. Fixed Calendar Fasts

19a. The True Taanit Is Called in Response to Crisis

The **archetypal fast is not the fixed calendar fast** (like Shiva Asar B'Tammuz), but rather the communally declared fast in response to a specific problem. "We call a fast because there's a problem. And we realize that we can't go on working." The four fixed fasts are a kind of institutionalized version, but the original concept is reactive and situational.

Side Digression: Constant Learning vs. Thinking

Just as constant productivity defeats itself, constant Torah learning without pause for *thinking* is also problematic. Anecdote of a man learning from a sefer at a bus stop: "You're learning so much all the time, when are you going to think?" **Taanit means:** "I don't have time to learn" — and that's the point. It creates space for reflection, not more input.

20. Historical/Textual Support: Withdrawal for Spiritual Work

20a. Rav Tzadok HaKohen and Rav Chaim Vital

Rav Tzadok cites Rav Chaim Vital, who one day told his wife he had a three-day "business trip" to a mountain — actually a spiritual retreat. **Parallel to Avraham Avinu and the Akeidah:** Avraham's family wasn't surprised by the trip itself — only Yitzchak noticed the missing lamb. This implies Avraham regularly took spiritual retreats to mountains, and this was *normal life*. Rav Tzadok compiles a list of such figures; he connects this to why the Avot were shepherds — the lifestyle allowed for periodic withdrawal.

Side Digression: Modern Impossibility and Halachic Caution

This model is admirable but practically difficult today. People who would spontaneously leave for Shabbos without warning their wives — halacha says you're *technically allowed* but it's "not a good thing to do." People have died attempting extreme spiritual withdrawal, so one must care for one's nefesh (life/soul). **Core point remains:** There *must* be space for non-routine spiritual work. Communal fasts and similar structures are meant to provide this.

21. Transition: The Deeper Meaning of Physical Affliction (Inui)

21a. Recap of Pshat-Level Reasons for Fasting

A transition from the "pshat of pshat" (plain meaning) to deeper layers. Recap of reasons discussed previously: **Paying back for sinful pleasure** — you stole pleasure through sin; pain is the repayment — like a bank account. Pain is still considered *bad*; it's instrumental, not valued for its own sake.

Side Digression: The Christian Approach to Pain

Christian model: Participating in the Passion of Christ through suffering. Christians are unique in valuing pain "for its own sake" (flagellation, asceticism). Pre-Vatican II flagellation practices described — monks would recite Tehillim 51 and 130 while self-flagellating, with superiors monitoring to ensure no one *enjoyed* the pain too much (masochism). Even in Christianity, the logic is still transactional (atoning, offering up suffering for others), not pure embrace of pain — though the rhetoric comes closer to valuing suffering intrinsically.

21b. Toward a New Pshat: The State of Klipah/Cheit

A **different interpretation** of physical affliction connected to "the state of the klipah, the state of the cheit" (the spiritual shell/sin-state). Reference to people who cut themselves as an analogy — connecting to the previous week's discussion that people can derive pleasure even from pain. The argument is cut off mid-sentence (content restrictions), but the direction is: there is a deeper understanding of fasting's physical dimension that relates to the existential condition of being trapped in sin/klipah, not merely transactional repayment.

22. Clocks, Modernity, and the Standardization of Time

Side Digression: Clocks as an Invention of Capitalism

Clocks were invented for trains, for industrial coordination. **Bergson's protest** against clock-time as alienating is referenced. The halakhic precision of shkiah (sunset) being pinpointed to the minute (e.g., 8:12) produces a "deep anxiety" — modernity's universalizing impulse has colonized even Jewish ritual time. Can one simply observe "when it gets dark" rather than follow precise clock-time? Left unresolved but flagged as a genuine question.

23. Standardization as a Tool of State Power

The standardization of time connects to the broader **standardization of measurement** — the meter, the kilogram — imposed by the French emperor as a project of Enlightenment rationality. The U.S. remains a holdout using customary units (feet, inches), treated as "unenlightened." Canada pragmatically mixes systems. The real motivation behind standardization was **state control and taxation:** if every locality has its own measures ("shiurim"), the state cannot efficiently manage and tax.

James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* is cited as the theoretical framework: states need legibility — uniform categories — to govern. This book is called "very important for Kabbalah," suggesting deep relevance to the broader project.

24. Central Philosophical Thesis: Universal ≠ Uniform (Kant's Conflation)

This is the **key philosophical move**. Modernity, and Kant in particular, made a fateful **misidentification:**

- **Universal** (objective): Rules/truths that are valid beyond any individual's subjective preference — they are *true* independently of the thinker.

- **Uniform:** Rules that apply *identically* to everyone in every place and time.

Kant correctly saw that ethics must be **objective** (not reducible to personal desire). But he then **leaped** to the conclusion that ethical rules must therefore be **uniform** — the same everywhere, always, for everyone. This is why Kant insists you cannot lie even to a Nazi asking if you're hiding Jews: lying violates the universal (i.e., uniform) moral law.

Counter-thesis: Objective truths can be realized differently in different particular contexts without losing their objectivity. Just as there are no "universal humans" walking around — only particular people living specific lives — so too ethical and human goods must be articulated *particularly* to be real, even though they point toward something universal.

25. Application: Jewish Problems as Human Problems

This philosophical distinction resolves a persistent modern dilemma: **Are Jewish concerns particular or universal?**

Answer: All Jewish problems are human problems. Jews are not a different species. But the universal human good can only be *lived* and *articulated* through particular forms of life. The particular is not a deficient version of the universal — it is the **only way** the universal becomes actual. The false

binary (Jewish vs. human concerns) arises from the Kantian conflation of universal with uniform.

26. The Tanya's Claim About Jewish Distinctiveness — Reinterpreted

The **Tanya's** (R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi) controversial claim that Jews are a different kind of being is addressed:

- The common modern reading that this is "genetic racism" is rejected — the Tanya never heard of genes or races.

- **Reinterpretation:** The Tanya is saying that **the tzaddik (the truly good human being) is as different from ordinary humans as humans are from animals** — not ontologically, but in terms of the *degree of actualization* of human potential.

- This is a claim about the **gap between potential and actualization:** a fully realized human is so radically different from an unrealized one that the difference *looks like* a species difference, but it isn't one in kind — it's one in degree of fulfillment.

- The "species" language is metaphorical/analogical, not biological.

Side Digression: Can a Ger (Convert) Become a Navi (Prophet)?

A student raises the classic question. Dismissed as a "trolley problem" — a question people get stuck on unproductively. **A ger can surely be a navi.** The Kuzari may disagree, but this is treated as a secondary debate. The Arizal acknowledges genetic/inherited spiritual tendencies, but this doesn't create absolute barriers. The practical answer: *Try.* If a ger encounters difficulty, that's an empirical discovery, not a metaphysical prohibition.

27. The Deep Problem: Lacking Language for Jewish Particularity

There is something genuinely important about Jewish distinctiveness that **we lack adequate language to express.** Every attempt to articulate it produces "weird things" — claims that sound like racism, or essentialism, or that collapse under scrutiny. Yet the underlying intuition is real and significant.

Proposed framework: Humans are one species — this is a **religious conviction** (one ancestor, one humanity), not originally a scientific one. **Early modern scientists and Darwinists** actually doubted the unity of the human species — "scientific racism" was partly grounded in the empirical observation that human populations differ enormously, so perhaps they are different species. It was **religious thinkers** who insisted on the unity of humanity.

28. Historical Digression: Religion vs. Science on Race

Religious missionaries (e.g., in Africa) were motivated by the belief in a single human species, *against* secular Darwinists and Enlightenment thinkers who posited multiple human species. Kant and many celebrated modern thinkers were, by today's standards, extreme racists — believing different races were different species — because the science of their day gave no reason to posit a common ancestor. Religious abolitionists held the opposite view (one human race), a piece of history suppressed by "anti-religious propaganda." Modern science

now supports common ancestry, but questions about where lineages split and converge remain open.

29. Human Communities and the Problem of Monoculture

There are **human communities**, and the question is how many genuinely distinct ones exist today. Provocative suggestion: there may now be **only one global culture** — the culture of people who watch Hollywood (essentially everyone). This is identified as a real philosophical problem, connected to thinkers like **Robin Hanson** and the concept of **monoculture.**

Side Digression: Are There Still Distinct Cultures?

Countries like Iran, China, and Russia are cited as *possibly* having different cultures, but their political leaders are **deliberately** trying to separate from a default global/UN culture. By default, everyone participates in one dominant world culture; who "runs" it is secondary.

Side Digression: Conspiracy Theories and Cultural Coordination

A sympathetic but critical reading of conspiracy theorists: they are **sensing something real** (strange, powerful cultural coordination) but lack the intellectual tools to articulate it properly, so they produce bizarre theories. The coordination is actually "out in the open" — not secret. It results from **founder effects, path dependencies,** and practical necessities (e.g., English dominance in computing, air traffic control, global communication).

30. The Dominance of English as Evidence of Monoculture

English (and to a lesser extent Chinese) are effectively the only languages that matter globally. "Language is a dialect with an army and a navy" — and the navy is the U.S. Navy. Computer code, air traffic control, global commerce — all operate in English. Even countries like India, with enormous linguistic diversity, function in English at the level that matters for participation in the modern world. The "American empire" is acknowledged as extraordinarily powerful culturally.

31. The Illusion of Cultural Diversity

We are **accustomed to talking about** different cultures, but upon reflection, much of it is **the same culture wearing different masks.** People across the globe share roughly the same morals, the same sense of good and bad, with only minor variations (e.g., a ~30-year lag between conservatives and liberals in different countries, but within the same moral universe). This convergence is what fuels conspiracy thinking — someone must be coordinating it — but the real explanation is more mundane (technology, path dependency, practical necessity).

32. Central Philosophical Claim: Culture Is Constitutive of Humanity, Not an Add-On

What makes humans distinctive is **culture:** language, belief systems, stories, literature, religion. This is **not an optional extra** layered on top of biology. It is **part of what a human being is.** Language here means not just the capacity to make sounds (animals do that) but the capacity to **communicate**

across vast distances of space and time through symbolic coding systems — something no animal does to a comparable degree. The difference in degree is sufficient to constitute a **difference in species** (functionally speaking). Therefore, a **full description of a human being** must include their culture — not just their biology. Even an alien scientist studying humanity would need to learn human languages, belief systems, and stories.

33. The Relevant Time Frame for "Human" in This Sense

If a human being is essentially a cultural being, then "humanity" in the relevant sense only extends back as far as **continuous cultural memory** — roughly **6,000–10,000 years**. Cave paintings from 30,000 years ago exist, but no one knows what they mean; there is no cultural continuity with them. This aligns (noted with some irony) with the **young-earth creationist** timeframe — not because of theology, but because of the limits of cultural memory.

34. Critique of the Enlightenment "Universal Human"

The Enlightenment ideal of a "universal human" — stripped of all particular cultural features — **never actually existed**. That "universal human" was really just a **Frenchman of the 18th/19th century** who imagined himself as the default by stripping away all "ornamental" particularities (specific religion, specific customs, etc.). But this stripping is itself an **arbitrary cultural choice** — someone else would strip away different things and arrive at a different "universal." This Enlightenment figure "won" in a sense: we largely live in the culture he created, due to technology and global mechanisms.

35. The Fragility of the Enlightenment/Technological World Order

The current global order **appears** to run on material/technological necessity (computers work because of bits, which are physical). But even computers encode **philosophical and metaphysical choices** — how categories are organized, parent-child relationships in code, etc. More importantly, the whole system **depends on humans believing in certain ideals** — freedom, liberalism, shared norms of communication. If people stop believing in or communicating through these shared higher-level ideals, the material infrastructure itself breaks down.

Concrete example: Why don't fishing boats cut the undersea cables connecting continents? Because the people on those boats participate in a shared culture (they "speak English," i.e., they recognize the authority of the system backed by the U.S. Navy). If that cultural buy-in disappears — if someone decides they don't actually care about the shared order — the physical infrastructure is trivially vulnerable.

36. The Insufficiency of the "Universal Human" — The Doctor Example

Someone might say, "I don't care what religion my doctor is, as long as he understands the human body." This seems reasonable. **Counterpoint:** You also need the doctor **not to murder you**. If the doctor holds a different moral framework (e.g., a utilitarian calculus that harvesting one patient's organs

to save five is justified), then shared biological knowledge is not enough.

Reference to Columbia Medical Ethics: Someone on the board changed the definition of death to make transplants work — an example of how supposedly "neutral" universal science smuggles in particular ethical commitments. **The hospital gown metaphor:** In the hospital, everyone wears the same gown, yarmulkes are removed — superficially everyone is "the same universal human." But this sameness is an illusion; the deeper moral and cultural layers still govern life-and-death decisions.

37. The "Second Level" Controls the "First Level"

Restatement of a prior week's argument: Yes, all humans get hungry (biological universality). But actual humans always get hungry **for specific culturally-defined food**. The biological ("first level") is real but less determinative than the cultural/particular ("second level"). The second level (culture, ethics, metaphysics) in many senses **controls** the first level (biology, material needs). A doctor with different ethics can kill you regardless of shared biology.

Shakespeare reference (**Merchant of Venice**): "If you prick us, do we not bleed?" — Yes, but the interesting question is **why would you prick me?** The universal biological fact (bleeding) is trivial; what matters is the particular moral and cultural framework that governs human interaction. Human beings are interesting and real **at the particular level**, not at the universal. The universal human is "boring" — there is nothing interesting about what all humans share; everything interesting is in the differences.

38. The Core Question: How Peoples Have Figured Out How to Live

Every group of people has historically figured out **a specific way to live**. This includes: relationship to God / ultimate metaphysics; what is really real; what is good; how to propagate values to children, students, friends; how to sustain and reproduce the human world (culture).

Critical qualification: Nobody has figured this out in a **universal** way. What is called "universal" is always a **specific** way that has been universalized. The Enlightenment thinkers (17th–18th century) who spoke of the "universal human" actually had specific ideas of universal ethics; they were "smarter than the modern guy" because they at least recognized the universal human must have a universal **mind** (hence Descartes' materialism as a coherent move). The modern version (utilitarianism, etc.) is just another particular ethics claiming universality.

39. The Jewish Question as a Case of the General Question of Peoples

The "Jewish question" is really the question of **any** people — the Jews simply make the problem visible. It is also the "Irish question," etc. **The question posed:** What happens when a people's specific way of life is **threatened**?

40. The City as the Embodiment of a Way of Life

A city is not "sticks and stones." A city is a place where humans live in a **specific way** — architecture, business practices,

marriage customs, friendship norms, even how they cheat. All of this *works* only because of culture. **Key claim:** "By default, humans don't work. You have to have culture."

41. Destruction of a City = Destruction of a Way of Being Human

When someone destroys a city, the specific good way of being human that those people had *ceases to exist*. Wars are about justice/the correct way to live (citing Socrates and Al-Farabi): The destroyers believe they have a *better* city/culture and that everyone should adopt it.

Side Digression: Dehumanization

Challenge to the modern concept of "dehumanization": The idea that you must dehumanize someone before killing them only makes sense if you assume a universal human dignity (a quasi-scientific concept). **Traditional view:** There are "all kinds of human." Being human is divided in many ways. Killing isn't necessarily premised on denying someone's humanity — it may be premised on the claim that one way of being human is *better* than another. Whether being a "better human" gives you the right to kill — "that's a different question."

42. Genocide as the "Real" Murder — A Provocative Thesis

Since a human being is not self-sustaining but inherently *social*, killing an individual is tragic but not the deepest form of destruction. **"Real murder" = destroying a whole people/city/civilization** — what we now call genocide. Only then is a *human being* (in the full cultural sense) truly destroyed.

43. The Fate of Peoples: Absorption and Cultural Death

Biblical illustration: The tribe of Zebulun no longer exists. Some Zebulonites became Judeans. They were "destroyed as their kind of people" — even if biologically their descendants survive. **Two mechanisms of destruction:**

1. **Conquest:** The conqueror believes his way of life is superior and imposes it.
2. **Voluntary absorption:** Some peoples recognize another group's way of life as better and voluntarily join (Zebulonites becoming Judeans).

Key clarification: "We're not talking about biology." Biological descent is irrelevant here; what matters is the *cultural* identity. If the culture ceases, the people ceases — regardless of genetic continuity. This is described as the "normal situation" — the destruction or absorption of peoples is the ordinary course of history.

44. The Problem of Destruction vs. Exile

When a culture is fully destroyed, there is no philosophical problem — there is no one left to ask questions. But **exile** introduces a genuinely novel and difficult problem. The Jews, particularly after the Second Temple's destruction, refused to accept the verdict of war. They were not fully destroyed; they continued to exist even after their city was breached and their temple razed.

45. What Is a City? — The Case of Jerusalem

45a. Jerusalem as Ideal vs. Physical Location

A sustained exploration of what it means for Jerusalem to "exist" or be "destroyed." **A city is not its walls or its physical location but the culture it embodies.** Modern Jerusalem — with streets named "Olympia" and "King George" — is arguably not Jerusalem at all but a semi-European, semi-Middle Eastern city built in its place. Different neighborhoods are essentially "fighting about which city it is."

Side Digression: Cities Rebuilt in Different Locations

Even ancient Jerusalem was rebuilt multiple times in slightly different places — King David's city is not the same physical location as King Herod's city, though both were considered "Jerusalem." The Jebusite city became a Davidic city; what matters is the identity, not the coordinates.

45b. The Naomi Shemer–Amos Oz Dispute

Illustrative anecdote: The songwriter Naomi Shemer described the Old City's market as "empty" during Jordanian occupation. Amos objected — it was full of people. Shemer responded with an analogy: it's like telling a man whose wife was taken by another that she's fine, just with someone else. **The point:** a city full of different people living a different culture is not the same city. It's just the same place.

45c. The City as Culture, Not Place

The location may be a necessary condition (climate, geography, economic base), but **the city is the human culture it represents.** The physical setting enables but does not constitute the city.

46. The Paradox of Continued Existence After Destruction

Jerusalem — and Jewish culture — continued to exist after being destroyed. This creates a **dual problem:**

- **Intellectually:** It's hard to justify or even describe what is going on when a destroyed culture persists.
- **Practically:** It's hard to survive in this condition even if the justification exists.

These two problems are connected. **Rav Saadiah Gaon** interpreted the prophetic verse "no weapon formed against you shall prosper" (*v'chol kli yutzar alecha lo yitzlach*) as a promise that Jews would always have good intellectual answers to challenges against their religion. **Conquering by argument and conquering by the sword are functionally similar** — both aim to convince a people to stop being what they are.

47. The Inseparability of Jewish People and Jewish Culture

Key claim: There is no Jewish culture without the Jewish people. The "Jewish way of instantiating the human good" requires actual people living it. One cannot coherently say "Judaism is about religion, not a people" because without the people, the religion ceases to exist in any humanly meaningful way. Abstract truth might persist in some "world of form," but **human truth requires human instantiation.**

48. The Challenge of Rival Cultures: Rome

The Romans (who still exist as the Roman Church, and whose cultural legacy — columns, ideals, institutions — persists) present a genuine challenge:

- They have their own plausible claim to a good way of life.
- They conquered the Jews militarily, which is itself an argument for cultural superiority.
- Their gods "won" in the immediate historical sense.

This sets up **the question of assimilation**: Why continue as Jews when a powerful, attractive alternative exists and is open to you? (The Romans were largely open to immigration/assimilation; Josephus is the famous example.)

49. The Jewish Answer (Provisional)

Jews historically are **not exclusivist** — they don't claim one must be Jewish to be good (citing the Rambam). However, they maintain that **for them**, the Jewish way is better, or at least that they cannot achieve their good through Roman culture:

- "Your holy books mean nothing to us; ours do something for us."
- Even without the Temple rituals, Jewish holy books and remaining practices are claimed to be superior to the full apparatus of Roman religion.
- Various Jews over the generations answered this differently; some agreed with the rival claim and assimilated. Those who didn't were implicitly asserting: **we have a way of being human that you don't offer us.**

50. The Real Jewish Problem: Is Survival-in-Exile Even Possible?

Even granting the justification for continued Jewish existence, the **deeper problem** is whether it is actually *possible*. Being good is not just about holding abstract ideals — it requires a full cultural form (dress, ritual, daily practice, etc.). Culture is what makes the human good concrete and livable, not a universal lecture on ideals. This is why ancient peoples never imagined goodness could be universal — it was always embedded in a particular culture. If you need a complete cultural apparatus (including something as specific as a way of dressing) to be good, **how can a culture survive in exile without its full institutional and material infrastructure?**

51. The Irreducibility of Cultural Practices

Making people good requires more than articulating ideals — it requires a **total way of life**, including seemingly trivial elements like dress. No one actually knows which specific elements of a culture are load-bearing and which are dispensable. This is framed as possibly unknowable by design ("God's secrets").

52. The "High Modernist" Error — James Scott's Forest Analogy

Extended Illustrative Digression (Central to the Argument)

James C. Scott's concept of "**high modernism**" illustrates the danger of rationalist reduction:

- **Traditional forestry**: Forests grew organically with diverse species; people harvested carefully and let them regenerate.

- **German "scientific" forestry**: Reduced forest health to a few known variables, planted monocultures in geometric grids, eliminated "useless" undergrowth.

- **Result**: Worked for roughly one and a half cycles, then collapsed — because the "random bushes" were performing essential ecological functions that scientists hadn't identified. Monocultures also proved catastrophically vulnerable to single pests.

- **Explicit connection to the Holocaust**: The same German rationalist mentality behind scientific forestry was behind the killing of the Jews "for similar reasons" — a shared hubris of reducing complex organic systems to controllable variables.

53. Application to Jewish Culture: You Don't Know What's Load-Bearing

If we can't even identify what keeps a **forest** alive, we certainly can't identify what keeps a **human culture** alive. Therefore:

- **Conservative traditionalists "are not crazy"** — even seemingly trivial practices (the amount of salt in a Friday night kugel) might be what sustains Jewish continuity.

- **The "ethical monotheism" reduction failed empirically**: Those who reduced Judaism to abstract ethical monotheism saw most of their grandchildren leave Judaism. It doesn't perpetuate itself, which is "condition number one for a successful culture."

- **Reference to the Cloud of the Pillar (Amud HaAnan) argument**: We observe practices even without full rational explanation because we don't know which elements are essential.

54. The Strongest Argument Against "Modern Judaism"

If you could be a "modern Jew" (Judaism reduced to a few universal principles), then **there's no reason to be Jewish at all**, since anyone can hold those principles. The real claim is that there is **a specific kind of good person called a Jew** — not interchangeable with other good people, but a distinct mode of human goodness. This requires not just three abstract principles (which everyone shares) but the full system of d'Oraita mitzvos (and possibly d'Rabbanan too), which constitutes **a whole world**, not just a set of beliefs held within someone else's world.

Side Discussion: Inter-Jewish Assimilation

An acknowledged digression prompted by an audience question. "I'm against inter-Jewish assimilation too, although I'm doing it." Hasidim refuse to intermarry with Litvaks for similar cultural-preservation reasons. But **"everything has a limit"** — with only 15 million Jews, excessive internal division is impractical. The need for Jewish unity constrains the anti-assimilation argument internally.

55. The Core Question: Can Jewish Culture Survive Inside a Dominant Non-Jewish Culture?

This is identified as **the real question** the lecture has been building toward. If Jewish goodness requires a complete Jewish cultural world, **can that world exist within a dominant alien culture?** "We're all Jews and we're speaking English... We think in English. We live in English." If Judaism is experienced through English, what distinguishes it? The Talmud might be a great book, but judged in English terms, it competes with other English books — that's "a question for a goy, not a Jewish question." This is **the question of exile (galut)**: being embedded in and shaped by a host culture.

56. The Zionist Answer and Its Problems

56a. The Cultural Zionist Solution

Cultures need "blood and soil" — an army, a navy, sovereignty — to truly exist. Without these, Jews are "parasites in a host culture," at its mercy, and their children assimilate. Therefore: only in a Jewish state with Jewish everything (cashiers, policemen, even prostitutes) can authentic Jewish culture exist.

56b. The Fatal Flaw

The Zionist argument implies that **all Jews for 1,900+ years of exile "weren't really Jewish"** — a deeply counterintuitive claim that delegitimizes one's own ancestors. This is "really weird" and suggests **there must be a different answer.**

Side Digression: Symbiosis vs. Parasitism

A student suggests the Jewish-gentile relationship could be **symbiotic** (like a bird on a rhinoceros) rather than parasitic. Partially accepted, but a distinction is drawn: from the **world's** perspective, Jews may help others (symbiosis), but from **the Jewish** perspective, the arrangement doesn't necessarily help Jews maintain their own cultural integrity. The asymmetry matters: symbiosis for the host doesn't solve the exile problem for the guest.

57. The Cultural Symbiosis Debate (Extended Class Discussion)

57a. The Asymmetry Argument

Cultural exchange might break down Jewish culture while benefiting the host culture — an asymmetric relationship. **Counter-argument:** Jews have always transformed the languages and cultures they inhabit (e.g., Yiddish from German, "Jewish English"), and this is a **natural, healthy sign** of cultural vitality. Observation: Host cultures tend to absorb only superficial or negative elements from Jewish culture (e.g., Yiddish curses like "oy vey" rather than blessings).

57b. Could Symbiosis Be Mutually Beneficial?

Jewish cultural influence could make both Jews and non-Jews better — a genuinely positive symbiosis. **Key tension:** Does this come at the cost of **dilution** of Jewish distinctiveness? The question is whether you can maintain the benefits of separation without being ***maximally*** separate. Moral claim: It seems **immoral** for Jews to give nothing back to their host culture.

Side Digression: Practical Proposal — Hatzalah

Jews should teach America how to replicate **Hatzalah** (Jewish volunteer EMS), which apparently functions more

efficiently than general EMS services. **Problem raised:** Hatzalah's efficiency may depend on **communal structures** that are inherently Jewish and difficult to replicate in non-Jewish contexts. Anecdote: A man from Lincoln was frustrated because he recognized the idea's value but knew he couldn't replicate it without the underlying community. This leads to the deeper question: Can you export the ***products*** of Jewish communal life without the community itself?

58. Restatement of the Core Thesis

The point of being Jewish is to live in a Jewish culture, not merely to perform halacha. Halacha is part of it, but the essence is having a **separate culture and way of being** — a "city within a city." Historically, both Jews and non-Jews understood Jewish communities as **autonomous communities** nested within larger political structures (under kings, etc.). **Only with the Enlightenment** did Jews attempt to understand themselves as individual ***citizens*** — but the concept of citizenship itself was new; everyone was "emancipated," not just Jews. Before that, local communities (including Jewish ones) took precedence in many practical ways.

59. The Mekubalim (Kabbalists) as the Best Articulators of This Problem

Very few Jews have been able to articulate this predicament clearly. The **mekubalim (Kabbalists)** are the exception: they created **myths** to express the problem because there was no better conceptual language available. They also proposed **different solutions** to the problem, some of which may be symbiotic.

60. Assessment of the Zionist Solution

60a. Partial Success

The Zionist solution **did work** in one crucial respect: Israeli Jews, **including the most Haredi**, possess a **cultural independence** necessary for Judaism to exist. Demographic reality: Almost no Jews remain outside of Israel and Jewish America; other diaspora communities are vanishing.

60b. The Haredi Blind Spot

It is strange that Haredi Jews in Israel don't recognize that they too are playing a **"Golus (exile) game"** — existing as a culture within a culture, even within the Jewish state.

60c. Hebrew as Cultural Independence — and Its Fragility

Ben-Yehuda's revival of Hebrew is credited as one of Zionism's genuine achievements, providing linguistic and therefore cultural space. **However:** Hebrew may be a **dying language even within Israel**. Studies from the Academy of the Hebrew Language show Hebrew fluency is declining. English dominates business, science, and increasingly daily life in Tel Aviv. Even descendants of idealistic Hebrew-only families now primarily speak and think in English. **Structural pressure:** Small states like Israel face enormous pressure to become "a little version of the United States" and lose cultural independence.

Side Digression: Cultural Independence vs. Western Assimilation (Illustrative Examples)

- **The Beatles incident:** An earlier Israeli government banned the Beatles as a bad cultural influence — viewed as a

defensible act of cultural self-preservation.

- **Eurovision:** Modern Israel celebrates participating in Eurovision as a "win" — seen as a symbol of cultural capitulation — Jewish girls performing for "European perverts" on stage. A **Golda Meir interview** expressing similar disdain for Eurovision in her era is cited.

- The **religious right in Israel** maintains strong cultural independence from America, which causes diplomatic friction but represents genuine cultural power — and is part of the point of Israel's existence.

61. The Kabbalists on the Land of Israel and Exile

61a. The Kabbalists and the Land

The mekubalim were among the **earliest Jews to practice** what they preached about the Land of Israel. They represent one of the **most coherent theories of Judaism** encountered. They believed deeply in the **physical land** (not political sovereignty) — the land as **divine soil**. Specific claim: If you want **revelation in the Jewish mode** — if you want God to speak to you **in Hebrew** — you must live in Israel. ("Hasn't been disproven yet.") They did **not** particularly care about political power — a notable distinction.

61b. The Kabbalistic Metaphor for Exile: The Soul in the Body

The Kabbalists understood Jewish existence in exile through the analogy of the **descent of the soul into the body**. Just as Neoplatonists believe the soul doesn't belong in a body, the Jewish people don't belong in exile. The soul has its own essence and preferred modes of expression (thought, certain mitzvot, certain actions), but the **material world of the body makes this expression difficult**. The Torah, according to the Kabbalists, provides **a way** for the soul to express itself even within bodily/material constraints.

61c. The Prison Metaphor

The mystics called the body a **prison** for the soul. This yields a powerful argument against suicide: **if God placed you in prison, who gave you permission to escape?**

62. Reframing the "Prison" of Embodiment as Purposeful

The later Neoplatonists, and especially the **Jewish Neoplatonists**, reinterpret the soul's imprisonment in the body positively: if **God** placed the soul in this "prison," there must be a purpose to fulfill there. Saying "God did it" means it is **good** — not merely that God is powerful and irresistible, but that God is **right and good**, so the arrangement must serve a positive end. Therefore, the soul can transform the prison into a **palace**: although the soul is dependent on the body and the material world (almost "parasitic"), it can **use** the material world as a vehicle for its own work. The soul is too vast to constitute its own entire world autonomously; in embodiment, it finds tools and materials to operate with at this level of reality.

63. Analogy: The Jewish People in Exile (Galus)

In a **direct parallel**, the Jewish people in exile don't belong there — they have their own world, but in exile they carry it only **in their heads**; it is not actualized. Living outside the Land of Israel means living under the spiritual influence

("demon") of whatever nation one inhabits — e.g., living in America means operating under the "American demon," thinking in English, being shaped by American spiritual forces (e.g., an excessive focus on *parnassah*/livelihood). Even prayer is filtered through these foreign spiritual structures. Yet there is a **point** to being in exile: the Jew can accomplish something deeply **paradoxical** — working within and through alien spiritual material.

64. The Ramak's Two Kinds of Galus (Exile) — The Central Closing Image

The lecture concludes with an image from **Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (Ramak)** that is found especially compelling:

64a. Galus Mitzrayim (Egyptian Exile) — Exile Without Tools

In Egypt, the Jewish people faced **existential danger of genocide and assimilation** — they could have ceased to exist entirely, absorbed into the dominant Egyptian culture. This is likened to a **human being swallowed by a monster**, slowly being devoured and digested in its belly. This exile **could not continue indefinitely** — it had to end, or the people would be destroyed.

64b. Post-Sinai Galus — Exile With the Torah as a Sword

After the Exodus and **Matan Torah** (the giving of the Torah), the situation fundamentally changes. The person is still inside the belly of the beast (still in exile), **but now possesses a sword** — the Torah. With this sword, the person can **carve out a space** within the monster's belly, building a **house** inside the Leviathan. The building materials are not brought from outside — they are fashioned **from the monster itself**, using the monster's own substance and tools. This is the paradoxical creative act of exile: constructing one's own autonomous space **out of the very medium that threatens to devour you**. This is the image of Jewish life in the current Galus: living inside the monster but possessing the specific tools (Torah) to create an inhabitable, distinctly Jewish space within it. **Without these tools**, one would be digested — fully assimilated into the host culture.

64c. The Messianic Horizon

When **Moshiach comes**, the people will finally **break through and emerge from the monster** entirely, possessing their own autonomous existence. This is not framed as a violent escape but as the culmination of the process of carving out space from within.

Brief Side Exchange: Shalosh Regalim

A student raises a point about the **Shalosh Regalim** (Three Pilgrimage Festivals) and how this framework relates to them. The connection is acknowledged but noted as requiring further elaboration — the Torah is what enables the process described, and the festivals presumably mark stages or dimensions of it.

Overall Arc of the Lecture

The lecture begins with the specific question of the 17th of Tammuz fast and the Rambam's theory that fasting is about **freeing time and focus** for spiritual work — not about suffering per se. This leads to a broader philosophical exploration of **human finitude** (the tragic necessity of choosing between physical and spiritual engagement), the **klippah of modern productivity and smartphone**

culture, and fasting as a **radical disruption** that Shabbos alone cannot provide. The argument then pivots to the question of **what makes a human being** — not biology alone but **culture**, which is constitutive of humanity. This yields a critique of the Enlightenment conflation of **universal with uniform** (via Kant and James Scott), and a defense of **Jewish particularity** as one specific instantiation of the universal human good. The question of whether Jewish culture can survive in exile — inside a dominant alien culture — is posed as the central existential problem. The Zionist

solution is evaluated and found partially successful but philosophically insufficient. Finally, the **Kabbalistic framework** is presented as the most coherent articulation of the problem: Jewish existence in exile is like the soul's descent into the body, and the **Torah functions as a sword** that allows the exiled people to carve out an autonomous cultural space from within the very medium that threatens to consume them — building a house inside the belly of the Leviathan, until the messianic emergence.

| Full Transcript

The Philosophy of Fasting: Focus, Human Limitation, and the 17th of Tammuz

Chapter 1: Introduction – The 17th of Tammuz Fast Day

Instructor: Very good, we're good. So, tonight is Shabbos [the Sabbath], the 17th of Tammuz, and when Shabbos is the 17th of Tammuz, it's a **minhag** [custom], something, that the Jews fast, right? On the 17th of Tammuz, something happened. What happened?

Student: The walls of Jerusalem were breached, in the siege.

Instructor: Because it was a day that... Something else.

Student: The **Luchos** [Tablets of the Law].

Instructor: Yeah.

Student: No, no, no. This is not in the Mishnah. What's his name? Who's the Greek? The Roman emperor. Adrian? No. Antiochus.

Student: Apostomos [Apostomos burned the Torah].

Instructor: Caesar killed him.

Student: Pompey?

Instructor: What about him?

Student: Pompey, yeah. I think he came to the **Kodesh Kodashim** [Holy of Holies].

Instructor: Maybe that's the... There's some things that say in the Mishnah that we don't know. He's very impressive. I'm not going to give him a card.

In any case, the point is that it's a **minhag** to fast. It's a **minhag** because, theoretically, in the Gemara [Talmud], it says that you only have to fast when there's wartime. In peacetime, you don't have to fast if it's only a **minhag**. In any case, and then there's a **machlokes** [dispute] between peacetime and wartime, depending on which mood the Rambam [Maimonides] is in that minute or something. Anyways.

Student: Yeah, right.

Instructor: So it might be only a **minhag**. But the point is, what is the **pshat** [simple/true meaning] of the **minhag**?

Chapter 2: Theories of Fasting and Asceticism

The Question of **Inui HaGuf**

Instructor: So I have a **pshat** today. I have a **pshat**. Everyone knows, remember, that we're learning about fasting. Our **sugya** [topic] is about eating and not eating, right? We discussed last week different reasons for mortifying the body, right? **Inui haguf** [affliction/mortification of the body] in Hebrew. Remember?

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: So what did we say? There's different theories of fasting, basically.

Student: You're talking about the theories of **inui**, or what the hell?

Instructor: Fasting is **inui**. It's literally called **ta'anis** [fast], which means something like pain or affliction, I don't know, pain. Isn't that what it means? The **pasuk** [verse] that says something wrong, **v'inisem es nafshoseichem** [and you shall afflict your souls] for **ta'anis** [fast], which literally means, I don't know how you translate it. Affliction, torture yourself. I don't know, none of that.

And we discussed those different theories. Why do we fast? Do you know what's the point of **ta'anis**? I have a lot of **pshtos** [explanations] about this. But I have a new one today, so I can't tell you the old ones again. I'll keep shut. I'll keep shut.

The Core Thesis: The Point of Fasting Is Not to Fast

Instructor: The point of fasting is not to fast.

So this very much conforms to our different theories of asceticism. So there's one theory, which is the Rambam's theory, for the most part, when he talks about asceticism, whether in the context of eating less or in the context of sexual things. His theory is usually that it's a waste of time to eat too much. Usually, it's about taking up a lot of time.

And for example, Yom Kippur [Day of Atonement], Rambam explicitly says this about Yom Kippur, that Yom Kippur is a day that we dedicate entirely to what he called things of the soul, or **inyanei neshama** [matters of the soul]. Everyone should do whatever you can do. But the point is, it's about taking time.

Now, the reason, the point of a **ta'anis**, that's why it says in a **ta'anis**, the most important time of a **ta'anis** is the afternoon. Afternoon of a **ta'anis**. Because there's like a person, a normal person has like a **seder hayom** [daily schedule], like he has a day. In the morning he eats, in the afternoon he eats, whatever his meal times are. It's like part of your daily schedule is there's work, study, whatever you're doing, and then there's eat.

Eat, which means that you're kind of limited in the amount of time that you have to do more important stuff. So if we take a day and we say, don't eat, so you've got a half hour empty. That's one thing. And now you can have a longer study session. Of course, if you let the fasting make you weak, it doesn't help. But anyways, that's how it's supposed to work theoretically.

Student: So similarly, would it be that in addition to the resource of time you make available, it also makes other resources available, like money?

Instructor: Yeah, I was going to ask you about money. Yes, yes, yes, for sure.

Chapter 3: The Philosophy of Focus and Human Limitation

Asceticism as Focus, Not Rejection

Instructor: So first, let's go back. First, since this is a very important theory. I don't know if I've ever been explicit, but a very important theory of asceticism, that's really about focus and not about being against anything. It's also a theory of separation in general, right?

Because humans are limited, unlike gods or things like that, that are unlimited, or you see God is infinity, do everything, be everywhere all the time, and so on. And so humans can only be at one place and at one time. And this is what we call *havana* [focus], or focus, *tzimtzum* [contraction/concentration].

And since we can only do one thing at a time, most of the things that people see as separating ourselves, like don't eat, nothing wrong with eating. But for me, as a human being, it's hard to eat and think at the same time, hard. So therefore, I have to choose.

Your choice is tragic, like human life is a tragedy in this sense, because we're not God. God could do everything at the same time. God could do *ruchniyus* [spirituality] and *gashmiyus* [physicality] at the same time, but humans can't.

Critique of Modern Theories

Instructor: That's why I'm kind of against all these, I'm jumping around, I'm kind of against all these like certain modern theorists that say, no, the point of life, the point is to live in the world and still be with God. That would be true if I would be God.

I think there's a certain non-recognition of the limitations of human being in all those kinds of theories. It's true, from the point of view of God, it's true that God is here, just like he's there, whatever the here and there anyways mean. Point is, from the point of view of God, there aren't any problems between, you know, like they say, you could eat and fast at the same time. Thank you very much. If I would be God, I'd be able to do it.

Since I'm not God, and I'm a very limited kind of being, relatively, humans are pretty great, but still pretty limited, I can only barely do one thing at a time, which is why I can't, you understand what I'm saying? It's a language where you have to choose.

I really think that, of course, there's a point in all this because they do want to see the world from the perspective of God and all of that, which is very nice. But not kind of. There's a certain humility in recognizing that we need limitations.

Chapter 4: Practical Application – Does Fasting Actually Work?

The Time Management Question

Student: Is it really like a time management strategy in that simple way? Because eating takes a total of five minutes.

Instructor: No, no, it takes a lot more than that, by the way. Of preparing your food and...

Firstly, it's preparing. Secondly, your body works on its food most of the day.

Student: Yeah, but that's not necessarily...

Instructor: It does, it does. You get tired from eating.

Student: Overeating, maybe?

Instructor: No, again, overeating, you get too tired. Fasting causes similar...

Student: You try, try to fast.

Instructor: Not when it's *halacha* [Jewish law], then whatever. I usually fast every day until 2 o'clock.

Student: Yeah, and that helps, because you have that time that you work, and you get some stuff done.

Instructor: I fast, I mean, I don't fast, but I don't drink coffee and stuff. I limit my food intake until a certain point in the afternoon every day where it breaks, and from then I don't really get anything done. Because your body, intellectual work or spiritual work, I'm not even saying, needs a huge amount, takes a huge amount of energy, energy in the sense of focus, in the sense of mental intent, mental focus.

And even your body having to, like, your stomach saying, wait, now I'm busy digesting your food for you. Thank you very much, stomach. But it's doing something. I know people say it's subconscious and all of that. It does, it literally makes you tired, besides for that, a little bit, at least. But it also, I think it takes away some of the focus that you need.

Parallel Practices in Other Traditions

Instructor: And it's interesting, because I know there's the custom that you're not really supposed to eat until after *Shacharis* [morning prayers]. And in other religious spinoff, the fan fiction, you're not like Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians. Well, Catholics have gotten lazy in recent years in *halacha*, too. But you weren't supposed to eat until after receiving communion. So it was the same thing, fasting from midnight.

Student: Yeah, there is such a thing.

Instructor: There's a very similar thing to this. There's also a Jewish, like Ashkenaz [Ashkenazi Jewish] tradition that every time you do a *mitzvah* [commandment] you fast until it, like that's what we like, before you take the *lulav* [palm branch used on Sukkot], before the *shofar* [ram's horn blown on Rosh Hashanah], things like that. And it's like *chassidim* [Hasidic Jews].

The Marina Abramović Example

Instructor: And I've read, there's a lady, you know, there's a lady that was accused of being a witch, you know, Marina Abramović. No, Marina Abramović, whatever, whatever, because I still think about this. But she's like a weird artist. And I read her book, her memoir once. You don't know who she is. She did this like MoMA [Museum of Modern Art] thing with looking at people, you know, the artist is present. Very cool stuff in my opinion.

In any case, she had like this exhibit which was just her sitting in the MoMA, not in the MoMA, in MoMA. And the MoMA is another weird modern temple. What was it? Anyways, I used to work next to it. I'm like using it for my lunch. Got a ticket.

And anyways, there's a, and she had like a, she just sat there in her room all day looking at people, like for five, maybe not five minutes or something, like I don't know, like, anyways, and

she has a memoir, so she liked those performance arts, basically, and she was in Hillary's leaked emails, whatever, I'm just kidding.

Point is, she wrote her memoir and she said like one of her big tricks is to fast, like whenever she has a performance, she fasts that day, because that's the only way to, like, be in the zone. So yeah, it's a very real thing. It focuses on it.

Addressing the Hunger Objection

Student: If you fasted by mistake, then I understand that. Not by mistake. No, I mean, if you fasted by mistake, I understand that. Because if you're hungry, that's another distraction.

Instructor: Right, exactly. Being hungry is a problem. But that's implementation. But that's implementation, also, as part of the meditation. That's implementation.

Yeah, fasting with being hungry is a problem. But the truth is that hunger is manageable. Like, people that do a lot of fasting, at some point, when they have a switch that they stop being hungry, if you've read about this.

Student: Or, yeah, you just ignore it. It goes away.

Instructor: Hunger, most of your body's cues, if you ignore them for a few minutes, they stop bothering you if you know this.

Student: I just want to explain to you what I mean. Not all of them.

Instructor: Fasting on a stay. It means you start focusing, and then you happen to not eat.

Student: That's true also.

Instructor: That's true also. But I think that, okay, so like everything, you can go both ways. I'm full.

Chapter 5: Transition to the Primary *Pshat*

Instructor: Okay, let's get back to this thing. The *pshat* of fasting, isn't some degree of sympathy or communion with historical suffering?

Student: First, I'm telling you that I'm a *pshat*, which is also *pshat al pi halacha* [explanation according to Jewish law]. I think that this is true, *chas v'shalom* [God forbid], in the sense that the *ikkar halacha* [primary legal ruling] says in the first one, there's the *ikkar halacha*, so I'm going to get to this. But first.

The Nature and Purpose of Fasting: Communal Gathering, Tzedakah, and Protest Against Consumerism

Chapter 6: The Mechanics of Fasting: Time, Focus, and Hunger Management

Instructor: Not by mistake. No, I mean if you fast by mistake I understand that because... If you're hungry that's another distraction.

Student: Right, exactly. Being hungry is a problem.

Instructor: But that's implementation. If you fast without being hungry...

Student: But that's implementation also, part of the limitation. You eat meat, that's the limitation.

Instructor: Yeah, fasting with being hungry is a problem. The truth is that hunger is manageable, like people that do a lot of fasting at some point they have a switch, like they stop being hungry if you regret about this, or yeah, you just ignore

it, it goes away. Hunger, most of your body's cues, if you ignore them for a few minutes, they stop bothering you.

I just want to explain to you what I mean by fasting on the state. It means you start focusing, and then you happen to not eat.

Student: That's true also, but I think that, okay, so like everything, you can go both ways.

Instructor: Okay, let's get back to this.

Student: The push of fasting, isn't some degree of sympathy or communion with historical suffering?

Instructor: No, no, no, wait, I wanted to get to that. First I'm telling you that I'm a mischievous person, which is also *pshata* [simple meaning] of the *Alav* [unclear reference, possibly *al av* or similar]. I think that is a true *Alav* in the sense it says in the first one, the *Iketanis* [unclear reference, possibly *Ta'anit* tractate], I'm going to get to this, but first, it's like this dedication of resources, like time, and you want to get into all these details, we got into the levels, but the point is very simple, part of your daily schedule is to eat, you take that out, you have a lot more time, try it out, you'll see, okay?

If you take out even other things, you get even more time, like other *Niyam* [unclear, possibly *inyanim*: matters/topics], and so on, but you do end up with a lot more time if you stop with this eating, by the way, eating makes you go to the bathroom also, there's a lot of things that take time, it takes a lot more time than it takes you to sit down and eat your food.

Chapter 7: Defense of Asceticism Against Modern Consumer Culture

So that's the simple thing. I do think I just got into this thing, because modern people have this real aversion against asceticism, against using anything that denies what the advertisements want us to buy more of. And I don't think that's true. We think of ourselves as very cool, as like, well, *Shulchan Aruch* [the Code of Jewish Law] came and said he shouldn't fast. Well, it's true he did that. Maybe he shouldn't fast or something as much as the people before him did. But it's not true that it doesn't work.

Fasting pretty much works. And it's a technique that every single tradition ever used. You can't say, oh, we'll figure it out. That's really dumb. We figured out that you should never do it. Okay, so you want to use it in a more measured way. You do only liquid fast and not a whatever. You can find all kinds of solutions. You don't have to make yourself sick or anything. But it's not true that fasting doesn't work. It definitely works, and it's literally, scientifically, it's materialistic. You don't even have to believe in anything for it to work. It's just a thing that works for many different reasons and in many ways. That's number one.

Chapter 8: Communal Fasting as Gathering: The Meaning of *Tzom*

And in communal fasts, since we're talking about the communal fast, right, because again, like personal things, but communal things are about focusing on community. Now, you want to get together the community. And traditionally, fast in And *tzom* might not [fast :צום] *the Bible is called *tzom even mean fasting. Might mean something like a gathering. Because it says in *Yoel* [the Book of Joel], "call a fast." How do you call a fast? Like, tell everyone to fast. It means get .together the people

And it says in the *Shulchan Aruch*, it says in the *Halakhah* [Jewish law], on a fast, you have to come together. Like, it's key to go to *shul* [synagogue] on the first day. Like, we think that it's key to go to *shul* three times a day. But it's obviously not, because otherwise there wouldn't be different kinds of days when you have [unclear], like you're saying, and things like that.

And that's why on a fast, we have [unclear] because the main [point] of the fast is that's the time that you end up right in the morning maybe after work and so on but in the afternoon when you would have ate it then what is the *Shai* [unclear, possibly *sha'ah*: time/hour] going to fast like over there it's similar the big source for fasting he talks about going fasting yeah anyways but he he makes this okay we're not getting into that I'm going to get to that in a second but the point is the simple meaning of that and therefore I sort of think that nowadays for example people that...

Modern Implementation Problems

But now it's like a faster, like, *shiva* [seven days of mourning]. Again, if you go to *shul* and you do *keresen toya* [unclear, possibly *kriat haTorah*: Torah reading], you do *vayichal* [Exodus 32:11-14, a prayer for forgiveness], so you're already doing some of that. Or *slichot* [penitential prayers], whatever. Whatever they do in the *shul*, which is like a *zeche* [merit/credit] for that, for what it's supposed to be. But it's supposed to be a way to get everyone together to :תשובה] *focus on whatever drama once they do in *tshuvah :תפילה] *or other people would say *tefillah [repentance whichever, whatever it is. It's mostly about that. And [prayer the not eating is just something that helps. Like, otherwise you .have to take care of one of your things

So, in other words, really, and it says in *Shulchan Aruch*, really, there should be also every fast [unclear]. Because work is another big distraction, of course. But the point is, we can't get people to stop working. But it's true that, and it says in the [unclear], that in the time of a fast, you're not supposed to work. Or it says explicitly that you don't work. But even in generally, a fast, there's no point in fasting when you're just having a regular day.

And yet they send all the kids home from school early because it's a fast. And now nobody can do anything all day. Like, I don't know what the point of that is. There is not really a point. Like, the point of it was to have this [communal gathering].

Chapter 9: Fasting and Tzedakah: The Connection to Social Justice

And like you're saying, the main point of the fast is giving to That's what also .[charity/righteousness :צדקה] *the *tzedakah said, right? And then there's this question, what does fasting have to do with giving to the *tzedakah*? Because it's very nice to do social justice, whatever is talking about. But what's it got to do with fasting? It's like, oh, you think that fasting is about deflating your own bones, but helping the poor. Wow. Like, ?you think, what's one going to do with the other

And at least one of the simple answers is that you save some money from not having to buy food. So again, from here we learned that we shouldn't have... The breakfast, breaking your fast shouldn't cost more than... Because usually you just eat more before and after and then you don't save anything. Usually you've got to skip a meal somehow. And then you have

some extra money and you give that money to the poor people. Something like that.

I don't know if it actually literally works. For most people, it literally works. I have that kind of level of judgment. I have five dollars in my lunch and I give it to the poor person. I don't know. But it's like an idea. It's like a focusing of financial energy, of communal energy, of time.

Student: According to the communal solidarity theory of fasting makes a lot more... it follows very naturally.

Chapter 10: The Protest Theory of Fasting: Professor Lambert's Interpretation

Instructor: Yeah, there's a different theory from Rabbi... what's the guy's name... I get a bunch of things based on his book about *Tshuvah* [repentance]. I forgot his name. *How Repentance Became Biblical*, what's his name... and he says... what was his *chat* [unclear]... you know, he said the fasting is a protest, remember?

Student: Yeah, because he said like this, that if you read the many times, I forgot his name.

Instructor: Lambert, I think, a professor, like a [unclear]. And he said that fasting, like we see in the [unclear] the big proof test for this, proof text for this. So he said that fasting is a protest. Like, how is fasting supposed to work?

So of course, like I told you, you get together and then you have time to think, to do some introspection. And specifically, if it's a communal thing, then you have to solve communal problems. And there's some people's communal *tshuvah* somehow, which hasn't worked since the times of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* [Ezra and Nehemiah, post-exilic leaders]. But anyways, that was the last time that the Jewish people as a group did *tshuvah*. Don't tell anyone. None of those were only individuals of *tshuvah*. But the people as a group, only the last time they ever did *tshuvah* was in the times of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*.

Student: The group integrity itself is, yeah, a little...

Instructor: First, you have to have a group. You should achieve it for not being a group, but then we get into the problems of being a group, so it gets there.

Fasting as Display of Distress to Invoke Divine Compassion

*The point is that he says that... If you read in the *Nevi'im prayer [נביאים] *if you read in the *Siddur [Prophets] and things like that, you don't get that impression. You [book is about [fast [תענית] *get the impression that *Ta'anit convincing God. It's not about, it's not towards people, like *Rambam* [Maimonides] turns everything towards humans, but it's turning towards God. It's about getting God to answer .our prayers

Okay, maybe you have to do *tshuvah* in order for God to listen to you, but it's secondary to that, right? The main point is, like I said, *tefillah*. Like, *Ta'anit* is more about *tefillah* than about *tshuvah*. So it's a way of praying. Of course, you could say the same thing, like you pray better when you're fasting, things like that.

Hebrew :תנ"ך] *But his theory is that since with the *Tanakh the whole *Tanakh* says that God has a lot of [Bible compassion on poor and broken people. Everyone knows that. Of course, he also has justice, but we're trying to get out of his justice into his compassion. So by making ourselves, ripping our clothes, and not eating, and making ourselves look very

and poor, we're making God have [compassion]. That's what his theory of fasting is. It's kind of protest, not like a protest, that's more like a like showing yourself to be in distress and then God has this thing that he has to help people that are in distress. That's why you don't eat and then you shine in his .eye

The Critique: Don't Fool God—Actually Help the Afflicted

And it makes a lot of sense because you're saying oh you think that God is going to love you so much because you're in distress, how about the guy that's really in distress, not playing at it.

Student: So it's a manipulation tactic like what?

Instructor: Yeah it's a manipulation tactic. It's not manipulation, it's true, because *Hashem Ohev Eshkenaz Daka* [unclear Hebrew phrase, possibly "God loves the downtrodden"], like he likes the downtrodden. We're pulling him. We don't think that's a problem.

Student: Exactly. Don't fool them, actually act that way, and character :מידה] *then you'll actually be more of that *middah .*for real, because you're doing the *middah [trait/quality

Instructor: That's the *Takishan* [unclear, possibly *tikkun*: repair/correction] of Islam, that you can't fool God.

See, even that is an act of solidarity in some sense.

Student: I think it's an extension of, it extends to that idea. Or you could say that we fast in order to remember the people that don't have food, money for food, or something like that.

Instructor: Yeah, even as a beseeching to God that we are one of these people that are, whether we know it or not, maybe to a certain degree, afflicted.

Chapter 11: Fasting as Protest Against Consumerism: "Plastic Judaism"

Student: I think it's a protest against consumerism, though. That's my [interpretation].

Instructor: Yeah, but it's always a [novel interpretation]. But now you could buy all of Judaism in a beautiful package. So it was [unclear].

Student: That's what I was saying. You call it plastic Judaism?

Instructor: Yeah. It comes wrapped in plastic, pre-wrapped.

Warning: The Danger of Baal Worship

And I think one of the dangers in the trying to have God to have mercy because we're afflicting ourselves is *Eliyahu HaNavi* [Elijah the Prophet] goaded the 400 prophets, the to do the exact ,[a Canaanite deity :בעל] *prophets of *Ba'al same thing. So we need to make sure that when we're doing it, it's actually for the true God and not for somehow accidentally .slipping into *Ba'al* worship

Instructor: Yeah, true. But they had the same theory, that they're going to hurt themselves, and maybe the *Ba'al* will ethical :מוסר] *have a [response]. It's good *mussar .Yeah, I guess .[teaching/rebuke

Theological Caveat: Can You Manipulate God?

Again, okay, but this is not a theology class. We're not manipulating God. It's true you can't manipulate God. But it turns out you could, somewhat. We have to figure out how. Now, like, what do you mean? Like, okay, like, whatever.

Naming the Klippah: Productivity, Busyness, and the Smartphone as Spiritual Obstacle

Concluding the Theological Point: Prayer and Divine Manipulation

Instructor: Yeah, true. But they have the same theory, that they're going to hurt themselves, and maybe the Baal will have a different one. It's good that the Baal is good, but yeah, I guess, again, okay, but we're not—this is not a theology class. I mean, the protest, it's true, you can't manipulate God, but it turns out you could somewhat, but you have to figure out how.

Like, what do you mean? Like, okay, like, whatever, old prayer, old petitionary prayer, like, every time you're asking God for something, you're trying—there's some—you have to explain how it works. So it works by making you a better person, or it works by some other magical way. Like, it's very hard to have religion without people at least thinking that they can manipulate God. Of course you can't, that's the point. That's the difference in some sense.

Yeah, yeah, it's the same thing. So you have this whole thing, okay, that's where that's not the main point. So those are the simple peshatim [simple interpretations], okay?

The Central Issue: Finding Time and Naming the Klippah

Instructor: The number one thing is you have to find some time. I think that what I really think practically is that, as I said, it's a protest against consumerism or a protest against busyness, okay?

We have to know the manner of klippot [spiritual husks/obstacles], okay? You have to call them by name. If you call them by name, you get power over them, you know? There's such a magical rule. Knowing the name of a klippah gives you power over it. Did you know that?

Student: I didn't know.

Instructor: Everyone knows, right? Well, usually...

The Power Dynamics of Naming

Instructor: The one that can't name means that he has more power over you. You can't—that's why you don't say your father's name like it's their... We don't call people that have power over us by their name because they can call us by name, but we can't call them. As admitted as they can, sir, not by their names [Yiddish: you say "sir," not their names].

Student: Exactly.

Instructor: Because if you say their name, if you don't say the name... No, I know, the theory of... No, whatever. You could say... Usually... Usually, klippot are used to not naming things. That's the problem. Right. At least nowadays, the reason that's the stupid letter is theory, right? The reason why the klippot are so powerful is because people are afraid of naming them. Because we're rationalists. We don't believe in klippot. They got you very well.

Of course, there's the opposite theory. That's why you're saying the opposite theory. It goes like, if you ignore them, then they don't be a klippah. But the problem is, that's worked before they trapped you. After they trapped you, after you're already stuck, it doesn't work. You've got to name it. Okay?

Since, to a large extent, all the klippot that we're naming are ones that actually exist that we're already in the trap. We got to name them, okay? And that's going to give us power.

Naming the Modern Klippah: Productivity, Busyness, Consumerism

Instructor: So the big klippah that we have is called productivity, busyness, consumerism. All these things go together. And they're the reason why there's no vacation time in the United States, right? And they get paid for sure not paid. You get an unlimited vacation now, which means zero, right? That's what I have. Literally, it's less than the real number.

Student: Anyway, so unless you're the boss then you really get unlimited vacation.

Instructor: The goal is to work to ruin your life for 50 years and then you can move out of work. But then you're so addicted to work that you can't do it. Right, and that's a big problem. That's a big problem. That's like the thought of and so on. So it's very hard to break that pattern.

The Tyranny of Daily Obligations: "Savage Commands"

Instructor: And like I said, there's so many things that catch us into like every day you have to do this, you have to do that, you have to do that. You have to eat, you have to go to work, you have to talk to your wife, you have to talk to your children, you have to talk to your friends. You have to do so many things. You have to answer all your WhatsApp notifications. All these things that you have to—like they're mitzvot [commandments]. It's like commands.

Like she calls them—what's her name? Kala's name for this? Primitive command, something like—I forgot. Primal—something like command. It's a command. It's like a mitzvah. And we're mekabel [accepting/observing] on these mitzvot a lot more than we're mekabel on any other mitzvah, right? Nachon [correct]?

Understanding Hesech HaDa'at [Distraction/Removal of Attention]

Instructor: You know that until they were smart, because I never understood what it means not to be maseach da'at [distracted/removing one's attention] from your tefillin [phylacteries]. Right? It says in the Gemara [Talmud], tefillin, asur b'hesech hada'at [forbidden to have distraction from tefillin], right?

Student: Barbaric command or something? I forgot.

Instructor: Savage command.

Student: Savage command, okay.

Instructor: Savage command. The commands of your body and of your, and every society. Those are the savage commands. Right? Mitzvah she'lach lipa [a commandment that comes from the klippah].

And until they were smart, because I never understood it, it says in the Gemara that you're not allowed to be maseach da'at from your tefillin. What does it mean? What does it mean? I'm sure there's someone that has a note. I'm not forgetting that I'm wearing tefillin. And so on.

The Smartphone as the Paradigmatic Klippah

The Evolution of Constant Connectivity

Instructor: And then people got smartphones. Actually, before that, they had cell phones. It was the same, by the way. Smartphones didn't make it worse. I remember when people checked their dumb phones every five seconds. Remember? It was so long ago. I remember.

Student: Yeah, they were looking at their contacts.

Instructor: I didn't even know what—playing snake game, looking maybe they got a call, they were text messages, maybe

you got a text, and so on. You're looking at their contacts, maybe I should call someone. What do you do?

And then I realized that's what, for God's sake, it's right here. That's called hesech da'at. You see, now I don't even know where it is. I do know, but, right? But otherwise, how many minutes of a day do you have hesech da'at from your phone? Zero, right?

Oh, it's crazy. Like, you're mekabel on it a lot more than on tefillin. And now you understand. It doesn't mean you look at it every second. I'm not accusing you of really being so addicted. But I think there was a story that a normal person unlocks his phone 300 times a day. Your phone actually counts. By the way, sadly, or scarily, there's actually enough. If you go into the settings somewhere, you'll actually find this number.

Student: Like in the health. What's it called? Apple has something.

Instructor: Yeah, whatever. It actually counts how many times you unlock your phone. It's like 300 a day, I think. And that's crazy. That means like every 30 seconds—no, like every five—like you don't work, you don't—you never more than four minutes away from it and you never more than four minutes in your mind away from it, right? That's what it means, that you're mekabel.

The Social Mitzvah of Constant Availability

Instructor: So you have to—what if—so what if I get a message? And if it's less you probably want it for longer and it's like it's a—I'll fill up them this look like it out of me. What if someone texts me? I don't know that—like you really feel like it's true. There's like a social demand for this, right? The savage man—there's like a little social mitzvah that says, what if someone will text you when you're in love with a she [Yiddish: when you're not paying attention]? What if it's your wife?

And I told my wife, she complains that I'm on my phone. I'm like, you know what? Most of me being on the phone is you. Because maybe my wife will text me. What if she's across the table? I don't know. If somebody should text me from across the table, it's okay. But, like...

Student: And then it's everyone else throughout the day when you're texting your wife.

Instructor: Yeah. Like, look at the phone. It's 30 messages a day. How did people survive before they had cell phones when they went to work and they didn't talk to their wife 30 times a day? Somehow they survived, right? Not actually so important.

But my point is not this. My point is, these are commands. We don't realize how firm we are about all these mitzvot. And they're taking all of our space.

The Shul Phone Ban as Naming the Klippah

Instructor: So this is why we have these evil Orthodox rabbis that say, don't use your phone in all shadows [Yiddish: in shul]. And they're just naming it a klippah. And all the rest of the week, you're literally chained to it. So don't. Look, nothing happens. You go to shul for three hours. Your wife doesn't need anything. It's amazing. How could it be? I don't know. Never happened during the week. Somehow it happened.

Student: Cars are also a klippah this way.

Instructor: Yeah, yeah.

Student: Why don't you say Shabbos [Sabbath] is that idea?

Instructor: Which idea?

Student: That exact idea. That?

Instructor: That in every generation, there's different things that people are busy with.

Student: Yeah, yeah.

Instructor: I think the car and the phone was a match made in hell. You shouldn't be busy with anything anymore. The car and the phone was a match made in hell. Today, you're busy with phones, and now you shouldn't be busy. With the car, I'm just saying, there's no way out. These are, these are. The phone is supposed to—but you have to get at this.

Identifying the Real Problem vs. The Rabbis' Focus

Instructor: I want to name it very clearly that it's a mitzvah. It's not. People think that the kol isha nidah arayot [voice of a woman, menstrual impurity, sexual prohibitions] helps. Remember, the problem we have with the world is not with the world, whatever. The problem we have in this world is not with the thing that kol isha nidah arayot is, right? And that's most rabbis when they talk about, why am I giving a drush [sermon] against my response? That's it. That's where everything ends up.

Student: Every person watching this.

Instructor: What?

Student: Every person watching.

Instructor: Is watching it on a phone.

Student: And the patch is that when you get a notification in the middle of the shiur [class] and not to click it.

Instructor: Yeah, it's very... So, yeah, nothing wrong. The point is...

Student: I was in the middle of a start. If I miss a shiur, I have to put it up on the TV. I can't do it.

Instructor: You have to.

Device Separation Theory and the Phone's Unique Klippah Quality

Instructor: By the way, phones are the worst format, worst for doing anything. They don't do anything. You have a laptop.

Student: Laptops, yeah.

Instructor: I took off the Twitter of my phone and put it on my laptop. I don't know, at least you can answer on the laptop. I can't even reply. For God's sake.

So, and like, I already have a different old theory that you have to have a different device for every activity that you do, right? That's why I have a book reader in my bed and only reads books and so on. And your phone is basically only for—I don't even know for what. I'm thinking to figure out what's smart, what the task format is, but focus on one thing. It's good for coming with you everywhere.

Student: Yeah, it's good for coming—you mean for you taking it everywhere, right?

Instructor: Yeah. It's good for putting things in front of your face that you'll look at. And literally coming to your face like this.

One of the reasons that smartphones are bad because you have to hold them within six inches of your face besides for it being not good for your eyes and stuff. It's also like, I think it's a klippah. I want to say that it's a klippah. I do it all the time. I'm

the one doing it. But it's a klippah because like, not that it's a klippah. You see, that's what I'm saying. Most of the...

Student: Oh, that's us. I understand.

Instructor: Most of the... I'm talking about smartphones. They're talking about the arayot. Oh, so everyone's watching porn all day. No, they're only watching porn like half hour a day, not all day. Right? So that's not a problem. And before that, anyway, people were thinking things like that after all day. That's not the change. I don't think that changed much about that. Maybe it did, maybe it didn't. I'm not—people told me that I'm a, I don't know.

Understanding the Mitzvot Before the Aveirot [Sins]

Instructor: But I think that you have to know what the mitzvot are before, not the aveirot [sins], right? And what the mitzvah means, which mitzvah do you make when you look on your—what—come to access even one text of you? It's a mitzvah. What do you mean? Maybe someone needs my help. Maybe I need to help them. Maybe they made a joke and I have to make an emoji to laugh at their joke. A lot of important things, right?

By the way, it's true that these are mitzvot. But even a mitzvah, if you do too much, it comes into an aveirah [sin]. And these are like social obligations. We call them social obligations. I think that if you don't have a phone, if you don't have any way to be contacted electronically, you're violating an aveirah d'rabbanan [a rabbinic-level prohibition]. Maybe it's an aveirah d'rabbanan. It could be just a...

Taanit as Radical Disruption: Breaking the Cycle Beyond Shabbos

The Problem of Constant Availability and the Need for Withdrawal

Instructor: I'm upset that I called to a guy, how can I message you? I don't know, send a messenger to my cuddle. Hello, you're a human being, be available. Now, do you have to be available 24 hours within 10 minutes? That sounds crazy. I'm available that way. That's why most people think that if I don't answer them within 10 minutes, I hate them. Maybe I was just in the bathroom for 10 minutes. Oh, you took me in front of your bathroom for the bathroom tour, right? Oh, God, finish it.

The mitzvah [commandment] is a mitzvah, and it's talking through that it's a mitzvah, and that's why we have other mitzvot [commandments] to counteract this mitzvah. You see? That's what I'm saying. That's why we have other mitzvot to counteract this mitzvah and say that on the Tammuz [referring to the fast of Shiva Asar B'Tammuz], you don't have to look at your phone. No, it doesn't work. People don't.

Taanit as a Stronger Form of Shabbos

The mitzvah used to be useful in that way, right? You have social obligations. You have to talk with this guy. You have to shmuz [chat] with that guy. But now we're all getting together, and we're going to say they tell them that food is also a bodily obligation, like a social obligation. But they say, today, you don't have to worry about this. Today, you put it from being productive. And I think that not eating makes you less productive, at least in the capitalist sense. I don't think it ever made you be able to work better. Probably never worked that way. But that's what it's for. Like, break it a little. You don't always have to do things all the time, like a little Shabbos

[Sabbath]. Shabbos has its way of doing it, and Tanis [fast] has its way of doing it. That's the main ikar [essence] of Shabbos, the main thing.

I don't know how to do it. All of these horrible people that they make you put your phone somewhere when you go to their class and stuff, they're right. And they're helping humanity.

Anyways, back to 9-9 [referring to Tisha B'Av, the ninth of Av].

Student: I'm trying to understand. Are you just saying that it's a day to focus on a different Shabbos? It's one day of focusing on something, and that's a different type of Shabbos?

Instructor: Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course. Shabbos is not enough. Shabbos becomes part of the cycle. Tanis has to break cycles in a stronger way than Shabbos.

The Problem with Shabbos: Capitalism Subsumes Everything

The problem with Shabbos? It's like capitalism. Capitalism is very smart, the klipah [shell/husk of evil], and it subsumes everything, right, remember? Like Marx said, it will even sell you the rope to hang yourself with when you're so depressed, right? That was the last Marx thing, the last capitalist sale that will happen, it will sell the last worker a rope to hang himself with. It really happens, just with a gun. Of course it really happens, it sells you a lot of things besides for ropes. It sells you all kinds of things to hang yourself.

And my point is, like I said, you could buy a Shabbos package. And not only that, the word that some of the, you know, there's like corporate wellness retreats which are a kind of Shabbos and whose purpose is to make you work more, right? So they're a trap, right? Right? There's a trap. The Shabbos and Yom Tov [holidays] could be destroyed. It could be subsumed also by the same klipah. Because it says, oh, you have a rest every seventh day. That's very good. Then on Sunday, one day, whenever, you work better. Right?

Taanit Must Be Unpredictable

So no, we've got to do some Shabbos sometimes on Wednesday. It can't be predicted in advance. That's the point of it. Sometimes on Wednesday, I have to do Teshuvah [repentance]. Thursday. Tomorrow is Thursday. What do you mean? It's not Shabbos. Shabbos and—No, there's another thing. It's called tanis. You understand? It's got to be unpredictable. It's got to break the thing a little bit. You've got to break the cycle.

And what we're going to do today, we're going to all get together in shul [synagogue], and we're going to say, oh, whatever, let's not get into what we're going to say. But the point is, we're going to break that cycle. It's very important.

The Problem with Current Practice of Fasting

And that's why I think that, I think that really, that the way that we do tanis are kind of a waste of time. But you have to find, like, of course we do it as a waste of time, because you're just doing all the halachos [Jewish laws], and then your kids come, like I said, and you don't get time for anything.

There has to be some way to break the thing and to make time for something else, to make a possibility, not only time. Time is the way of saying, because everything takes time, but it's really a lot more than this emotional time and space and physical time and space and all kinds of different levels of time and space.

The Ideal: Unpredictable, Crisis-Driven Fasts

So the real good way would be if they would say, OK, this year it's Taanit [fast] in the town. That's what a taanit is. The four taaniyot [fasts] that we have are just like—the archetypal one is whenever there's a problem, we call a Tanis. And we say that day before, or Shabbos before, or whatever.

But Tanis is not the archetypal fast. Oh, it is the archetypal fast. No, it's not. The archetypal fast is the one—we call a fast, because there's a problem. And we realize that we can't go on working. Oh, what do you mean? What about the productivity? What about—

The whole point of the Tanis—people don't realize that. I'm very serious about this. Again, I'm not saying someone has a shiur [Torah class]—sometimes there's a point, there's a great point in having a shiur that goes on every day, but sometimes it becomes like, okay, so now I never have time.

The Problem of Constant Learning Without Thinking

Like, I wouldn't have told the guy that he was with his sefer [Torah book] in the bus stop, right? You're learning so much all the time, when are you gonna think? Right? It's like—Tanis means I don't have time to learn, okay, so. That's the pshat [plain meaning]. Okay, well, that's all the pshat. Now I have to say I have to peace out, okay?

Student: Okay.

Instructor: It doesn't work.

Student: Yeah, for sure.

Historical Models: Avraham Avinu and Periodic Withdrawal

Instructor: There has to be, like, everyone knows that, I never told this to you, right? Rav Tzadok HaKohen [Rabbi Tzadok of Lublin] said in his book, that he has an inyan [concept/matter] from Rav Chaim Vital like this. Rav Chaim Vital, one day woke up in the morning and told his wife, I've got a business trip for three days, I've got to go somewhere. It doesn't matter where. Somewhere, right?

She didn't know where he was going because she wouldn't have that whole story at least. So, I mean, it doesn't look—it seems like nobody was surprised. He woke up in the morning, which we're traveling to where? To some mountain where God said we should go. And everyone was like, sure. Is the donkey ready? Let's get it together. Yitzchak [Isaac] just didn't understand where's the seh [lamb]. That was the big problem. Wait, wait, you forgot to bring the—that's the only question that they had. But everything else made total sense, right? We're going to a mountain.

So from here we see that the normal way of life of Avraham Avinu [Abraham our forefather] was that from time to time he would take a trip to the mountains to meet God, to do his avodah [spiritual work], to do things and his wife wasn't surprised when he didn't come back. When he talked then she started getting worried but before that everything was normal.

He has a whole list of people doing this right?

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: He has a long list. He said that that's why they were shepherds. I like this. I wish I would be able to do this. Like see these people. I've known some people like this. They would tell their wife, wait, I forgot to tell you, I'm going to the [yeshiva] for Shabbos. Bye bye. See you next week. See you on the Shabbos.

You're not allowed to do that, right? It doesn't make much sense that you're allowed to do it. It says that's not a good thing to do. It says that you're allowed to, and it's not a good thing. It says that you're allowed to.

About something where a few people died trying to do it. So you've got to care about your nefesh [soul/life]. I don't know, just saying, there has to be space like that. It has to be like, how often is anything going to get done ever that's not just daily needs?

OK, so we have communal things, like we have fasts and things like that, but there has to be. That was the pshat one. OK, now that's all of the pshat.

Beyond Pshat: The Deeper Meaning of Physical Affliction

Now, pshat is very important to realize the pshat of pshat, like going back to what we discussed about the reasons for physical inui [affliction], like for—and as we said, that of pshat, there is, what did we say last week? So there's like, not pshat, like there's the thing of paying back for the pleasure of your chet [sin]. OK.

Student: Interesting.

Instructor: You said the Christian one, right? Right? I'm going to give you the Christian one now. OK.

The Christian Approach to Pain

There is a Christian one that said, participating in the Passion of Christ, while you're pained. The Christians are the only ones that really like pain for their own sake, I think. I don't know if it's anyone else that really talks like that. Is there? It should hurt, something like that. Only weird ascetics really do it, but still that's the way I do think.

But I do think that no, they said I told you, they said that yeah, because they said that you took pleasure without, like I said, you stole pleasure because you had some pleasure in aveirah [sin]. We're not allowed to have that pleasure, pleasure costs. You have to pay it back by paying like a bank account, but it's not—it's not paying for its own sake. They still think that pain is bad, they're just saying that they're paying back for the pleasure that you had by having some pain.

Student: Yeah, because I mean you're supposed to be atoning for sins and maybe offering up for other people.

Instructor: Exactly.

Student: But it's a lot right, but by not being—

Instructor: They enjoyed their sins too much something itself. It's something like where the world is bad and you have to—

Student: Prior to Vatican II, they had what they called [flagellation] where they were actually [self-flagellating] and they would say Tehillim [Psalms] 51 and 130 as part of the prayers they would do that, believe it or not.

Instructor: Like, prepare yourself.

Student: And supposedly, they would have to make sure, like in at least one order, I know that they would do it in their own rooms. And the superior would make sure people weren't getting too into the pain and enjoying it too much.

Instructor: Even the pain, even your masochism has to be—exactly, we just said this last week that people like pain out of the pleasure, that's what we said, okay, know about it, but I think like this, I think like this, people that cut themselves, yeah, yeah, yeah, but I think that there's a different pshat, and

it has to do with the state of, like, you'd say something like this, with the state of the klipah, the state of the chet [sin], now we need to find—I don't have a good way to talk about this since people on YouTube don't let me say—

Modernity, Universalism, and Jewish Particularity: The Confusion Between Universal and Uniform

The Problem of Standardized Time and State Control

Instructor: Exactly. We just said this last week, that people like pain out of pleasure. Okay, no, but I think like this, I think like this... People that cut themselves, I don't know. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But I think that there's a different shot, and it has to do with the state of, like, you'd say something like this, with the state of the Clydesdor [possibly: klal Yisrael, the community of Israel], the state of the Shekel [the currency/economic state].

Now, we need to find that, it's probably not a good way to talk about this, since people on YouTube don't let me say Kabbalah [Kabbalah: Jewish mystical tradition] enough but they don't let their eyes, their ears are not open.

Student: Not you, like everyone else.

Instructor: Yeah. Anyways, but like we have to explain. I'll tell you what, what the point is, what the point is like this. Okay, so there's, I'll start somewhere else. What, I don't know, I don't know how much time I have, so I took away my phone. So I have a clock over there. I have to hang it up.

By the way, watches, clocks were invented by the capitalism also to enslave us, right? It's for trains, right?

Student: Right, for the trains, and for the...

Instructor: Anyways, this is Bergson's [Henri Bergson, French philosopher, 1859-1941] whole protest against it. Yeah, like, why would I need to know what time it is now? You want to tell me? Well, get tired. I'll know this by myself. I don't need a clock anymore. It's not Christian. I think shkiah [shkiah: sunset, the time for evening prayers] being at 8:12 is not a good thing for the Jews. It's like a deep anxiety that that produces, I think. Trains, well, not trains, but modernity, universalizing shooting [possibly: shiurim, measurements] and stuff.

Somebody wants to ask me, now that we have clock time, can I just do when it gets dark? Yeah, it's a question. Maybe you can't. Maybe you have to do it all every single day. Okay. You don't have to ski [possibly: shkiah] during the rest of the week, so.

Wait, wait, wait. Wait, so I have to get back to where I was.

The Enlightenment Project of Universal Standardization

Instructor: The point is like this. No, no, but I do think, so you see, part of this, it does connect. See, everything is connected now. So since modernity wants the king, not the king, but the emperor of France to be the one that sets the kilogram and the meter and everything. And the whole world has to follow his meters. Otherwise, you're not enlightened. Did you know? If you use customary units, you're not enlightened. The United States to this day is not enlightened enough. We're coming to the French. Because we use these weird things called feet and inches and stuff like that. And they're not rational. Did you realize? We're not rational.

Descartes [René Descartes, French philosopher, 1596-1650] said, Descartes and the encyclopedias, what was his name? Descartes said that we're only going to be rational when

everyone's going to use meters. Don't know, don't know. You understand, right? I'm trying to figure out a few holdouts. Like the United States. But even the United States, like Feinstein [possibly: fine science], only uses meters and stuff. It's only like government that still uses the old ways. In his times, it was people that did it for some reason, or told them to do it. They invented meters.

Canada happens to be an interesting case, because Canada uses the imperial system when it makes sense and the metric system when it makes sense. I think they're enlightened.

So the point is, why do we have this? Because the king needs to be able to tax everyone, basically. That's how it started. Basically, he needs to manage everything and tax everyone and control everything. And if everyone has their own shiurim [shiurim: measurements], and every place calls their bushel of wheat differently, he doesn't have much tax to pay.

This is James Scott's [James C. Scott, political scientist and anthropologist] theory from **Seeing Like a State** [**Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed**, 1998]. Very important book for Kabbalah. But you should read it.

Kant's Confusion: Universal vs. Uniform

Instructor: And **Seeing Like a State**, James Scott, I think that's his name. And the point is like this, and this is why I gave this sheet already about Kantian [Immanuel Kant, German philosopher, 1724-1804] ethics and in particular how there's this confusion in modernity between universal rules in the sense universal and objective, in the sense universal rules are the ones that apply to everyone equally in the same way, and objective rules are rules that are true outside of the person thinking them, but that doesn't mean that they apply in every place in the same way. Do I give the douche [possibly: diyuk, precise distinction] yet?

In any case, this is the application of this, in the same kind of problems. Since we have like this, you understand what I'm saying? Like Kant said that for moral, everyone understand that for ethics to be true that can't be about what I want. But Kant seems to make a leap and think that therefore it has to be the same for everyone all the time. That's why he's like against the obvious exceptions, like lying in the case of the Nazi asking you if they're Jews, they're right.

Kant says that you can't lie, even for a good purpose, because lying goes against the universal law of ethics, and ethics has to be true, has to be universal, and by universal means uniform, like the same in all places. The same way the meter is the same all over, it doesn't matter. If in Europe nobody has a meter stick, it doesn't matter. It still has to be the same meter that the King of France made. You understand what I'm saying?

So that's why it became very hard to talk about human goods in a particular way, because of this misidentification. I think it's just a misidentification. We have this whole other conflict between do we talk about Jewish problems or do we talk about human problems? And nobody realizes that they could be the same thing without being reducible to the same kind of thing.

Jewish Problems as Human Problems

Instructor: All Jewish problems are human problems, just to be clear. I don't believe that we are different kinds of people. And I think even the [Tanya, foundational text of Chabad Hasidism by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, 1745-1812] that said that Jews are a different kind of being, I don't think he

meant to say this in the way that it's a universal fifth kind of being. Because that's how we read it. Since we're scientists, we say, well, he's doing genetic racism. He never heard of genes or races. How could he be doing that?

What he's saying is there's a universal human, there's a human good. But since there are no universal humans in this world, just like there are no actual meters. There's only people that use the general meter. In order to be good in any way, we have to talk about the specific ones. Because we live individual lives or even communal lives, but still specifically we don't live in the enlightened cult of the supreme being or whatever.

Student: But that is still a claim that the particularity of human beings is the same kind of degree of separation as the function of what's called human capacity over animals.

Instructor: Yeah, there's some shared things between all humans versus animals.

Student: Right, meaning, what I think is interesting about the division is that he's saying that the division between a diamond [possibly: tzaddik, righteous person] and a chi [possibly: chai, living being, or ordinary person] is the same as the difference between a universal kind of human and a particular kind of human.

Instructor: No, okay, well, that's... He's making an analogy. I didn't mean to get him to that point. I mean, I did mean to get him to that point, but I have to get him to it and in my way that I can get to it.

Reinterpreting the Tanya's Claim About Jewish Distinctiveness

Instructor: So he's not saying there's another species. No, I think he's saying that the perfect... I would say something like this, the drama [possibly: madreigah, spiritual level] about the greeters [possibly: gedolim, great ones], the really good human being is as different from other human beings as humans are from animals, or at least almost as different. And that's, I think, true.

If you've met, like, we were sort of tricked by our eyes or by our universal categories. All humans are the same, all deserve the same dignity. That might be true. But if you meet a really, like, because he says, if you meet Moshe [Moses], as a scientist, you would categorize him in a different species because he's so different. They're so much better.

Now, it's still true that that betterness is the fulfillment of what is potential in every human. You don't have to make it into a... Maybe this is a commentary on the gap of actualization.

Student: Yeah, good humans are different enough from not good humans, or not fully good humans, to count as different species if you want. But it's just a game on the, it's not really saying it's different species in the sense that you can't become that, or in the sense that...

Instructor: And because he does say that. He won't forget him. Because he has, by the way, it's also, also, that is like, you can't make it too much out of it. Especially, the kids [possibly: Kuzari, medieval Jewish philosophical text by Judah Halevi] say you can't. It's getting too mixed up.

Student: No, right, it's also a very small question. You can't get stuck on that.

Instructor: The Arizal [Rabbi Isaac Luria, 1534-1572, foundational Kabbalist], of course, people have genetic

inheritance. Doesn't mean that you can't get into that. It's still true that the Arizal...

The Question of Converts and Prophecy

Instructor: Okay, I want to get back to what I had. People get stuck on this little [question], so could it get to becoming, okay, we'll be again, and he'll try to become a navi [navi: prophet], he'll just be lacking that one problem. We'll get to the bottom of the question. We're not really... It's like the trolley problem. Everyone is stuck. And the answer truly was, if I did, there was a ger [ger: convert to Judaism], there was a navi, maybe the Kuzari disagrees with that theory.

Okay, all these, like, okay, you know, try. You know something, try to become a navi. We'll all try. And when we'll see that the ger and we're having a harder time than everyone else, we'll see if the ger is right. But the ger could be a navi, too. Of course the ger could be a navi.

Student: Wait, we're getting there. A ger could surely be a navi.

The Lack of Language for Jewish Particularity

Instructor: The point is like this. Of course, there's something important here. That's what we have to get at. There's something very important here. And this is the Jewish problem. There's something very important here that we probably are lacking language to talk about. And whenever we try to put it in language, we end up saying weird things. And we don't understand what we're saying. But there's something very, very important here to be able to talk about.

And this is how I would understand it like this. And maybe this is my over-rationalization of Kabbalistic things, but this is how I would understand it. How I would understand it is, like I said, there's a kind of being, species, animal called the human being. That kind of species, it's true that it's very, very varied.

The Religious Conviction of Human Unity

Instructor: One of the things that makes humans different from animals is that it's kind of a belief that we have that there's one human species. It's very important. I mean, famously, the modern scientists didn't actually believe that, right? It was the religious people that believed this. You know this history, right? We did this once, ever, right? But they're not wrong.

And in early modern, like in Darwinism, I think people were like, how do we even know there's one ancestor for all human beings? We don't actually know that. Nowadays, there are theories that claim that that is true. But the reason that's like scientific racism is mostly based on that theory, that we don't really know that different races are the same species. If we're doing this empirical scientific thing, then people are different in all kinds of ways. So maybe they're different kind of species, similar, but who said that they're a different kind?

It was actually the religious people that were saying...

Culture as Constitutive of Human Nature: The Problem of Global Monoculture

The Historical Religious Argument for Human Unity

Instructor: So there can only be one kind of human being. And originally, the religious people, that's why they were missionaries in Africa and all these things, because they believed that against the secular Darwinists and things that said that there were different human species, they believed that ultimately there can only be one human race in the sense

of human species. This is a piece of history that you probably weren't taught because of anti-religious propaganda. But actually, this is the history, or a big part of history. That's why most abolitionists and so on were religious. There's a lot of that.

Kant famously thought that black people are different species, and it was, there's a very great—or it doesn't have to be only black, the Chinese.

Student: Right, yeah, yeah, true.

Instructor: Yeah, many great modern thinkers actually were extreme right in that sense, extreme racists, because of science and because of their not being in their day at least a reason scientifically to think that humans have a common ancestor. Nowadays, we do believe that, but it doesn't mean, again, questions of where it splits and why it closes. So it's not important. It is important, but it's why I have a note that says in class.

[Phone interruption]

Student: Is that your finger?

Instructor: Yeah. And I have a pre-made message that says in class. But so the kids that I'm asking, not—

So right, so where am I? But the important thing is like this. The point is not to talk about racism and all this matter and heresies. The point is to say it like this.

The Contemporary Problem: How Many Human Communities Actually Exist?

Instructor: The point is to say that there are human communities. Nowadays, it's not clear how many of them there are. Because there's only people that watch Hollywood and people that don't watch Hollywood, which don't exist. So maybe it's only one human community. That's a real problem. But I'm going to get to this. This is what Gullis [?] is, right?

So traditionally, one's like, what's his name? Robin Hanson is busy with this. Like, do we have a monoculture? I mean, it's not really clear to what extent we can talk about different cultures existing anymore. Unless you're like Iran, which has some type of different culture than we have. Do they? Am I clear? At least some of it? China? People that have a great firewall? Some countries that are poor to a certain amount.

No, because the leaders, what I'm saying is that the political leaders of these countries, like Iran, China, Russia, to a certain extent, are deliberately trying to separate themselves from the world, UN culture. By default, everyone lives in that culture. It's a very powerful culture. Whoever is, whoever you want to think is the boss of it, if it's the Pope or the Jewish president, the American president, doesn't matter, the Jewish president, sorry, whoever it is.

Student: No, but I think that there's something that you have to get at this.

Instructor: It's something weird. We have to, I think all conspiracy theorists are always getting at something that you're not allowed to say, but they have these really weird theories because they're not smart enough to figure out what's really going on. But it's true in very weird ways. There's some very weird coordination. It's very true.

Again, we have stories. We still have to tell ourselves that there are different nations and different cultures. Maybe traditionally Jewish, there's supposed to be 70 cultures or 70 nations. Maybe the UN counts 150, I don't remember how

many countries they count. And there should be even more cultures and so on. And supposedly, there's 6,000 languages in the list of languages that you can talk in linguistics.

In reality, it's only about 1 and 1 half languages, English and Chinese, basically. How many people are there in the world that don't speak English or Chinese? Five?

Student: Five? How many? As a second language sometimes, right, but still, right, there's very few, right? Who?

Language as Culture: The Dominance of English

Instructor: And the reason why they speak English, by the way, is because of their culture. Language is a culture. Language is a—because of education. Language is a dialect with the army and the navy, and the navy is the U.S. Navy. It's real, right? You've got to speak English.

Student: But I think also—

Instructor: Do you know that air traffic control in the entire world speaks English? English. And the same thing for computer code. You basically have to read, anyone that's participating in the modern world speaks English. There isn't, I think in China they have some things that work in Chinese, but even, I think even the Chinese codes and stuff are mostly in English, I'm not sure. Right? What's it called, Gujarati, not Gujarati? What's the main—

The American empire is very powerful. Right? Now—

Student: India is pretty substantially—

Instructor: They're all speaking English, but—

Student: I mean, they're calling you that time today, no?

Instructor: I think English, of course, because I'm British. It doesn't matter.

The Illusion of Cultural Diversity

Instructor: The point is, there's really, this is the important thing. So we're used to talking about there being different cultures. And when you think about it, you realize that a lot of it is just the same culture wearing different masks. All the people ultimately have the same morals, for the most part. They believe in the same kind of things being good and bad. Again, with some slight discrepancy, like there's a 30-year difference in every country between the conservatives and the liberals and whatever. But still in the same world, more or less. And there's a reason to think like this is weird, someone is behind this, right? That's what conspiracy is. It must be the Jews coordinating it. Okay, doesn't matter who it is. Point is how did I get into this?

So there's different culture. Now you can't even hear the full conspiracy at least what—

Student: I don't have a conspiracy.

Instructor: I mean the conspiracy is out in the open. The funny thing is it's out there, nobody, there's no secrets. You want to write a piece, I said you write about a piece of code, you gotta speak English basically because of the guy that made the computers was a guy in the America. It's very obvious, no secret. There's also founder effects and path dependencies and all kind of things, reasons why things happen that way, it's not always planned out that way.

Culture as Essential to Human Nature

Instructor: But the fact, the point is that humans are, one of the things that make humans interesting is that we have culture, right? Language, culture, these are—I sent you a list

from the anti-Arab guy, it's like a video of a—no, I sent it in the group one day.

But the point is, humans are—part of being human means to have a culture. It's very important to realize that it's not an add-on thing. If we do a scientific investigation, it's like, what makes humans different? Okay, you could say they have the capacity to have a culture, but then we actually have one, right? We have language, we have culture.

And culture means more than, when I say language, I don't mean the capacity to make sounds, because animals can do that also, right? I mean the capacity to communicate across huge amounts of space and time by symbolic coding system, something like that, right? That basically no animal does that, or at least not to the extent that humans do it. And the extent is enough to call it a different species, okay? That's basically the argument.

The Time Frame of Cultural Humanity

Instructor: Now, but this is very important. This means that when you talk about a human being in the relevant sense, not in the sense of someone has human biology, maybe the guy in whatever, if you believe, ancient, maybe 200,000 years ago, there were people like that. We're talking about basically only in, it's weird, but the time frame that the younger [young-earth creationist] kind of theory talks about, because there's only human culture, at least one that we have any continuity with that we know to talk about, for something like 6,000, 10,000 years, not a lot more. Nobody really remembers anything other than that, right?

There's cave paintings from 30,000 years ago. Okay, nobody knows what they mean, right? Maybe they're just foreign. Who knows?

Anyways, the point is, when you talk about a human, you have to talk about a human with his culture. That's what a human being is. There's no full description of a human that is only the biology section. There's also literature, there's also religion, there's also, that's why if you don't, right, if you want to know a person, you have to know his culture.

As a scientist, even as an alien scientist that would come and try to discuss humanity, try to understand this weird creature that live on this green earth called humans, he would have to learn their language and learn their belief systems and learn their stories and all of that, right?

Critique of the Enlightenment Universal Human

Instructor: This is why the universal, that's very important to realize, the universal human that the Enlightenment and things talk about is not the one that ever existed. Besides, if you really think that the universal human is a Frenchman in the 19th century or the 18th century, which he's obviously not. I think now we're smart enough to realize that that guy was kind of cool and smart, but he wasn't the universal human yardstick. We shouldn't measure all humans by him. If you use inches instead of meters, you're not really less universal human.

But this universalism is the absence of something instead of—right?

Student: But that universal as opposed to metropolitan or universal?

Instructor: No, that guy that I'm talking about is trying to take out all the particular things. I said, the cult, he's going to

believe in only the supreme being. He's going to be a deist, a modern deist, right? He's going to believe in everything not. And he can take off all ornaments, all particular things from his life, worldview, from his being. And he's going to be just the universal human, right?

But even that is just an arbitrary choice because someone else will take off other things and say that's the universal thing. And of course, in some sense, he won that universal human. We somewhat live in the culture that he created because of technology and the mechanisms of the world we live in, kind of living.

The Fragility of the Technological Order

Instructor: And I think now we're starting to realize that it doesn't actually work so well. In other words, it relies on a lot more metaphysical assumptions and certain educational systems working than the mere material necessity of it would work, something like—

Our world assumes that as long as your computer works, which means, of course, there's many cultural choices that go into making computers. Not necessarily that the code doesn't have to be organized. If you learn a little bit of coding and stuff, it's all philosophical concepts of how to organize categories and what's the father, what's the child, things like that. There's very basic metaphysical philosophical choices, even in the ways that your computer works, and the internet works, and so on.

But it still works because it's bits, which are physical things, working. But even for that to work, it turns out you need human beings to believe in some kind of ideal of what is to be a free human or liberalism and so on. And at some point, if people stop being able to communicate at the higher so-called level, the social level, that stops working, too. Because they just cut the cables, literally, right?

Why don't fishing boats cut all the cables connected to the continents? Because they all speak English, right? Which means the U.S. Navy tells them they shouldn't, right? But if they stop, whoever is the one, the troublemaker who speaks, realizes we don't actually speak English, we don't actually care about the American people—

The Particular Nature of Human Civilization: Why "Universal Humanity" Cannot Sustain Itself

The Physical Infrastructure Depends on Cultural-Political Order

Instructor: Because they just cut the cables, literally, right? Why don't we cut, why don't fishing boats cut all the cables connected to the continents? Because they all speak English, right? Which means the U.S. Navy tells them they shouldn't, right? But if they stop, right, if you, whoever is the one, the troublemaker who speaks, realizes we don't actually speak English, you don't actually care what the American Navy does, they're not as strong as they pretend to be or whatever, then you don't have the internet either, the physical one either.

So there is, the point is just, we're starting to realize this in many ways if you look at the world, but my point is that human beings are not this thing that you can abstract away all their differences from all their peculiar, weird things, all their specific differences from, and end up with this universal human.

The Insufficiency of Universal Biology: The Doctor Example

Like the guy would say, it doesn't matter to me which religion my doctor is because as long as he understands the human body. That's true, because, yes, it's true that doctors study the human body as a human body, but you need the doctor not to murder you, right? And if he stops, but he doesn't have the same morality as you, he might just make you a transplant, because, you know, five people, you could save five people, right, if we use all your organs. Maybe that's literally a morality that some doctors in the United States or in Canada have already.

And then, like, it doesn't help all the fact that he's at the base level of reality. He's not actually the baseload of reality, because he's ruling that level also by killing people, right? You need communication on all these levels, right?

So therefore, my point of all of this is, the thing that they teach about, again, biologically, the one that they teach about in medical school, right? They don't teach you, it doesn't matter which yarmulke [yarmulke: traditional Jewish head covering] the guy had before he went to surgery, because they take off his yarmulke by surgery, right? But no, it's the image of it, right? Everyone wears the same hospital gown, right? But turns out that that's not enough.

Student: Who? That's what he's talking about.

Instructor: The scientist, the medical scientist, and he's going to say, imagine all humans.

Student: Culture and characteristics.

Instructor: The guy on the board of the Columbia Medical Ethics has decided that, remember, that in order to make transplants work, we just change the definition of death. Because that's how we solve our problem. As if he didn't have any problem. But his human being is always the guy wearing the hospital cap, right? And they all wear the same, right? Ideally, you shouldn't have a beard or anything like that, either. So then you're entirely the same, right?

Student: You're making, it sounds like you're making jokes, sir.

Instructor: I'm not making jokes. I'm serious.

Student: No, no, no, no.

The Second Level Controls the First Level

Instructor: What I mean to say is, when they spoke about, in 17-whatever, they spoke about the universal human, what came into that? Yeah, it turns out that they actually had some ideas of what the universal ethics would be. That's why we have universal ethics and all. Because they were smarter than the modern guy. The modern guy also has a universal ethics. It's some kind of utilitarianism, whatever. But they did understand that the universal human has also a universal human mind. That's why people like Descartes were actually materialists. Because they did have that.

I mean, if the universal human gets hungry, that's true.

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: The universal thing gets frisky and gets fired. The point is that it's less true. So if you remember last week's class, it's less true than you would think, right? The universal human gets hungry, but there's no universal humans. And when actual humans get hungry, they always get hungry for some food that their culture calls them as food, right? Like it says...

Student: No, no, it's the second level, but it turns out the second level, in many senses, controls the first level.

Instructor: Like I told you from Lesith [unclear reference], from like if he has a different idea of what a human is or different level terms of ethics then he's just going to murder you and all the fact that your hunger is the same as everyone else's.

Like if you like Shakespeare, right, if you stab a Jew he bleeds like everyone else, but the question is if he stabs you, right? It's true, remember Shakespeare, right, if you prick us do we not bleed [reference to *The Merchant of Venice*, Act III, Scene 1]? Of course. But why would you prick me? What's going on?

Student: I don't think you're talking to the same...

Instructor: No, what's meant by that is that human beings are interesting on their particular level, not on the universal. These people that they always in the movie, they always show like this, like, you know, there's nothing interesting about all these people. There's only the things that are interesting about them.

Student: Yeah, they're so boring.

Instructor: They only punish things for it also. They universalize this through in particular.

Student: Right, right, OK, so let's move on.

Instructor: The guy that works with Duet [unclear reference] actually is trying to be that boring as the universal human, which is kind of dumb. OK.

The Central Question: How Peoples Have Figured Out How to Live

OK, but it turns out that he, whatever, any case, my point is, so therefore, this is very important.

Student: [inaudible]

Instructor: Now, here's really where the question is, right?

Student: [inaudible]

Instructor: The question is, this is really where the question is, or the question of the Jewish question is, or the question of any people really is. The Jews are just the ones that tell everyone that there's such a problem for some reason. But everyone should, every, it's also the Irish question. It's not just the Jews, right?

The question is like this. Since, now, historically, factually, we, every group of people but some more than others or some better than others we know about us, we have figured out a certain way to live. This includes, when we say live, what we call in traditional terms live on this world and on the next, to live in what kind of God we have, how we relate to our God, what we think about the ultimate metaphysics of the world, what is really real and so on, what is good, how to propagate our values to our children, like our good, our ideal of the world, how to make our world exist, right?

The human world needs to self-propagate, it needs to teach it to our children, which is what the culture basically is, but not only children, to our students, to our friends, to our people that are part of our world, right? We have figured this out.

Now, we have figured this out in a specific way. We have not, nobody has figured it out in a universal way. The universal way is just a specific way, very much universalized, okay. But we have figured it out in a certain way, right? That's the point.

The Threat to a People's Way of Life

Now, what happens? What happens, and this is really where the question is, because what happens when this way is threatened, right? That's the first first thing, right? What happens when this is threatened, right?

The City as Embodiment of a Way of Life

We have a city, right? The city is not a, like we have this very cute saying, right, he poured out his wrath on sticks and stones, but that's a really dumb way of looking at a city, right? It's like very reductionist. Of course this guy that said this wasn't that dumb. He's trying to do something, right? A city is not sticks and stones, okay? Anyone that tells you...

And the city is a place where humans live in a certain way. They have ideals of how their architecture should be too. But they also probably have ideals of how they cheat or don't cheat. By the way, even the place that cheat is a way how you cheat. If you cheat a different way, that can work. They deal with each other in a certain way. They marry in a certain way. They're friends in a certain way. They do business a certain way. They do all the human beings in a certain way, which works. By default, they don't work. There's no default that says humans just work. You have to have culture.

Destruction of a City as Destruction of a Way of Being Human

So then we have a city. Now comes someone else and he destroys my city. He breaks down the city. Now what happens now? The normal thing to happen is, normal in the sense of assuming my assumptions are correct, is that whatever good way of being a human being these people had is going to stop existing.

Of course usually, like Socrates said every war is really armed about justice. Probably we did a class about this once. The other people who destroyed my city, they think that they have a better city than me and they feel we should all go live in their city, no matter if we're physically living in this city or that city. The point is we should adopt their culture and be them. That's one of Al-Farabi's [Al-Farabi: 9th-10th century Islamic philosopher] justifications.

Student: For?

Instructor: For wars.

Student: Yeah, yeah.

Instructor: That's not what he said. Wars are about that. Wars are always one guy saying we have the correct view. We are human. You're not human.

Rethinking "Dehumanization"

Like again, there's like dehumanization. I don't think it's dehumanization. This is very weird that we, humanization is only when you assume that there's like a universal human and the only people you're allowed to kill is the one... No, if they're wrong you're also allowed to kill them, you see?

The whole, we only need this like better than animals because of this assumption of universal human dignity which is something like scientific like about human and then in order, in order to be able to kill someone has to be not a human, right? That turns out that traditionally that's not the case. There's all kinds of human but being a human is divided in all these ways and if you're a better human maybe I don't know if you're allowed to kill. That's a different question.

Student: Why would you be allowed to kill him?

Instructor: Okay, but in some cases there's war. Stop, stop, stop. Hello, I'm in a class. Is it an emergency? I'm sorry, bye. I'll talk to you later.

Genocide as the "Real" Murder

So, how do you call it? So that person, that human is destroyed, right? It's a real destruction of that. Not only of, you have to be there. Therefore, every destruction of a city, that's like I come to the conclusion that only genocide is murder, right?

Because if you talk about a human being, a human being is not a self-sustaining thing, right? You can't live on your own. A human being is a social being, right? So to kill a human being is not very, it's very sad, but that's not a real murder. Real murder is only when you kill a whole city, right? Or a whole people, a whole civilization, so to speak, right? Then you destroy a human being and that's what that's existing, right? Right? That's the situation.

The Fate of Peoples: The Example of Zebulun

Now, that would be simple. Then we wouldn't have any problems, right? If we would have all been dead, we wouldn't have any problems. Not only if we would have been dead, right? That's the other point. If we would be like the Sers [unclear reference] and Shavuot [Shavuot: Jewish holiday; unclear reference here] who are dead functionally, right? They don't exist. They're that kind of person. Look at that. There's no such that kind of guy. There's no Zvilamite [Zebulonite: member of the tribe of Zebulun] anymore. Whoever Zvilam was must have been amazing. And because of that, right? There's only Judeans now, right?

So the Zvilam people, they stopped existing. Some of those Wilhelmites [Zebulonites] became Judeans. That's the point. They still were destroyed as their kind of people. Now there's only Judah kind of people. And that's all. Maybe it was very sad. Apparently whoever destroyed them thought that he had a better way of being a human being and it's correct for him to destroy that. Or the other ones that were subsumed also. In this sense, there's murderers in question, but the ones that came to Judea and they said were Judeans now, they also realized that Judah, Judah has a better way of life. And they said, we're stopping being Zebulonites. Now we're being Yehudah [Yehudah: Judah], right? That's the claim, right?

Student: So like in biology, there may be more Zebulun, but in this...

Instructor: Yeah, yeah, it doesn't matter. We're not talking about biology. There's no biology.

Student: No, I'm saying.

Instructor: There might literally not be biology, but that's a different discussion. But we're not talking about biology. There's no culture, right?

Student: Yeah.

Instructor: Right, now, this is a normal situation. This is called destruction of a [cuts off]

The Problem of Jewish Survival in Exile: Culture, Identity, and the Possibility of Continued Existence

The Paradox of Exile vs. Complete Destruction

Instructor: No problem. There's not a problem. It's not a problem. It's very sad for the people that get destroyed, but there's no question left. There's nobody to ask the question.

There's a bigger question called exile, right? Exile is this thing that Jews invented. I mean, they didn't invent it, but at least the primary, again, the primary example of it is the Jews. The Jews, specifically those Judeans, after maybe in the first temple, but for sure after the second temple, decided that they're not going to accept the verdict of the war, right? We discussed this in a different context. But the point is, or we could say it in a different way, they were not actually destroyed, right? The city was breached, and then the temple was destroyed and all of that, and somehow the city continues living, right?

What Is a City? The Case of Jerusalem

Jerusalem: Physical Location vs. Cultural Identity

Instructor: That's why it's very weird. We talk about Jerusalem, like the Bnei Yerushalayim [the children/inhabitants of Jerusalem], and then people are like, wait, I was in Jerusalem, it's pretty built up, nothing destroyed. But again, the question, you could question what the liturgy exactly should say. But when we talk about a city, we're never talking about the walls.

And it's a serious question if Jerusalem was built. Maybe what was built in place of it is you were in Jerusalem. I think it's what was, Jerusalem doesn't exist. I mean, it exists in an ideal, it's still that place. But basically, some semi-European, semi-Middle Eastern city was built in its place. It's not clear where, like different blocks of the city are fighting about which city it is. But Jerusalem went right, there's streets that are called Olympia Street, okay? That's not Jerusalem, okay? King George. How is King George like one of the main streets in Jerusalem? Obviously Jerusalem not, that's not Jerusalem, that's like a British colony, right?

Historical Precedent: Ancient Jerusalem's Multiple Locations

Instructor: But that's not even real Jerusalem anyways. That's just because it's not real, because it's not on the location. I'm curious about the location. We could rebuild an ancient city in a different place, you know? They're not going to be in the same place. In the ancient world, people actually practiced that. Jerusalem itself was rebuilt three or four times in slightly different places.

Student: Eighteen.

Instructor: Yeah, no, but King David's city is not the same place as King Herod's city was. We actually, you can visit both of them nowadays. And they're a few blocks apart. It's the same city, though. Nobody thought it was a different city, because this is the city.

Student: I thought you were saying even the ancient Jerusalem.

Instructor: Right. It's another question. It was a Jebusite [Yevusi] city to begin with. But then it became a Davidic city at some point. And that's what it means to build Jerusalem.

The Naomi Shemer–Amos Oz Dispute

Instructor: It doesn't mean like Hannah, what's her name? Like Naomi Shemer said, right? Remember the fight that Naomi Shemer had with Amos about this, right? About the shuk [market]. You know the song which was written while the old city was under Jordanian occupation? It says that the shuk of the Old City is empty. And Amos wrote a letter in the newspaper or something like that and said he doesn't

understand what she means. Empty? It's been there. You can see it. It's full of Arab women walking around.

And Naomi Shemer wrote a poem and it was a lot more right-wing than him. She answered and she said that he sounds like there was a guy whose wife was conquered by someone else and said, what are you saying? She's just with another man. You understand?

A City Is Its Culture, Not Its Population

Instructor: But when you're talking about a city, we're not talking about the people, of course. There's different people living in it. It's not the same city. It's just in the same place. It's not the same city, right? It's the city being built up. It's the kind of culture that that city represents or is.

Of course, there might be some physical needs. It might be that it can only exist in a certain location. I'm not saying the location is not important. The location might be a part of what makes it able to be what it is. It's part of the conditions that you have to have a certain climate or a certain culture or a certain economic base, place, whatever it is, for the city, the human city, to exist, but the city is not a place.

The Intellectual and Practical Problem of Continued Existence

Jerusalem's Problematic Survival

Instructor: Now the weird thing is that Jerusalem still exists. It went on existing after being destroyed. Now this situation is very problematic. It's problematic intellectually, like it's hard to justify, or at least you need a description of what's going on, and it's also hard to survive, even if it's justified. Those things are not disconnected, right?

Rav Saadia Gaon: The Promise of Good Answers

Instructor: Like Rav Saadia [Gaon] said that, and when the Navi [prophet] told us, v'chol kli yutzar alecha lo yitzlach [and every weapon formed against you shall not prosper], and said, this is a promise of the Navi that we will always have good answers to the people who have arguments against our religion. Of course, literally, it's talking about tools of war. But there's not a big difference between conquering a culture by argument and conquering it by the sword. Those are just different ways of convincing the people to stop being and be someone else, something else, right?

So these are two things, but they're two distinct things. You can still be convinced by the argument and still have a hard time, right? But mostly, it's probably the arguments are even more important, right? And this is the argument.

The Inseparability of Jewish People and Jewish Culture

Instructor: This is why people that have discussions about the Jewish culture and the Jewish people, with the Jewish religion, are really confused. Because there is no Jewish culture without Jewish people. Whatever you think is the good, which is like the Jewish way of instantiating the human good, that's what it is. If you think you shouldn't be religious, then you're not religious, doesn't matter. There's still, there isn't a possibility to talk about, Jewish is about religion, not a people.

Okay, I'm not a people, but I act in that religion, right? Otherwise, it stops existing. The truth can go on existing in the world of form somewhere. It doesn't make any difference, right? There isn't really such a truth, because we're talking about the human kind of truth. So I think that can work.

The Challenge of Rome: Why Continue as Jews?

The Roman Question

Instructor: So the point is, now we have a real question. And the first question is, who told you that you have a better way of life than the Romans, right? The Romans still exist, right? They just changed their name to a church now. It's a famous church called the Roman Church. And they were the funny ones, but we said that they're still the same. Like, they're the ones that call themselves that. And they're not ashamed? No, I don't. Anyways.

But anyways, my point is, and the Roman Empire's culture obviously still exists, right? The guy's still literally building Roman columns in his building. It's like part of the culture, and their ideals and so on. And they claim that they have a good way of living, which I'm sure it has something to speak for it. It's not totally nonsense, right?

The Question of Assimilation

Instructor: And then we should just let what we call the question of assimilation. But they also managed to conquer us, right? So they're stronger militarily, at least, which is a claim for their culture being better in some way, right? And their god being better, which using god as the word for whatever culture and good, ideas of the good, exist in that world. Although the people that destroyed the temple really believed in their gods, so that's a problem. But whatever.

However, and now we have a question. Why are we continuing to exist? But yeah, now we have different answers, better and worse ones, right?

The Jewish Answer: Non-Exclusivist but Particular

Jews Don't Claim Exclusivity on Goodness

Instructor: Now, assuming that there, what, what, if, assuming, I'm not going to be worried about this question right now. In other words, we're going to skip it, but I'm saying, assuming, since we continue to exist, we must understand that we are assuming that there's some way, or it doesn't have to mean that nobody else can, you don't have to believe, you don't have to be exclusivist, right? You don't have to believe there's no way to be a good person without being Jewish.

I don't think any Jew, historically the Jews don't actually believe that, right? It's the Christians that believe that, though the extreme Jews. But historically the Jews believe that you can definitely be a good Roman and even go to heaven and so on, like most of the Rambam [Maimonides] says like that at least.

But Jews Believe Their Way Is Better for Them

Instructor: But we historically believe that, but we still think that we probably can't, right? At least it would be hard for me and my children to be good by being good Romans. Otherwise, it's much cheaper and much more convenient to become a Roman. And they kind of let you. The Romans were not anti-immigration. And not as much, like there was a question about that in Rome too, but for the most part, you could. Josephus became a Roman famously, right?

But the claim is that at least to us, like we say for our god, right, and there's many different ways in which Jews have explained this themselves over the generations. Some of them actually agreed to the conclusion and converted or assimilated. But the ones that didn't, it means that they're saying that we think that we can do better than you, right? For us, at least. It

would be very hard. It's worth it for us to even have hardship, because we have some way of being people, which you don't, or which you don't, we don't read their language, your holy books don't mean nothing to us. They don't really have holy books for whatever your sacrifices and your rituals don't do anything for us. Ours do something for us.

Even Without the Temple, Jewish Practice Is Superior

Instructor: Now, of course, we don't even have our own rituals, but we do have our holy books, and we have some of them, and even that is better than your... Our rituals are better than their whole ones. They tried to simulate it, and they moved on. They tried to simulate...

The Real Jewish Problem: Is Survival-in-Exile Even Possible?

Everyone Assumes There's an Answer

Instructor: Now, what I want to get... I assume that everyone has the answer to this. I realize that we don't have the answer to this. In any case, now we have a question of how. This is the problem. The real problem, of course. The real Jewish problem.

The real Jewish problem is that even if you agree to that, it's still not self-evident that it's possible. Right? Why is it not self-evident that it's possible?

The Foundational Argument: Culture Requires Material Form

Instructor: Because you remember. You remember what we said. You remember the whole point, the whole reason that we say that there's such a thing as value, and that culture is what it means to be human, not just like this universal idea. It's that, again, this is modern times, an ancient time that just said, straight out, it's a question of whose culture is better. Nobody thought that it could be universal. Like the Romans had such pretenses in some sense. Like imperialism is about that, but it turns out to be just Roman, right?

But the reason why we say that is because we say in order to be good people you can't just give like give a lecture and say these are the good ideals and that's what you do. You have to have a certain way of dress. Why do you have to have a certain way of dressing? How does that help—

The Problem of Cultural Preservation in Exile: Why Judaism Cannot Be Reduced to Abstract Principles

The Impossibility of Universal Culture

Instructor: Nobody thought that it could be universal. Like the Romans had such pretenses in some sense. Like imperialism is about that. But it turns out to be just be a Roman, right? But how do I say it? So assuming that you have that, the reason why we say that is because we are saying, in order to be good people, you can't just give a lecture and say, these are the good ideals, and that's what you do. You have to have a certain way of dress. Why do you have to have a certain way of dress, and how does that help? I don't know exactly. Nobody knows exactly. Nobody even knows which part of a culture you could take out and it could continue to be that culture. Literally nobody knows. And probably, you're not supposed to know probably. These are God's secrets. I don't know.

The High Modernist Error: James Scott's Forest Analogy

Instructor: These are things that culture, this is also one of the mistakes of modernity, what he calls high modernism. You

can't actually, you can't even do this in nature. James Scott's example is from a forest. Modern forestry, like what was once modern. Now we have two of us already, with the modern ecology and everything. But the moderns originally said something like this. There's a forest. Originally, people just let forests grow on. There's all kinds of random trees and bushes and stuff that grow on. Then once in a while, people come, and they cut it down. They use it, and then it grows back. And we try to be careful not to cut down too much at a time, so it can perpetuate itself and so on.

Then the Germans came and said, the literal Germans, by the way, the same ones that killed the Jews for similar reasons. Yeah, it's not a joke. And they said, look, we kind of know what makes trees grow. It's like three variables. For example, soil, and air, and water, and whatever. And we only really need one kind of tree. They planted these huge fires [forests], like in geometrical order. But it's also kind of weird that you have to go around to find the tree. Let's just make rows of trees, each one three meters apart, exactly. There's like a grid. You can literally go to such fires [forests] still. They ruined it for generations, these kind of things.

And there's only one kind of tree in that fire [forest], and there's equally space and nothing else growing and they figured out every 70 years you cut it down and you get the next one and so on. It's perfectly organized and we could fully control the fires [forests]. Turns out that this works for one and a half cycles and they didn't even know that there's actually more variables to a good forest than those three ones that the scientists discovered and turns out that those random bushes were actually doing something for the big trees also and so on. And now we have science and ecology a little more advanced and realize that and it's also a big problem with monocultures, right? If you have one kind of tree, then one bug that destroyed that tree, then you have nothing left, and so on and so forth.

Application to Human Culture

Instructor: Basically, we don't even know what nature needs to keep on surviving. And this is even for trees, which are relatively simple, relative to humans. So nobody knows what it really takes for a human family, or human culture, or human community to survive. It might be that this is why the crazy conservatives are not crazy. They have a point. Sometimes they end up funny. They seem funny. But you don't know if the amount of salt you put in your kugel [traditional Jewish pudding/casserole] of Friday night isn't what's keeping Yiddishkeit [Judaism/Jewish way of life] to go.

We don't actually know. Everyone is rationalist and has sciences. We know. You only have to believe. You have to have ethical monotheism. That's enough. Turns out all the people that said ethical monotheism, most of their grandchildren are not Jews anymore. So obviously that's not enough. I'm not saying that ethical monotheism isn't a great thing. It sounds a good thing. I mean, I think it's a very poor description of what the Torah is, but it sounds like good things, but it's definitely not good even for itself, because it doesn't perpetuate itself, which is like condition number one for being successful culture, right?

So we don't actually know what those things are but there's something and this is the argument behind the cloud continues first time [Amud HaAnan - the Pillar of Cloud], right? Remember one of my most famous YouTube video said

they have to work time on showers [Shabbos] for similar reasons, right? Because we don't know if Shabbos [the Sabbath] of course nobody's dumb enough to say a multi one that the Shabbos has to do with the time but yeah yeah he know he has no explanation that and modern week since we did in a culture that remember this in that case but we don't know because what I'm saying is you can't, this is my point, right?

The Strongest Argument Against "Modern Judaism"

Instructor: It's not actually, if you could be, this is my strongest argument, if you could be a modern Jew, like, modern was the claim, but the central claim of that, then it's not clear that you should be a Jew at all, right? Because you could be a good person, okay, you could say, he has like a justification, everyone follows the laws of their ancestors, we'll follow our ancestral laws, okay, you know? That's not true, our point is true. Okay. It's not true. OK, well, wait. My point is something else. My point is that that's not the argument. I guess that depends on what your argument for why there's specific cultures to begin with.

The Specificity of Jewish Goodness

Instructor: But if the argument is a deeper argument, if the argument is there's a kind of good person called a Jew, it's not interchangeable with everything. I'm not saying there's no other kind of good people. There might be other good people. We've probably met some of them. No problem. But there is a certain kind of good person called a Jew. Maybe it helps for the ecology of the world that there's more of the one kind of good person. It seems to be like God wants that. Like, that's how the world has usually been. Any case, there's one kind of good person being a Jew.

And to be that kind of great person is not having three principles. Because everyone has those principles. Ethical monotheism, like, who doesn't believe in that? Okay, you could be, by the way, ethical polytheism doesn't sound so bad either anyways. Like, maybe it goes together, you can't be, okay, whatever. Like, it doesn't matter. I just said it for my polytheist friends to be happy with.

My point is, is that those years? What? Is that normal that you change every 100 years? If there is this thing called the Jew? It doesn't change so much. Again, if the point is something very abstract, like some basic things, it's true that those are the essential good things, but that is not the claim of the religion, of the culture, the culture, no, no, no, they have the same ethics, no, no, no, I've met the Talmudic guys, it's the same exact beliefs. Now, the differences are, like, you have to ask a Goy [non-Jew] to tell you if there's a difference, not a Yiddish [Jew], of course, you see there's minor differences. Even if it's the best thing in the culture, it doesn't mean that that's a small thing.

The Question of Inter-Jewish Assimilation

Instructor: By the way, it's a serious question, by the way, what you're saying is a different question, and it's not that I'm not talking about that. I'm against inter-Jewish assimilation, too, although I'm doing it. But you should be against that for similar reasons. Of course, maybe everything has a limit. It's enough that we're accepting ourselves, all of being Jewish, separate in the nation. We have to also be accepting of other Jews. That's too much. There's a and everything. Your argument is true. It's not clear to me that inter-Jewish

assimilation, which is one of the modern Jewish projects, and famously the [Hasidim] are against it. That's why they don't intermarry with [Litvaks]. Far than there's great inter-Jewish racism.

Student: You mean [between different Jewish groups].

Instructor: Of course, yeah. I'm against that because everything has a limit. Even if these are good arguments, but how many Jews are there? You're going to end up with three because you can't. There's only 15 million Jews in the whole world.

The Central Problem: Can Jewish Culture Exist Within a Dominant Alien Culture?

Instructor: OK, that seems to be, by the way, and I'm getting to my question. I didn't even get the question. The point is that since the argument is that what sustains this, let's say these three basic principles, but what sustains them in the Jewish way, which we claim is important enough for us to make it survive, right? And it has to do with all our d'Oraita [Torah-level] mitzvos [commandments] and maybe even d'Rabbanan [Rabbinic-level commandments] also, but let's even say d'Oraita mitzvos, right? And d'Oraita mitzvos means a culture, means a world, right? It means not other people in a world who are doing something. It means having a whole world, right?

Now, is it even possible to do that within a world that's not that? To what extent are we even Jewish and not Germans of the Mosaic religion, right? Or Americans, right? That's the real question. And if we're just that then it seems like a lot of work for very little benefit because the point of our whole point is to say that no we have a better culture or some in some ways that maybe in some ways others are better we don't have to like even make it absolute but some better things and that's what allows us to be good in our way.

The Reality of Cultural Dominance

Instructor: If we can't actually have our own culture if the dominant culture is extremely strong as it is and has always been in a bad way. Extremely strong. Nobody thinks, literally, we're all Jews and we're speaking English, which was invented by some weirdos in England, or whatever. And we think in English. That's not what we think. We think in English. We live in English, for the most part.

Now, what is the point of being Jewish in English? If you want to read an English smart book, OK. Are there smarter books than the Shas [Talmud] and Shulchan Aruch [Code of Jewish Law] in English? I don't know, maybe there are. Maybe there aren't. OK, that's a question for a goy [non-Jew]. It's not a Jewish question. It's a pretty cool book, but the coolest one, maybe it is, maybe it isn't. That's the point, right? And this is the question of exile, you understand? And exile means you're now, now.

The Zionist Answer and Its Problems

Instructor: One solution, just to be clear, there is a Zionist answer to this problem. I think it's not realistic entirely. If you read Zionists, you'll see that they try to solve this problem, some of them at least. And they said that therefore, right? But even the others, the Zionist thing to say, and I think there's a lot of truth in that Zionist point, is to say that therefore, since we do believe that some of the cultural Islamists [likely: cultural Zionists] or whatever did believe in something called Jewish culture which is worth preserving, has some worth at

least for us, for the world, but cultures do not actually, and at least this was the belief in modernity at least, that cultures do not actually exist without an army and a navy.

Blood and Soil: The Zionist Claim

Instructor: Cultures need blood and soil to exist. There's, again, some truth in that, because otherwise you're a parasite in a host culture, and you're at least at its mercy, but also you stop existing because your children start thinking in the ways and living in the ways of that culture. So therefore if we want the Torah [Jewish Bible/Law] to exist we need to have a land. This is what Britain [likely: Berdichevsky or another cultural Zionist] believes also, right? Well for some in some way, right?

So therefore only in the Jewish state on Jewish soil with Jewish cashiers and Jewish policemen and Jewish prostitutes and all of that can we even begin to be Jewish. Everything until now, the fact that Jews have survived for 1900 years before they're in exile or actually for two and a half thousand years before that doesn't matter or forever and it's been an aberration. It didn't really work. They weren't really Jewish. That's what the Zionist argument is.

The Fatal Flaw in the Zionist Argument

Instructor: It's a really weird argument because it says that all your ancestors were really Jewish. There must be a different answer to this question. You could say the situation has changed. Maybe in modern times it's harder for people to exist without having their own army. Maybe that's true. Maybe not. I don't know. It kind of depends. They also had more of their own countries and other places. It kind of depends on the societies. Yeah. And you could do that in the United States. It's not so impossible.

Symbiosis vs. Parasitism: A Different Model?

Student: I want to go back to, you just used the word parasitic. But there's also a different understanding of some species that's a more symbiotic relationship. And it could be seen that maybe the Jews are the, like there's a bird on the [rhinoceros].

Instructor: But not from our perspective.

Student: But from our perspective, right? Why? From our perspective, we're helping other people.

Instructor: Right, that's what I'm saying. Symbiotic.

Student: No, but it doesn't mean it helps us.

Instructor: Right, that's what I'm saying.

Jewish Cultural Independence: The Kabbalistic Understanding of Exile and the Israeli Experiment

The Asymmetry of Cultural Exchange

Student: Well, that's the argument that if it breaks down our culture, it's not good for us. It doesn't mean it's not good for other people, because we break down theirs in a good way.

Instructor: You're talking about thinking in English, but what is Yiddish? If it was German, it would transform between the languages. There's Jewish English. The English also learn only the bad things. The South and the Gulf only learn bad things from us. They only learn their Yiddish curses. They don't learn any Yiddish blessings. Like, halal [unclear term]. Jews always make Yiddish. Every culture does. That's like the good sign. Every culture does that. So there's a symbiotic point.

And I'm not arguing to be a diasporist, but I think there's something in the way that Jews have transformed culture and made it and seen it through a Jewish lens that maybe by sanctifying one more time. I think it would just be a way that then it's right. Since you can think, let's say, the Jewish culture is better, if that was to be positive, then you could say that, yeah, it makes them better or makes them better. But it makes us better, too.

Student: Yeah, it could be. It's a good thing. It makes everyone better. It's not necessarily can't be. It could be. Does it come at the cost of dilution?

Instructor: No. I tell you, the question is first, then you're less separate. You could say that. In order for us to have the benefits of separation, you don't have to be that as separate. I mean, you definitely shouldn't that it seems immoral to not give anything back to your host culture. You should give them something.

The Hatzalah Proposal: A Case Study in Cultural Export

I have proposals for this, but nobody wants to accept them. We [הצלה] should teach all of America how to make Hatzalah as efficient as we [Jewish volunteer emergency medical service do, okay? We actually do something very basic, and I think a little better. I don't know how much better, but apparently it exists because it's better, than the general version of EMS [שליחים] services. And why don't we go around having shlichim to the old states and teaching them how to do it? [emissaries .Maybe someone will listen to my video

Student: We need a community for that.

Instructor: Oh, that's the problem. It's possible that it's actually hard. There might be structural reasons why we can do that. Because we have—

Student: That's the guy who came to Lincoln who's a few years mad because he liked that. Because the guy came to Lincoln, he was mad because he saw the idea, and he liked it, and he knows he can't replicate it.

Instructor: I'm not like, OK, maybe we should teach them to have community. I don't know. It's a question. Could you have it? Could you not have it? I don't know. Maybe that's OK. But that's, I don't know. I'm saying that's why it's a lot of [trails off]. You think it's not possible?

Student: I don't know.

Instructor: OK, we shouldn't talk this discussion any longer. difficult [קושייא] Let's move on. I have to finish my kushya .It's already 11 o'clock [question/problem

Student: Hello, you want to go on forever as long as the goodness—

Restating the Core Problem: Judaism as a Separate Culture

Instructor: The point is there's a question and you understand the problem. You understand the problem. The problem is that the point of being Jewish is live in a Jewish That's the [Jewish law: הלכה] culture, not to do the halacha halacha good could do too like whatever if it's good for him if it works you might as well whatever. The point is to have a separate culture in a way of being in a city, not which mark —which means that for

always have [exile: גלות] It's true that Jewish and Golus understood the self to be a city within a city. They've never understood the self, only in the Enlightenment, have Jews

tried to understand themselves as citizens. And the truth is that the idea of citizenship was invented then, so it's not just .the Jews that were emancipated. Everyone was emancipated But before that, everyone understood that as a community, which the king is somehow the community above the community, but there are always local communities that take precedence in many ways. And the Jews were one more local community with their structure and so on. But that's the question, right? Understand?

The Mekubalim's Unique Articulation

Now, I have to tell you something, very important. I don't think that many Jews have even known how to express this .[Kabbalists: מקובלים] problem, besides for a few mekubalim Problems the mekubalim create myths to express it, because there isn't a better way to express it. But the mekubalim have expressed this problem very clearly, and have also expressed how different ways, like some of them might be symbiotic, I don't know. But they've expressed different ways of how to .deal with it

Which is why, if you're a Yidden [Yiddish: Jew]—

The Zionist Solution: Successes and Failures

And just to be clear, the Zionist solution didn't actually work.

Student: I think it did work.

Instructor: I think Israeli Jews, including the most Haredi ones of them, have a cultural [ultra-Orthodox: הרה"ק] independence that is needed, necessary for Judaism to exist. Also, they're the only Jews left, other than from Jewish .America

Student: Okay, that's because of the pressure. There are some Jews, only Jews. There are some Jews.

Instructor: Out of Israel, I'm talking about. There are almost no Jews out of Israel. There's less. The Russian guy, it is what the guy is. Okay. There are very strong pressures stopping this, it's true.

In any case, but I'm thinking even culturally. Like, it's weird to me that Haredi people don't get it, that they're also a culture within a culture. They're playing their own Golus game within the state. But the point is still that there is a certain cultural independence because of not speaking, because literally in Hebrew speaking, Zionism did one good thing, which was bringing back Hebrew, or making it a living language.

Student: Who?

Instructor: Ben-Yehudah [Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, reviver of modern Hebrew].

The Fragility of Hebrew in Modern Israel

Yeah, and I think that that gives space. But unfortunately, if you actually go on Israel, you know that Hebrew is possibly a dying language within Israel, right? I have a friend, yeah, I have a friend whose sister works in the Hebrew Academy, The Academy of the [האקדמיה ללשון העברית: what's it called which was modeled on the French],[Hebrew Language Academy of French. And there are now studies showing that Hebrew fluency is actually on the way down in Israel. And it's .English. Because the economy runs in English

And you could literally go into Tel Aviv and hear more English, not only in Tel Aviv, like where all the immigrants live, like the Americans. Okay, then next generation, they'll speak Hebrew. But it's actually many people whose grandparents spoke Hebrew as a first language, or you know there were all these

scientists who only spoke their children Hebrew with it which I didn't know myself and you know like it's funny like real idealistic like we're gonna create a new man, a new Jew. And then their grandchildren—

Student: Oh yeah, yeah.

Instructor: And then their grandchildren mostly speak English because that's the language of business and of science like the universal language and they start thinking English too and like it's a big lot. Okay, there's all these theories social marketing and it is really social debates and theories.

But there's a huge pressure on small states like Israel, especially when they think of themselves, at least, as existing as part of the Western system. And there's huge pressure on them to be social, to be a little version of the United States, and to not have cultural independence.

Cultural Independence vs. Western Assimilation: Historical Examples

You know that, I forgot who was the prime minister, like the Israeli government didn't let the Beatles come to Israel because they said that they were a bad influence. That era has passed a long time—

Student: They weren't wrong.

Instructor: The English felt the same originally. They were like we're Jewish, we could have a Jewish song. They didn't play Wagner all things now Israel.

the Ninth [תשעה באב: Sadly, you should really cry on Tisha B'Av that the Israeli government [of Av, Jewish day of mourning think that it's a win that they can get the Eurovision contest. You should be the one country that spits on it. Like, seriously? We have our girls undressing on the stage for the old European perverts? That's what the state of Israel is great about? And we're never going to win, by the way, because .they're still going to be better than us over there

It's very sad. There's actually an interview with Golda Meir [Israeli Prime Minister 1969-1974] saying this in her time about the origin. I don't care about this. The old times, they were really trying to get away with it.

So you understand what I'm saying? So it's not clear that probably the Frum [Yiddish: religiously observant] people in Israel, again, which have not only Frum, by the way, the right, in general, religious right, has a very strong cultural independence from America, which, of course, causes diplomatic incidents every week. But culturally, there's some extreme power in that. And that's one of the points of the state of Israel existing.

The Kabbalistic Framework: Land, Exile, and the Soul

But the Mekubalim, they also believed there. By the way, the Mekubalim, one of the earliest Jews to, I mean, of course, because he was before them, but they actually practiced it. And what we call the great people and they're probably one of the most coherent theories of Judaism that I need to ever have. And they believe very much in the physical state of Israel, not the state, land not state, land. They didn't really care about political power, very interesting.

But they did care, you see, they did care very much about the land. They literally believe that this is the divine soil. I don't know. This is weird. At least the Jewish way, because they said, this is weird, if you want revelation in the Jewish, if you

want God to speak to you in Hebrew, you've got to live in Israel. Passively true, right? Hasn't been disproven yet.

The Kabbalistic Metaphor: The Soul in the Body

And they very much explained the paradox or the predicament of exile. Their images were always this, of course, using this and the [righteous person :צדיק] whole structure of the tzadik tzaddik and the shema's [unclear reference] going down, in some sense, very much saw it as analogous. I don't know .which analogy everyone knows that we could use

But the Kabbalists basically saw the descent, like the existence of the Jewish people in exile, as the highest analogy would be the descent of the soul, which like every Neoplatonist believes, that the human soul doesn't belong in a body. And therefore, not only is there a very similar problem, the soul has things that it does that it likes doing. The essence of the soul, OK, that's again, let it. It doesn't matter. It doesn't hurt anything.

But the soul also wants to express itself in certain ways, like :מצוות] primarily in thought, but maybe in certain mitzvot and certain actions also. And it's actually [commandments hard for it to do that in this world of the body. But according to them, the theory of the Torah is that there is a way to do that, .or there's some way

The Prison Metaphor and the Problem of Suicide

Like [the mystics] said that the mystics, the name of the mysteries, that the soul is in prison in the body. And that's why it can't leave because if God puts you in prison that's why you're not gonna commit suicide, you know, right? Because if God puts you in prison who let you escape? Very cool reason not to—

The Torah as Sword: Building a Palace Within the Prison of Exile

The Soul's Prison Transformed into Purpose

Instructor: And it's actually hard for it [the soul] to do that in this world of the body. But, according to them, the theory of the Torah is that there is a way to do that, or there's some way—like, you know, Socrates said that the mystics, it's in the name of the mysteries, that the soul is in prison in the body, and that's why it can't leave, because if God puts you in prison, that's why you're not allowed to commit suicide, right? Because if God puts you in prison, who will let you escape? Very cool reason not to commit suicide.

But they're actually—the later Neoplatonists and especially the Jewish ones—explain that this means that it's a good thing. Because if God put you in this prison, there must be something for you to do in this prison. It's not like—but yeah, when you say God did it, you mean it's good, right? Doesn't mean that you can't go against God because he's stronger than you. Means because he's right, right? Because he's good. And therefore there's a way to create a palace out of that prison in some sense.

In other words, give the soul—although it is, you can say, parasitic. I mean, it's not the correct word, but it's like needs in order for it to do its things. It's not going to be able to provide its whole world. It's so big and being the whole world isn't true. And before it, they saw the sand or whatever in different levels. In this world, it can use this.

The Parallel: Jewish Exile and the Soul's Embodiment

In the very same way, in a similar way, they understood that the Jewish people being in exile—the Jewish people don't

belong in exile, which means they have their own world. And they carry it in their head, unfortunately, in exile. It's not existing. But the point of a Yid [Jew] in Galus [exile] is to acknowledge that.

Like the saying, that they like saying: If you live in the land of Israel, by which they understand, not being under the influence of a certain side, of a certain, right, one of the demons that control different nations—and if you live in America you are under the demon of the United States. There's no way out of that. Even when you pray to God you pray in English, or you think in English, it doesn't matter. I mean, it does help a little, but it's going through sort of the American God, right? And—

Student: Overly focused on Parnasah [livelihood].

Instructor: Yeah. True. And then when he adapts to Parnasah in America, there's a point in that. Like he is able to do something very paradoxical.

The Ramak's Two Types of Exile: Egypt and Post-Sinai

And that's—the Ramak [Rabbi Moshe Cordovero] says like this. Ramak says that there's two kinds of Galus, and I'm going to finish with this thought, because I like this image very much.

First Type: Galus Mitzrayim [Egyptian Exile]

There's two kinds of Galus. There's Galus Mitzrayim [Egyptian exile]. In Mitzrayim [Egypt], we're actually in danger of genocide, because we could have stopped existing. If that's why we had to go out. That Galus couldn't have existed and couldn't have went on forever. Because at some point, we would just be Egyptian. And of course, Egypt was then the dominant culture. It matches very well. And it would be entirely destroyed. And that's like a human being being in the belly of a monster, and slowly the monster devours it.

Second Type: Post-Sinai Exile with the Torah as Sword

But, now that we are after Mitzrayim, we have the Torah. So the Torah is like this. This is what the Matan Torah [giving of the Torah] gave relative to Galus. That guy, there was a person, a human being swallowed by a monster, now he's living in the belly of the beast. It's a biblical image right from Yonah [Jonah]. He's living in the belly of the beast, literally. And the Torah is a sword.

Now this guy has a sword by which he can cut himself out, carve himself out of space within the belly of the beast. That's the Torah. Now that you have the Torah, what it sees the Torah doing in Galus is allowing Galus to create a space within this impossible state, where we need a space. If we don't have a space, you're going to be devoured. You're going to become part of the monster. You're going to be digested by it.

But you have certain tools, very specific tools, which allow you to create yourself a house, to build yourself a house, like inside the Leviathan, inside the monster. You're going to create a house. And that's what we're doing in Galus. This is an image of the Galus. We're under the—we're inside the monster. But we have the tools to create a house out of the monster. We didn't bring our own wood in. We're creating a house out of the master's house and using its own tools to create ourself a space, which is our own space within that. That is the state of the Galus.

The Messianic Breakthrough

And when Moshiach [Messiah] comes, we'll break through and get out of the monster to actually have our own thing. That's

the opposite of like, I'm going to break out. In any case, that's his image. And I think that that's the story. Anyways, that was what I wanted to say.

Closing Exchange

Student: Your major fantasy has this about the Shalosh Regalim [Three Pilgrimage Festivals], the Shrine of—

Instructor: Yeah, I have ways of describing how this works, but it's really 11 and something. He says about the Shalosh Regalim, the Shrine of Boshu. He says that's before that, the Torah. That's what this means. Yeah, we have to think of how the Torah actually helps us doing that. But yeah, that's his thought. But yeah.

Student: That's very nice. Thank you.