

TEASER TRANSCRIPT FOR WEB

Shira: Shalom, Joshua

Josh: Shalom Rabbi Shira, it's great to see you.

Shira: It's great to see you as well. I'm really excited because we are here to do a little bit of a teaser for our new podcast, which is called Chutzpod! Ancient texts for modern times.

Josh: That's right. You all are the very first listeners to our new project: Chutzpod! It's the podcast named after the Yiddish word "chutzpah," meaning audacity, nerve, boldness.

Shira: Yeah together we're going to explore Torah and other ancient and more recent texts as we use our own chutzpah to look at modern life through a fresh Jewish lens.

Josh: And yes, we invoked the "T" word, Torah, but please do not be nervous. Do not switch off your set. This is no Sunday school. Here on this podcast, we're on a search for relevance and immediacy. Basically, how can these words from the past enrich us today right now? Our aim is to reach out to Jews of all stripes and to people who just consider themselves to be "chai-curious."

Shira: "Chai-curious?" So is this going to be about Judaism or marijuana?

Josh: No, no, no, that's "hi-curious." There also, of course is "*Chai*-curious," which I believe is a Starbucks promotional campaign.

Shira: Amazing. Okay, so look, here's what we want to try to do, I think. Tell me if I got it. We want to try to address some of the toughest questions of our day. Why are we here? Why is this happening? I mean, choose whatever the "this" is.

Josh: We've all got a "this."

Shira: We've all got a "this." Personally or like, in the world. How can I make a difference? We all have these questions and we want to just address these questions through the lens of Jewish text, ancient texts, contemporary texts. This is a podcast we hope, we aspire, for humans who want to lead a meaningful life. For anyone who's ever been out on a run on a Saturday morning, you know, or like sitting on the couch or like in a bar with your friends and you're thinking to yourself, "Alright, this is it. I got this one time around. What do I want to do? How do I want to learn? How do I want to grow?"

Josh: Right on. These are all questions that hum in the background of my mind a lot and often I don't address them and I'm excited to address them with you. Should we introduce ourselves to the audience?

Shira: Yes. So Josh, who are you?

Josh: Well, Rabbi, I am Joshua Malina. I'm an actor. You might recognize me from the West Wing or Scandal or maybe something else. I have been kicking around Hollywood for about 30 years, but far more important to me than my identity as an actor is that I'm a Jew. That is the cornerstone of my identity, and I try to live a substantive Jewish life but I am always looking for ways to find a little uplift, especially these days.

Shira: Yeah.

Josh: These are dark times, and I'm always in search of a little new knowledge. So I'm really excited to work on this with you to learn from you and with you, Rabbi, but tell me this, who are you?

Shira: It's a very deep question, actually. Who am I?

Josh: Who am I anyway? Am I my resume?

Shira: What is that from?

Josh: A Chorus line. Are you a musical fan?

Shira: I am not a musical fan.

Josh: Okay, well, this will be, well maybe not a major focus of the podcast, this will have to be addressed.

Shira: And I feel like we're getting our first angry emails as we speak.

Josh: So would you also not recognized had I gone with, "who am I two, four, six, oh-one?"

Shira: That I would recognize, I'm not a neanderthal.

Josh: Okay.

Shira: I am Rabbi Shira Stutman and for the last 11 years, I've been the rabbi at Sixth & I in Washington, DC and I left a few months ago. The work at Sixth & I was so incredibly inspiring. I got to work with all different kinds of people. It didn't matter what religious background they had, who were just looking for a meaningful life and looking to be of service in the world. And so I left a few months ago with the goal of trying to sort of translate some of what I learned from my congregants and Sixth & I and all the people I've worked with over 20 years in the rabbinate, out into the wider world, to really have these conversations, to pay attention to the hum in our brains, as you would say, and to really try to figure out how to create the world that we want to see in our own homes and out on the street.

Josh: Beautiful, and am I right that you have a book coming out?

Shira: Oh my God, you're so sweet! I am currently writing a book about the blessing of interfaith couples, tentative title "Some Greater than its Parts," but I don't really love the title so listeners, if you have a better title, let me know.

Josh: Oh, yes send them in. You can write to us Chutzpod@gmail.com.

Shira: Perfect. And really, if we're talking about the book, the book sort of dovetails with the podcast in that it doesn't matter to me and I'm pretty sure you too Josh whether someone is Jewish. What matters is that they do Jewish. Doesn't matter if you feel like you're a good person, what matters is if you do good in the world,

Josh: Absolutely. Unless you're my doctor I don't care whether you're Jewish or not. Can I say that? Was that chutzpah?

Shira: That's why we're called Chutzpod! There's gonna be some chutzpah here. Okay, on every episode, we're going to do a little bit of learning together, sometimes with a guest, sometimes on our own. So let's get to it. Let's get to today's hum moment. So this past weekend, I was sitting with a group of friends. And you know, we had this realization that among the small group of us, every single one of us had started something new during COVID. I quit my job like I spoke about before, but you know, whether it was someone deciding to try to have another child, whether it was someone deciding to cut back on their work and take on something that used to be an avocation and make it a vocation, whether it was someone who unfortunately split from their partner or found a new partner and fell in love, there were all these different people who were at a point of newness and change. And so I was thinking about that, about that inflection point, you know, you stand at the crossroads, right? And you're deciding which path to take; how do we make those moments sacred? How are they not throw-away moments? Judaism is actually quite into liminal spaces what was before and what will be and tries to help us make them sacred because of all the emotions that are mashed up in them. All the emotions that are a part of these in-between moments, think of what you're feeling right now. I'll use "I" statements. I'm so excited. I'm so joyous, just happy to be laughing with you on this and to see your face.

Josh: Me too.

Shira: I'm remembering our past. I'm anticipating our future. I am terrified that this is going to be a total flop and I'm going to be embarrassed. The best liminal of moments have all of that.

Josh: I like how you're talking about time as sacred because I do think of the Jewish people as a temporal people that we live often more in time than in space, we mark the Jewish calendar. Our holidays are precise and specific and we live in time sometimes rather than space. And I think in part because we have a history of persecution in which we as a people have been

moved around and kicked out of many spaces over the course of millennia. And so we've found a way to settle in time together.

Shira: Yeah. We found the positive.

Josh: That's right.

Shira: Right, so we have this blessing called the shehecheyanu, which is a favorite I know in my house. It is a blessing in which we say "Shehecheyanu, we give thanks to God for giving us life," for being actually alive. You could only say a blessing if you're actually breathing so the shehecheyanu. The v'kiymanu, right, this idea that we have been brought along sometimes we have been dragged along right v'higiyanu, and we have arrived, la'zman hazeh, to this moment. Maybe this is not the best moment, maybe we are lost in the forest and we are going to choose whatever path, the more or less traveled by in this moment. Maybe we are going through a divorce or a loss or a breakup of some sort. But we have arrived at this moment and we are turning to face the next one.

Josh: As I listen to you, I'm realizing that there's more to the shehecheyanu, I know that it said at prescribed times at the beginning of holidays and things like that and I know I've also used it with my family at joyous times like we're all together again, even if it's Thanksgiving or whatever the event is. So I think of it as a joyous prayer. Am I wrong? Is it as appropriate to say it in a time of darkness and difficulty as it is to say it at a time of rejoicing?

Shira: Yeah, I think that is true to an extent. Right. And I'll begin with the caveat: you don't say shehecheyanu at a funeral. At an extremely sad moment you wouldn't say the shehecheyanu, and for sure, in traditional Judaism, there are prescribed times to say that.

Josh: So there are also proscribed times to say it. Don't say it at a funeral.

Shira: That's right. Note to self: if you've learned one thing from this f***in teaser...

Josh: You're gonna get bad looks at that funeral.

Shira: The ancient rabbis call this prayer – they don't call it the joyous prayer – they call it the prayer of Zmanim, the prayer of time, because it is true that you don't only say this prayer when you are radically happy, and that sometimes you say it in moments of transition that aren't especially happy. You know the Rosh Hashanah that was two weeks after my father died, I was not happy, I was very sad. But yet we were sitting at the Rosh Hashanah table and so we said the shehecheyanu and so yes you don't really say it when you're getting divorced for instance, because that's even though some people are happy in that moment, you don't necessarily say it. But it is something that you say when you are hitting a new moment, almost no matter what you're actually feeling on the inside.

Josh: So the way you're reframing it actually adds power and adds an element to me in a way I think it's a prayer, a blessing that expresses the basic unit of gratitude, which is we are here.

Shira: I love the idea of the basic unit of gratitude. The idea of gratitude is being totally denuded of all of its thrills right? Naked gratitude, that is it at our most basic level, we are still alive. There are stories of people when it is for instance again, one of the Jewish holidays in the camps in the Holocaust. There are stories of people who are saying that shehecheyanu because they're alive. It's not a place that any human being would ever want to be, but they are alive. And so I do think this idea of the most basic block of gratitude is the shehecheyanu.

Josh: Yeah, and it makes a lot of sense to me that a people such as ours with our history has a prayer that whatever else is going on, just to thank God we're alive.

Shira: I actually do think that is one of the things that I am grateful for, sort of walking the Jewish, path this idea. Of course, leave it to the Jews. The gefilte fish might be too fishy and the matzah ball soup is cold and my father is not here, but thank God we're alive.

Josh: That's right. We may have a very high bar for restaurants, but for gratitude, we set the bar very low, we're alive.

Shira: That's right I do not say shehecheyanu at a bad restaurant.

Josh: So another thing occurs to me as you're talking about the prayer the shehecheyanu is essentially a very zen blessing. It's all about now, being in the moment. There's sort of an implicit nod to the past because we've come through something to be here, but it's not to look ahead to the future. It's just acknowledging something that's very difficult for me to do, by the way, just acknowledge and be in the present moment.

Shira: Yeah, I think there are a few things that are really important about what you're saying Josh because the Jews were not known as being an "in this moment" kind of people. We're known as being like, a yearning people, "okay okay what's next" people. We say in Hebrew "hamevin yavin," those who understand will understand. That's what we're used to. So the idea of us also having this little bit of dayenu, this would have been enough. Here we are in this exact moment, is incredibly meaningful. And I think we have those threads of Judaism, but it might be again, because of our recent history that we just haven't had the luxury of sitting with them. We've always been thinking about "Alright, where are we going next?" And I think this is one of the blessings of living in a place like America. Where there is a permeability between religions and cultures and ways of being, this sort of the Buddhist idea of non-attachment is something that we can learn out in the world, and we can bring into our own hearts and souls. And then we can look to our own tradition and find the places where non attachment is to be seen in our own tradition as well.

Josh: I guess it's appropriate both as a learning moment, or a teaching moment, or both. And to mark that we are starting a new project together in the midst of darkness to say the prayer itself.

Shira: Yeah, and that we have all the feelings Josh, we're gonna hold all of them, you and I.

Josh: Before we say the prayer, if you want to follow along, or in fact join us you can find the Hebrew wording and the English translation of the shehecheyanu on our website, Chutzpod.com. That's "ech" u-t-z – just kidding – that's Chutzpod.com. You should know how to spell ".com" I'm not going to walk you through that. So here we go.

Together: Baruch atah, Adonai eloheinu melech haolam, shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.

Josh: Amen.

Shira: Amen. Amen. Amen. So may it be.

Josh: We are so happy to have reached this moment in time with all of you. We hope that you enjoyed this small taste, this schmear, of Chutzpod! Please subscribe to the show wherever fine podcasts are given away for free. In terms of social media, you can follow me on Twitter. I'm @joshmalina M-a-l-i-n-a and on Facebook you can follow the rabbi @rabbishira r-a-b-b-i-s-h-i-r-a space Stutman s-t-u-t-m-a-n. We really look forward to learning and sharing more with you soon. And we're close to wrapping things up here but you should know that at the very end of the episode, Rabbi Shira is going to lead all of us in a brief guided meditation so that we can all appreciate and mark this moment together. But first, a segment we'll include every episode wherein a notable person helps us review the Hebrew and Yiddish terms we've learned over the course of our conversation. For our inaugural review, we welcome all around mensch and master practitioner of comic chutzpah: Michael Ian Black

Michael: Hello, this is Michael Ian Black; noted Jew, terrible Jew, but enthusiastic Jew nonetheless. And I've got some words for you that you've heard already. **Chutzpah**. Everybody knows that one: audacity, pluck, daring do. It took a lot of **chutzpah** for Josh to ask me to do this on my day off. **Chai**. That means life, aliveness. **Mazel tov**. I'm getting the classics. You know, this first episode, I get hit with the classics. I feel good about that. Because those are pretty much all the ones I know. So it literally means may all the constellations align for you, but colloquially it's "good luck," you know "congratulations." You know, somebody has a kid, **mazel Tov!** You know, somebody has a new podcast, **mazel tov!** **Rosh Hashanah** literally means the head of the year. It's the Jewish new year, and it's actually one of four Jewish New Years, but it's the only one that anybody pays any attention to. Jews like the Chinese New Year because we like Chinese food. **Hamevin yavin**, and that's like an inside joke. So literally, it means "those who understand will understand." I feel like I'm saying that sentence correctly. In my best sort of, Jewey, those who understand will understand. **Yasher koach** literally means keep on going with strength, or like, great job on your hard work. You know, you work hard on something, **yasher koach**. **Nigun** – a wordless folk melody. You know, what would that be? What's a wordless folk melody that I can think of? Just doyle deedle deedle deedle dum. I mean, I guess those are words. **Dayenu** literally means it would have been enough. Like, you know, if Charles had just

stayed married to Princess **Dayenu**, it would have been enough. **Halevai** – if only. **Halevai**, if only there were more words I could keep having more fun but that's the last word

Shira: Yasher koach Michael, that was hilarious. I also, as we're closing and right before we move into the meditation, I just want to say thank you to our intrepid executive producer, Tim Shovers, and thank you also to PRX for distributing our show. Learn more about them at prx.org

Josh: Thank you also to Hadag Nahash for permission to use their fabulous song Lazuz.

Shira: At the end of the meditation. You're going to hear Rabbi Miriam Margles sing us out of this teaser episode with an extraordinary rendition of the nigun by Eitan Katz. You heard Michael Ian Black say that niguns usually don't have words. This one does, it's set with the words of the shehecheyanu. Alright, beautiful people. It's time to take a breath. Just a breath in and let it go. You can stop what you're doing but you don't have to. It turns out you can breathe even while you're driving, or running or doing the dishes or sitting on the couch. So just take a breath in and then let it go. And think to yourself: "For what am I grateful today? What is my most basic unit of gratitude today? Why am I grateful to be alive at this moment? Where have I arrived today?" For some of us, it might be just the fact that we're breathing. That alone is enough. But for each of us, there is something to be grateful for. There is something new that we're doing, something that might scare us a little bit, but that's okay. In these new scary moments, we have the shehecheyanu, reminding us that no matter what happened tomorrow, we have right now. So wherever you are and whatever you're doing, remember that this is a sacred moment. That no matter where you're going, that you have arrived. And for that we are grateful.