

EPISODE 7 TRANSCRIPT FOR WEB LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY

Shira: Hey, Joshua.

Josh: Hey rabbi, how goes it?

Shira: It's going great, listen I just want to jump right in today, if that's ok with you.

Josh: There's a lot to cover.

Shira: I mean this is a seriously talkable torah portion today, but I want to begin by asking you a question that has to do with getting lost, or being lost. Is there a time in your life, a story you can think of, where you yourself got lost or you lost your kids? I want to hear from you and then I want to pull back the aperture to what's happening with our Israelites in the desert.

Josh: Okay great, conveniently I do remember losing my children.

Shira: (laughter) Did it happen many times?

Josh: A time or two, but one story stands out. I was on the beach and my kids and their friends all went to the snack bar. And at a certain point, I was like, "Where—Where are the kids? Where are they? It's been too long. They have to be back from the snack bar." And I started, you know, going from lifeguard station to lifeguard station. "Have you seen the kid? She's in a one-piece yellow, there are two kids in red shorts." And this is also, we laugh about it now because you know, they were just kids. They came back eventually. I was like, sweating and near hysteria, like "I've lost my children!" and as soon as I knew they were okay, I was like, "Where have you been? Why did you do that to me?" And they were like, "You're out of your mind, we got an ice cream. We're back!"

Shira: First of all, I love that you actually knew what they were all wearing.

Josh: I think being a nervous parent, I had heard somewhere like always clock what your kids are wearing, because God forbid they're abducted or something, you can say it was a blue shirt and a green hat

Shira: Okay. So we're adding the fact that you were in general, a nervous parent, right? So reflecting on this story, you can see a whole boatload of emotions coming up all at once, I think makes them more rather than less intense, right? You have the anger, you have the relief, you have the gratitude, you have probably a little bit of the, I don't know, embarrassment at being so nervous in the first place. You have the anxiety that something could happen again in the future, something almost happened this time, maybe something can happen. You know these moments of being lost even after we are found can be emotionally incredibly complicated, but incredibly fraught as well.

Josh: Yeah that's right, all these things bumping up against each other make you feel dysregulated.

Shira: It wasn't only your kids –which is bad enough– it was someone else's kids as well. It was like a community, such as it was.

Josh: Yeah, I was a bad bad influence on everybody because I think the other parents were like. "They're probably fine." I was like, "No, they're gone, THEY'RE GONE!"

Shira: (Laughter) I want to connect to the part of you that went running when you were young and like, waiting for an antisemitic attack. I feel like it's all part of Jewish trauma.

Josh: It is.

Shira: The reason I wanted to begin is because I want those of us who are listening to try and sort of imagine a time when we have felt lost and sort of what are the emotions that have come up for us, or a time when we have felt uncertain. About the moment that we were standing in. Like, say for instance you know, the last two years of COVID or the political situation or something that's happening for you personally, I do just want to set a stage for us because that's where the Israelites are sitting in this week's Torah portion, which is called **Ki Tisa**. Those of you who are Chutzpod! fanatics, what was the word that Greenblatt used? Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, who we interviewed last week?

Audio from Ep. 6 Greenblatt interview

Jonathan: This is a treat for me! Like I'm on the Chutzpod! man. I have made it. I'm a "Chutzpioneer!"

Josh: We need a collective noun for people who listened to Chutzpod! I did an informal canvas of Twitter. "Chutzposse" sounds a little dirty, but I think is not bad. My friend Kim Caramelly suggested that and I think it might be the leading contender. So folks, if you think you can beat "Chutzposse," email us at Chutzpod@gmail.com.

Shira: Okay. We're talking about the golden calf, right? And so for those of you who are part of the "Chutzposse," you might remember this is not the first time we've talked about the golden calf. Israelites are in the same place they've been in since Chutzpod! Started. They are in the desert. Moses, their leader, is up on top of Mount Sinai. He's been hanging out with God for 40 days and 40 nights. So they're having conversations about Shabbat. God is giving Moses the tablets written in God's own fingers as it were, it says in the Torah. And meanwhile down on the ground, I want you all now to inhabit either Joshua and that moment of losing his kids, right? Embody yourself in that moment of losing something, not knowing where you are, this COVID moment of uncertainty. That's what the Israelites were feeling. They thought Moses was supposed to have come down already. He had not come down. They were scared. They were furious. They were stubborn. They were all the things, and so they turned to Aaron the high priest and they say "Aaron, make us a God," and Aaron says, the rabbis are uncertain as to whether Aaron says no or yes in this situation so I'm going to try to play it on both ways as I'm telling the story, but Aaron says, "Bring your earrings to

me.” Aaron takes the earrings. He melts it into gold and he makes an idol, a golden calf. And the Israelites say, “This is the God that brought us out of Egypt.” And then Aaron builds like an altar to this calf and the next day they have a festival and the people make offerings. Meanwhile, up on top of Mount Sinai, God says to Moses “What the actual F Moses? Your people are rebelling, I’m going to kill them all.” Moses says, I kid you not this is sort of tangential to the story, but I don’t care it’s so good, Moses is like, “God what will the Egyptians think if you kill them all off so soon after you brought them out of Egypt?”

Josh: Creating a grand tradition of what will the neighbors think among Jews?

Shira: That’s true. The fear of airing your dirty laundry is a very big fear. Okay, so Moses comes down, Joshua finish the story. What happens when he’s carrying tablets and he sees them celebrating to this God?

Josh: He actually hurls, I’m going to give you the movie version anyway, he hurls the tablets and destroys these God-given God-written tablets, these 10 commandments, and then calls for the destruction of the golden calf itself. I think it’s even ground down into like a powder. I believe reading the Parshah, I can’t be making this up, the Israelites were made to drink it? Is that true?

Shira: Yup.

Soundbite from The Ten Commandments(1956)

Josh: So it’s a complete flip out.

Second soundbite from The Ten Commandments(1956)

Josh(movie audio still playing in background): He’s angry. And then I think per God’s, maybe I’m getting ahead of myself, but per God’s wishes, then kills a fair number of people.

Shira: Yep.

Josh: It’s a bad, bad scene.

Shira: First 3000 people die, and then there’s a plague, and a lot more people die. This is for those who are following along in the Bible: It’s Exodus chapter 32, verses 1-6 we’re going to talk about today.

Josh: And if you’re following along with the movie *The Ten Commandments*(1956), the time-code is four hours, 52 minutes, and 37 seconds on the incredibly long network broadcast.

Shira: How did you respond to the story? I want you to sort of sit with the Israelites in 2022 and I’m interested in sort of, how do you respond to this story given this moment that we’re living in right now?

Josh: My first response was, I wrote down in capital letters “HIGH STAKES.” The people freaked out a little bit. We were expecting our guy Moshe Rabbeinu. He was the guy. Our point man is gone, we don't know if he's even coming back. I get the panic, I get the “What do we do now? I sort of got it on a more gut level than I have in the past, because I used to think, “You already had revelation at Sinai.” I mean, how do you pivot from there to “let's build a thing” and then call that thing God? In this reading I think because of the conversations I've had with you over the last couple of months, I get it more. The Israelites were lost altogether, right? I'm not a geography scholar, but it took 40 years to get from Egypt to Israel. They're pretty close to each other.

Shira: Oh yeah.

Josh: They're about a few hundred miles apart. They were a lost people having come out of slavery, you know, there's this massive confusion, then you throw in revelation and then immediately it's sort of taken away from them. They're tied to this “God is gone.” I get sort of the panicked, “What do we do now?” of it all, and we must do something.

Shira: Panic, we must do something; that reminds me of you running around to the lifeguard while the other people are like, “It's going to be okay,” you're like “No, I got to do something.” And by the way, that is something that Jews historically have been accused of and also honored for is sort of being a people that actually do something, right? We're not the ones who are like, “Let's wait and see.” We're like, “No, we gotta do something.” I had more compassion for them as well this year, because first of all, they thought Moses was supposed to have come down, right? Aaron thought Moses was supposed to have come down already.

Josh: I felt that my kids should have been back. I decided they're supposed to have been back by now, something's wrong and I have to do something. And what I was doing was about as valuable as the golden calf. I'm like, “I'll just walk in the direction they went, maybe that'll work.”

Shira: I don't think you should sell yourself short. You were trying to figure out a problem and the Israelites thought that Moses was supposed to be down already. The rabbinic stories teach that Satan actually changed the calendar so that the Israelites would be confused and think that he was supposed to have already come down.

Josh: This could be the origin of daylight savings. “No, the devil, Satan created daylight savings!” And everyone was confused and thought things should have happened already.

Shira: Queue all the emails saying “We thought Jews didn't believe in Satan.” We'll talk about that another time. These Israelites, they had come from Egypt, which was a place where there was worship of idols. So of course it would make sense to them that, oh, this thing that we thought was going to be a thing isn't a thing anymore. So instead we're going to worship this idol and sacrifice to this idol. Like it makes sense in context and I'm actually kind of sad that people like you and me were raised with such disdain, for the Israelites and Aaron as their leader. I feel like we could look at this through a compassionate lens and think of all the stupid mistakes we've made over the past two years to try to gain some control over our lives in this COVID moment. That in retrospect, what are some of the more

ridiculous—oh, oh, remember when we used to let our packages sit for four days and then wipe them down with cloths and, what are some of the other things?

Josh: Yes, “Honey what do I do with the banana? Do I wipe down a banana? I'm not going to eat the peel.” Something you just said actually made me think. I'm thinking of all sorts of golden calves that I have. Overeating, speaking of food. I think that is a thing, sometimes when I am, maybe we're really just looking at me too much,

Shira: We should change the name of the podcast to “Josh's Inner Life.”

Josh: It's something I do to assuage anxiety. It's certainly not helpful and it is arguably harmful to me, but that's one of my go-to things. That's a golden calf of mine.

Shira: I think that is a beautiful insight. There are all of these things that we turn to. There's this statistic that I learned once for a sermon that has stuck with me over the course of my career, which is I'm going to massacre at a tiny bit, but the truth is not so far from what I'm saying, which is 47% of people who have a net worth of \$25 million or more—basically, half the people who have a net worth of \$25 million or more—feel that they do not have enough money and feel financially insecure.

Josh: Wow

Shira: And that is about another golden calf that we have, which is that, if we accumulate more money, that we'll somehow be safe. We'll live longer, we'll be happier, our lives will have more meaning. Again I actually have compassion for those people too in a certain way. If \$25 million is not going to get you where you need to go in terms of feeling a sense of financial security, if it doesn't help you assuage your feelings of unsteadiness as it comes to the economics of your life, money itself can become a type of golden calf.

Josh: I agree. I really hope one day I'll get to see whether or not \$25 million is enough for me.

Shira: Amen. Think of the tzedakah you could give Josh.

Josh: That's what I meant, oh of course. For me this is cognitively transformational, because I have, I was weaned on villainizing these people. It's interesting, you really turned it on its head for me.

Shira: Yeah I agree with you Josh, I feel a little bit transformed as well. I mean let's look at this one word in Hebrew: **Boucher**. Do you know what the word **Boucher** means?

Josh: I think it means...a shame?

Shira: Yes! 72 times it is used in the Torah to indicate shame.

Snippet of “It's A Shame” by The Spinners

Shira: One time, the word **Boucher** is translated as “to delay” or “to tarry.” It's in this Torah portion, and this Torah portion of Exodus 32, verse one, it says “when the people saw that Moses **Ki Voshesh**, when Moses tarried” –and I’m putting that in scare quotes– “from coming down the mountain.” And it sort of like all the other times it almost used to mean shame. And to me that, there is something about the way that the Israelites were shamed here. I mean, they were killed too, but that they were shamed when they made this terrible mistake, right? God is the only God.

Josh: What have you done?

Shira: That just, it doesn't sit well with me this year, as we're trying to figure out so, so much. I just wish that instead of the connecting word being about shame, which is definitionally making people feel bad, making people feel like they themselves are bad at their core, instead there could have been a little bit of a redirect of helping the Israelites understand how they could do better. I mean again this connects to the conversation we were having last week about Whoopi Goldberg as well. Where does shame take us, at the end of the day?

Josh: It's my personal fuel, I run on it.

Shira: I bet you do, I mean I actually don't know if you do but I know a lot of people who do, and I think it's really problematic.

Josh: I'm highly motivated to avoid it.

Shira: Me as well. Alright this is getting a little bit too deep for me, let's change the topic. Josh, do you know what the term “groupthink” means?

Josh: I selfthink I do.

Shira: (Laughter) One of the interesting moments in this Torah portion happens in this very same verse that I was talking about before, happens in chapter 32, verse one, where it says “**vayichahel haam** – the nation gathered together against Aaron.” And there is something, if we are looking at the idea of idol worship as something that you shouldn't do, even if we have compassion, it's still something that you shouldn't do. This sort of, taking your eye off the larger spiritual presence of God and thinking that you will find meaning in something that is gold. This is the first time the word and the nation banded together against Aaron, banded together. It's like one of the first times as we are watching the process of this ragtag group of people become a nation, it's one of the first times that the text says they actually banded together.

Josh: And does that also, does that excuse Aaron a little bit, like he was ganged up against, and is it “What was I supposed to do? There were thousands of people against me.”

Shira: Yeah, it is, it does excuse Aaron. Some of the rabbis were like, they were going to kill him. And so if you actually read the text, you see that Aaron says, “Tomorrow we're going to

sacrifice, tomorrow we're going to have this festival." And it was Aaron's way of looking up to the heavens, literally, and being like "Moses? God? Guys?"

Josh: "I bought you another day."

Shira: "I bought you one more day."

Josh: It's time to start rappelling down now, brother. And how about God's attitude towards Moses? Like, I just gave you those and you threw them down in anger? Does he get –I was going to say clean slate– does he get a free pass for breaking his two slates?

Shira: You know, it's an excellent question Joshua, because later in our Torah readings, you're going to see Moses gets in a lot of trouble for having bad anger management, but in this moment he doesn't. In this moment, Moses and God are sort of like, I mean they're not lockstep in that Moses convinces God not to kill off all the Israelites, but they are in that they're both really upset. We're going to talk about this more later with Miriam. The people are called "stiff-necked," the idea that the Jews are stiff-necked, it's instead that like this idea that the Jews are so stubborn and I feel there's like God, rolling God's eyes, and it was like, "Really? There were so many peoples who were enslaved. Why were these the ones that I chose to bring out, the ones who are so fricking stubborn?"

Josh: Is there an offer from God? Like, we'll start over. We could kill everybody and start over with a new line from you. A new mosaic line of people, I didn't remember that in my reread, I was like, wow, there was an offer. Like let's just start this whole experiment again. Jews didn't work. We'll create a new line from you, Moses. That hit me hard,

Shira: Remember, it's not the first time God has done this. That's what God did with Noah and the Ark.

Josh: Oh yeah, there you go. Yes!

Shira: So God is how do we say this...

Josh: Big on the do-overs!

Shira: God is a learning God in the Torah

Josh: The God of mulligans.

Shira: God is really figuring stuff out.

Shira: Speaking of using contemporary terms to apply to ancient times, I want to throw to our interview with Miriam Anzovin. I think it is safe to say that she has revolutionized the study of Talmud on TikTok. We're going to begin by playing a little snippet of one of her Tiktok...episodes, I don't know what they're called, that teach about the Talmud. We are so excited to have you on the podcast this week.

Josh: My thought was that you are a modern day Jewish superhero and we should start by getting your origin story.

Miriam: So, I'll start by saying, I did indeed go on a journey. My family became religious sort of early on in my childhood, and by religious I mean **Shomer Shabbat, Shomer Kashrut**, becoming Orthodox. And I was very into it. I embraced it totally and completely. I was very, very devout in my own way. I went to a **CHABAD** middle school, Yeshiva, like sixth through eighth grade and then, since there were no local girl's schools to go to where I grew up in Amherst, Massachusetts, I homeschooled myself until college and that's when I got my degree in Judaic studies at UMass Amherst. So while all this was happening, you know, really really invested in the learning in the place of the individual and the peoplehood of Jews, and at the same time, the more I learned the more I struggled with the concept of personal belief. And so eventually I did stop being **Shomer Mitzvot** and had to step back from it but challenges primarily involved with the role of women in, in some Orthodox communities, certainly not all but some. But what can I say? I love Judaism and I just cannot step away.

"I wish I knew how to quit you" soundbite

Miriam: Throughout my actual career, I've spent a lot of time working at Jewish nonprofits and that's the work I've been doing and then at the beginning of December, it was actually, I was just like, you know, I've been doing **Daf Yomi** for two years. **Daf Yomi** being the daily study of one page of Talmud. The most recent cycle began on January 5th, 2020, right before the pandemic. I've been doing the learning every day since then, and sort of over the same time, I had also been getting really into TikTok, that really kept me going through a lot of the past few years to be quite honest. And I was like, "You know what? Why don't I see? Why don't I give it a shot?" I've been learning so much about other people's cultures and religions and practices and hobbies and interesting things on TikTok, maybe there is a fun community who might appreciate what I'm doing. They're also doing it. Maybe it'd be like a fun little in-joke and thing to do, and that's what happened, but it quickly transformed.

Shira: So Josh, I'm interested in sort of using the word hero to talk about Miriam. I'd love to hear you expand on where that came from.

Josh: As a consumer of content, I often bemoan the fact that there is little out there of Jewish substance. There are things that are tangentially Jewishy. I enjoy *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. I like Mel Brooks movies. There are plenty of things that we can relate to as cultural touchstones, but there's not usually a lot of substance behind it. And when there is substance behind it, and that can be found, it's usually not funny or relatable. And I think what Miriam has done is a very difficult task, which is to bring the two together. What she does is funny. It's deep. It's bringing Talmud to TikTok. It just seems so unlikely and so impossible that I think had I read on paper somebody's pitch for this TikTok account, prior to seeing it, I would have said, "As an idea, that's funny, you can't actually do it," So I think there is something heroic in what she's doing.

Miriam: Thank you, first of all. That's very, very kind of you and I also would have been like, "Ha! That's a funny joke, hilarious. No one's going to ever watch this. No one's going to care," and I was wrong. But the thing that I would like to emphasize here is that the people who should really be platformed about their heroism about Talmudic learning is, for me, the

women who have worked really, really hard over years to be accepted and that's amazing. That was not the case before. So really the heroes are the people who have done the work to get this out into the world and give people the tools to make content like what I'm doing. I could not have done this without the ability to listen to a female Talmudic teacher on a podcast I listen to every day, Rabbanit Michelle Farber and for the free access I get through **Safaria**. So just like, massive shout out to all the people who have been doing this work. I would not exist at all in this space without their incredibly, incredibly hard work and efforts.

Shira: To acknowledge the ways that you were standing on so many people's shoulders and specifically some women's shoulders as you are teaching Torah in a way that is unique to this moment, it's beautiful. And it feels to me like what we say in Hebrew **Kiddush Hashem**. It's a sanctification of God's names, alright but you're laughing when I say that, and so what makes you laugh about that?

Miriam: I laugh because there are many people who say the **Chilul Hashem**, the diametric opposite. So I'm very flattered that you don't think it's a **Chilul Hashem** and I really, really appreciate that, but I know that there's, in a lot of people's minds, there is a very firm delineation. I really am the worst to many people and to other people, they see my content as inspiring and motivating in the space of Jewish learning.

Josh: Yeah for people listening you know, it hurts my ear, and I can imagine a lot contemporary American Jewish audience would be unfamiliar with the Judaism that is unwelcoming to women. So it's disturbing to hear and im curious to know where does this come from the, idea that woman learning and or teaching is questionable or even to be avoided?

Miriam: It's in the Talmud.

Josh: Yeah. I was afraid that's what you were going to say.

Miriam: Here's the thing. There's everything in there, because these are conversations. So some people in the Talmud, yeah, they don't believe that women should be doing this. And in addition, there's other things about me besides the fact that I'm a woman, that to them, are more egregious than that. Such as the fact that I do swear on occasion because to me, swearing is punctuation. It shows that I really care and I'm invested in what I'm talking about and I feel really passionately about it. That's not to say I swear on each and every video, but I do. There's also the fact that people think it's wrong to bring humor to something that, let's face it, already has humor in it. The Talmud is very funny. There's a lot of jokes in there and there's a response to treat it all with such absolute sanctity and respect, when if you really engage with it, you can see that not everything makes sense now, and that's okay. Some things are really funny. Sometimes they make jokes to each other. Sometimes the sages insult each other even. I just bought a book, it should be here soon, about the best Talmudic insults and I'm really excited about that. And I'm going to start responding to people who send me hate messages with real insults from the Talmud.

Shira: Oh I wanna get a copy of that book as well. One of the many things I love about your Tiktoks Miriam, is the way that you make the rabbis come to life. One of my favorite things to

do now when I'm teaching is to send people to all of the Talmudic rabbis' Wikipedia pages. Have you ever seen their Wikipedia pages?

Miriam: Oh, I go there all the time.

Shira: They're amazing and what they do is they really make these rabbis come to life, which, to a certain extent, was one of the purposes of the Talmud. These were people having conversations. And so we too can have conversations. The idea that people push back against that, it's such a subversion of what I think is one of the main goals of this text in the first place.

Miriam: Okay, so I will give an example of today's Daf, today's page of Talmudic learning, Chagigah 5, and it's pertinent because we're recording on Valentine's Day, is we get a story here about Ralph Gahanna hiding under the bed of Rob while Rob is having sex with his wife, to find out how does the rabbi do it? And the answer is it's Torah and I must learn. So the idea that I'm supposed to take that with the same amount of sanctity as anything else and not make fun of that. When I read that I'm thinking about his poor wife, I'm like "Good God!" I hope that she would have taken a frying pan and just beaten the s**t out of him. Honestly, invading her privacy at a very private moment with her husband and here's this creep, hanging out under the bed because he thinks it's informative and we don't hear in the Talmud how she reacts but I think often when we study the Talmud, we're not actually thinking about not only the sages, but the other people as real human beings with real human responses. And maybe she was just like, "oh, you know, it's another of those weird things that happened to me because my life is strange now" or whatever, or maybe she was furious, but we don't know and yet the important thing is to look at these people as real people. That doesn't mean that they don't have incredibly insightful and holy things to say. It doesn't mean that I think all of them do all the time. There's some things that I think are profoundly not relevant and frankly laughable and that's okay. We've come a long way over 1,500 years or so.

Josh: An anecdote like that makes me maybe understand why the rabbis didn't want women reading.

Miriam: You've exactly, I think, hit upon the thing.

Josh: There's a rabbi under your bed. Now you know.

Miriam: I do understand though why some people are really cautious. They're like oh my God, she's going to share this stuff and people won't have context to understand it and they're going to think that we all act like this now, and that she's going to blow up our spot, basically. She's going to share our secrets that we don't really want anybody to know. And my view is, for all Jews, this is our intellectual and literary and emotional heritage that we all deserve to have access to, and I believe it can stand on its own feet and be viewed and respected or, sort of viewed with discernment, what you want to respect and what you don't, but there's enough in here that still merits being spoken about. So I don't believe that keeping it locked up is actually going to engage anybody in becoming more Jewish quote unquote or knowing more Jewish things. It protects it, but it also calcifies it.

Shira: Can I just rant for one second? Because I understand that the Torah is sacred and I understand why we treat it with such reverence, but I find it problematic that human beings are more scared to hold a Torah than they are to hold a baby. That's literal, but speaking metaphorically, there's this idea that if we actually open up the Torah, if we actually show all of its warts, and here I'm using the word torah widely with a lowercase "t," it's going to somehow fall apart. 4000 years of Jewish tradition gone, the second Miriam says something bad about Rabbi Hillel or Rabbi Shammai, we're screwed. And if that's true, we deserve it. I don't think it's true. I think the Torah can take it. I don't know what people are so scared of and it makes me sad for them because I feel like the reason that we were given all of this, is so that we can continue to turn it and turn it and turn it. And what people are asking you to do is fossilize it.

Josh: I have an admiration for what you do and the way you articulate your goals and what you're doing. It's rare for someone to be in that zone and not have disdain for what it is that you're talking about.

Miriam: I really, truly do love Judaism. I love the Jewish people. I love our history.

Shira: Miriam I have a feeling that Josh and I could talk to you for hours about your work in the world on TikTok, but we also thought that you might have some great insight on this week's Torah portion: **Ki Tisa** – this moment of the golden calf. What did you notice this year, Miriam, in rereading the text that perhaps you had never even noticed before?

Miriam: Yeah so when I re-read it, one thing that stood out to me is the acts of creation, of artistic creation, the sort of juxtaposition of Betzalel, the guy who's tasked with creating all the holy objects in the Mishkan, I think you guys touched upon this last episode, you did. He's tasked with creating the beautiful objects, the ritual object that will fill that space, and that's holy creation, that's creation and art that God wants you to do. And then later, we get to the creation of the golden calf, oopsie woopsie, in the middle we have God himself actually creating God himself, writing the commandments on the tablets and giving them to Moses who then, you know, breaks them. But the act of the holy creation, the holy art versus when they throw, Aaron and the Israelites, throw the gold into the fire and out comes the golden calf sort of created itself– likely story Aaron we know what you did. That is an interesting juxtaposition for me that I hadn't really thought of in that same way before. This parsha is bookended by acts of art, both holy and unholy.

Josh: I was opining way back when that asking for gold to be melted down and everything to be gilt and precious gems and all this stuff used to create the Mishkan and its various parts was a little bit of a bait and switch set up for the Israelites to think “we thought this is what you like, you like gold, you like to make things artisan crafted,” I feel a little bit like, God, maybe set them up a bit.

Shira: You added this extra wrinkle to some of what Josh and I were talking about last week, which is the wrinkle of Hashem. Like, God, God self-creating art also, which I think is just tremendous. And it reminds me a little bit of the push and pull about the work that you're doing right now in the world. Is your art more like the golden calf? Idol worship, worshipping American internet blah-blah-blah or is it more like the work of Betzalel who was this artist handpicked by God? Or is it more like God got self sort of transmitting these teachings from generation to generation, and certainly come down that your work is not the work of building

a golden calf. That is more of the holy artwork, but there is, this is still a conversation we're having. God, what do you want for us? How do we create for you?

Miriam: That's why I like this Parshah because it's real. So dark.

Josh: I was thinking the same thing too. It's problematic. It's dark. It's disturbing.

Miriam: Full of murder.

Shira: What I noticed sort of for the first time, all over again this year in preparing is the use of the word stiff neck, Am K'sheh Oref, over and over, it's like four times in this one portion where, all of a sudden God's like "Oh yeah, this is who they're going to be? A pain in the ass?"

Miriam: Like he didn't know?

Shira: It's very confusing because it does seem like God's a little surprised. Because if God didn't know, why would God want to kill us all off?

Josh: I wrote down that same thing, Am K'sheh Oref, because it's always stuck in my mind because I've always been described by my parents as stubborn. Not that exact phrase, but it cuts both ways. Even reading it in the parsha it's also a little bit of a compliment. This is also going to stand you in good stead through life being a little stiff-necked. It's not all negative, I think.

Miriam: It is interesting when you view it juxtaposed with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Is it that we innately are just royal pains in the ass and that's the way it's going to be? I don't know.

Josh: And our concept of God. God could be fairly stiff-necked as well, including in this parasha.

Miriam: Yes he can be loving and forgiving and all those things.

Josh: Thank you for giving us so much of your time, and it was great. Great conversation.

Shira: Thank you, Miriam. That was so great. I am so inspired by your Torah. We're going to take a quick break, we'll be right back.

Josh: Hey everyone, Purim is coming up on March 16th, and we here at Chutzpod! Are planning a very special episode. Purim, like some other Jewish holidays, celebrates the survival of our people against long odds. Unlike other holidays, it is celebrated by the wearing of costumes, the performance of skits and plays, and even the imbibing of wine and spirits. Rabbi Shira and I would like you to join us at 4:30 p.m. PST, that's 7:30 EST, on Sunday, March 13th as we record live on Zoom. If you feel like throwing on a costume and

participating as we record our Purim episode, let us know by visiting our website Chutzpod.com and clicking on the Purim button. It may be meaningful, but it will be silly.

Shira: Okay, we're back and we're going back to the Torah portion. And it's very clear from the Torah portion, how the Israelites dealt with their uncertainty. They complained a lot, there's a lot of complaining, and they build a golden calf. You spoke earlier about the idea of eating a food as a source of comfort for you in uncertain times, and I want to leave our listeners with sort of, what are the different sorts of ways of bringing comfort in uncertain times? Maybe some of them we can pull out from this week's Torah portion. Maybe not. Maybe some we can bring from our personal stories, but I want to lead us sort of in an optimistic posture, we are in this moment. What do we do about it?

Josh: Yeah, I also like what you said that, it was the first instance of the Israelites coming together without a leader, as a group, and even if they made a bad decision or they went in a wrong direction, there's something to be said for community. I find that in the pandemic that the fact that other people are struggling and looking for answers strengthens me. Maybe as a group, we can make some good decisions too.

Shira: I think that's true. I do think we're going to, and we'll see this word will now start to come up with more regularity. This word **Vayikahel** – coming together. This is a whole process of revelation at Sinai is figuring out how to become a people, and I think that's true. Like groups of people can make terrible decisions and they can make really beautiful decisions and they can support each other.

Josh: And if we just keep killing off enough of the people who make the wrong decisions, we'll narrow it down to a really tight knit group of good decision-makers.

Shira: That's great.

Josh: That's what I'm taking away.

Shira: What makes me a little bit annoyed at the Israelites? Often one of the best indicators of the future is the past, and you would think the Israelites had seen that God and Moses had come through for them over and over again. And so instead of like catastrophizing and saying it's all over, there could have been a way that maybe they could have said, "Well, we thought it was over before, but it wasn't." And maybe this time as well.

Josh: My wife, the lovely, generous, compassionate, brilliant Melissa. She often tells me "Don't catastrophize." Let things play out a little bit. I sometimes think, ohhhhhh I think this is a very Jewish thing, I think worrying about something somehow has a magical power that I'll get ahead of something or be able to prevent it by worrying about it. That doesn't work.

Shira: That is a very Jewish thing. This is what Renee Brown calls foreboding joy, this idea that when you're looking at your child asleep and you know, your heart feels, "oh, I love this child," but your brain tells you to say, "oh my God, what if they die tomorrow?" And then now this is true, that Jewish history to a certain extent has taught us that things can change on a dime, but that sort of feeling of trauma is what leads a Joshua Molina to be running up and

down the beach. When his friends are sitting right next to him saying, “Josh, it's going to be fine. They're going to be okay”

Josh: We're not Jewish, we're pretty confident our kids are going to come back. Let the Jew run down the beach. And I came back with all the kids.

Shira: Oh, see, so you were right!

Josh: Exactly. I mean in the end and who was right?

Josh: And now it's time to turn the floor over to my friend, James Roday Rodriguez, who will review for us the Hebrew and Yiddish words that were used in this episode. He starred for eight seasons on *Psych* and can currently be seen starring in ABC's *A Million Little Things*. Take it away James.

James: Moshe Rabbeinu – Hebrew. Literally “Moses our teacher.” And our friend? Was he more of like a kind of salty, eyes on the prize, professor-type. Or was he a man of the people? I don't know, I feel like there's all kinds of stories out there about Moses. **Midrash**. Come on people we've gone over this. The **Midrash** is rabbinic interpretation of the Bible, from ancient times to the early medieval period. **Kiddush Hashem**. No big deal, just the sanctification of God's HOLY NAME. **Chilul Hashem**, the opposite of the last one I just said. **Shomer Shabbat** – this is the Hebrew term for “one who obeys the laws of sabbath.” **Shomer Kashrut** – this is the Hebrew term for “one who observes the laws of keeping kosher.” **Shomer Mitzvot** – this is the Hebrew term for “one who keeps the Torah's commandments.” **Shomer Pyle** – this is the Hebrew term for someone who watches Gomer Pyle religiously. **Chabad**, also known as **Lubavitch**, an Orthodox Jewish Hasidic dynasty. These are the “Are you Jewish?” guys. **Boucher** – Hebrew for disgrace, shame, embarrassment; see Mel Gibson.

Josh: Thanks so much James, you rock. We want to thank our Atlantan executive producer, Tim Shovers. Thank you to PRX for distributing our podcast. You can follow the rabbi and me on socials @rabbishira @JoshMolina, and you can follow @chutzpod on Twitter. Chutzpod@gmail.com if you want to drop us a line, if you think you can top “Chutzposse” for the collective noun of our listeners, give it a shot. Eventually we'll put it to a vote. Thanks to Hadag Nahash for allowing us to use their rocking song Lazuz as our opener and stick around. If you're feeling lost, the rabbi will give you a couple of minutes of guidance in the form of a guided meditation.

Shira: We want to thank Miriam Anzovin for being with us today on the podcast. Please look her up on every single social media channel that exists.

Josh: Yes. If you want to follow her on Twitter, she is @anzovina. And from there, you can find out how to follow her everywhere else.

Shira: For our meditation today, we'll begin as always with just a little bit of breathing. Just remember that you're breathing. I want you to think of that time when you were lost or when you lost someone meaningful to you? It can be a literal moment, like in Josh's story or it can be something more metaphorical the way that you are in the world, and I want to try to pull

out some of the emotions that you could be feeling. A fear or anger or indignance, abandonment, loss, or confusion, anxiety, deception, possibility? Each of us has these moments of feeling out of place, of feeling that we are not where we should be, or that those we love are not where they should be. This is part of a human condition. These moments are terrible. I'm not going to say otherwise. But when they move to closure, as they often do, when we find our beloved, there is possibility for learning and for change. In Hebrew, the word is **t'shuvah** – For right setting, for growth. After the winter is when the buds start to spring and we witness new growth and we see flowers that we've seen before, but also the ones that we could never have imagined. And so if you're sitting in the uncertainty and in the loss right now know that there is a **Kahal**, there are others with you in this moment as well. And pray and know that this moment will most likely end, and after the end there will be new growth and new learning and new possibility.

James: This is righteous Gentile, James Roday Rodriguez, wishing you the Shalomiest of Shabbats.