

## EPISODE 8 TRANSCRIPT FOR WEB

**Shira:** Hi, Josh.

**Josh:** Greetings Rabbi. How are you?

**Shira:** I'm good. Although I'm also anxious because I feel like we need to have the next chapter of our conversation about what Chutzpod! listeners are going to be called.

**Josh:** Oh yes.

**Shira:** I actually learned something last week which – I don't want to say I'm embarrassed to say it because we're all learning and evolving – which is that “posse” is not a term that feels safe or comfortable for everyone.

**Josh:** It's off the table! We're taking it off the table!

**Shira:** Is off the table and I apologize.

**Josh:** It's a racially-charged word. It also, it brings to mind, images of getting a group of men together to do violence. So...our bad. Okay!

**Shira:** Well, our good in that we are now educating thousands of people about it.

**Josh:** Yes.

**Shira:** Okay. But that means what do we have left Josh?

**Josh:** Far and away, the leading candidate right now, in terms of people writing, is “Chutzpodnik,” which plays off of **kibbutznik**. I don't know, what is the derivation of the “nik” part?

**Shira:** It's some Yiddish thing, I don't know.

**Josh:** I thought it came from Nick at night, but here's my problem with “Chutzpodnik,” it makes sense to me, but there's no joke. You gotta use the “pah,” people. Like we could, we could just call our listeners the “Chutzpod.” There's also “Chutzpals,” which is pretty cute. There's “Chutzpachah,” which is a play on **mishpachah**, which is the Hebrew word for family.

**Shira:** No. Too much Hebrew, for the Rabbi.

**Josh:** The polls are still open, people, if you have suggestions, bring it. I've heard “Chutzquad” too, but we promise to be balanced politically, and I think there are a lot of

–(laughter) I'm sorry – a lot of Jews on the right don't want to be reminded of the squad when we sell them a t-shirt.

**Shira:** We are now davka going to be called the “Chutzquad” from now on.

**Josh:** I'm blackballing it, there's also “Chutzchaverim,” which means “chutzfriends,” but again, too much Hebrew.

**Shira:** Too much Hebrew. Wait, I actually like “The Chutzpod,” sort of like “The New York Times.”

**Josh:** Yes and like a pod of whales. “The Chutzpod” isn't terrible.

**Shira:** So keep those emails coming. Listen, there's another ritual that we have to create. And I'm stressed about this as well, which is that next week we are, for the first time, going to finish a book of Torah. You know, there are five books of Torah. We started sort of in the middle of Exodus, but next week is the end of Exodus.

**Josh:** Chazak chazak v'nitchazek.

**Shira:** Right, strong, be strong, and be strengthened. So that is what we say in synagogue when we finish a book of Torah and so maybe we'll just say that at the end, but I don't know.

**Josh:** By the way, I do a lot of paid speaking engagements for Jewish federations and other Jewish groups. And my mom gave me that as a closer and it kills, it kills. I close my speech and I say “Now I think it would be appropriate to say the three words that we shout out in synagogue after completing one of the books of Torah: Chazak chazak v'nitchazek. Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another.” And then the crowd goes wild and I'm like, mom, you're money in the bank.

**Shira:** So **vayakhel**. That's this week. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

**Josh:** Yeah, okay, I do have a big sort of general question. I am a little confused by the chronology, in terms of Revelation, then getting the Ten Commandments, were the Ten Commandments part of the original revelation? Also they're building the mishkan, then something else happens, then they're building the mishkan again. I get a little bit lost in the chronology if you can lay it out for me a little bit better.

**Shira:** Everytime a question like that unfolds, I think of that scene from *The Princess Bride* where it's like, “What do we do when we find the lady? And when we find the lady, how do we get out of the castle? And when we get out of the castle, how do we find that?” And it's like, you know, you just see it coming down, down, and I know Tim, here comes the drop-in:

\*Audio snippet from *The Princess Bride*\*

**Shira:** Because Chutzpod! has become nothing, if not an hour-long **tish**.

**Josh:** Tish you? I hardly know you.

**Shira:** You are a hundred percent correct. This week's Torah portion is about the building of the tabernacle. But for those of you who have been listening along at home for many weeks, you are thinking to yourself right now: "But wait, weren't we building the tabernacle a few weeks ago when we studied Teruma? Haven't we been building the tabernacle already? Why are we starting this week again to build the tabernacle?" And I need to tell you Joshua Molina, your confusion, you are standing directly in line with thousands of years of Jewish history. The rabbis have been eternally confused and they basically came up with two – this is so Jewish – there are two totally different answers as to why we were like building the tabernacle two, I want to say two episodes ago, but I guess the Torah came before the podcast. Okay, two answers. Answer number one, **Ayn Kadma v'achra b'torah**, the rabbis teach.

**Josh:** There's no beginning, there's no before and after when it comes to Torah?

**Shira:** That's right. Listeners at home, you should know that Joshua Malina just translated, it is not Hebrew, but Aramaic to show that his Jewish knowledge knows no bounds. There is no before and after in the Torah, that there is no chronological timeline in the Torah that, sometimes historical things can happen and then we go back and then we go forward and look, I need to say a lot of people buy this one; this is not my favorite. Jews are such a history based people. The idea that all of a sudden in Torah like, oh, there's no such thing as time. We're just going to throw it all up in the air. But many great rabbis do agree.

**Josh:** This is a little bit, I think, of the rabbis participating in what the science fiction and fantasy worlds call *retconning*, retroactive continuity, where you add a new fact or exposition which recontextualizes things in the past. So the rabbis are deciding "Oh okay, there's no before and after in the Torah. And so everything that came before now makes sense. We see it in a different light. There's no time space continuum when it comes to Torah. It's "reb-conning," if you will.

**Shira:** That's right. This is the retcon, retcon moment of Torah.

**Josh:** This is reb-con.

**Shira:** Red like the color?

**Josh:** No, R-E-B, reb-con, the rabbis.

**Shira:** Oh, that's funny (laughter).

**Josh:** My jokes are often funny after a brief explanation.

**Shira:** Other rabbis say no, no, no, all the instructions, instructions, not the actual actions for building the tabernacle and the priestly clothing happened before the golden calf. It was only after the golden calf that the actual building and dressing began. Now that we all understand exactly how the Torah was written, I want to go to a conversation about community, this is what I want us to sort of like, just think through. I want everyone who's listening to think of a

community that you're a part of. Now, by the way, there's a specific understanding of the word "community," it's actually not something that you have to buy into. If you're paying for it, let's just put that to the side for now, right? It's a group of people who are somehow connected to each other. One could argue responsible for each other. to a certain extent, notices if someone isn't there for a while. The Chutzpod is a different sort of community, but it is a community of people who, God willing, it will grow into a community of people who, to a certain extent, know each other and interact with each other. So this community is not, this sort of contemporary, capitalistic understanding of it. That being said, what is required in your mind, if you think of some of the communities you've been part of, that make a community work, function?

**Josh:** That's a good question. Okay. I think, reliability, knowing that the community is going to be there for you when you need them and that you have access to them, I think is very important.

**Shira:** Risht, so communities are not ephemeral? There is a way communities can come and go, but still they are long lasting and they are not built for ephemerality.

**Josh:** (laughter) Yes.

**Shira:** To use a Josh Molina word.

**Josh:** I think, supportive, whatever that means to you that a community, there's an unspoken, there's an implicit pledge to support each other, to uplift each other.

**Shira:** So those are two different things.

**Josh:** You're right, that's true.

**Shira:** And I like that different communities have different types of spoken and unspoken rules about how they support each other. I think one of the things that's happening with the Israelites right now is they're trying to figure out how to be a community, a people. Those words are not exactly the same, but the Venn diagram between the two of them do overlap. So we saw in last week's episode/Torah portion, because they're basically the same thing now, this word for the first time. **Vayikahel** – the nation gathered at this point, they gathered sort of, against Aaron. They were scared, and this led to them building the golden calf. By the way, I would argue that one quality that a community to a certain extent needs is an "other," that is not in the community. You know, and like that joke about the person who's stranded on a desert island and someone finds them and there are two buildings and the rescuers...what's the punchline?

**Josh:** "That synagogue I wouldn't walk into if you paid me!" Isn't that what it is?

**Shira:** We create all these others, right? So if the other might be a different religion, but it also might be that other synagogue that sort of keeps our synagogue, sort of, complete.

**Josh:** Right, that's how you have splinter communities when Jews turn on Jews and you're not really a Jew, my community is this, that's when it's I guess, "othering" altogether is. Well,

it's weird, it's a balance thing. I think communities are great, but you're right, they are by definition, exclusionary, otherwise every community is everyone.

**Shira:** That's right.

**Josh:** There are pluses and minuses, and I guess it's the criteria by which you decide who's in your community that determines, I guess, whether you're good or bad?

**Shira:** I think you're so right Josh, and I think that, I mean this goes back to our earlier conversation about the people who wouldn't want us to use the word "squad," you know, as we're trying to figure out right now, what is the community of Chutzpod? How far do we want the tent to go? Because we could write the tent so wide that it splits in half and then it's nothing. We can only write it so far and your argument was that I want to write it far enough so that someone who might not like the word "squad" doesn't feel offended. So we hear this word **Vayikahel** in Exodus 32, and it comes back again for a second time at the beginning of this week's Torah portion. The text, this is Exodus 35, and it begins it's **Vayakhel Moshe et-kol-adat benei yisra'el**. Moses gathered all of the **adat**. It's another word for community, congregation, if any of you belong to synagogues, **Adath Israel, Adas Israel, adat Israel**, Moses gathers them all. And now we go back into, what do you think he talks about first, when he gathers them?

**Josh:** Rabbi I don't know.

**Shira:** I know, you wouldn't know. There's no way you would guess what he's talking about when he first gathers them. So that's in a way, the right answer. He talks about Shabbat.

**Josh:** You're such a classic teacher. You're like, I said I don't know and you're proud of me. That's actually the correct answer. You're so encouraging. I love, you're such a good rabbi. I can literally just exhale and go "I don't know" and you're like, "Yes, yes. I love how you're framing it. You don't know because why would you expect? And that's brilliant, that's perfect."

**Shira:** In my defense...

**Josh:** No, there's nothing to defend. It's a lovely way to be.

**Shira:** If you had said Moses gets them together and talks about Satan worship, I would have been like, no.

**Josh:** I dunno. I'm not sure I believe there's any answer I could give where you're just like, that's dumb and wrong.

**Shira:** That's probably true.

**Josh:** It's just not in your nature.

**Shira:** So he gets them together and talks about **Shabbat**. Now, you and I have not spent a lot of time talking about Shabbat, which I think is, to our detriment and to the detriment of all of our listeners, and so we need to rectify that. Maybe after Passover is over.

**Josh:** I look forward to that because I think actually that is one of the greatest lacunae, if I may, of my religious life, that I have not – you're looking it up?(laughter).

**Shira:** Yes I am!

**Josh:** A lacuna being a hole or a gap, and I think the plural is lacunae, in my life is that I haven't embraced Shabbat more. On the times that I have, and when I do, I'm always like, wow, what a gift and what a great thing. And yet it's hard in this modern world to carve out that thing, even though it's of such value,

**Shira:** I actually think that, well not just me, but the rabbis also think that talking about gathering the community and then talking about Shabbat is actually not by accident. It is because it is virtually impossible to celebrate Shabbat on your own. The idea of 25 hours of ceasing just doesn't work on your own. And I actually have, in my notes, you know, the list of things that make a community work is some sort of rest or joy in gathering, like there just has to be some of that as part of community flourishing. It can't be all work all the time or it's something else.

**Josh:** Right.

**Shira:** So we will talk about it and I think that's really important. So this idea of community, right? This is a lot of what we're going to be talking about in just a minute with Wajahat Ali, about the Muslim community, the American community, the Jewish community. And I think it's not immaterial that the very first thing Moses does, after the incident with the golden calf, right before we actually start to build the tabernacle, right before we even start to talk about Shabbat, the very first thing he does is to gather the community together. And actually there is a beautiful teaching from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, I think is so beautiful that here in these two Torah portions–

**Josh:** **Alav hashalom.**

**Shira:** **Alav hashalom**, may his memory be for a blessing, yeah, that there are these two types of gathering. The first is a gathering against, in preparation for building the golden calf. And the second is a gathering for, a gathering for Shabbat, a gathering for the building of the tabernacle. And he talks about it as a **Tikkun**, as a healing, that there are ways that communities can be broken, from time to time, that difficult things can happen. We talked about this earlier, but our task is to sort of see if we can overcome the difficulty.

**Josh:** Communities are defined by what they're for and against, and the Jewish community has such a history of vilification and expulsion and murder that we, too often, we have to define ourselves by what we're against and those who are against us. And it would be nice if we could focus more on what we're for and what we're about.

**Shira:** Yeah, but it's also dangerous, Josh,

**Josh:** Yes, I know.

**Shira:** You know, what's kept the Jewish people unified over thousands of years?

**Josh:** Yeah, anti-Semitism?

**Shira:** Yeah, the fact that everyone hated us, we couldn't go to secular universities, we couldn't get most jobs. Why are there so many Jews in Hollywood, Josh? Do you know?

**Josh:** uhhhhh...

**Shira:** Because we were shut out of so many jobs on the east coast because we were Jews that we had to go out to California to jump into this new industry.

**Josh:** And if we hadn't hit in Hollywood, we would've kept going west and we'd be doing the kayak and surfing concessions in Hawaii.

**Shira:** (laughter) Thank God we hit in Hollywood. I do think that sort of, one of the things that communities need to be able to do is, you know, there's that great line by Esther Perel that everyone has three or four marriages, over the course of their lifetime, but you want to hope is that they're all to the same person. And I feel that the same thing works with the community. Like you want to be in a community that you can be in for many, many, many years, not something that you're in and out of, but when you want is for it to be able to morph over the course of a lifetime. And I do think that because Jews are living so freely in America, which we are, – current significant increase in antisemitism notwithstanding – there's such permeability that our community needs to evolve into new ways of being. New ways of determining who is in and who chooses not to be in. New ways of celebrating. New ways of struggling. You know, in a minute we're going to throw to our interview with Wajahat Ali, but I'm just feeling a little bit disappointed, because I wanted us to go deeper with our conversation about community, but what I'm realizing is, this is going to be an ongoing conversation for us, Josh. Like this is, I mean, God willing, over the years that Chutzpod! is going to be around. We're gonna have to figure out, what does community look like for these people who are listening? What should community look like coming out of the pandemic in America? What should Jewish community look like? And so I just like, I want this to be an amuse-bouche for everyone. Just like a little teaser and a way of sort of like, to get our minds beginning to think about a conversation we're going to have a thousand times more.

**Josh:** Okay I think that does it for the shmah-ing around section of this episode, now it's time to go to our esteemed guest: Wajahat Ali. Waj is a New York Times op-ed contributor, a public speaker, and author of the recently published *Go Back to Where You Came From: And Other Helpful Recommendations on How to Become American*.

**Shira:** Welcome back everyone and a special welcome to Wajahat Ali, who is an old friend and who has written a book that I could not put down for the last few weeks. I have so many questions for you Waj, but I'm actually most excited for you and Josh to finally, well

Zoom-meet each other. Two of the funnier people that I know, and I do want to get to humor at a certain point.

**Josh:** Lotta pressure.

**Wajahat:** But first, pain and misery. Sadness and suffering.

**Shira:** That's sort of the Jewish way, is it the Muslim way to begin with the suffering?

**Wajahat:** Of course. That's the thing like whenever, I remember when you invited me to this podcast and thank you, I remember I said something, we have to do like this, suffering context, this guilt, because the Catholics for some reason and I don't know why this happened in America, Catholics apparently are number one with guilt. I'm like, "Who are you Catholics?" I went to an all boys Catholic school. You guys have nothing on Muslims and Jews. Nothing.

**Shira:** Yeah. I mean maybe if there's more in the church that's about guilt, but certainly in the culture, I kind of feel like we got that one. Aren't we lucky?

**Wajahat:** Yeah (laughter), we got that. We got gold and silver, at least.

**Shira:** (laughter) Oh, that's funny. I thought you were talking, making a Jewish joke and I was like, "that's a little..."

**Josh:** (laughter) Let's be very clear. That was an Olympic medal reference.

**Wajahat:** Oh, no no. There are the Olympics in China right now. Please, Wajahat Ali made an Olympics reference that everyone except Shira understood.

**Josh:** Don't send us emails!

**Wajahat:** She went straight to horrible Jewish stereotypes.

**Shira:** (laughter) That's what Chutzpod's about, every week, Josh and I.

**Wajahat:** Oh, that's awesome. I love how you were so casual about it. You're like "Oh, yeah. Yeah, I guess so. Yeah, Jews are known for that too," I'm like "What? Wait!"

**Shira:** I'm just a loyalist, Waj, and I feel like you're a friend and so I just trust you that whatever you're saying is like, it's okay. Okay, the book's called *Go Back to Where You Came From: And Other Helpful Recommendations on How to Become American*. Waj I thought the book was terrific, tell me a tiny bit about your childhood.

**Wajahat:** My parents were, believe it or not, like you know how they always say "fresh off the boat" or you know, "integrate or burn the boat?" My parents brought the boat inside the home, in the sense that, so they're very traditional in that regard, but when it comes to this,

the writing and stuff, they were very radical and they always supported me. Can you believe that? But my mom did say “have insurance” and insurance was a law degree.

**Shira:** Right. It was in the books somewhere. Like, just go to law school and then you can become a writer. And there was actually this great line where you said “I was on my way to law school, and then I was going to become a writer.” There was no pretense even, of like, “And then I was going to be a lawyer,” for 14 seconds.

**Wajahat:** So when I went to law school, I always knew that I would use the law degree as like, one of the tools in my Batman utility belt. I don't know if this was a diss, but even in law school, my law professors were like, “You shouldn't become a lawyer.” I'm like, “I'm slightly offended. Am I like, that stupid?” They're like, “No, no, no. You'll be a good lawyer, but just don't waste your time,” and anyone who's listening who's a lawyer or knows lawyers, like secretly they all want to be like writers or actors like Joshua, or like opera singers. You'll find out, so many of them are like, “I'm actually a painter,” by then they just were like, professional adults, and the rest of us were these clowns who went into the arts.

**Josh:** I did it the easy way. I've played many, many lawyers.

**Wajahat:** Yeah, you're a very good lawyer on TV.

**Josh:** No law school, thank you. Attorney General of the United States, never cracked a book.

**Wajahat:** Much more convincing than actual attorney generals.

**Shira:** All right, here's what we do on this podcast Waj. We sort of talk about the weekly Torah portion, right? The weekly scriptural reading, but we also sort of try to relate it to what's going on around us in the world. And this week what we're talking about is community and what powers community, what makes community work, what makes it break apart? One of the things that I thought was most meaningful in the book was that you saw some of the best of humanity, right? Like the 500 people who came out when your daughter needed a transplant to see if they could give a liver transplant to your daughter? That's like the best of humanity. You also saw some of the worst of humanity. The way that your “community,” and I'm using that in scare quotes, turned against you when your family was sort of down and out. And I guess, my question for you is, I don't know, are you pro or con humanity, given the different kinds of life experiences you've had? In the Jewish tradition, by the way, there's a lot of rabbinic stories about whether God is pro or con-humanity, so not to compare you to God, but where do you come down on this?

**Wajahat:** That is a good question in the sense that it's very easy to imagine that those who have wronged us are evil, but they're not. They're just people and terrible things happen to good people all the time, and good things happen to terrible people all the time. And if we're honest with ourselves, which we rarely are, is that we also have the capacity to be both good and bad. And oftentimes each person, right, each person in their story is either the hero or the victim. No one is ever the villain, even the villains aren't the villain. Like even if you look at the comic books, the villain is justified in their villainy. They're like, “No, I'm the victim, I have to do this.” Or even if you look at white supremacists – and I think this a safe space podcast where we can agree that they're bad – I think, you know it depends, like five years

ago you could go anywhere and people were like “White supremacists are bad,” but now you have to like, test the room: “White supremacy, right? Bad?” And they're like “ehhhh...” So, in white supremacy, if you listen to their ideology, they're the victims, they're being replaced, and they have to use violence in order to save themselves, right? So no one's ever the villain. And so I think that's an important part to understand and I think with the reflection I tried in this book not to be cruel or malicious, I tried to be very fair. And with my community in particular, you saw both the best of the community and the worst of the community.

**Shira:** We let ourselves off the hook when we try to put all bad people in one category, close the door over there and say, “oh, well that's not me, I'm fine.”

**Wajahat:** Exactly. It's that permanent get out of jail free card, And then the really tough conversations are like “Maybe I have to work on myself. Maybe there's some biases that I have,” but you have to then confront yourself. You have to confront some ugly parts of yourself. And then if you're a part of a community, that community has to confront itself, and then that becomes, you know people would much rather I think, delude themselves with a fictional narrative of heroism or victimhood, because it gives them a get out of jail free pass to really confront the ugliness. But without confronting the ugliness, how do we get better as a people and as a community?

**Shira:** The hardest part of being human is reminding ourselves that we can always do a little bit better. I wanted to talk about mental health and I want that because I'm someone who's always tried to use my rabbinate to talk about my own therapy, to talk about my medication, because I want to sort of make mental health a conversation that we can have the way we would talk about someone having a broken leg or someone having any other long-term illness.

**Wajahat:** And you mention this in your sermons?

**Shira:** I do.

**Wajahat:** That's very radical.

**Shira:** And my therapist, the only thing she's upset about, is that I won't say her by name. She's like “Shira, this is the best PR ever!” And I said, “Oh, I'm sorry Brooke.” I mean, I do call her by name, there it is.

**Josh:** Tell her ad space is available. We don't do this for free.

**Wajahat:** “When I emailed Brooketherapist@gmail.com, my life changed.”

**Shira:** Was it a hard decision for you to be so transparent about your struggles, your family's struggles? I was just so grateful. I felt myself tearing up just reading it because I knew how many other people would see it.

**Wajahat:** In the book, I did a New York Times article about two and a half, two years ago I think, about OCD – obsessive compulsive disorder – which is an anxiety disorder that often, not always, has a genetic component to it. And so my father also has it. And I think a few of

my cousins now have it as well, even though they don't talk about it. You know, I got diagnosed almost, I think, around the age of 17 or 18. And then once I got diagnosed and once I started reading about it, I'm like, "Ohhhh, that makes a lot of sense, I'm not crazy. I understand how my brain works." And obsessive compulsive disorder, for those of you who don't know, and the reason why it's called an anxiety disorder, is because there's a kind of electrical misfiring in the brain where your brain, acting like your best friend, makes you super concerned about things you shouldn't be concerned about. And so your flight system goes off. And so what was really helpful to me was that if everybody else had this electrical misfiring, they would have behaved like me, which means that you're not like, you know, "I'm not crazy. I'm not alone." This is just how my mind processes things and my mind is trying to actually help me, but in trying to help me, it hurts me because it's giving the "danger signal, danger signal." And what happens when you have the dangerous signal is I could be sitting here talking to Joshua and Shira and internally, it looks like I'm going through fire. Externally, you're like, "Waj is so calm and cool." And so, you know, leadership, chaos, crises, I'm always the guy who steps up, but internally, you know, I was suffering from OCD for years. I white knuckled it forever, and that's what you do as a man, right? Especially those antiquated old male, who's not gen Z, you suffer quietly, you suffer well, and then one day people are like "Oh he was so healthy and he died at 62." Huh. What happened? And then even though our generation of men, me and Joshua, if you're like "Okay, you could live 10 extra years, really good years. You could live to the age of 75. You'll just have to cry once. If you just cry once, if one tear comes out, you live 10 extra years." Like no, give me death, I'll die at 65. I'll just suffer and die. And so the amount of emails that I have gotten from that. You will be shocked.

**Josh:** Whew, a lot of this resonates with me. First I want to thank you for grouping me, I think you said men of our generation, and I'm so much older than you.

**Wajahat:** That was my compliment of the day.

**Josh:** That was very subtle, very kind, and it was noted. I've been diagnosed as, I guess, OCD adjacent – Anxiety with inclinations towards OCD – and I wonder, sometimes the faith/religion-OCD connection, because I have a lot of that feeling of sometimes doing things that I feel will somehow be preventative of disaster. And I do think there is an overlay, or a dovetailing sometimes, like with petitionary prayer. I read an account of your discovery that your daughter had cancer, and when my daughter was two, we found out that she needed open heart surgery, and so I also really identify with you there and the immediate feeling that I just had to beseech God, and also start doing that sort of, religious calculus of if I could take it on myself, if I could swap out her pain for mine, that that really spoke to me.

**Wajahat:** There is a ritual aspect of OCD and anxiety, right? And I think the reason why some, especially those of us who are religious and and partake in these rituals, what the compulsion aspect of OCD. Oftentimes people count or oftentimes people have a prayer. If I just get the right formula, if I just get the right number, then I will feel okay. And so I will do this X amount of times and then I will get my reward. "Well, where's the reward? How come the reward didn't happen?" And that's where, if you have an incorrect, unhealthy understanding of religion and God and even mental health, that's when you get these two terrible feelings: shame and guilt. And shame and guilt are like the fuel of OCD and oftentimes mental health, right? You suffer quietly and you feel ashamed that you're having these feelings and thoughts and behaviors. You feel immensely guilty. You feel like "I can't share this with anyone. If I share this with anyone, they judge me. There's something wrong

with me.” And it's like pouring fuel on the fire, especially when it comes to anxiety and OCD. So now I realized, because my mom and dad tell me, that my father's generation, like a few people speak up. That uncle who was always stern? Yeah, he's in therapy for depression and all of a sudden it's like, “That makes sense, I understand why that uncle was so weird his entire life.” Like all these things make sense because we finally have the courage to be honest about ourselves and share it publicly. But in the absence of that honesty, what we have is fiction and people just suffer quietly and that's what we're taught: suffer well.

**Shira:** Right. You know, I'm just going to Brené Brown the s\*\*t out of everything you just said Waj, because it's true. It's, you know, the connection between vulnerability and shame, you have this uncle who perhaps you hate, no one wants to be around them, he's grumpy or whatever it is, but the second that you hear that he has depression or that he's in therapy or that he's trying to figure stuff out, so you see a little bit of his vulnerability, right? The opening in the armor, and it changes everything for you. One could say it sort of reveals a little bit more of a godliness that resides within all of us. So I would like to talk a little bit about humor. We're coming upon the Jewish holiday of Purim, which happens in less than a month now in which we purposely use humor to help process our pain. You are a very funny person and you are someone who can sort of speak about Islam with a sense of humor, but that is respectful?

**Wajahat:** Some would say disrespectful, but the intention is always respectful. Yes.

**Shira:** I'm interested in sort of how you use humor to lift up your community and you can define that word however you want, in difficult times.

**Wajahat:** This is what's interesting. I would say, “America, why are the arts and culture so dominated by African-Americans and Jews, right?” Or why have they made such an impression? And I think pain and sadness oftentimes explains why there are people who feel the need to create, right? Because if you're being erased, if you're being oppressed, if your voice is being silenced, then you seek out avenues where you can share your story. And oftentimes, storytelling through humor or comedy is how you're able to both process the pain, but also how you're able to experience joy, that joy that oftentimes is missing in life. I think for human beings, humor – and especially in this book – if used with intention, I think what we can do is you can boobytrap the stereotypes. You can make the medicine go down easier, you can sweeten the medicine. And what the research shows is that if you get people to laugh, they'll release endorphins, and as they're laughing they become more open to otherwise hostile ideas on religion and politics and culture that they would not otherwise entertain. So as they're laughing, they're like, “Okay, let's listen to what this brown kid has to say about a white supremacy.” “Okay, he's got me laughing, let's see what he has to say about this thing called Islam.” What I get from my community is, to answer the last part of your question, is I say Muslim communities, just like, you know how you got 10 Jews, you've got 11 opinions? It's like the most diverse religious communities in America. I've never met a Muslim community. I always say Muslim communities for that reason, the most diverse religious community in America are the Muslims. They're just like, yeah, you got like 10 Muslims, you got 14 opinions, and three of those opinions are fatwas against the other 10. And so with me, I've had a love/hate relationship, and let me mention it this way: If you dabble with religiosity a little bit – I think people who are religious in the arts and entertainment can, you know, empathize with this – is there are people who say “You cannot touch that. That is a sacred cow. How dare you even go in that direction?” Right? I'll give you one example that got me like, quasi-fatwaed. Allahu Akbar is trending for all the wro–

whatever Jew, Muslim, rabbi, Holocaust, like something terrible is happening. Muslim, nothing good. Whenever Jews are trending: terrible. Judaism's trending, something terrible is happening to Jews.

**Josh:** Or the Oscars are coming up.

**Wajahat:** But what happens is the following. Allahu Akbar is trending, real quick and apparently some person yelled Allahu Akbar before they did something terrible. And then all these people were like, saying “He yelled **Allahu Akbar** and like, yada, yada,” And so I use Twitter for like the next 20 minutes to explain how Muslims use Allahu Akbar. I did like 20 tweets. Some of them went viral. One of them was like “Allahu Akbar means God is greatest,” I say Allahu Akbar like 57 times a day. You know, we also use Allahu Akbar when we're like, excited about something. Like the Warriors win, I say Allahu Akbar and one time I said, I've taken giant dumps and then said Allahu Akbar, right? And I remember that tweet, out of all tweets, it went viral. Everyone's like, “I understand Allahu Akbar. I have also said God is great. Oh, Muslims and, you know, Catholics, Muslims and atheists, right?” Scott Simon of NPR leads off with that tweet, right? So I'm like I've done my job, people get it. Muslims were like “Look at you Wajahat. How dare you! You say Allahu Akbar in the toilet after taking a dump, you have desecrated it!” And the funny thing is, I'm like dude, literally when you go into the bathroom, there's a prayer. And when you leave the bathroom, there's a prayer. If you reveal the humanity, if you reveal literally the lowest of the low, but somehow tie religion to it, you are somehow desecrating the religion, but we need the fiction. We need the fiction of piety. We need the fiction of perfection. We need the fiction that none of us have said “Thank you God” after relieving ourselves, because who says that, even though everyone has. This is the fiction that we portray and we hide all the shame, the guilt, the mental health, the divorces, the poverty, the pain, because **log kya kahenge – what will people say?** And so to save the good face, you, you live a fiction, you promote a fictional narrative, and you suffer quietly and you suffer well.

**Josh:** You know there's also something very disarming about humor, which is that even if something you don't want to acknowledge or somebody you don't want to hear it from or identify with, when something makes you laugh, like what you just said is going to make some people laugh that maybe didn't even want to, there's something that, it can be penetrating, making people laugh.

**Wajahat:** Yeah. It opens doors, it lowers the defenses. You laugh, endorphins, you have an experience with that human being where like, “That person made me laugh. I like that person. I have associated a good memory and a good emotion with that person.” Right? You can get away with a lot more, I've seen. I think through humor, some of the best satirists, some of the people who've told the best truths about the human condition and about America are people who are funny.

**Shira:** I'm a little bit happy to hear that you get some pushback from the Muslim community as well, because the vast majority of mine, I know Josh gets a lot of antisemites who are not Jews, I get a lot of Jews pushing back on me. And in your book, you mentioned a lot of people, who I assume are not Muslims, saying things like go “back to where you came from” and saying terrible things about Islam.

**Wajahat:** Oh no that's just my mom, that was my mother.

**Shira:** "You should've been a lawyer, I didn't mean it!"

**Wajahat:** I'm like "that's cold blooded, Mom." You know what, nowadays this is what, I mean we have to laugh through it because it's getting worse, is back in the day they used to hide their names and used to create fake emails. Now, especially in the past two years, people sign it, sign these emails. They don't even hide it. They don't care about hiding it. So it's their name, their city, their state, their actual email addresses. And I get, every day without fail, several forms of ugly hate mail. "How dare you say that white supremacy is real and we're racist. Now, let me say something racist in my email." That's what I get all the time. And I lead the book with these two pieces of hate mail, which are the most common. One is "go back to where you came from" and the second one – I want a nerd who's listening, there has to be some Jewish nerds who are listening, some academic to do some research on this – they always tell us to go F a goat or a camel. And my question is why this obsession of beastiality and why only goats and camels? Like the only two animals, because there's so many different animals and they're just stuck on goats and camels. And for Muslims, I've noticed, and for those who are like brown skin and from the Middle East even though I'm from South Asia, it's "You go back and go F a goat and camel!" Why?

**Shira:** I get mostly Nazi terminology.

**Josh:** I get a lot of that, but I mean, I get it from both sides too. I get it from people who think, you know, if I say something critical of Israel, I'm a self-hating Jew. If I say something, if I write a piece about Mel Gibson, we want to turn you into a lampshade. I get it from both sides and it's vile on both sides, but also to be expected. And also, I feel like if you're getting it from both sides, you're probably saying something interesting. There must be some merit to it, you must have found some provocative middle ground that offends both sides.

**Wajahat:** That's what I try. Some people say like, "If all sides are hating on you, you must be doing something right. Or you're just an a\*\*hole." (laughter)

**Josh:** Also a possibility and a fair number of people who feel that way about me.

**Wajahat:** That's why I always say like, "You're getting it from all sides, you must be doing something, right. Like I'm just, maybe everyone hates me. Maybe I'm just like, a terrible person. But I do think the point is if you try to be intellectually honest, if you try it, I mean that's the attempt, and you try to be sincere and you try to call out injustices where they exist, both inside your community and outside your community – going back to the community aspect of it – then you're going to expect this. You're going to expect it. I get this all the time now: "You're self hating. you're sucking up to white power. you are selling your people out to get ahead." The casual antisemitic trope, "You're sucking up to Zionist power and they like you, which is why you have the book and which is why, you know, Rabbi Shira likes you, because you're the token Muslim, you're the native informant, you're telling them what they want," yada, yada, dah, dah, dah. And so I'm like, "Didn't you just see me on TV? Where I went for like, I don't know, 15 minutes and debated against white supremacy?" And they're like, "Doesn't matter, that's what they want you to say."

**Shira:** Alright listen, we need to end with something optimistic and positive.

**Josh:** Ever since I read, I guess it's a Muslim aphorism: Trust in Allah, but tie your camel first. I read you saying that, that has stuck with me since I read it. It's very Jewish to me too. It's very wise.

**Wajahat:** It's a beautiful saying and I end the book and the last chapter in the book is "Invest in hope, but tie your camel first" but the saying is "Have faith in God and tie your camel first," or "Have faith in God... but tie your camel first," which says that yes, have faith in this omniscient loving creator, but God has given you your mental and physical faculties, and you have to do everything within your power first. You have to exhaust yourself of your resources to fix your situation, right? And then you leave it to God. And so when it comes to tie your camel, our people come from the desert, you know, you have to tie your camel. If you don't tie your camel, your camel wanders off, and then you're screwed. You're S.O.L. as they say.

**Josh:** Spoiler alert. I gave away the end of the book. Sorry.

**Shira:** The line that we have in Judaism is if you're planting a tree and someone tells you the Messiah has come, first finish planting the tree and then go find the Messiah.

**Wajahat:** Can I tell the Muslim version of that? "If you see the day of judgment coming around the corner, plant the seed." The prophet Muhammed Alayhis Salaam said that if you have a sapling, right? If you have a sapling and you're about to plant it, but you see the hour is near, the day of judgment is coming, first plant the sapling. It's very similar to the Jewish one as well that I knew of: "If you see the Messiah, first plant it." So, which means you never know. I think what it means is this, is even in the most hopeless of times, our faith commands us to have hope, but God commands us to have hope. You see the day of judgment coming. Ain't nothing happened after the day of judgment, right?(laughter) It's all ending, but even then God says, "You never know, plant the seed." And I think there are these moments in life, in our people's history where things were so bleak that you're like, there's no way a loving God exists and there's no way for us to have hope. And what's the point? What's the point? And the opposite of hope is apathy and cynicism, which is cheap and lazy. It requires zero effort. Hope is painful. And I wrote this in the book, because hope means exposing yourself to the possibility there's a better future only to be betrayed. "Ahhhh, I had hope and then my hope was crushed." And so cynicism is like this protective shield, "Well if I don't have hope, I can never feel pain again." I can't afford to do it, like, that's why we have to plant the seed, because you never know. It ain't over until it's over, you never know.

**Shira:** That's really beautiful. And so thank you for coming on Chutzpod!

**Wajahat:** Nice to meet you. Thanks, you guys, for having me and I think Chutzpod! is probably top five podcast names. Well done. Well played.

**Josh:** Thank you.

**Shira:** Thanks Waj, really. Thank you. We'll be right back after this.

\*Ad\*

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\*End of Ad\*

**Josh:** Okay, I'm excited now to introduce our first celebrity couple to help us with Hebrew and Yiddish terms. They are Jasmine Simon and her husband Dulé Hill. Dulé and I are old friends, back from *The West Wing* days, he's on the hit *Wonder Years* reboot now. Jasmine, you know from *Ballers* and *Raising Dion* and *Psych* and she is the author of the new kid's book: *Most Perfect You*, and we'll put up a link so you can pre-order that. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Jas and Dulé.

**Jasmine:** **Alav/Aleha Hashalom** – a Hebrew honorific for the dead; may peace be upon her.

**Dulé:** **Kahal** – this is the Hebrew word for “community.”

**Jasmine:** **Baruch Hashem** – Hebrew for “blessed is God” or “Thank God.”

**Dulé:** **Chazak** – Hebrew word for “strong.”

**Jasmine:** **Kibbutz** – **Kibbutz**, in Hebrew, literally means “gathering.” **Kibbutz** is an Israeli collective community. *Kinky Boots* was a Broadway musical about a sexy **Kibbutz**

**Dulé: Kibbutznik** – A member of a **Kibbutz**...named Nik. If I lived on a **Kibbutz**, I'd be **Kibbutzdulé**. You get it.

**Jasmine: Ayn Kadma v'achra b'torah** – It's arameic; "There is no early or late in the Torah." This was a brilliant piece of retconning that explains why the chronology of the certain events in the Bible are a little **Farkakte**.

**Dulé: Farkakte** – Yiddish for defective, lousy, messed up.

**Josh:** Okay. So there we've done it again. Number eight in the can. Let's thank the people without whom we could not make the show. Chief among them, Tim Shovers, our executive producer and the pride of Atlanta, Georgia. PRX, fantastic company that distributes our show. You can learn more about them at [PRX.org](http://PRX.org). Gotta love the group Hadag Nahash, who have allowed us to use their fabulous song, Lazuz, as our intro music. As always, you can follow us on social media @rabbishira @JoshMolina @chutzpod. And you can write to us with new suggestions that include a "pah" joke for our collective noun at [Chutzpod@gmail.com](mailto:Chutzpod@gmail.com). Do not switch off your sets, Rabbi Shira Stutman will now lead us in a brief guided meditation.

**Shira:** Take a minute, while you're concentrating on your breathing, to think about a community that you're a part of. Maybe it's one that you've lost a little connection with over the course of the pandemic, maybe it's one that has sustained you over the last few years. Think about all of the parts that make the community work, the shared history, a shared sense of humor, the ability to evolve as individuals and as a community, to do **Teshuvah**, to get better and better. The responsibility you feel for the other community members. Take a moment to send energy to the people in the community that you love, and maybe even the ones you don't like very much, you can even mention them by name. Now take a moment to think of what you can give to this community that you have not been giving in the days, weeks, months, or few years that have passed, how you can help the community continue to grow and to thrive. Feel grateful that you have one, two, three communities that you are a part of. Open your heart to other people who might want or need in, community for themselves. Set your intention in this week to come to give back, but also to take what is it that you need from the people in this community and from the community at large. Shabbat Shalom everyone.

**Jasmine:** I'm Jasmine Simon.

**Dulé:** And I'm Dulé Hill.

**Jasmine:** And we both wish you a peaceful and meaningful Shabbat.

**Jasmine & Dulé(together):** Shabbat Shalom!