

Justin Pines at The Kallah 2022: *EMET* Keynote¹

Hi, my name is Justin Pines. I want to start by saying thank you to The Mussar Institute for having me here, and also thank you to you for spending a few minutes together. What I'd like to talk about today is what I want to call a *Yesod*. A *Yesod*, as I understand it, and there are other meanings in Kabbalah, but when I say the word *Yesod* today, what I mean is a core truth, or value, that someone has. Something that is not obvious to everyone, and that guides us on our path, our day to day lives, and also the trajectory of our whole lives. And what I'd like to do is spend a few minutes sharing a few of my personal *Yesods*, to give you a sense of what I mean by *Yesod*. And then also talk a little bit about what it means to live a life accessing and utilizing your *Yesods*, and some best practices.

So let's start with myself. As many stories start, my story starts with the Holocaust. My four grandparents were survivors of the *Shoah*. And one of my grandparents, my mother's father, Murray Pantirer, was a huge influence in my life. One of the key *Yesods*, one of the key foundational ideas that he taught me, that he modeled himself, was the idea that everything you have in life is an obligation to use to serve Hashem. So if you have money, you have talent, you have good looks, you have a geographical location, you have a network, you have skills, you have talents, whatever things the Lord, whatever God has given you, you have an obligation to put to use. So in his perspective, he had no family, he lost all his siblings and his parents in the Shoah. And so he dedicated his life to first building a family, and also serving as a lay leader. Someone who used his time, and his resources, to build out his family, and also to serve his community.

That actually continued to my grandfather's son-in-law, my father as well, who similarly lives a path of service, where he takes the gifts that he has and continues to serve as a lay leader. And I think growing up I also tapped into this image, this *Yesod*, whatever you have, you put to good use. And so, for me, for example, when I was at Penn as an undergrad, I was the president of the Hillel. When I went to Harvard Law School, I was the co-head of the Jewish Law Student Association. When I was at Paul, Weiss, my law firm, I was like an undercover Rabbi, I introduced my office mate and friends to different ideas around

¹ Please note that this transcript has been lightly edited for readability.

Judaism. I served on the boards of various young leadership causes. And I had this path, this *Yesod*, around what I means to be a lay leader and to take Jewish values and bring it into the world?

And then somewhere along the way, I started to discover, I looked around, and noticed, wow, all of my friends who are super talented, that could be amazing Jewish professionals, are going to work at Google, and Goldman Sachs, and hedge funds, and real estate. And no one's going into the Jewish world to work professionally. And so I felt an itch, to be like, okay, well, here's an area where I might put some skills to practice that not everyone is pouring their talents into. And at the same time, I also felt imposter syndrome, I felt like I was a Jewish lay leader who did not know enough Torah, or hadn't spent enough time with text. And so I thought it was important for me to consider learning deeply more Torah in a serious way, and so I made a major shift in my life, I left my law firm, Paul, Weiss, and I switched over to Yeshiva. I went to several Yeshivas, including Chovevei Torah, where I began to learn, and began to pursue, a career of serving the Jewish people more full-time.

Along those ways, another core idea formulated itself for me, another *Yesod*, which was my encounter with Mussar and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, which answered a key question for me. My whole life, I even have memories being younger, and saying, "I want to make movies when I grew up, so I can take Jewish ideas and get them to the masses through this medium." I even remember writing an essay, well before I came to Rabbinical School, talking about how my goal was to think about what does it mean be a Jewish corporate lawyer? What does it mean to take Jewish values to everyday life? Not in a ritual sense, but in a practice, in a human-to-human sense.

And then, of course, when I got to Yeshiva, I discovered Mussar, that there was a whole area of practice around clarifying what it means to be Adam l'Adam, from person to person, to be in conversation with people around us. And to have an actual system for thinking about how we treat others, and how we behave with others. And I encountered Rabbi David Jaffe, who helped me to really understand deeply, build out an understanding. And I also encountered Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, who taught me a theology that went with that, the idea that every human being was infinitely valuable, equal in value, and unique, because they're created in God's image. And that I started thinking about how can I live my life in a way that treats people that way? So I already had an idea of trying to think about bringing Jewish values to

the world. But these *Yesods*, these new ideas, Mussar gave me a structure and a path, and Rabbi Yitz gave me a theology to build that upon.

And then I'll say another *Yesod* that developed out of this was the idea of *Hitlamdut*. That also, I think, was a theme along my life. I was blessed, not on purpose, my parents sent me to an Orthodox synagogue, a conservative day school and reform camp. And that caused me to be someone who was constantly learning in different situations. Wherever I was, I was in some way an outsider, but I was also able to bring ideas from other places, and also encounter new ideas. So that got me into the practice of what it means to learn from others.

And then I discovered *Hitlamdut*, Rabbi Jaffe taught it to me the first time in Alei Shur, and I'm not going to go deep into *Hitlamdut*, I'm assuming most of the people who are watching this have had some exposure to *Hitlamdut*. If not, I highly recommend it. *Hitlamdut* added a piece to, my *Yesod*, the idea that everything is practice. The way Rav Wolbe says at the end, "We don't die, we learn how to die." It really made me realize that even in this moment right now, I'm practicing. I'm actually personally practicing my first asynchronous program like this. I'm used to speaking in a situation where there's humans in the room, and I'm speaking to you in an asynchronous recording. So even that right now, I'm doing *Hitlamdut*, and this very moment, I'm learning how to do that thing. And I'm not scared of failure, and I'm not assuming I'm going to have success because of the mindset of *Hitlamdut*.

And we use *Hitlamdut* to find new *Yesods*. By having those antennae on, we look around the world, and we can discover different *Yesods*. My current *Yesods*, just to give you a sense, in terms of those are big three things that have gone through my life: The idea of putting my gifts to practice, the idea of the Mussar, and theology of Rabbi Yitz, as an outlook, and then the idea of *Hitlamdut* as a *Yesod* tool for me.

But then I'll say in my own practice right now, my current *Yesod*, is the following, I've been struggling, something I was really going through since Rosh Hashanah, was feeling I was so present with my family and my kids on the Hagim, on the holidays. On Rosh Hashanah, on Sukkot, on Hanukkah, over Thanksgiving, these moments where I had a break from my professional life and was able to really zone in, I felt so present and so connected. And then when it would go back to work time, I would feel super

focused and present in my work. And I would find that when I was watching my kids, or having breakfast in the morning, I was thinking about the next thing. I was thinking about, okay, what am I teaching later today? What do I have to write later today? Who do I owe an email to later today? And all those things.

And working with Rabbi Jaffe, I developed a *Yesod* in my practice, which was, I need *Seder* [order], *Savlanut* [patience], and *Bitachon* [trust in God]. *Seder* - the idea that I need to clarify what I'm going to do when, so that I can get places. But then I need to have *Savlanut*, and recognize that I'm not going to accomplish everything I want to accomplish at home, or everything that I want to accomplish at work, in one day. And to have a little bit *Bitachon*, that if I continue on this path, and I continue to be present, it will all work out.

I'll even just say this morning, in my mind, I was thinking about that I was going to be doing this later today, and my mind wanted to travel there. And this morning with my kids, before they left for school, I was like, no, I want to be present with them. I gave them smiles, I was connected with them, I used my eyes, I was focused on their needs and I was totally present. And I had *Bitachon*, I don't need to worry about the TMI program later, I can think about that later. And that's a way where a *Yesod* is not only just this foundational idea, but we're using the Mussar tools that many of us are familiar with, how one might lay out their own personal *Yesod* around Mussar tools.

That's a little bit about me. And hopefully those examples give you a little bit of a taste of what a *Yesod* is. And what I want to spend a few minutes doing now is actually to talk through some best practices, right? If we have a sense of what a *Yesod* is, I'm sure if you think hard, you'll realize there are some of them in your life already. I want to think about how do we refine and improve our *Yesods*? How do we discover new *Yesods*? And so let's spend a few minutes thinking about how one discovers a new *Yesod*? Or finds a *Yesod*?

Here, I'm quoting Rabbi Lechter, and his Shiurim, which are on Spotify. And one of the points that he brings down is the idea that where we're interacting with human, or a piece of Mussar text, and we're trying to grow, we're trying to define the *Yesod*, it should make us uncomfortable. Not uncomfortable because it's too hard, but because we're not used to thinking this way. It's something that knocks us off

our chair. We want to butt our heads with it a little bit, right? If growth is about change, it's not necessarily about only changing only the familiar.

And I'll just give you an example. I was thinking back, when I remember I was in camp, in eighth grade, I was not at a religious Jewish camp, I was at a sports camp, and I would put on tefillin every morning. And my counselor, I was the only person in camp doing this, and my counselor, I think was very moved by that, to see someone in eighth grade wake up before everyone else every morning and pray to God. He was not Jewish, but he had a religious understanding of that, was very appreciative of that. I remember even once, I was late for flagpole in the morning, and instead of me getting docked, he defended me to the head of camping, like, no, no, no, it's okay, he was praying, leave him alone.

And then one day, they used to do evaluations of the campers, he left the evaluations inside the bunk, and he was out. And I remember one of the kids in the bunk said, "Oh, my God, the evaluation." He found the evaluations. So being the curious people that we were, of course, we went into the evaluations, and started reading them, and hearing what he has to say. There's nothing more interesting than hearing someone else's objective opinion about you, and they don't have to have the barrier of saying it to your face. And we read it. And he walked in on us. And, of course, felt very betrayed and very angry. And what really stuck with me in that moment was when he looked at me, and he said, and you, you pray every morning, how could you do this? How could you betray my trust like this when you pray every morning, right?

And that was a moment where I had this *Yesod*, I pray every morning, this is something I believe in, I'm a holy person, I'm doing these things. And this moment knocked me off my feet. Something made me uncomfortable, made me realize, whoa, there's a new *Yesod* here, there's a new *Yesod* that I have to add onto my *Yesod*, which is, you can't be someone who's attempting to pray to Hashem, who's davening every day, who wants to be what's called a *Kiddush* Hashem, someone who's trying to represent God in a positive light in this world. And then at the same time, be doing things like, betraying someone's trust that way. And so that *Yesod*, that wasn't a *Yesod* I went looking for, but that was an example of like, in some ways, the best version, things that make you so uncomfortable in the moment that you never forget them.

But if it's not something that's knocking you off your feet, if you're trying to go and find it, if you're looking at a Mussar text, you're spending time with friends, you're trying to learn, you're doing the *Hitlamdut* mindset. And I think the key here is remembering that we're trying to become a different person, not the same person. We're trying to think of what's our dormant potential? What's the potential we're not activating? And how can we not just work harder, but work different, right? If you come across a person, or a text, and you think they're saying something you just agree with, you're probably staying within your comfort zone. You have to remember that our goal is to change.

And often what we find is that we push ahead on our existing *Yesods*, that we use them. We have some problem facing us, let's just use my *Yesod*. I have my way of seeing the world, if I just stick to that, I'll overpower it, I'll get through it. But often that means we're rooted in only one way. And a new *Yesod* will say, do you know what you're capable of? Do you know who you are? Do you know about the other possibility which exists within you? It so demands something of you. It wants to educate you. In that moment, it was demanded of me, you need to behave a certain way if you're going to put on tefillin every day.

And I think one of the big challenges we have in society today is that it's a lot about producing more of what we're comfortable with, whether at the corporate level, the personal level, the family level. We have these things that we do, and just do more, and more, and more of them, make the people around us happy. They expect us to be a certain way and keep doing more and more. And so, we're trying to think about, can we go in a different way? Can we do something differently?

Now I want to spend a few minutes just talking about, even if we employ *Hitlamdut* to discover *Yesods*, and these *Yesods* are something that are outside us, they push us to grow, they are different, or coming up against something, how do we actually discern when our *Yesod* is *Emet*? To use that word truth. How do we know if our *Yesod* is actually *Emet*? Is actually true? How do we know we're not just telling ourselves a story?

And for that, I want to turn to Rabbi Israel Salanter. And I'll say that, in this case, I've worked closely with Rabbi Yitz Greenberg on the translation of the *Ohr Yisrael* which is forthcoming. And so I'll say that this is

my limited understanding of Rabbi Yitz's understanding, of Rabbi Israel Salanter, but I'll try my best here. He said the following, which is that, any *Yesod* we have, any outlook we have, any foundational principal we have, is going to be conditioned, right? It's a result of our setting, our culture, our habits, our personal experiences. And so the initial thinking of Rabbi Salanter was we have to isolate ourselves and we have to narrow things to pure reason. I'm only going to speak in pure reason, I'm only going to think in pure reason. But, of course, as we all know, and Rabbi Salanter writes, there's no such thing as pure reason, right? There's always subconscious bias. Before Freud was writing about subconscious, and made it popular, Rabi Salanter recognized that there's always going to be a subconscious bias.

And so now we have a new challenge, if it's impossible to have pure reason, what do we do? And Rabbi Salanter solves the question by saying, Hashem, or God, gave us the Torah. And if God wanted the Torah to be perfect, and stay in heaven, he wouldn't have given it to humans. And by bringing it down into this world, we recognize that we're trying to embrace the human element. And if you think deeply about Torah for a minute, of course, it's imperfect, right? The very nature of the fact that Torah is written in human language, that it's presented in a linear fashion. That it's time-bound, it came into our hands at a certain time in history, and therefore was in conversation with certain things in history, all make it imperfect.

And this is true of anything, right? If you think of 2D painting, it's impossible to paint the front, and back, and side of some someone's head at the same time. And so we do our best to try to capture a portrait, but it's certainly 2D. It's not something that can be seen from multiple sides. But by giving us the Torah, God affirms this human element. God recognizes that by bringing it into a human form that can be received by humans, we're bringing it into all the constraints of humanity.

So now what? What do we do with that information? If we know there's a human element, do we just give up if there's no such thing as objective truth? Once there's humans involved, whoever wants to say whatever they want can say they're right? No. Rabbi Salanter still says, within recognizing those challenges, we have to pause and actually do two things.

The first is that we have to work on ourselves psychologically. We have to actually clarify, what are my biases? And what are the emotions that are getting involved in my thinking here? Can I lessen them? Can I turn the volume down on them? Recognizing that they're not going away, they're part of who I am.

Can I notice what are my personal blind spots? What are the things that I'm going to struggle with overcoming here? And can we actually work on our rational capacity?

And second, a check, or a balance, to go with that is to bring in chavrutas, learning partners, to expand the conversation, to surround ourselves with people we disagree with, who have their own blind spots, so that we can help each other in a trusting way, find our blind spots. Can I make the best case for my *Yesod*? And can I also make the best case for someone else's *Yesod*? And can I actually recognize that maybe one of them is better in one moment and one of them is better in another? And so this, in some ways, is a little bit towards pluralism. It's not relativism, let's be careful, it's not relativism. But it's the idea of being in conversation, to try to bring us to a more accurate truth.

The next thing I want to say is something about how do we build beyond pluralism, to real deep incompatible truths, right? So your mind could go towards politics today, but I want to stay within Torah for now. So, what do we do when there's two *Yesods*, which both feel like real *Yesods*, right? God given truths. Torah, whatever it is, which are completely incompatible, right? And Rav Leuchter points out that, well, actually when we think about these two challenging ideas, when we bring them together and recognize they have the same purpose, that's what we call *Keddusha* actually. So, if you think a little bit about that, those moments where it comes together, it's *Keddusha*.

So what do I mean? So, first, just a few examples, God's names, right? God has many names, not just two. But even YHWH-Adonai versus *Elohim*, those two names have totally different ideas behind them. And how do we live in a world which fuses them together, right? Or *Avodah*, is *Avodah* all about discipline? Or is *Avodah* all about spontaneity? Those are two totally different ideas. How do we bring them together? Similarly, I was just learning *Mesilat Yesharim* this morning, like abstinence versus taking pleasure in this world, right? How do we say it's important to abstain and to recognize things are temporal? And also, life is temporal, how could you not partake in the world? Or, God is above, and God is here.

I'll say one, for me, that I struggle with a lot, is that, and this is one of my blind spots, I am very concerned about technology. I think that the rise of technology, we're going to look back on the social media, iPhones, as cigarettes of the previous generation, and be shocked that we allowed people to do

all these things. And so part of me wants to really just stay as far as possible from phones, and from social media, all those things. And there's another part of me, that says, like, well, the people, the world, are in this world. This is where the world's going. So I'm currently trying to push myself to consider what does it mean to find a way to be part of the digital world? Even though it feels so not kosher to me. How can I fuse those two principles together?

And then last, I'll say, are *Chesed* and *Gevurah*, which I want to talk about a little bit deeper for a few minutes. So Rabbi Salanter says that our goal, in our practice, is to be conscious of, and able to use, every Middah and its opposite. So *Chesed* and *Gevurah*, are two, are a great example of opposites. *Chesed* being empathetic, overflowing kindness, and *Gevurah* being strictness, and sticking to something, and being strong.

And so the classic person associated with *Emet*, Truth, is Yaakov Avinu, Israel, Jacob in English. And Yaakov interestingly comes from Abraham, who is *Chesed*, and Yitzhak who is *Gevurah*, right? So, his father and his grandfather are these two ends of the spectrum, and he's *Emet* in the middle. And similarly he marries Raḥel, Rachel, and Leah. Raḥel being *Chesed* again, and Leah being *Gevurah*. So both in his marriage, and in his legacy, he is balancing both *Chesed* and *Gevurah*. And he is *Emet*, why is he called *Emet*? If you think of the word *Emet*, Aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Tav is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and Mem is the middle. And so he's in that middle, Yaakov, he's able to pull the Aleph and the Tav together, to bring them together, to create Alef-Mem-TAv, that's *Emet*.

And that's why Yaakov is the first of the patriarchs to be able to connect to his grandchildren. We don't have any ideas of Abraham, or Yitzhak, talking to their grandchildren. We have an idea that Yaakov connects with his grandchildren. And not only that, whereas the two previous generations each had two sons, and were unable to keep them in the same home, that they divided, and one was sent away. When it comes to Yaakov, despite everything that happens with Yosef, at the end of the day, he blesses all of his children. He's able to separate his 12 sons, create unique, and different blessings. So he's not only maintaining two sides to a whole, he's maintaining 12 sides to a whole, right? He's really getting to that level of having *Yesods* that are in conflict and in conversation with each other.

And if we can now apply this idea of *Chesed* and *Gevurah* to ourselves, when we look at *Gevurah*, we need to have *Gevurah* when we think of a *Yesod*. When it comes to my *Yesod*, my *Gevurah* says, I strongly believe, and I live this value, this foundational principle, right? And then I'm strong headed, I'm decisive, I know what I'm doing. At the same time, we want to have *Chesed*, we want to say, I can fully empathize, I can fully take on, and live, and imagine in my head, someone else's idea. Or this other concept that's in front of me, this other worldview, I have an openness to that. These seem incompatible, how can we be so strong, and so open at the same time? And that's the challenge. Can we live our *Yesods* while being deeply open to others?

And then I'll add to that, something I learned from improv, the idea of what's called "yes, and..." right? So if we discover a new *Yesod*, it does not eradicate our old *Yesod*, right? We're saying, "yes," my current *Yesod*, "and" I'm adding what you're sharing. The old is important. The idea is not you learn something from a Rabbi, you throw everything out the window. Or you learn something from a Mussar text], or you learn something from a counselor, right? The idea is how can you assimilate what you're learning into the person that you are? And everything that's unique about you and special about you. It's not, oh, I'm a totally different person, I look totally different the next day. The goal is to, in some ways, change below the surface, to slowly keep improving.

I will say, by the way, I'm not talking about a situation where there's part of you that needs to be removed, because it's a sin, or you're missing the mark, or something's off, right? That, of course, we want to actually eradicate those. But assuming a *Yesod* is founded in *Emet*, we want to think of ways to refine them and to assimilate new ones.

A couple words, just as we think about living our lives with these *Yesods* in practice. Number one, is that this is a path, right? It's not an indecisive endeavor, where every single day there's a new *Yesod*, I'm turning it upside down, I'm a new person, and this, and that. It's a path, right? That means that we have to live the *Yesods* we have today as though they are an absolute truth from God, as though they are the absolute *Emet*. The only absolute *Emet* is God, but can we live as though whatever *Yesods* we're holding onto are full truth? And we have to pretend there is no human element, even though we know the human limits of truth, right?

This is the best course I have right now, given everything that I have experienced, and I've learned, and I've taken in from the world. Here's my *Yesod*, live it to the fullest, and recognize that I'm going to discover other *Yesods*. And I think we have to have the humility, the *Anavah*, to recognize that there are other *Yesods*. Other people have their *Yesods*. There are *Yesods* from the past, there are *Yesods* from the present, and future generations are going to discover new *Yesods* that we don't even know about. And so can we make space for those and recognize those?

And then I just want to share, kind of to bring it home, I shared some examples at the beginning, I want to just share one more example, that I was just reflecting on and I feel is a relevant one here. And this is, in some ways, a smaller example, but brings into the real world. So I want to just tell the story of me coaching my daughter's U8 girl soccer team this year. This was my first time. I'm not a soccer player, I played soccer in high school, but I certainly don't know much about coaching soccer. But my daughter wanted me to coach, and so I coached.

And so what was my first step? As we discussed earlier, *Hitlamdut*. I called up my friend, whose daughter is now 12, I said, I remember you coached for six, seven years, tell me, what do you do? What did you do? How did you spend the time? What did you do for practice? What was your goal when you were spending time with them? I asked other coaches who were in the league, I asked the commissioner, I just started trying to learn. I watched a few YouTube videos. I started to really bring in some of these ideas, think about clarifying my goal, my *Yesod*, and also clarifying the techniques that would get there.

I think my initial *Yesod*, as I came to that, was that they're at an educational age, so the goal was really to teach them how to play, to create a space where they continued to learn the next steps. So passing, and shooting, and dribbling, just to give examples, don't have to get into details, right? And then what happened? Once I clarified my goals, we started playing. And the second, I missed the first game, I was away, the second game I was there. And we were awesome, our team won really well. We won our first game, we won our second game, and we were good. And so suddenly the Yetzar Harah started creeping into my head, and said, the *Yesod* is to win, the *Yesod* is to win. You're playing soccer, coach, come on, the *Yesod* is to win. So suddenly, as I prepared for the next game, my *Yesod*, the foundational principle

that was driving me, was no longer an educational experience for the girls, it was what can I do to help my team win?

So I focused on who's going to play when, and I'm going to play this person the most, because they're the best. And I had this whole plan about how to win. I remember I got there, and I did two terrible things, in the second game, the first was that I screamed at my daughter. We were late, and I wanted to be on time, because I didn't want to miss a minute of practice, and she was not putting on her shoes fast enough. And instead of treating her with Kavod, honor, being created in God's image, like seeing who she was, I was totally focused on winning, and I was completely inappropriate and a terrible father to her in that moment. I didn't appreciate her. And instead, I was focused on moving her along and yelling at her.

Similarly, a parent said to me like, can we end early today? Because the weather's a little bit wet. Let's get home, we have grandparents, they don't want to be cold. And I was like, no, it's 60 minutes, we're going to play for 60 minutes. So I was focused. These kids need to learn, they need to win, I have a *Yesod* here. My *Yesod* is not like the health of grandparents on the sideline, or parents who wanted to get their kids home because they have other errands, my *Yesod* was focusing on winning. Of course, by the way, we lost.

But coming home from that game, I felt terrible, I had totally missed it. My *Yesod* was totally off. I missed it. And so I did some learning, I did some thinking, I tried to clarify, well, what's my *Yesod*? I thought of Ted Lasso, from a TV show, who's a coach who really leads with kindness, and helping people, and seeing them as humans. And I also thought of my *Yesod*, my *Yesods* in life beyond soccer. My *Yesod* is the idea of treating people as infinitely valuable, and equal, and unique, and in what way was I practicing that? I didn't practice that with the parent, I didn't practice that with my daughter, I didn't practice that with the team. I totally missed it. And so then I went back, and I retooled, and I thought about how am I going to coach so that I'm doing that?

And the next time we came to the practice, I was totally focused on being present for the girls, and figuring out what they wanted, and hearing from them. And I heard from them that they like a song, and so we started singing that song. Our practice was like we had a whole chant around the song, the girls

liked it, and they were so into it. They were smiling, and they were giggling, and they loved it, right? And that whole game, I was about giving people opportunities to try things, I was focusing on lifting them up and not worrying about winning anymore. And it was great. We had a few games in a row that it was like that, and it was wonderful. We won some of the games, the kids loved it, most importantly. I even had them, at the end of each game, each go around and say one nice thing about someone else that they did that day. I'm focusing, on the *Yesod*. The *Yesod* is not winning, the *Yesod* is making people who treat each other *B'tselem Elohim*, as created in God's image.

And then, of course, I had some incompatible truth coming to me. I had a parent yell at me that I was spending too much time on the field, I was blocking his view, because I was busy coaching the kids, right? And I had parents who were upset when I was not playing the best players, and I was giving everyone a chance, and we weren't winning games the same way. And so I started to think about like, okay, great, there's this *Yesod* I have, but I also have to be mindful of the *Yesods* that other people are bringing, which is that they want nachas from the kids. They want to see their kids perform well, and they want their kids to win.

And so the final game of the season, I tried to balance all these *Yesods*. And so, I set up a lineup that gave everyone a chance to play, and really focused again on treating everyone as created in God's image, *b'Tzelem Elokim*. And we got crushed in the first half, the other team scored three goals in a row, we were down 3-0 at half time. And then in the second half, I did some minor, minor tweaks, I thought, Can I make a couple small changes? That no one will be offended ~~by, but~~ by but will give us a slightly better chance to win. But will still be in a way that's treating everyone *b'Tzelem Elokim*, that will feel like I'm treating everyone with *Kavod*[. And I did that.

And, of course, when you're coaching, you can't do anything aside from what you do as a coach, you can't play yourself. And slowly, but surely, we scored one goal. Then we scored the second goal. And then with one minute left in the game, one of our players who never ever scored, I think she scored once the whole season, who normally I would've been like, I need my best players, I'm not putting that person in. But instead, I was like, no, I have to treat her with *B'tselem Elohim* and give her a chance. She scored a goal and tied it at 3-3.

And it was amazing. And I'm not an emotional coach, but I jumped up in the air. My niece, was like, uncle Justin, I can't believe you jumped up in the air, what was going on there? But it felt like *kedusha*, right?. I managed to balance the *Yesod* of treating everyone *B'tselem Elochim*, and the *Yesod* that recognizes that part of treating the parents with *B'tselem Elochim* is recognizing that they do want to see their children succeed. In addition to just being happy, they want to see them succeed, and I was able to strike a balance. We didn't win, we tied 3-3, but I was able to strike a balance where everyone felt they were seen and they were lifted up, and it involved balancing different sides.

And the last thing I'll say is that, the next step, is to recognize that I can't have the same game plan next year. If God willing my daughter asks me to coach again, I need to bring everything that I learned, and I need to recognize that everyone is going to be a year older, and have different opinions, and different views, and have grown differently, and I'm going to have to clarify that *Yesod* again. I leave you with that story as something to think about. I hope that the time we spent together today will give you something to think about as you build your own *Yesods*, as you sit with a Mussar text and try to refine, or create, new *Yesods*, as you interact with a Rabbi, or a friend, or a loved one, and try to create new *Yesods*. I hope some of these examples gave you a way to swim in them a little bit. Thank you so much.