- Okay, what I first wanna do before I welcome Matan to this conversation is to welcome really members of our, in particular, our Melrose community who are with us this afternoon. Here on the East Coast it's 1:30 in the afternoon. It's still morning in L.A. where Matan is. And I also wanna welcome, there's some members, we have a Disability Inclusion Committee which is a great group of people in our congregation. Some of us have joined us this afternoon. Matan's official title, he's Vice President for Workforce, Leadership, and Faith Programs at RespectAbility, which is a nonprofit organization, and I quote, fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. We have him really with us this afternoon. Many of us are aware that the month of February has been designated on the Jewish calendar as disability and inclusion month. Those of us who are part of the disability community, who have family members or ourselves have certain challenges recognize that Disability Inclusion Month is a misnomer. Every day, every day, every hour is disability and inclusion day, an opportunity to improve lives of those who are challenged and in search really of an inclusive community. Matan's personal narrative is very, very impressive. And just one, himself has significant physical challenges, but if you read over his life narrative, some years ago he was appointed by President Obama which required a Senate confirmation to the National Council on Disability which recognizes his tremendous abilities to make this world a better, better place. What I'd like to do very briefly, we have maybe 45 minutes or so. I know you've got a busy life. But what I'd like you to tell us a little, what is RespectAbility? What is this organization? What is it about?

- I think that is a great place to start. And so, at its heart, RespectAbility is an organization with a very simple premise. The simple premise is that, we people with disabilities represent tremendous talent, represent tremendous ability, and that the real goal of society as it encounters disability should be to, A, utilize that talent, and B, by utilizing that talent in a way that makes sense, allow us to become self-sufficient, to live life to the fullest. So RespectAbility pushes that idea. We believe that there are in fact, two major components to why that is not the case. One is that, the policies and practices that is the know-how and/or the way the world is set up, don't necessarily always promote that. The other is, however that people with disabilities still tend to be seen in a pity model, tend to be seen not for as they are with the complexities that every human being has, but as objects of anywhere from pity to fear or, so RespectAbility's mission is really simultaneously to advocate on behalf of better practices and policies, but also to really work on fighting stigma, to really work on changing the way people with disabilities are perceived. And interestingly, and if my colleague Lauren Appelbaum was here, Rabbi mentioned in our prerecorded moment, she would take pains to emphasize, since this is her department, that we do not talk in terms of positive portrayals, we talk in terms of accurate portrayals because after all, people with disabilities have a fullness to them that includes the good, the bad, and just the fullness of human existence. So RespectAbility does the stigma fighting by really promoting every kind of positive portrayal, whether it's our work, Lauren's work really with the media, and with Hollywood Studios and with television shows, we recently got a shout out from Disney for our work on Marvel's "Eternals." I actually got to attend the Blue Carpet premier because that's what happens when your organization works on a movie. But also for instance, if you are a subscriber to our weekly Jewish Newsletter, our Jewish Disability Perspectives Newsletter, you see that we really try to profile some of the wonderful Jewish talent that is out there doing things with disabilities. You see that we profile our speakers, and we train speakers. We profile other folks doing good work because part of fighting stigma is honestly just getting folks to know what's out there. One of my speakers, a young man by the name of Justin Moses recently had a dialogue with Rabbi Sherman's son where he really showcased his abilities as a sportscaster. I mean, yes, he's a person with a disability, but he is also just gifted in the way that he talks about sports, in the way that he presents about, which is so huge. Part of what RespectAbility does is change that portrayal. The other part is to change policies and practices. So we do that by, sometimes by working with government. And we've actually worked in all 50 states and the federal government and have been a go-to now for three presidential administrations. We work by doing that, by educating and training. And we train everywhere from philanthropy to the Jewish world to non-prep, to pretty much any area you can think of 'cause our training even goes into corporate. Not much of our other work is corporate, but our training spans. And then so to support all of that work, we also realized that there need to be more capable people with disabilities at decision-making tables. And when RespectAbility was founded, we noticed that the key pipelines that get people to those decision-making tables, fellowships, internships, that sort of thing, really weren't serving people with disabilities. So we founded our own apprenticeship program which Jake, Jake wave at the camera, Jake is a product of. So not only do we train apprentices, but we hire, we've trained over 200, we've only been able to hire five ourselves, but we do practice what we've reached in terms of the value of our apprentices. And down we have other pipeline programs. We have a lab program for creatives, we have the Speakers Bureau Program that I've now referenced to train speakers. Not because we're a direct service organization, we categorically are not. And if someone comes to us seeking services directly, we refer them elsewhere, but because we're really looking for that next generation of leaders to train them up. Before the recording started and before some of you were on, Rabbi Sherman asked me my age. I'm 40. And what that means, I hope I have another 40 good years to be doing this work. I won't be around forever. So it is important that we continue to train the pipeline of people to do the work, right? Because we do hope that someday we will get to the place of full inclusion. But to paraphrase the Rabbi's (speaking in foreign language) I can't do it myself, right? So, that's where our training pipeline comes in.

- Okay, let me ask you a question. What I wanna do, I wanna move away from RespectAbility, and I wanna talk a little about you. We said before you come from a rabbinic family, share with us briefly your life narrative, your physical challenge is what? And take us through a little of your life story, which I find absolutely compelling and also inspiring.

- So let's see. Whenever someone asks me to tell my life story, I always jokingly, but not jokingly start by saying it was a cold winter's day in 1981, because it actually was a cold winter's day in 1981, it was Arab Elvis. My mother went into labor roughly 12 weeks early, and this was the early '80s. So that was not an occurrence that many babies survived, right? But thanks to a good bit of Providence and also the medical experts at Yale and Haven Hospital, I did in fact survive. I survived with cerebral palsy and it was pretty clear at a very early age. I've even read some of the reports that said two very interesting things. One said that I was going to have very significant physical limitations throughout my life. And in fact, if you read the medical reports, the doctors knew along before my parents accepted it, that I was never gonna be walking or really performing self-care. But that also I was, did not appear to be intellectually impaired. And in fact appeared to be reaching intellectual milestones at an accelerated rate. So there was sort of this twice exceptional notion as people sometimes say in the disability world that attached early. And I think my parents really ran with that. I went to disability preschool, but then at four years old, they put me into the first grade because I could already read, I could already do basic mathematics. And there was a thought that putting me into kindergarten didn't make sense. So they put me right into the first grade, the idea being that we then sort of took the next year off so that I could focus on and physical therapy and physical development where I was in a first grade classroom for a second year for social stimulation. And at the same time, they just sort of had me doing everything their other children did, right? My parents were both on faculty at URJ summer camps, and at NFTY which is the Reform Jewish Youth Movement, they brought their other children along to those things. So of course they brought me along as well, because that's what you do. I always joke that the URJs camp did not become accessible in some sort of grand plan to let me in, they became accessible because I was sitting there and they didn't know what else to do, right? I had sort of grown up. Well, I had grown up, I mean, my first summer camp, I was less than six months old. So literally I had in fact grown up there. And I think that helped in some ways, and in a way that is my Jewish inclusion narrative. It's an interesting thing when your family is so inconstant the Jewish community, that it's not actually about breaking in, it's just about the fact that you're kind of already there, right? My synagogue wasn't physically accessible till after my Barista because it was a poorly resourced small congregation in Connecticut, but it was just understood that literally every service, a group of congregants would carry me in, right? It was just, but of course, part that was that it's easier when you're the rabbi's child for it just to be understood that that is what's gonna happen. That Matan is going to go to services. I participated in most Jewish programs because there was just never a thought that I wouldn't. And I know that my parents did have to advocate. I'm not naive, but I also know as someone who now does this work professionally, that they had a much lower hurdle as someone with personal relationships everywhere they were trying to go, than would a similar parent, a similar set of parents who had not gone through. So that was sort of my Jewish journey. And my secular journey was similar. I mean, I was always what we now call fully included then called mainstreamed. If anything, I was advanced academically, I got into Yale at age 16. Started at age 16. Have been living independently on my own since age 16, I guess we're coming up on 25 years already, which just makes me feel a little old. And went to law school, Harvard. Practiced law for about the better part of a decade, including at the beginning of my Obama administration service, because the National Council on Disability is a job where you tend to keep your day job. And then decided that I wanted to go more full time into this disability work. I launched a consultancy, the most common people that came knocking were the Jewish world. I didn't set up to be a consultant to the Jewish world. I set up to be a generalized consultant, but it was right at the time that the Ruderman Family Foundation was beginning to spend a lot of money on Jewish inclusion, but people needed expertise, right? 'Cause money is one thing, expertise is another. And so I struck up a friendship with the Ruderman Family, and then they started recommending to people looking for expertise, well, there's this consultant you could hire, Matan. And so I would go and I would provide expertise. And a few years ago, Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi the then CEO of RespectAbility called me up and said, I really, I had let her know in passing that I was looking for my next adventure, and then I was thinking actually, probably to go back to law practice, just because I'd been doing the advocate thing for about 10 years that point, and at some point you kind of want to know your savings for retirement or something, right? Being an advocate doesn't come with a pension. So I was thinking to go back into a law world, and people broadly knew that I was looking including Jennifer, and she called me and she said, I have actually real interesting proposition. I need someone to jumpstart our Jewish program, which has been moving very slowly and to open up our West Coast office. And it would mean moving to Los Angeles, and we will support you if you do, and does that have any interest to you? And where I was at at the time, I was living in Boston, I knew that Boston was not the right long-term fit for me. I was making plans to move back to New York to be closer to family. And all of a sudden I said, L.A., why not? And actually one of the first people I called was Rabbi Sherman's son, Erez, also Rabbi Sherman, who basically said, don't do it. L.A. is a tough city. Don't go so far away from where you know. And I said, but, Erez, I think it's a good opportunity. Like this seems like something to do. And when he couldn't talk me out of it, that we started talking about what it might mean for me to actually do it. And so I moved here, and RespectAbility is now flourishing in California. We're up to 10 employees here, actually more than we have in any other physical location. And we've become truly national. Our Rockville office has even closed down, and our only physical space is here. And so this has been a really interesting chapter for me as I combine some Jewish advocacy, some secular advocacy, some leadership and management and mentorship and whatever else. And there's a lot more to my story, but how much rambling can one guy do? So -

- Okay, Matan, let me ask you just a very rude, brief question. You said you've been living independently ever since you went to Yale. We've been in each other's presence, you've got significant physical challenges. I mean, you have someone living with you, who takes care of those needs, or?

- No. So I have a staff of people that come in and out, and this is actually a good point. There's an interesting definition to living independently. And I think it's important actually. And I thank you for the opportunity to share it. Living independently does not mean that you do all of your own activities of daily living, right? What it means is that you are responsible for making sure that your activities of daily living are met. So it will always be the case that I need other human beings to help me on a daily basis, right? It's highly unlikely that in my lifetime, either medical science or assistive technology, one or the other will advance to a place where I do not require the assistance of other human beings to meet my activities of daily living. The difference between living independently and not is defined as, am I in charge of that system, or is that system taking care of me? And so the reality is, yes, there's a whole stuff of people that come in and out. This moment there are two agencies that I've contracted with that are splitting up my care depending on what the need is. But for a lot of that time, I hired my own people. As you know, I actually met your sons Erez, and your daughter-in-law Nicole, because during one of those times, when the professional systems failed, I put out a general call for help to the Rabbinical Schools in New York, and they responded as potential helpers. So we first met because they responded. And so this is about independence. Independence does not mean alone. And in fact, I think one of the great fallacies in our society, and it's part of this somewhat harmful American bootstrap ideology that people embrace is the notion that anybody does it alone. I know it was controversial when President Obama my former boss said, you didn't build that. But what he was saying was we all have a part of each other's success. And so, yes, from a purely physical perspective, there is a village of people that makes sure are my needs are met. What makes it living independently is that I direct my own life, and within the benefits of the resources, within the limits of the resources that are available to me, I choose how those needs will be met much as everyone choose who their service providers are unless, 'cause most people can't fix their own car, clean their own house, build their own addition, you find someone and you hire them, right? Like that's sort of partners adulting is the old expression and goes.

- Yeah, I wanna tell you, I wanna thank you for that wonderful moment of insight. I mean, that we all need someone else to climb really, really whatever that ladder really is. And let me move it over now to, I guess to the community. Is that not just simply really as being part of an important organization, but in terms of your own personal life narrative. Let's talk about Jewish community life. And what I mean by that in candor, what are we doing right, and also what are we not doing at this point?

- Okay. So let us start with what we're doing right. And it's interesting RespectAbility -

- Also also, and let me enlarge that. It may be we ought to do because is it's a synagogue. Let's talk about if we can drill down in terms of the synagogue.

- Sure. So I think what we're doing right, and RespectAbility recently completed a national survey to ascertain this. Is almost 90% of synagogues and Jewish organizations that have thought about diversity and inclusion at all have made a specific commitment to include individuals with disabilities. So we have probably gotten to a place where it's very rare to enter a synagogue and have someone say, oh, we haven't thought about that. That discussion's never come up, right? Because we seem to have crossed a threshold where at the very least, everyone sort of knows it's a thing which whether or not is a big deal. There was a time not so long ago when you would get to an inaccesible synagogue, either physically or some other type of inaccess. And there would try to be a shrug. We don't have Jews like that. That's not an issue for us. My favorite story, a story told by my friend Jason Lieberman was when he pulled himself arm over arm, up a large flight of stairs in front of a popular Orthodox Synagogue, that he would've normally chosen to join, right? And spoke to the rabbi and said, I think it's a problem that you do not have physical access, right? And the rabbi said to him, well, that's okay, we don't have anyone who uses a wheelchair in our community. And Jason who had just pulled himself up arm over arm to get into looked at the rabbi and said, now, why do you think that is? And part of it is because, well, obviously nobody, most people couldn't do what he did, and even those, the good would not be inclined to, right? Like that it's not their first, so I think that we have made a significant positive step in terms of people just knowing that this matters, and that there are people out there looking to get in, and we've made an okay step in terms of building strategies to make that possible, which is to say, I mean, RespectAbility just release the Jewish inclusion talk. And if you were to look at our talk, it will frankly, some of the other wonderful resources that organizations like CJP, or the Jewish Federation of Greater was incident put out, you'd see that we've actually come up with a fair number of strategies, absent just ramps and elevators to bridge different kind of access gaps. So you could say that the Jewish community is also doing well, that we figured that out, now there are notable gaps. I believe, and Rabbi Sherman, please, correct me if I'm wrong, that this is a conservative congregation that I'm speaking to. Is that -

- Yeah.

- So it is the case, for example, that because of funding difficulties, and I've spoken directly with Jacob Blumenthal about this, Lev Shalem is not available in braille. I don't know if this synagogue uses Lev Shalem, but the most common conservative prayer book is not available in braille. And when one asks the RA and the USCJ why that is, the simple answer is, it would cost about $0.5 million. And nobody's put up the $0.5 million to have it created, right? So, I think there are still gaps in that regard, but I do think to flip the script, there are Orthodox rail sit available and ish feel the reform movement is available in braille. So there was a time when no movement that braille, right? So there is a progress being made even if it is not exactly. and to be clear, I believe if memory serves Sim Shalom, no Sim Shalom is not available, the conservative sitter that came before Sim Shalom that, we used in my house growing up the name of which I can't remember right now.

- Silverman. Silverman.

- Yes. That is available in Brail. So if you wanna go back to the sitter from way back when you can get that in braille, just not any of the modern conservative ones. So there are gaps in that spot, but it's certainly better than it was, but in terms of where I don't think we are yet. So when I made my living going around, speaking to congregations, I would always tell a story. And the story that I would tell is how I arrived in Cincinnati, Ohio, which was the first place I lived after law school, where my first job after law school was, and I was welcomed by my congregation there, conservative congregation, Northern Hill Synagogue. And I talked through all the things they did to be welcoming, but that's not the important part of the story. I then flip and I say, as a result of this, they got a regular governor, a member of their scholar residents committee, a member of the original, and the point that I'm making is that hopefully I enriched the congregation with my presence and what I could bring to it, even as they enriched me in all the ways that a congregation does from spiritual life to a ride to the airport when I was interviewing for job in New York, because Cincinnati turned out not to be a very accessible place to live, but that's a different issue. And I think what the Jewish world needs to really start to do is focus on the inclusion of those of us with disabilities, not because it's has said a nice thing to do, or even because it's huge. I mean, although we are all supposed to do it and I could teach a whole class on that, if that was what we were here to talk about, but rather because it is really amazing what our communities can benefit from. I don't know your community well. This is my first visit, but in all of my years of attending shuls, speaking at shuls, working at shuls, I've never met one that's in, we just don't need any more talented and committed member. We're good, send them somewhere else, thanks. I feel like our friends down the street need them more than we do. I've never seen it. Child of a public rabbi, brother of someone who was a public rabbi for a decade before moving into other things, most of my friends or public rabbis, just never heard say, we've got enough, we're good, it's done. And given that, why on earth are we letting potentially up to one in four Jewish adults not be welcome in our shuls, not be a part of our shuls, right? I think that that's the message that where I think we still have a place to go is I want people to be inclusive, and it's funny, I may be a rabbi's kid, but I'm also graduate of the Harvard Law School, which is all about economics and people's motivations. I want people to be selfishly inclusive. I want people to say, we want to be inclusive, 'cause look what we're gonna get out of it. I'm okay with that. I really am. The end result is still good, and I think it is a greater motivation. So I have to give the plug and the pitch, if this selfish benefit excites people. We at RespectAbility have created just a myriad of resources so that you can get that benefit for yourself. And Jake can link to our new tool kit in the chat, but also to our various webinars, because you should want to for your own wonderfully selfish benefit, right? So, yeah.

- Let me just, that is terrific. And I could just add really to the commentary because of our own family narrative, which you're very much aware of, is that what I've discovered in the disability community with institutions and unfortunately from synagogues and even though being a rabbi, certainly not at Melrose, okay? But what I discovered is that we talk the talk, but don't walk the walk. And what I mean by that is that synagogues and other Jewish community institutions have started really making physical adaptations and things like that, but they're still lacking what I call this kind of welcoming mindset. I remember our son used to go to USY activities, and my wife would bring him, and the kids would say, hi, Eyal. And that was it. And then we'd go off to their own things. And he would sit there in the corner with my wife, and I think again, it's not just the physical adaptations, it's changing the psychology of synagogue life in terms of what you said. And maybe if you just want to comment on what I just said, maybe a minute or two, 'cause I want to move the conversation to something else because it's coming late.

- Absolutely. And I think that -

- How do you do that? How do you change the emotional intellectual mindset of a synagogue community?

- Well, here, so let me respond a little bit in this and say, and it's wonderful that we can use Eyal (speaking in foreign language) for an example, which is to say that my understanding, although I never had the privilege of meaning him, Eyal was a pretty interesting guy if you got to know him. There was stuff to get to know, right? I've seen about, read about his flowers and this and the that. And so the key is that if the USY folks had stayed a little longer than hello, they would have enjoyed their experience, right? It would've enriched their experience of being in USY just as I think people often say that interacting with me enriched their NFTY or their URJ camp experience. So on the one hand, I don't know how one, but on the other hand, I do think it's deceptively simple. The deceptively simple way to the change is for people to see narratives of benefit. And what do I mean by that? For people to see that there really are non-hypothetical examples of people who feel their life is meaningfully better because they meaningfully interact with someone that maybe they had to learn a little bit before they knew how to interact properly when they took the time and put in the efforts to get to know somebody that they actually feel better for the process. And in that way, not that I want to place any demands upon the Sherman family, but I think that you probably have some great stories of people who would be willing to talk about the vast and positive impact that having Eyal in their life was for them. And I think those stories are actually really helpful, not to talk about inspiration because we in the disability movement don't really like the concept of inspiration very much. We're not inspiration stories, but just to talk a about what it was to love someone, what it was to enjoy their presence, what it was. I mean, I have to say the things that touched me the most when I started doing this work were the people who wrote about what they learned about themselves from interacting with me at Kutz, which was the URJ leadership academy, or interacting with me as, the camp that my parents were on faculty, because those stories are the real answer to changing perceptions. Again, it's not, what can you do for me? It's, how will your life be improved and enriched by letting me in and taking the time? Because if someone just says hello and walked away, or if even sadly happens, avoids us like the plague, because they're vaguely frightened of someone who presents as different, which is something that every person and with a visible disability has encountered at some point, then they're really missing out. 'Cause like, I think I'm pretty worth getting to know, Jake is pretty worth getting to know. Well, we can talk about that more, but I think so. And certainly from the stories I read, none can argue, but that Eyal's worth getting to know. And so I think that is a part of it, is just that we need people. I say it this way. I often say, I actually tell this whole story that I don't wanna tell at length because we're short on time, but I always talk about the notion of someone shul shopping, getting a flat tire and not visiting the shul, right? And it turns out in an alternate universe, if they hadn't gotten the flat tire, they were gonna turn out to be your best friend at shul, but because they got the flat tire, they shut the different shul the following week, ended up a member there, you never met them, they ever became your best friend, and you don't know what you missed because like every time travel narrative, you don't know what changed. I see a barrier to access to their front door. Think of your best shul friend, whether they are a person with a disability or not, and think about what would've happened if they had in fact, never gotten to your shul, whether it's because of a flat tire or because of an access barrier where they weren't able physically or metaphorically to enter. You would have lost out on this best friend, and you'd never know what you were missing. And I want that hypothetical FOMO to be something that drives us. Is everyone here familiar with the expression the kids use these days, FOMO? It's a abbreviation for Fear Of Missing Out. I want that notion of fear of missing out to drive us to be relentlessly inclusive because we're so curious about what wonderful people we might encounter. Now I know a whole discussion going on in the comments about Rabbi Lenny Sarko and his braille Torah. We did have him write a guest article for us in our JDP Newsletter a couple of weeks ago. So if people would like to learn more about that, you can go to the RespectAbility website. But turning it back over to you, Rabbi Sherman.

- Okay, let's say, I'm gonna ask you, it's getting a bit late and I know you're busy. And what I wanna do is ask really maybe one or two last questions, but it's an existential question. And I think it transcends the disability community and the inclusion committee, but it really it props the core. Knowing your life scenarios, and I always wonder having met at me, how do you do it? How do you get up every single morning of your life knowing these significant challenges you've had literally since birth and to try and meet these challenges and tell stories, laugh, engage the community, have a terrific sense of humor, how do you do it?

- Well, so it's interesting. I know how I used to answer, and I've sort of modified the answer a little bit. But the way that I used to answer, and the way that I was raised was this concept of (speaking in foreign language) for those that are not familiar (speaking in foreign language) is basically the literal Hebrew words, there are no choice. There isn't a choice, but it's this notion that by and large, when one has no choice, one rises to the occasion, right? But I think it's actually a little more than that because to be overly Hebrewic about it, (speaking in foreign language) right? There is a choice. It's just not a very good one. The choice for me is, do those things you mentioned and have a pretty good life, which is, I think I can say that I've had a very good life to date, or not do those things and I have a really horrible life. So again, there's total self-interest, right? Like I didn't agree with every moral lesson my parents tried to teach me because, who does? But one thing I think they were absolutely right about was that ultimately fairness is not a relevant concern. Difficulty is only a relevant concern to the extent that something exceeds your ability. But ultimately the real question comes down to, what life do you want, and is it within your ability to make it possible? And in my case, the answer to the first question was a good life. The answer to the second question was, yes. And if it is challenging, and of course it's been challenging, well, then I have the benefits to show for it had I not put in the effort. It's unclear whether I would still be alive because there was a lot of fighting involved to stay healthy and what have you, but even if I were, but I'd be living probably at this point in a state-sponsored institution since my father's passed and my wonderful mother is at this point no longer the place where she could take care of me, right? And so I would not be enjoying the life that I was leading. And for too many people at the moment, there is no choice. And in fact, a large part of what RespectAbility does is try to make sure that the tools and supports are available so that more people have the option of making the choice that I made. But I am lucky in that there was enough combination of whatever God gave me and whatever my parents gave me and whatever existed in society as I was coming up through it, for me to have the life that I've had, but only if I reach out and grab it and take it and do it. So again, the answer if not (speaking in foreign language) is at least it was the best choice I had, right? So, does that answer the question sort of?

- For me, it does. Let me, and I wanna end with one last question, and obviously it's a synagogue community. You grew up in a rabbinic family. What role, I've seen you at Sinai Temple, what role has God plays in your life experience? And do you ever get angry at God and say, what's this all about here? It's so unfair.

- Well, I think it's an interesting, certainly my mother does, right? Like, I mean, one of the interesting things about growing up, not just in rabbinic family, but in a family of Jewish professionals, which is to say, yes, my father was a rabbi practically, my whole family or professional Jews, is that there's a lot of God discussion as it were, right? Like it's something that comes up. So, I think it's interesting to think about different takes on the divine, and yes, I have a degree in theology. No, we won't go deeply into that. But, and what that means, so my mother, again, who has a fairly deterministic view of divine will and the way God plays in the world, has definitely asked those questions. Although I happened asked her recently, I would guess that she still does. For me, I tend to look at the divine as a much more complex system. And so when I teach, so I teach about what disability means in the fabric of Jewish society. And one of the things that I teach is this notion, and it's an interesting notion. First, there's a notion that when Moshe complains to God and says, I'm not the right person to be your spokesperson, I'm (speaking in foreign language) which we believe to be a speech disability, it's not always 100% clear. God says, who made you that way? I did, right? So like, there's this immediate notion that exactly who Moshe was was the right person for what was needed. And then there's this interesting notion that the rabbis toss around and they say, we are all created (speaking in foreign language) we are all created in the image of God and yet we all look different. And what can that mean? And one of the glosses that I've looked at seen is that God is vast, right? God is presumably infinite. We are not fast, we are small, we are finite. And so, how can the finite reflect the infinite? Well, the finite reflects infinite because the infinite is more than we are, and we each reflect different pieces. So something about, so every part of who I am from my cerebral palsy to my Polish on for purple skirts is some version, some aspect of the divine that I reflect. And as such, I can wish that the world was easier. So my father has an interesting take. We all know the scene in where gods in Deuteronomy, where God says, you have two choices, you can choose this and all this wonderful stuff is gonna happen, you can choose this and all this bad stuff is gonna happen. And my father always thought that that was about the societies that resulted from people's choices, not about divine retribution. Well, the social modeling disability teaches us that most of what makes life with a disability challenging are the decisions that society has made in the way we've designed it, in the way we've set it up, in the way we do or don't support each other in our lives. And as such, I'm not angry at God for making me who I am. I am who I am, and that was presumably part of the divine plan. I can take issue with folks that have made choices in the design of society that make my life more difficult than I do work to get folks to reconsider those choices. But broadly speaking, if we believe that there is a divine plan at all, then me being me was obviously a part of it, right? Like you being you was a part of it. Each of us being each of us was a part of it, and how that plays out in terms of our life experience is a result not only of our own choices, but of the choices made by the 7 billion people with whom we share this planet. So I realize that's a bit of a meandering answer, but that's the way I sort of approach it.

- Okay, let me just say, we're coming to the end of the hour. First of all, I'm absolutely thrilled that we're recording this conversation. It went in a direction which to me certain ways was unexpected, but people who know me when I had these conversations, I say to myself, boy, this is a Yom Kippur sermon. And this is not simply about disabilities and inclusion. it really, it's response really to life. And a very personal response. And Matan really I want to thank you on behalf of our Melrose community for giving us an hour of your time, and so much really wonderful reflection and thought to consider and reconsider who we are and where we need to be really as a synagogue community. Again, we're gonna put this onto our Facebook page as quickly as we're able to. And Jake, if you could sort of help us and tell us how to do that, I wanna thank Jake really as well. I wanna end with something that I wrote if you allow me.

- Okay.

- But it's not something that I wrote, in a book that I wrote, the first page has a very popular English nursery rhyme. And we all know it. It's Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, and Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the King's forces and all the King's men couldn't put Humpty together again. And that may have been good back then, but I think as we've had this conversation with Matan, and our congregation, Melrose takes disability and inclusion very seriously, we have an opportunity to least try to put Humpty back together again. And that requires a commitment from all of us. And I'm absolutely thrilled that this coming Saturday morning, that we will continue that what we're doing finally. We're putting up a beautiful Mordecai Rosenstein mezuzah as people enter the sanctuary, it will be moved down, this beautiful Mezuzah, to allow those people who have difficulties accessing it, be it a wheelchair or walker to be able now to walk in and to kiss the Mezuzah and to offer really that prayer. Again, we wanna offer everybody really a thank you for being with us here, and just to, do you have a closing blessing, what do you wanna say to us, Matan, anything?

- Well, I wanna close with the idea that really our entire existence to my mind is a struggle to bring the divine further into the world, to whether we talk about it as (speaking in foreign language) whether we talk about it as gathering the broken pieces of the vessel of Shekhinah, and if we believe as I do that in order to fully reflect God in our world, then if everyone needs a place, then I leave everyone with this blessing that we should do all of the technicals of inclusion about which you can read, not simply as an ending to themselves, but as a part of that mission of that idea, of that idea of building a place that God, and by that, I mean every aspect and all of God can truly dwell among us. And if we unite in that work, we will indeed be overjoyed in the world that we see. So I leave you with the blessing of hope, but also the charge to try to make that a reality. And I wish you all a good day.

- Thank you my friend, enjoy. Give by a love to my family out in California.

- I will do.

- We'll see you probably in a couple weeks, my friend, okay?

- Sounds good.

- Enjoy, everybody. Thank you for joining us. And we'll see everybody at Melrose. If you're able to be with us 9:15 we start on Shabbat Morning and also we have our virtual community. Jake, yeah, be in touch with me how we can get this up as quickly as possible, okay?

- Of course, thank you for having us.

- Thank you my friend. Everybody have a great afternoon. Stay safe and stay warm. Bye bye, take care.

- Bye, thank you.

- Bye bye.