

Lulav: Hey, nerd.

Jaz: Hi! What's something cool or queer or Jewish that happened to you this week?

Lulav: Mine is a little bit heavy. Do you wanna go first?

Jaz: No.

Lulav: Okay, cool. So, I wanted to talk about the work, actually, of one of our patrons, who is really rad. I finished reading Fresh Meat recently--

Jaz: Okay.

Lulav: --a webcomic by gray Folie. And so, I just wanted to talk about their work and how I was exposed to it, and what it means to me and my friends. So, content warning on this part, because gray's work deals with mental illness and suicidality and stuff like that. So, if that is a problem for you, skip ahead to 4:36, and you can hear Jaz's cool and queer or Jewish thing. I don't want to not talk about these comics because they're, like, really cool, and I appreciate gray's art and storytelling. I first came across Drop-Out when my best friend Theo brought it to my attention. Bear in mind that I haven't read Drop-Out in, like, a year or two, but it is a webcomic about people who are dating going on a trip to the Grand Canyon to commit suicide, and it's about living when it feels like you've tried everything, and it's like, "oh man am I gonna be like this forever?" And like, finding a way through that anyway?

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: And like, there was stuff about being intelligible as a nonbinary person to randos— spoiler alert, not terribly. It sucks. (*laughs*)

Jaz: In general.

Lulav: Yeah. Yeah, just like, some really deep themes that get conveyed in this really sketchy but really detailed artwork, and it's stuff that I haven't seen from other people, right?

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: Like, this is something that you really only get from online spaces. It's a story from, I think at the time, like, a 20-year-old, queer, very mentally ill person.

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: And like, other queer mentally ill people saw themselves in it, and came out the other side, right?

Jaz: Sure.

Lulav: Yeah. I wouldn't recommend Drop-Out or Fresh Meat to anybody without caveats, because it is work that is from the perspective of people who are in really rough situations and trying to figure out what to do there.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: But Theo really loved it, and I really love Drop-Out and then really loved Fresh Meat when I read it. Some friends that I play Blades in the Dark with are also really into gray's work, and they have, apparently, been a patron of ours for a while--

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: --and supporting the cool queer Jewish stuff that we do.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Which I'm super grateful for. But yeah, I want to maybe show you a little more of that if you're okay with it, but we'll see. And that was just something cool and queer and Jewish that I've come across recently. So shout out to gray Folie. We'll put some links and content warnings to Drop-Out, Fresh Meat, and their Patreon.

Jaz: Beautiful. Thank you for sharing.

Lulav: How do you feel about works that deal with tough subjects like being in a place of suicidality?

Jaz: It depends. I don't at all resonate with your earlier claim that you only find that in, like, very online communities—

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: I have found works dealing with the problem of being a human and not always wanting to be—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —in a variety of different time periods and really different kinds of writers, and I think that there can be really beautiful and difficult work dealing with that. There have been times in my life where, like, most of the things I'm reading are heavier things about death and dying—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —and there have been times in my life where all I want to do is, like, read escapist fiction.

Lulav: Uh-huh.

Jaz: And I think that both have their place.

Lulav: Yeah. Thanks. So, with that in mind, what's something cool and queer or Jewish that's happened in your life recently?

Jaz: I recently came back from a vacation, which was a lovely vacation but not a particularly queer one in any (*Lulav laughs*) strong respect—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —but I was there with my family, and on Friday night, we did a little mini-Shabbat of our own over dinner, and we were in this dining hall type of setup, so there were a bunch of other families at other tables, who were definitely not doing Shabbat things, (*Lulav laughs*) while we were.

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: But it was very sweet. It was, like, a nice moment for all of us together.

Lulav: Mmm.

Jaz: And then the following day, on Shabbat, I left, and flew to Minneapolis, where I'm here in a house where the only people here are the five trans people currently in the house, (*Lulav laughs*) which is more trans people than I've been around at one time in probably the last year and three months? (*Lulav laughs*) I haven't done it since the pandemic started. It used to be that I regularly scheduled my life such that I found myself in places with more trans people, but that hasn't been true during the pandemic, and I've never lived with other trans people, and so it's like a nice place to land for a little bit—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —before I go back and have to say goodbye to New York, and have to figure out moving to a new place and establishing new communities, which will be great and exciting, and definitely Jewish. (*Lulav laughs*) And I will be figuring out how to get all of those different pieces in a new place.

Lulav: Yeah. That's great.

Jaz: Are you ready to take us into the episode?

Lulav: Well, howdy doody! I...y-yeah. Yes.

(*Brivele intro*)

Lulav: Welcome to Kosher Queers, a podcast with at least two Jews and generally more than three opinions. Each week we bring you queer takes on Torah. They're Jaz—

Jaz: And she's Lulav—

Lulav: And we're here to joke about Judaism and talk Tanakh together. Today, our chavruta is learning the haftarah of Va'etchanan, which is Yeshiyahu 40:1 to 40:26.

Jaz: Absolutely. Now, Lulav, are you gonna summarize this week's parsha for us?

Lulav: I surely am. Can you give me this...Ooh, this looks like 50 seconds?

Jaz: Sure thing. 3, 2, 1, go.

Lulav: Moshe recounts some arguing with Hashem. In this particular case, it's about whether he can pretty please go to the Promised Land anyway? He cannot. He's pretty resigned to this, though, and was maybe just using it as a cautionary segue into some rules that must be followed exactly. We get a deep dive into the first commandment, starting with not representing Hashem via incarnation. There's a stern warning about not transgressing it, lest we be scattered among the nations. Why can't we be contented with being brought mi'mitzrayim and being chosen for a divine relationship among all humans? We play my favorite White Wolf RPG, Prophecy: the Man-slaying, then finally talk about some other commandments with more restatements, both of the commandments and-- both restating the commandments and restating the need to be faithful to the Covenant. Boom! Ha! Ha ha ha ha! Great.

Jaz: Nice job. Excellent timing.

Lulav: (*laughs*) And that included all my, like, "oh no, I read what I wrote wrong and I have to figure out a way to restate it so it makes sense." (*laughs*)

Jaz: Uh-huh.

Lulav: Yeah, so, because we are now into the Consolations, we're doing something a little different, and instead of talking about the same context about Yeshiyahu and where he's coming from and how he's, like, a couple of different people and just rehashing that, we wanted to talk about some things that give us hope for the future, whether or not they are in the future that we immediately see.

Jaz: Yeah, so, Lulav's idea, which, those of you who listened last week's episode may remember, was specifically to bring something — either written by somebody else, or written by yourself — about this idea of something that is a modern Consolation, that gives you a sense of promise or hope or possibility for the future. And I went through a number of these as possibilities, and as I'm not home at the moment, I don't have all of my usual books to pull from.

Lulav: Nooo.

Jaz: So, apropos of Lulav's opening segment, I'm also going to touch on a Consolation that may seem a little counterintuitive, (*Lulav laughs*) because this is a poem, also, about death and wanting to die.

Lulav: Hm!

Jaz: And it's also a poem about not doing it—

Lulav: Hm!

Jaz: —about what it's like to get a reprieve from being in that kind of desolate state and the type of joy that can be created when you get relief from something, and how that joy is maybe difficult to understand if you haven't been in that kind of place—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —but is nevertheless a really powerful kind of joy all on its own, even though you might wish that nobody ever had to feel quite exactly that joy—

Lulav: Uh-huh.

Jaz: —and yet, there is a type of really genuine, sweet pleasure to it.

Lulav: Yeah. Do you think that, in haolam habo, that sort of joy of living through something that really really sucks, and like, having that lifted for at least a little bit— that that's still going to exist?

Jaz: I don't know.

Lulav: Hmm.

Jaz: So, part of the reason I brought it is because I was looking through the poems that have gotten me through really difficult times—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —or the poems I turn to when I want to imagine a brighter future. And I have poems that really speak to me, but a number of those are poems that, in different ways, speak to hardship, or emerging out of hardship—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: And this is, in some respects, the purest encapsulation to me of the idea of there is beauty and joy waiting for us, and it is hard to remember when you're in it, but that is waiting for us, and we will get there, and it will be, in some ways, its own special kind of beautiful, because we had to go through other things to get it.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: And there is a thing sometimes, where people talk about, it is actually hard to imagine a utopian future. And so, to me, the idea of holding on to a vision for it — even if that vision is vague, and you don't know exactly what it looks like — it feels like a nice place to start for us. And then as we move forward, perhaps we can flesh out that vision more specifically. But here, I wanted to start us with this idea of joy emerging out of a really difficult place.

Lulav: Yeah. I do think that there is going to be that sort of joy of emerging out of a difficult place, even in a utopian future, because like, people aren't gonna stop being mentally ill, right? And the thing that makes it a utopian future— I mean, “utopia” is like “a place that doesn't exist”— but like, the thing that would make it a future that is possible and good and worth, then, everybody living in, is that there are ways to live with that. Like, when you have problems, there are support systems that value you as a person and aren't just inflicting themselves on you, you know?

Jaz: Mm-hmm.

Lulav: So, to answer my own question, I do think that that's still going to exist, even in the storied Messianic Age.

Jaz: Good.

Lulav: So—

Jaz: It reminds me, sometimes, of how you see people having different discussions of what disability might mean in a non-capitalist system, and how you have some people who argue that we just won't have disabilities, because we'll conceive of things differently and things that disenfranchise people because of capitalism now won't be considered problems—

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: And then other people who look at that and are like, “Well, we might conceive of things differently. I hope so. Probably under a better conceived system, I wouldn't also have to worry about housing at the same time.

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: “But the things that are going on in my biochemistry—

Lulav: Right.

Jaz: “—are going to be going on, and I'm still going to have to deal with them on a day-to-day basis—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: “—no matter what our economic and political systems are, and some of those can make things harder—

Lulav: Right.

Jaz: “—but... (*Lulav laughs*) the body still exists.”

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: “Does its thing.”

Lulav: "I'm still gonna have hemiplegic seizures, but, uhh, maybe the recovery will be better and like, the way that you live around that, and with it." Yeah.

Jaz: Yeah. So, the poem I'd like to share today — and you'll forgive me for the fact that this is— I really don't know anything about this author, so I can't give you, like, different identities, or whatever. I don't think she's either queer or Jewish, but bear with me. We'll bring other people and other pieces of writing.

Lulav: Also, it means a lot to me that you're sharing this particular piece, because we talked about it a little bit before.

Jaz: It's a special poem to me, called "Hammond B3 Organ Cistern" by Gabrielle Calvocoressi.

"The days I don't want to kill myself
are extraordinary. Deep bass. All the people
in the streets waiting for their high fives
and leaping, I mean *leaping*,
when they see me. I am the sun-filled
god of love. Or at least an optimistic
under-secretary. There should be a word for it.
The days you wake up and do not want
to slit your throat. Money in the bank.
Enough for an iced green tea every weekday
and Saturday and Sunday! It's like being
in the armpit of a Hammond B3 organ.
Just reeks of gratitude and funk.
The funk of ages. *I am not going to ruin
my love's life today.* It's like the time I said yes
to gray sneakers but then the salesman said
Wait. And there, out of the back room,
like the bakery's first biscuits: bright-blue kicks.
Iridescent. Like a scarab! Oh, who am I kidding,
it was nothing like a scarab! It was like
bright. blue. fucking. sneakers! I did not
want to die that day. Oh, my God.
Why don't we talk about it? How good it feels.
And if you don't know then you're lucky
but also you poor thing. Bring the band out on the stoop.
Let the whole neighborhood hear. Come on, Everybody.
Say it with me nice and slow
no pills no cliff no brains on the floor
Bring the bass back. *no rope no hose* not today, Satan.

Every day I wake up with my good fortune
and news of my demise. Don't keep it from me.
Why don't we have a name for it?
Bring the bass back. Bring the band out on the stoop.
Hallelujah!"

Lulav: Thank you. That was great. What a good start to a week of Consolations.

Jaz: So, welcome to our first Consolation, and we'll be doing more of these. If you— also, as you're listening to our offerings for Consolations and our dreams of the world, want to offer your own, email us your suggestions or send them to us on Twitter. I would love to see your constellations and your dreams and your visions as well.

Lulav: Yeah, it would be a special treat to see like, "@kosherqueers this is what really makes me think of the future being cool," or something like that, so thank you, in advance, and also: Thank you for being you. You're a peach. *(both laugh)*

Jaz: You think we're ready to go into our reading for the week?

Lulav: I do. Can you start us off at Isaiah 40, verse 1?

Jaz: Yeah. This introduces, as is so appropriate for a Consolation... Our JPS translation renders that as, "'Comfort, o comfort my people,' says your G-d."

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: So, the Hebrew reads, "Nachamu, nachamu ami, yomar Elohechem."¹ So, I am not yet good enough at imperatives to know if "nachamu" is an imperative or past tense--

Lulav: Or possessive, maybe?

Jaz: No, it is not. That one I know.

Lulav: Okay. *(laughs)*

Jaz: It reads to me like past tense, "nachamu"? But the thing that, to me, is interesting about this sentence is that it's clear that it says "My people."

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

¹ נַחְמוּ נַחְמוּ עַמִּי יֹאמֵר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

Jaz: But what's interesting about it is, this word "nachamu," this root, nun-chet-mem, can be about consolation, but also—

Lulav: Ooh.

Jaz: —about being sorry, about being regretful—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —about repenting. And so, if it's telling people to either take comfort or comfort somebody else—

Lulav: Mmm.

Jaz: —or comfort each other, it's doing so in a way that is also asking people to have some amount of self awareness.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: The next line talks about speaking tenderly, saying that time is up, but it also is about forgiving for wrongdoing. So it's not idle comfort, (*Lulav laughs*) it's like comfort specifically with the idea that you've kind of now made up for wrongdoing, you've done a full teshuvah.

Lulav: Hmm.

Jaz: Which I think is an interesting premise.

Lulav: Yeah. It's a comfort of contrition. Is that fair?

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: And it's explained here as "Yerushalayim"—which usually stands in for Am Yisrael, the people that wrestle with God—"She has received, at the hand of Hashem, double for all her sins."

Jaz: Mm-hmm.

Lulav: So it's like, "man, you been through a lot, hopefully you have learned from that." Is that fair?

Jaz: Yeah. And not just hopefully, but there is a certainty there, of "you're good now."

Lulav: *(laughs)* Yeah.

Jaz: It reminds me a little bit of a recent episode of Ear Hustle, which is, in general, a podcast that talks to people who are incarcerated, mostly in the state of California. It has, historically, been a podcast that works and has hosts both inside the San Quentin prison, and outside of it, though its original inside hosts then out of prison, and now they have a new inside host, though it's been kind of difficult for them to do it in the pandemic--

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Anyway, but one of their recent episodes, they were talking to a woman who's been incarcerated for a really long time there, who was talking about having received a life sentence and then gone up for parole on a number of occasions, and each time she's gotten paroled, then it's been sent on to the next step in the authorization, and then it's denied again.

Lulav: Great.

Jaz: But she thinks, because she has a very high-profile case, and that it would be, especially bad politics to let her out of prison--

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: I don't know that she said it like that, or if I said it like that, but it felt like the implication.

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: But, she did talk about how, the first time the parole committee said she can leave, she's not a danger to other people, she can leave — even though she didn't, in fact, get to leave —

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: She felt so happy about it, because she felt like she had been doing a lot of different work and working on herself, and believed that the things she was involved in, and the murder she'd been a part of, were terrible things, but she really believes she'd done a lot of work and was ready to leave, but to have other people who weren't her to look at her and validate that and agree that she was ready to leave—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —was so moving, and that there's the idea of like, what's happening here, to say, speak tenderly, declare that her term of service is over. Any wrong she did is gone, for she has received so much hurt.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Double what she could have “warranted,” in quotes--

Lulav: Yeah, definitely some air quotes there.

Jaz: Right, and so, there's a certain amount of looking at someone who, at this point in time, you can look at and say, "Oh, this person is also really a victim right now," and the idea of being able to declare to someone, "You just get to go, you just get to go home now," is, I think, the level of ethos and relief—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: —that's trying to be captured here in verse 40:2.

Lulav: And like, when we conceive of G-d's role as, like, meting out punishment for the unfaithfulness of someone's ancestors... These people have been in exile for generations. Even if you accept the premise that the exile was direct punishment from G-d, this isn't even punishment for something that these people did.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: And being able to come back from that, or like, having a good parole meeting after being part of a carceral — air-quote — "justice system" for however many years. That's a breath of fresh air, in something that's so totally out of your control.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: And that connects to themes, I think, from Fresh Meat—

Jaz: Okay.

Lulav: —which I forgot to talk about, but—

Jaz: Please, say more.

Lulav: Yeah, it's a comic about a 17-year-old's first stay in a mental hospital, on inpatient hold, and just struggling with the arbitrary nature of that system.

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: And also, she's got stuff that she needs to work on.

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: Any kindness that is coming from the system that is supposed to — air quotes — supposed to "help" her with that is an accident, mostly.

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: Or totally covered over by all of the hurt that is being done by the same people to her.

Jaz: Gotcha.

Lulav: But yeah, that was the comic that I finished most recently from gray, and yeah, it ends with like, getting out of the inpatient stay and no real resolution beyond that--

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: Because sometimes we don't get that resolution. *(laughs)*

Jaz: Yeah. The world can be a scattered and fragmented place, and also closure's not real.

Lulav: Uh-huh. But sometimes you get to rip off that wristband and walk forward into the rain of whatever is coming next.

Jaz: Yeah. I do really believe that closure's not real, like *(Lulav laughs)*, that the things that you want, sometimes people are like, "I can't let go of this thing until I asked this person a bunch of questions and that'll give me real closure."

Lulav: Yeah, but then what happens?

Jaz: And it's like, no. Probably that won't help. I'm not saying you can't ever follow up on a thing and say, "What happened? Can we talk through something a little more?" You know—

Lulav: Right.

Jaz: Sometimes you can, but oftentimes, really what's going on is that something painful happened, and you wish something painful didn't happen, and you're gonna have to deal

with the reality that something painful happened, whether or not you get the answers about why.

Lulav: Right. And there's not, like, a magic phrase that the person you're asking questions of can say that will, like, erase all that? If you are asking questions for closure, it's because you want to learn a little more about what happened and how that will work going forward, and not because you want a specific outcome, or like, a wiping away of—

Jaz: Right.

Lulav: —things that happened.

Jaz: And I also think that there's a certain amount of like, at some point, you also are the only one who gets to control how you feel about something.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Not in a, like, "therefore you're obligated to forgive people," way, but in a, like, "it's better for you if you don't spend all of your time thinking about them, even if they're the one who hurt you."

Lulav: Yeah. Everybody should be able to live rent-free, but the people who hurt you should not live rent-free in your head. *(both laugh)*

Jaz: Or pay rent there, frankly. Just like, have them leave.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Exit them.

Lulav: Uh-huh. One of you's gotta move cities. That's just how it's gotta be.

Jaz: Aaah.

Lulav: We do not advocate forcing your exes to move to different cities.

Jaz: Though I can say, moving to another city right after a breakup was kinda excellent.

Lulav: Yeah. *(both laugh)*

Jaz: That wasn't why I moved, it was semi-coincidental, but it was great.

Lulav: It's a thing you can do, and it will probably be nice, but it's not a thing that you *should* necessarily do.

Jaz: I feel like I have made choices in my life that have worked out really well for me that I, like, don't necessarily always recommend for other people.

Lulav: *(laughs)* Uh-huh.

Jaz: I feel like my most ready example of that is the bisexuality thing where I was like, "I just can't know whether or not I'm really bisexual until I have tested this out with science, which means having at least kissed both a man and a woman, and other than that, there's just no way for me to know." Please ignore the fact that I've asked out, already, both men and women. Can't know. *(Lulav laughs)* I just can't know yet. And I did that for longer than I'd care to admit.

Lulav: Uh-huh. And once more, that is not a standard that you would enforce for anybody else.

Jaz: Oh, no, it's a really bad standard.

Lulav: Oh, man, Jaz, do you hear that? There's like, a voice ringing out or something. My auditory processing isn't great, can you tell me what's going on?

Jaz: "Clear in the desert, a road for the low, level in the wilderness, a highway for our G-d."

Lulav: *(laughs)* They did a really dramatic shoulder touch just then. So what does this all mean?

Jaz: So... Then there is actually more things that the voice ringing out has spoken. Do you want me to continue reading it for you?

Lulav: Only if you would like to, my dear.

Jaz: I will say, I don't necessarily endorse every bit of this translation, but mostly it's adequate, and it says, "Let every valley be razed, every hill and mount made low. Let the rugged ground become level and the ridges become a plane. The presence of G-d shall appear and all flesh--"

(clip of Dracula from Symphony of the Night: "Flesh!")

Jaz: "--as one shall behold, for G-d themselves has spoken."

Lulav: (*laughs*) That was really impressive mental editing, also. Like, even while I was messing around with having Dracula from the Symphony of the Night say "Flesh," you just like, came in there and said, G-d themself, instead of the Lord Himself, like the JPS translation has it.

Jaz: Yeah. I think I said this to y'all before, on our earlier episode, but when I was doing my grandfather's funeral, and I did a similar mental editing, because I do that to basically all of my texts, and my mother was like, "I was kind of impressed and surprised at you transforming the texts to make them gender-neutral," and I was like, "Where and when did I do that?"

Lulav: (*laughs*) You did it without even noticing!

Jaz: No, I mean, I noticed in the moment, once I understood really what she was talking about, but she had phrased it initially as like, "You changed the service to make it gender-neutral," and I was like, "What do you mean?" (*both laugh*)

Lulav: It's *all* translation.

Jaz: Yeah, yeah. (*Lulav laughs*) So part of what I appreciate about the metaphor happening here is—

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: —is this is about, like, "Let's make a road, and let's make a road that people from each area can reach."

Lulav: Mm.

Jaz: So, this is a like, "From the valley, go up; from the hills, go low; if it's on rough ground, let it be more level, and if it's on a ridge area, it becomes a plane." It's basically a, like, "And then G-d will be there, and everybody can see it." So it's like, all behold, but instead, this is a, there will be a big path, and everybody will have access to it, because that's where G-d is.

Lulav: I like the way you said that, because the way it is written in the JPS translation does sound like "bulldoze the heck out of literally everything until there's a flat road that's at whatever we have declared the average to be." (*laughs*) The idea of like, you are taking contributions from everything and weaving a road with that together, sounds a lot nicer.

Jaz: Yeah. So, that is the thing, right? This is what I was saying about, like, I have some quibbles with the translation. They translate it as "highway", but there weren't really

highways as we think of highways, so this is just like a big public road, you know? Which is like, a little bit of a different implication.

Lulav: It's what highway means, but not to Americans.

Jaz: Right, like, we think of it as like, and there are no people, only cars. *(Lulav laughs)* Although the one time I've ever seen a highway with no cars on it—

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: Have you ever seen a highway with no cars on it?

Lulav: Uh...kind of, but no.

Jaz: So, this was a highway in Jerusalem—

Lulav: Mmm.

Jaz: On Yom Kippur.

Lulav: Mmmm. *(laughs)*

Jaz: And there's areas in Jerusalem and in other, like, religious or Orthodox neighborhoods where there's not a lot of cars driving, like, on Shabbat—

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: But on Yom Kippur, like, really a lot of things shut down. And there's really not a lot of cars driving, and so, for the more secular Jewish folks, they're also off school, like, the children aren't fasting, 'cause children don't fast—

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: And there are children playing soccer on the highways, and like, riding their bikes, and stuff like that.

Lulav: Yeah. That's cool.

Jaz: It was wonderful. We don't have anything like that, not religious holidays, but not secular days either.

Lulav: Right. When I was like, "kind of, but no," I was thinking of driving on the highway at three in the morning, and even then there are cars.

Jaz: Right.

Lulav: So. (*laughs*)

Jaz: Yeah, and it's not like there's absolutely no cars allowed, but also, there aren't cars, like—

Lulav: Uh-huh.

Jaz: I saw maybe a few cars that day, but I could have counted them on my fingers on one hand.

Lulav: Yeah. Um... all flesh is grass.

Jaz: All flesh is grass!

Lulav: All grass! (*laughs*)

Jaz: Yeah, and this is so interesting too, because it does a, like, "kol habasar chatzir,"² which is, very literally, "all flesh is grass"; "v'kol chasdo k'tzitz,"³ and I emphasize the "k" there, because... First one is very, like, "This is this," and the second one is like, "This is *like* this." It's like one of those types of things that your English teacher--

Lulav: "Here's a metaphor."

Jaz: Right, that your English, when you were very small, would have been like, "THIS one is a metaphor, and THIS one is a simile."

Lulav: Wow, Jaz is really stunting on my English education, where I probably learned that when I was like, eleven.

Jaz: That's small.

Lulav: (*laughs*) Okay, cool. Good.

Jaz: But they translate this, "All its goodness is like the flowers of the field." I probably would have translated "chasdo"— like that word, "chesed,"⁴ as "kindness" rather than "goodness." But that's a fine translation, I'm just nitpicking.

Lulav: All its kindnesses...

Jaz: ...are like flowers.

Lulav: And I noticed that "tsits" sounds a lot like "tzitzit."⁵

Jaz: Oooh.

Lulav: 'Cuz that's "flowers," right?

Jaz: Uh-huh.

Lulav: Is that a spurious connection?

Jaz: No.

Lulav: Mm!

Jaz: It's related, with "tzitzit" indicating things about fringes, or coming forth.

Lulav: Okay, so like, blossoms — flowers — come forth, and tzitzit come forth from the edge of a garment.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: That's great.

Jaz: Which is also, like, a really nice connection, because part of the point of tzitzit, at least I would argue, is that it is supposed to remind you to be a person who practices chesed—

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: So it's goodness blossoming forth, it's goodness extending off the edges of you like tzitzit.

Lulav: All its kindnesses are the things that you wear every day.

Jaz: Yeah. (*Lulav laughs*) And also, the things you most visibly see and are most beautiful that also have to be cultivated.

Lulav: Hey, but I'm like 50% tearing up, which is like bawling, for me. So there's a lot here about impermanence of the organism, but eternal continuation of the species.

Jaz: In fact, that's what they're gonna say next. (*Lulav laughs*) Right?

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Grass can wither and fade, and so can we.

Lulav: This, to me, is the most clearly— at least to English-speaking sensibilities, is the most clearly poetic—

Jaz: Because it repeats?

Lulav: —that we've seen. Yeah. It says, "Grass withers, flowers fade," and then it has the rest of a line, and then it repeats, "Grass withers, flowers fade," and it emphasizes that with another fairly different line.

Jaz: Yeah, and there's two different words for G-d used in those two different sentences.

Lulav: Oh.

Jaz: Arguably more than two, but definitely two.

Lulav: Eloheinu.

Jaz: Mm-hmm.

Lulav: Versus...Hashem?

Jaz: Mm-hmm. And they emphasize different qualities, from "Ruach Hashem,"⁶ like, the breath or the spirit of G-d, versus "d'var Eloheinu,"⁷ like, the word of our G-d. So. There's just different aspects that are being emphasized.

Lulav: Yeah. Okay. If we continue at this pace, this will be an hour and a half long episode?

⁶ רוח "
⁷ דבר אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Jaz: Nooo, keep going.

Lulav: So, we're ascending a lofty mountain, o herald of joy to Tzion. We're all singing, 'cause singing is a thing that is often related to joy in Jewish imagery and practice.

Jaz: (*singing*) Sing unto G-d all the earth a new song. (*humming*) Ah, I can't do it. So, then, G-d comes with—

Lulav: Might?

Jaz: Yeah. "Chazak" is a word that, when I translate it to my students, I translate it as "strength, being strong."

Lulav: Would you accept "fortitude"?

Jaz: Hmm. Yeah, sure.

Lulav: (*laughs*) It does seem a little more offensive than I was thinking. "To prevail upon, to press, be urgent."

Jaz: So, the place where I most often consciously think about the word "chazak" is when you finish a book of Torah, you are supposed to say, "chazak, chazak, v'nitzchazek,"⁸ which is like, "strength, strength, and may you be strengthened."

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: And it is not just the idea, we don't just emphasize physical strength. It is also the idea of like, you'll return to this, you have been made stronger by knowing it and learning it and reviewing it.

Lulav: Yeah. A fun thing that we like to do when translating something that's just repeated words is to take different meanings of that same word, so it's like, "strength, fortitude, and may you grow stout." (*laughs*)

Jaz: So, then we move from also this, like, "Strength! Reward!" (*Lulav laughs*) To, like, gently carrying for--

Lulav: Carrying them in your bosom.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Oh, and then we get some questions — like speaking out of the whirlwind — “Who measured the waters with the hollow of its hand, and gauged the skies with its span, and meted Earth's dust with a measure, and weighed the mountains with a scale, and the hills with a balance?” This is much more scientific than we usually think about the creation? Right?

Jaz: It's very cute. (*Lulav laughs*) I like it. I also think, in some respects, it doesn't remind me of science so much?

Lulav: Mm.

Jaz: As, like, careful construction, or careful craftwork. Which I recognize as, like, related to science, but feels distinct in my mind, about a skilled craftsman.

Lulav: Mm. Picking the syllables of the name that you wanna give something to make it be real, rather than carefully measuring out like, “this will be exactly 7.5 decimeters—”

Jaz: No! That's— okay, so, when you get into a craft that's like— knitting is the one I know best, right? But you can apply this to lots of different crafts. You might get into it because you're like, “Well, I'm not a math person, and so I'm gonna do this crafty thing instead.” But actually, like, to make garments that fit people, and to have things turn out the way that you want and pick two yarns and figure out, “Well, will they work together in the way that I want?” You actually do have to have a sense of, like, “Well, what's their proportion, and what's their ratio, and how do I test this by knitting a swatch that's four inches by four inches, and then seeing how many stitches per inch it has in this direction and in this direction.” And to do a good craft requires that you take into consideration what you're working with.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: And that's what it reminds me of.

Lulav: Cool. So, is there anything in like, 13 through 15 that you wanna hone in on, or do you think it's kinda the same speaking out of a whirlwind?

Jaz: No, I like 14.

Lulav: Okay. (*laughs*)

Jaz: The idea that they just go off into this tangent about like, “Well, and who was G-d's teachers?” (*Lulav laughs*) They do not answer this question, they just ask it, and I really appreciate that.

Lulav: If there's anything that I've learned from the Gojira movies, it's that there's now Mega-G-d. *(laughs)*

Jaz: What?

Lulav: No. Also, I haven't watched any Gojira movies except for ones that I wasn't paying much attention during and were, like, the American remakes. Cassidy, hit me up, we should watch some Gojira. *(laughs)*

Jaz: What do you think about this other stuff happening, of like, "Nations are just a drop in the bucket." "Things are like dust."

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: "Lebanon is not sufficient fuel"?

Lulav: *(laughs)* Yeah.

Jaz: "All nations are as nothing, so who can you compare to G-d?" I will throw in one small thing, which is, I think Lebanon is mostly inserted here as an example of a powerful nation?

Lulav: Right.

Jaz: That's nearby; that it's not Lebanon-specific.

Lulav: And also a place with so much wood.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Like, an unimaginable amount of wood, and Lebanon is not fuel enough? Oh, geez. I mean, it's kind of saying there is nothing that you could sacrifice that would be enough.

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: So let's be real about what has meaning here.

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: The kindnesses that you have, like tsits, and it gets into more stuff about like, "To whom can you liken Hashem? What form compare to it? The idol? A woodworker shaped that, and a smith overlaid it with gold, forging links of silver." So like, this really connects to

the parsha, which is a thing that I forgot to talk about, in that most of parashat Va'etchanan—

Jaz: Mm-hmm.

Lulav: —is talking about...don't make idols.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: And not just the general thing of like, "Don't make idols because idols mean you're probably worshipping something else that's not G-d," but very specifically, "You cannot represent the animate force of literally everything—

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: "—as like, a bull.

Jaz: Sure.

Lulav: "Or even a whirlwind. And definitely not a white dude with a big flowing gray beard in robes.

Jaz: Yes.

Lulav: (*laughs*) "So just don't? Don't even try. Color the whole page brown if your teacher asks you to draw G-d." (*laughs*)

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Yeah. And this comes up very strongly here, like, "What comparisons can you make to the animate force of all things? None, really." (*laughs*)

Jaz: Uh-huh. Then there's an additional thing about, like, "Inhabitants are like grasshoppers. (*Lulav laughs*) Skies are like a little tent.

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: "Rulers of stuff? They're like, nothing. (*Lulav laughs*) Hardly are they planted. Hardly are they sown. Hardly has their stem taken root, when G-d just, like, (*blowing noise*) (*Lulav laughs*) blows on them, and they're all dried off and blown away."

Lulav: Yeah. And I think the thing about "Lebanon would not be fuel enough"?

Jaz: Uh-huh.

Lulav: Not specifically about Lebanon, but it's like, all of this majesty and these very specific things could be totally burned away, and there would still be...people?

Jaz: Mmm.

Lulav: There would still be living things.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Which is not an excuse for, like... "Okay, let's burn entire civilizations up,"

Jaz: Right.

Lulav: But new stuff does come out even when horrific things like that happen.

Jaz: And there's a specificity here of, like, "G-d is beautiful and powerful specifically because G-d is the one who calls them each by name."

Lulav: Mmm.

Jaz: Who can look at all these things that could be like grasshoppers, could be like grass, could be like nothing—

Lulav: Ooh.

Jaz: —and still is like, yeah, that one. Specifically.

Lulav: "That's Jaz!" (*laughs*)

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: That's really cool. Line 26 which ends the haftarah reading: "It that sends out their host by count, who calls them each by name."

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Cool. So, that's the haftarah, right?

Jaz: It is.

Lulav: And that brings us to Rating G-d's Writing, a section where we squint at the brown-colored page, and try to derive, heretically, imagery from it that we can wrap our brains around.

Jaz: Incredible.

Lulav: (*laughs*) So, Jaz, let's say that, if you went outside right now--

Jaz: Mm-hmm.

Lulav: You could find, like, five grasshoppers.

Jaz: Okay.

Lulav: How many grasshoppers does this make you want to go out and name?

Jaz: That's very sweet. Okay, so you know how there's a thing sometimes in fairy stories?

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: About how people all have a secret true name?

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: And there was interesting trans readings of them sometimes. I remember an artist who was like, "I don't know what to do with this." (*Lulav laughs*) And part of the way that I have always liked the true-name thing--

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: --is when stories are like, "Yes, this thing has a true name. It is a real name. Because it is so special and secret, we may refer to this true name constantly on page, but we will never tell you exactly what it is."

Lulav: Mmm.

Jaz: Which is to say, this haftarah is one that I really liked. It does not make me want to go out and name any grasshoppers, because they already have their own names.

Lulav: Oh. That's really sweet.

Jaz: But it does make me more inclined to remember that, and I appreciate that.

Lulav: Good. Can I share my— I don't know if it's my favorite, but it's definitely the most memorable to me at this current point in my life.

Jaz: Mm-hmm.

Lulav: In season 4 of *Friends at the Table*, *Twilight Mirage*, there's a character who uses true names, and the way in which true names come up isn't like, "There is one name that just is this person's secret name"? It's a description that feels intimate and true. And so, the example that Austin Walker gave when he was hashing this out with Janine Hawkins was the idea of his dad picking him up in his arms and throwing him into the air and saying, "My boy!" And so, like, "my boy" can be a true name—

Jaz: Right.

Lulav: —coming from that person.

Jaz: Right. Or in the way that, like, when I changed my name—

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: I knew that my parents really accepted my name when they started giving me affectionate nicknames around it.

Lulav: *(laughs)* DJ Jazzy Jeff.

Jaz: Rude! *(Lulav laughs)* So that would be a situation in which, like, my mother calling me Jazzeroo. It's a nickname that is like, specific to her, but would be, like, a true name in that context.

Lulav: Yeah. That's great. Do me, do me.

Jaz: So, for you... This parsha talks about how humans are like grass, and kindnesses are like flowers. So what kind of plant would this haftarah be?

Lulav: This haftarah is a brassica. *(laughs)* Right?

Jaz: Okay.

Lulav: Because there are so many different ways to be a brassica.

Jaz: Tell people a little bit more about what kinda things are brassicas.

Lulav: Right. So, uncultivated *brassica oleracea* is called wild cabbage.

Jaz: Okay.

Lulav: But when it is bred by plant tenders — 'cuz that's what they're called — you can make domestic cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, brussels sprouts, collard greens, savoy cabbage (whatever that is), kohlrabi, and gai lan.

Jaz: They're just like, half of all vegetables that we eat.

Lulav: Basically. Including— I don't think it's actually *brassica oleracea*, but canola oil is made from what I like to call napeseed — because then we aren't using a really touchy verb — but yeah, it's just like, fields of yellow that can be pushed down into some oils that won't make my head fall off.

Jaz: Uh-huh.

Lulav: I'm— soy is a migraine trigger for me.

Jaz: Yes.

Lulav: It's bad. (*laughs*) Anyway. So, I think that is a brassica, but not *brassica oleracea*...

Jaz: So why is this haftarah a brassica?

Lulav: Right, it's because there's so much variety to it, and there are ways of doing monoculture, where you are just getting paid by the Canada Oil Company or whatever to make 10,000 acres of canola, but most times, you've got, like, wild cabbage, or like we have, in this house, you got a pot out back that's growing kale that you harvest every so often to just, like, dump a little in your soups.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: And it's beautiful and tasty and there's so many different ways in which it's tasty. And even if humans are gone, there will still be brassicas, probably.

Jaz: Okay.

Lulav: And they will be brassicas that we cannot even imagine.

Jaz: Beautiful.

Lulav: Jaz, would you mind taking us to the close?

Jaz: Thanks for listening to Kosher Queers. If you like what you've heard, you can support us on patreon at patreon.com/kosherqueers, which will give you bonus content and help us keep making this for you. Also, if you can't commit to ongoing support but would still like to contribute, you can give to our Ko-fi, which is at ko-fi.com/kosherqueers. Find out more information about our podcast, including bios for our team and links to our social media, at kosherqueers.gay. Also, please spread the word about Kosher Queers. Our artwork is by the talented Lior Gross. Our music is courtesy of the fabulous band Brivele, whose work you can find on Bandcamp. Go buy their albums, they're great. Our sound production this week is done by my lovely cohost, Lulav Arnow.

Lulav: Jaz Twersky makes sure that I wake up at reasonable times and go to bed at reasonable times, which is pretty rad, but more to the point of this podcast, Jaz makes sure that every episode gets transcribed. You can find the link to the transcripts in our episode descriptions at kosherqueers.gay, where you can also see if Jaz roped in additional help for the episode. Recently it's been JJ Jensen, who you can find [@pantspossum](https://twitter.com/pantspossum) on Twitter. They're pretty rad, and have been really helping us in times of crunch. *(laughs)*

Jaz: I'm Jaz Twersky, and you can find me...mmm, not on the internet, probably, unless, again, as aforementioned, you want to talk to us on Twitter, [@kosherqueers](https://twitter.com/kosherqueers), to tell us about your Consolations, or email us about them as well.

Lulav: Yeah. I'm Lulav Arnow, and you can find me [@spacetrucksix](https://twitter.com/spacetrucksix) on Twitter, but probably don't, unless I already know you. Or you can yell at me publicly [@palmliker](https://twitter.com/palmliker), which I would really appreciate. We recorded this audio on the traditional lands of the Wahpékute Dakota.

Jaz: Have a lovely queer Jewish day.

(Brivele outro)

Jaz: This week's gender is: piles of bureaucratic paperwork.

Lulav: This week's pronouns are: they/thed.