Yashar koach. Cora and Joshua, you have taught us some very important Torah this morning and, maybe most importantly, you have raised some very important questions. Trying to understand more about anger and about contradictions in this time that we are living through is existentially important.

Cora, you asked this question - “what do we do when two things are spoken - where if one of them is true, by design the other cannot be true - but our tradition insists that they are both true?” Does this mean that the whole tradition is false or disposable?

As you wisely concluded, no. And you reminded us that contradictions are possibly the opposite of that - that they can draw us even deeper into our spiritual life - that they are opportunities to be more curious, to ask probing questions, to learn to sit with our discomfort, and so many other things we can do that elevate how we experience this world instead of only leading us to frustration or disappointment.

The most classic example of a contradiction in Jewish tradition is really quite telling. It’s from Pirkei Avot, which is part of the Mishna. There, it says: הַכֹּל צָפוּי, וְהָרְשׁוּת נְתוּנָה
“All things are known, **and** free will is given.” This is understood to mean that God knows everything that will ever happen. AND that human beings make choices and control our own destinies. Of course - if God already knows what our future is, how is anything we do really a genuine choice? Yet here is this text in Jewish tradition anyway. A seemingly unsolvable contradiction.

But if we view it through the lens you’ve taught us today - it actually makes me wonder if this text is purposely intended for us as a reminder that Jewish tradition is not meant to provide us with simple answers and that the most important things that we encounter in life are rarely as black and white as we’d like them to be. Perhaps the purpose of contradictions in faith, then, is to draw us into the gray areas where our best and highest selves might emerge. But let’s put a pin in that and come back to it in a moment. And let’s talk about anger for a bit.

Joshua, you raise this powerful question about God’s anger and whether it’s right or fair that God reacts with so much heat for the misbehaved actions of the Israelites. After all of the good they have done, you questioned how quickly God loses God’s temper in anger. And I think this is also a very important question for today.

The Talmudic rabbis also think about anger. Now, mainly, they talk about human anger, but it’s not very far from how we might understand God-anger.

There’s a great text in the Babylonian Talmud, in masechet Eruvin, that teaches: "By **three things a person is known**: by koso, kiso, and ka’aso. By his cup, by his pocket, and by his anger. His cup refers to his actions when he’s drinking wine. His pocket refers to how honest he is in his finances. And his anger refers to how he conducts himself when he is angry.

Now, first, let's note that Jewish tradition doesn't pretend that anger doesn't exist or ask us to not express it. But the rabbis do care a lot about *how* we express it - do we rage with the unbridled anger of God in parshat Ha'azinu? Is our temper short? Do we let it flare with fury? The rabbis understand that these choices have consequences.

In fact, at the end of parshat Ha'azinu, we are reminded of the consequences of acting with unbridled anger. At the end of this Torah portion, God again tells Moses that he is not allowed to enter the land of Israel with them.

We trace this punishment back to a moment in the Book of Numbers, in which the people were complaining of their thirst and God told Moses to speak to a rock and water would flow forth from it for the people. But Moses got so angry. The people have been obnoxious and misbehaved and ungrateful. And so, out of Moses' anger, he strikes the rock and yells out: shall we get water for you out of this rock?!" Not only did he hit the rock instead of speaking to it, but he took credit for God's miracle. Overcome by his anger, Moses let it control him. And his punishment is profound.

The commentator Ibn Ezra teaches that in this moment, Moses' anger distracted him from his ultimate purpose, from who he wanted to be, and from what he most wanted to accomplish. He wanted to help his people and be lovingly connected to God, but he let his anger rule him.

There are many things today that we might be feeling a great deal of anger about. Anger for the antisemitic attack in Manchester yesterday. Anger for 48 Israelis still held captive almost 2 years after October 7th. Anger for the suffering of innocent civilians in Gaza starving and terrified and dying. Anger at our administration, willing to shut down the government and then lie and say that it is the fault of undocumented immigrants who want free healthcare. We might feel a boiling inside of us for this and for so much more.

So what do we do with that anger if expressing it ragefully might in fact distract us from our purpose, from who we want to be, and from what we want to accomplish - like it did for Moses - whether that is to eradicate antisemitism and hate of all kinds, or to free the hostages, or to end the war, or to support our immigrant neighbors, and so much more? If an uncontrolled anger has these obvious spiritual and strategic consequences - what do we do?

It might help us to note that the word anger comes from the Norse word for grief. A-n-g is the Norse word meaning the emotion of grief that we feel when we experience loss. And I think this makes a lot of sense. Consider the things that are making us angry right now. Aren't they rooted in some kind of loss? The loss of our sense of safety, the loss of an identity that we were once clear about, the loss of our innocence, the loss of a country that seemed to try to reflect a certain set of values.

If anger expressed as unbridled rage pushes away and destroys, could anger expressed through grief draw others near in empathy? And how do we live in this world that is rife with things that are worthy of our anger and full of contradiction … without losing ourselves.

I think we find the beginning of some answers at the intersection of anger and contradiction. See, the ancient rabbis left us some wisdom that ties your two teachings together in a powerful way. Over the past ten days of awe, we have been praying a certain set of words over and over again.

Adonai Adonai El Rachum v'Chanun, Erech Apayim v'Rav Chesed v'Emet. Notzer chesed la'alaphim, nosei avon va'fesha v'chata v'nakeh. "יהוה! יהוה! a God compassionate and gracious, **slow to anger,** abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.

These are the 13 attributes of God that we recite during the High Holy Days. Why? Because they are the words that God told Moses to say when they were in the wilderness and God's anger turned to wrath and violence. When the people needed forgiveness, God said: remind me of this. Remind me of my purpose, and who I want to be. I am rachum v'chanun - compassionate and full of grace. And . . . I am Erech Apayim . . . slow to anger. Remind me, Moses, that it is good for me to be slow to anger, it's who I want to be, though I sometimes forget that.

But there is an amazing contradiction baked into this key to God's forgiveness.What we say on the High Holy Days is not the full text that we find in the Torah. When the rabbis put it into the machzor, the High Holy Day prayerbook, they truncated it.

In Torah, it says: "יהוה! יהוה! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin—yet not remitting punishment, but visiting the sin of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations." The contradiction? God is forgiving and compassionate. And also, God is not. When it went into the machzor, they cut that last part entirely.

Which leads us to the other thing we can do with a contradiction. We can choose. Remember . . . ha'r'shut n'tunah. Human beings have free will. The heart of contradiction is what saves us from an unforgiving anger. We can choose how to express that which is most deeply felt inside of us. We can choose to not be distracted from our purpose, from who we are. The stakes are so high right now on all of it . . . so in addition to all of the other beautiful things we can do with contradiction - we can choose, like the rabbis did, which part of the contradiction must be fulfilled - is there compassion or no compassion? And we can learn from Moses and God and decide how to express our anger with a humanity that draws others in instead of pushing them away.

Cora and Joshua, may we take your deep and thoughtful teachings with us as we face the most confounding and the most painful challenges ahead - so that we can continue to do our very best to fulfill our purpose and be who we want to be. Yashar koach to you both.