>> Ben Bond: Welcome everybody! We're so happy that you're here. My name is Ben Bond. I use he/they pronouns. I am a white person that is masculine presenting with brown hair, a brown beard, brown glasses, and a blue shirt, with the gray RespectAbility logo background. We are so so grateful that you are with us today. We have the tremendous opportunity of hosting Rabbi Dr. Julia Watts Belser for this webinar. And as we head into that, I just wanted to give y'all and everybody a few housekeeping items. Eric can go ahead and put up the slide. So this webinar has ASL interpretation and live CART captioning. You can pin the ASL interpreter to keep them in view for the entire presentation. The interpreter will be in view for each part of the presentation, so that should not be an issue. If anything comes up, feel free to let us know in the chat. To view the live CART transcript in a separate window, use the link in the chat box that Eric will put in soon. And this webinar is being recorded, and will be posted to the RespectAbility.org/JDAIM link by next week and after open captions are added to the recording. So for any access needs, this can be looked over again at a later date. And without further ado, I will pass it off to my incredible supervisor, Shelly Christensen.

>> Shelly Christensen: Thank you Ben, hi everyone! Thanks for being here today. We're so excited about spending time with Rabbi Julia. I'm Shelly Christensen, the Senior Director of Faith Inclusion and Belonging at RespectAbility. And I am a white woman with very curly dark brown hair. I'm wearing blue glasses. I have this lovely lipstick on. And I'm wearing a check sweater with a red top. And behind me are pictures from my garden of flowers, and that's just a wonderful backdrop to have today. Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, may his memory be for a blessing, wrote in his book The Sabbath, "creation, we are taught, is not an act that happened once upon a time, once, and forever. The act of bringing the world into existence is a continuous process." And so, as we recognize the 15th anniversary of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month – JDAIM – we pause briefly to recognize the inclusive practices that are now part of the Jewish Community. Every February, Jewish organizations and communities, including synagogues, schools, community centers, and federations, have responded to the call to create a world where disabled Jews and those who love us are welcomed and included. Still, to borrow from Heschel, we must allow the process to continue to develop beyond inclusion, until finally, all people who want access to the full scope of Jewish life belong. And we will put in the chat the 2024 JDAIM program guide. It has a lot of information, and our website has a lot of programs, and we have upcoming events, which we'll talk about later. Thank you Eric. And now I would love to welcome Dr. Hannah Roussel.

>> Hannah Roussel: Hi, thank you Shelly. I'm Dr. Hannah Roussel. I was recently a fellow at RespectAbility in the Faith Inclusion and Belonging department, and I recently got my doctorate in ancient Jewish history. And Rabbi Dr. Julia Watts Belser was on my dissertation committee, and is still one of my mentors in the academic world. So I was very excited and honored to be invited to be a part of this conversation. I use she/her pronouns, I have long curly or today more wavy brown hair that sometimes is slightly red depending on the lighting, and I'm wearing a blue sweater and blouse, and I have green glasses, and my background is the gray RespectAbility Zoom background.

>> Shelly Christensen: Great. And Hannah will be joining us in our conversation today. Julia Watts Belser is a Rabbi, scholar, and spiritual teacher who works at the intersections of disability studies, queer feminist Jewish ethics, and environmental justice. She is a professor of Jewish studies at Georgetown University, research fellow -- Senior Research Fellow at the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, and core faculty in Georgetown's disability studies program. A longtime advocate for disability and gender justice, Rabbi Belser directs an initiative on disability and climate change. She's a passionate wheelchair hiker, an avid gardener, and a lover of wild places. Today Hannah and I -- [coughs] excuse me -- will be talking with Julia about her most recent book, and one of our JDAIM Reads selections: "Loving Our Own Bones: Disability Wisdom and the Spiritual Subversiveness of Knowing Ourselves Whole," which just received a national Jewish book award -- the Myra H. Craft Memorial Award in Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice. Mazel Tov! I was so excited -- we're so excited that this amazing book has been recognized.

>> Rabbi Belser: Thank you so so much Shelly and Hannah. It's really a pleasure to be with you today and to get to have this conversation in honor of JDAIM, and all of the powerful groundbreaking work that you, Shelly, have been helping to catalyze within Jewish communities for so many years.

>> Shelly Christensen: One will never retire as long as there's work to do.

>> Rabbi Belser: Let me give a quick visual description before we launch in. I'm Julia Watts Belser. I'm a white Jewish woman, with short curly brown hair, and I'm wearing a purple blazer and a kippah to match.

>> Shelly Christensen: Let's just dive right in.

>> Rabbi Belser: Great!

>> Shelly Christensen: I'm so excited. I keep saying that but it's true [laughs]. Julia, tell us why you wrote the book. Why did you write Loving Our Own Bones?

>> Rabbi Belser: Ah, I mean, you know, Shelly, I have been studying and researching and working at the intersection of disability and religion, particularly disability and Jewish texts, for a long time -- for most of my adult life. And this book for me represents a chance to really braid together my professional expertise, my work as a scholar, my work as a Rabbi, but also my own lived experience. I like to say about Loving Our Own Bones that it really feels like a love letter to disability community. The book is grounded in the recognition that we matter, that our lives matter, that our spiritual experiences matter, that our insights matter, that disabled folks have powerful, potent insight about Torah, about power and politics, about the vivid complexity of being and staying alive in a world that so often was not built for us. The subtitle of the book centers the idea of disability wisdom, and it's really a core thread that runs through the work. When I say disability wisdom, I mean at our best, disability communities, disabled folks of all kinds, are building countercultural knowledge about access as a radical practice of hospitality and care, about collective care in general, what it means to show up for each other lovingly and fiercely, even when it's complicated -- I mean, actually, especially when it's complicated, right, to really figure out how to do that kind of care work as living practice. Disability wisdom for resisting ableism and all of the intertwined systems of oppression that go along with it, cracking open those tight, constricting, one size fits all spaces, what I call hegemonic norms, all of the systems and practices and messages that insist there's only one right way to have a body, only one good way to move through the world, only one acceptable pace that's full steam ahead, only one right way of thinking, feeling, perceiving the world. That is a brutal terrible lie, but so much of our world is built on that premise. And while ableism hits hardest against disabled folks, especially against multiply marginalized disabled folks, it's also brutal for a lot of people who don't necessarily have disabilities, right? Normativity, those kind of -- those tight constricting norms -- end up hitting, targeting people of color, queer people, trans and non-binary people, fat people, Jews, Muslims, right? So many of us in different ways know something about that feeling of being on the outside, of being --you know, sometimes it's that sense of not being enough, sometimes it's that sense of being too much, right? My work and my writing is grounded in a commitment to resisting that, to imagining that differently, to helping us all develop more tools for building a world that works differently, to untangling those intertwined systems of oppression, and asking how that commitment can shape and reshape our spiritual and political lives.

>> Shelly Christensen: Oh. I want to go back to something that you just said, and that is the word "enough." I am enough. What is enough? Who defines the enoughness -- in experiences both as a disabled person, as a parent, and as an advocate, I -- we still struggle with this notion that -- and it's an ableist notion -- of expecting people with disabilities to show up and just merge into that very narrow normative, for lack of a better word, stream. And how do you think about -- [coughs] excuse me -- how do you think about that? What do you think about that enoughness and --

>> Rabbi Belser: Yeah, you know, disability is such a broad, complex umbrella, right? It's a huge category. It's actually a kind of weird category, right -- and I should say briefly when I think about the -- about disability, I mean that category expansively. I mean to include sensory disabilities, physical disabilities, intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health disabilities, things like depression, anxiety, neurodivergence and neurodiversity, chronic illness, chronic pain, long COVID, right? There's so many ways that -- so many different ways that disabilities manifest and unfold in people's lives. What makes the category of disability tick is the idea that there is a sort of ideal "normal" body and mind against which everyone is measured and some of us are found particularly wanting. Now I think in some ways that idea is a myth. Like, no one has that ideal body mind, or I don't know, maybe you get it for like a second, some people, who knows, right? But it's a -- even if you briefly have some some sort of fantasy moment, where it's -- where you feel aligned with it -- it's not actually something, a position that -- that any of us hold. It's a -- it's a cultural fantasy, but it's a fantasy with teeth, right? Because our world is built in a way that it -- our world is built to accommodate some people, and to make other people always race or reach or flinch trying to catch up and fit in. Right? We all -- so I want to go back for a moment to say I really -- the category of disability, even though it is in some ways a kind of artificial category that's produced by this norm, the category is very important to me. I don't want to dissolve it, I don't want to do away with it. It names something really crucial about my own experience and the experience of a lot of other people who -- like, one thing that's essential about my life is that feeling of not actually fitting a lot of spaces in which I move through, right? That experience of not fitting has been both a source of profound pain, and a source of extraordinary -- catalytic power. And I think that when I talk about the way that disability can be a kind of spiritual catalyst -- it's in that really critical recognition that disability can help us understand something crucial about -- about power, about the way the world is set up -- and also be a kind of incitement, an invitation, a call, a goad to do it differently, to actually really truly go all in on trying to build a world where all of us, all of our actual bodies and minds belong.

>> Shelly Christensen: Mmh. I love the idea of disability as a spiritual catalyst, and it's experiential, it comes from living our lives.

>> Rabbi Belser: Yeah, yeah. You know, it's funny, Shelly, people have often asked me, you know, I mean it's a professional hazard -- people ask me all the time "what does the Torah say -- what does the Bible say about disability?" But the question I'm asking in this book is really different. It's a question of saying, "how can lived experiences of disability open up new perspectives on Torah?" So this is disability Torah.

>> Shelly Christensen: It is disability Torah.

>> Rabbi Belser: And it's also for all of us, right? I think I wanted to recognize that in many ways I feel it anchored in and belonging to, emerging out of the insights and lived experiences, often hard won, of disabled folks. And I also truly believe that it can be transformative for everyone with a body, because ableism isn't actually good news for any of us.

>> Shelly Christensen: [laughs] Indeed. I want to bring us to Torah.

>> Rabbi Belser: Okay, great.

>> Shelly Christensen: Bring our conversation --

>> Rabbi Belser: Yes.

>> Shelly Christensen: For many many people, reading the Torah and reading about Moses -- Moses is disabled. His speech disability, God provides an accommodation, the interpretation of that -- incident, that part where Moses is called by God to be God's spokesperson to lead the Israelites. And I loved reading your -- just how you rethought that story in such a deeply genuine, realistic, and certainly looking at the ableism that surrounds not only that story, but Moses's life. And so I'm just -- I thought -- found it so compelling in the book, I've read that part, I don't know, three times, four times. Full disclosure: I've read the book of the paperback, I've read the Kindle, I'm listening to the book and learning so much every single time. So -- let's talk about Moses, let's talk about --

>> Rabbi Belser: Well let's talk about that moment of reasonable accommodation, which is a powerful "wow" moment. God says to Moses, right, God calls Moses to go and speak to pharaoh, and Moses says -- spoiler alert -- Moses says no. I mean, it's an amazing moment, actually. Moses says no because he says that his disability, his -- in Hebrew the word is related to the idea of a heavy tongue -- it's often understood to be a speech impediment, a speech difference. And Moses says, look, that's going to -- disqualify me. You don't want to send me out to speak on your behalf. And I'm torn. I'm torn between -- as I have spent time with this story, I'm torn between reading that as a moment of internalized ableism, right? A moment that I know so well in my own life of letting those external messages -- "you're not good enough" -- get under my skin. So that's one possibility. But I think the other possibility is Moses knows full well how harsh the judgments and exclusions of ableism can be. And Moses says, look, this is a mismatch, it's not going to work. And in an extraordinary moment, God redesigns the divine plan in order to provide Moses with what we would today imagine as a disability accommodation, right? He says okay, take your brother, and your brother will revoice for you. Now if we stop there, I think we have a very tidy nice story about disability being accommodated. I want to mess that up a little bit though, because I'm uncomfortable leaving it just so pretty.

>> Shelly Christensen: Exactly.

>> Rabbi Belser: I think one of the risks of that story is that it makes a kind of very neat oh, you know, Shelly, what you were saying about disabled folks just being expected to go with the dominant flow, right? Really what Moses needs to do is become -- what everyone needs to do is be a fluid fast speaker, and the accommodation allows Moses to be sort of like that, right, to sort of get that done. But it never challenges the basic, fundamental power structures that say being able to speak in a certain way is essential for spiritual leadership, prophecy, communication, getting the Israelites out of -- out of bondage, whatever.

>> Shelly Christensen: Right.

>> Rabbi Belser: So I actually find even more provocative a moment that happens earlier, and that's when God gives to Moses a set of signs. Moses says, "what if they don't believe me? What if they don't listen to me?" And God reveals a set of signs -- gestural language. Instead of saying "Moses, use your words like everybody else does," God says, "all right, play to your strengths. Do your thing. Crack this whole thing open. Let them see and feel and know in a totally different way. Use your own native language." That to me is a really powerful, provocative moment that says actually, if we're only doing disability accommodations by getting disabled people into sort of the same spaces, doing the same things, trying to keep up at the same game, we have missed one of the most important insights, which is disability also can be a kind of radical encounter with difference that matters, that deserves to be taken seriously in its own right, that can be its own kind of revelation.

>> Shelly Christensen: Mmh. I just keep thinking and -- I'm sure everyone watching is just kind of, you know, really thinking about Moses as -- not as that person God chose to lead the Israelites and gave accommodations so Moses could lead in, you know, this very kind of culturally expected way. And further on, you talk about Moses' disability kind of disappearing -- totally disappearing from -- the story, from who he is.

>> Rabbi Belser: Yeah, I mean, we have this really amazing moment where -- there's actually a couple of moments where aspects of Moses's disabled embodiment show up, right? There's an extraordinary scene, for example, where Moses has to keep his hands held high in order to make sure the Israelites don't falter, and he can't do it, so he has support people actually, like, prop up his hands. It's an extraordinary moment. The Biblical Studies scholar Rhiannon Graybill has written about this in a way that just rocked my world to think about, that moment of physical disability also at the heart of Moses's life. So there's these glimmers. But the big experience of speech disability, which is central to Moses's first extended conversation with the divine presence, right, really recedes, so much so, actually, that by the end of the Torah, right, we see in the book of Deuteronomy -- we see Moses as the, like, speaker par excellence. The whole book of Deuteronomy is Moses giving a long speech. There's actually a really terrible midrash about this, right, Midrash Tanhuma, I talk about it in the book, Midrash Tanhuma says, what gives, Moses? Right? On the -- back in Exodus, right, you said you were not a good speaker. Now, look at you! I mean, I'm paraphrasing here a little bit. [laughter] Right? What do we make of this difference. And then, brace yourselves because this is hard. It hurts, actually, I really hate this Midrash. The Midrash says "learn Torah and you will be healed." Oh, so painful, right? Not only can the Midrash not imagine Moses as a disabled spiritual leader and speaker, but it also, like, tries to universalize that to suggest that it's a sort of recipe here -- and a recipe that I think is so, so hurtful to so many disabled folks. So I want to read that -- I read that Midrash differently, right? I read that moment differently. I do think there's a really interesting question -- what happens between Exodus and Deuteronomy, right? But rather than imagining Moses healed and transformed and suddenly speaking with this sort of almost supernatural fluency, I imagine -- I like to think of Moses, the prophet, stuttering his way through the book of Deuteronomy, stuttering, like, in his own truest tongue, without shame, without hesitation, and the entire community has come to learn, and understand, and know how to properly, truly listen to his voice. It's not just Moses that's transformed, right? It's also the rest of the people who have learned something, understood something, come to a more intimate knowledge of disability through their connection to Moses, and so become the kind of people who can actually witness and honor Moses's disabled spiritual leadership, and hear the voice of God in and through him.

>> Shelly Christensen: I need a moment. Hannah -- we're -- thank you Julia.

>> Rabbi Belser: Absolutely. Hannah, I'd love to talk with you.

>> Hannah Roussel: Yeah -- I loved listening to all of that, and reading it in your book, and talking with you about it in previous conversations as well. In preparation for our talk today, I was rereading the chapter "The Land You Cannot Enter." Oh it's chapter seven, I have here in my notes. And I feel like that's such an important counter to what we were just talking about with Moses's story, because there are times where transformation is not possible and there is some sort of -- be it in the person, the community, maybe it is possible, but the community isn't there because of deep set ableism, and that there are lands, metaphorically, that we cannot enter as people who are disabled. And I -- so you -- sorry I should backtrack --

>> Rabbi Belser: And let me actually -- I'll say a little something here. So this chapter actually is built around the idea of reading the prophet Moses as one who is never -- who is told that he will not enter into the promised land, and it's built around a kind of kinship that I felt and feel as a disabled person, as a wheelchair user, about knowing that there are lands I cannot enter, that really, no matter what we do, no matter what happens, there are some mountains I will just never climb. It's very -- I think this is actually very deeply countercultural, because one of the most pernicious messages that people with disabilities often receive is, like, just keep trying, just push harder, right, just never give up, right? And that's just bogus, right, like actually, there are limits in life. And so -- now I want to be clear, so often those limits are improperly and poorly applied. So often those limits are also about other people's ableism, crappy structures, unfortunate arrangements, like, we have to call out bad limits, wrong limits, limits that put barriers in front of disabled folks. But there's also another story about this, and that's when I became a wheelchair user, I came to learn that there were some places that wheels would not take me. This, I think, Hannah, I think this was the edgiest chapter of the book to write, because that terrain is so rarely something that it feels safe to share. The entire world, it often feels like, is out there waiting to make my disabled life into a story about tragedy, right? People are like so ready with the tragedy story, or the "oh I'm so sorry," "oh it must be so terrible, it must be so awful" -- I spend so much time pushing back against that, that this work of saying, like, actually, there are certain losses in my life, and I'll go out on a limb and say in your life, in the lives of many disabled folks, that I believe we also deserve as disabled folks the space to honor, to acknowledge, to hold that truth alongside the truth that our stories are not tragic stories and we are not solely scripted in the key of lament, right? But that -- that difficult place -- that cracking open of the door was one of the edgiest things for me as a writer to do in this book. And Moses was one of the ways that I did that, because -- Moses was a companion for me in going to that territory, in part because Moses -- Moses wants to enter the land. This was the thing that freaked me out the most, it was like, Moses, don't want it. Moses, it's not safe to want certain things, right? I heard my own kind of -- what my own heart has learned navigating this often hard, ableist world -- that it is dangerous to -- put that desire out there, because everybody and their uncle's going to come up with some story about healing and overcoming and how you could really make it happen if you just tried hard enough, and have you had your kale smoothie or whatever -- all of that -- this -- there's something about thinking about the ache of Moses's want that felt like spiritual terrain that also really matters.

>> Hannah Roussel: Something that you -- in your book you pull out the moment where Moses -- I underlined it, but let's see if I can find it -- well I'll just -- I don't want to take the time to find it, but where Moses, I think, falls on his face and asks the community to pray for him.

>> Rabbi Belser: Yeah.

>> Hannah Roussel: But there's a disconnection that they don't pray for him, or they don't know how to pray for him, and what this -- to me, I resonated with Moses in that moment with that same conflict that you're expressing in -- there's that disconnect with the community, of we want -- what I'm hearing and what I also experience is -- wanting to share and acknowledge the limits and the struggles that I experience with my disability, but not being able to with my broader community because they might want to give me a fix, or they want my whole story about tragedy, right?

>> Rabbi Belser: Right!

>> Hannah Roussel: And that disconnect really resonated for me in that moment with Moses.

>> Rabbi Belser: Yes, yes. You know, I think that -- I think about the -- I have a long time allergy to synagogue mi sheberach lists, the list of names that is recited for healing. And like, don't get me anywhere near that list, right? Because I have this sense that like if I ever -- touch close to it, I will never get away from it -- the cultural power of that assumption that disability requires, demands, needs healing is so intense. Now I want to say, I want to be clear that I also am a strong believer in -- I want health equity for disabled folks, and I want disabled people to have access to good, meaningful, respectful healthcare, right? So that's not what I'm saying. I think there's this projection, this investment that other people -- often strangers or random acquaintances have in -- "fixing," like there's something deeply wrong with me, us, right? And that's the part that I think -- I just -- I want to help us get free of that -- because even if a person in their own -- I mean, this stuff is so complicated, our feelings about bodies, our relationships with the different trajectories of our body change, life course -- all of that. I sometimes like to say the only truth of the body is change, right? It's -- that's the one thing we can say for sure about bodies is they are not going to be the same next year or in 10 years as they were, as they are now. And that complex story often gets shoehorned in a really -- tight constricting way for disabled folks. I'm thinking about the -- are you better yet? Are you feeling better yet? That is so oh, how are you feeling, you getting better --

>> Hannah Roussel: Right, like -- or when I would go to synagogue -- not to call out -- I love my congregation, but -- people -- so I have been -- I developed an autoimmune disease a couple years ago, and at first especially -- and I think this is where it also gets complicated. when -- my disability is called -- a disease or an illness, and so there is that thinking of -- I asked to be on those prayer lists, to have people praying for me, because I wanted to get better. And there was some quote-unquote "improvement" -- it's a loaded word, so I put it in quotes. But -- sometimes I would talk to people in my congregation, and I'd be like oh yeah, I'm -- doing a lot better -- and they'll be like, "Hannah, how are you?" And I'll be like, "oh, I'm doing good." And they'll be like, "oh, that's so great to hear." And -- you can literally, their shoulders fall as -- like physically, as if a weight has been lifted off of them. And I -- and it's so interesting, like, oh, my autoimmune disease was such a burden to this person, like there's -- and I haven't fully parsed through my thoughts on all of that, but I think it's relevant to this conversation, and it's what was coming up for me as I was rereading that chapter.

>> Rabbi Belser: Yeah, thanks so much for sharing that, Hannah, it really resonates with me what you're saying about the way in which disability, chronic illness, right, are often conceptualized as kind of a burden, a difficulty, right, and so -- and if you -- I think this is -- and I hear this particularly from folks who are living with chronic illness, like, if you miss those targets, right, for getting better on a particular trajectory, it's like you're "failing" at health! Like it's a -- public obligation, right?

>> Hannah Roussel: Right.

>> Rabbi Belser: And I think that this -- the pain of that, right, the additional expectations of that, of -- doing your health and healing right according to someone else's metric, that's I think can be a very -- devastating and alienating feeling for a lot of disabled folks. And so I think that part of what I draw from this actually is an invitation for -- because so often these, like, inquiries, "how are you doing," right, come from a deeply -- a beautiful place. They come from a place of desire for connection and empathy and love and support. Okay So we don't want to -- we don't want to -- we just want to, like, temper that, like, rightsize that impulse a little bit, so that it's -- I often -- in the book I call it an empathy misfire. Sometimes empathy gets so big, right, that it actually closes out the space for the disabled person to, like, have our own feelings about whatever, right? So sort of bringing -- dialing that back a little bit, not assuming that it's clear -- what that trajectory is or should look like, what healing, "healing" if we even -- I'm kind of allergic to the word healing, I don't like the word healing. But I think in some religious communities, the idea of healing is really important to folks. But I always like to hold out the possibility that that can look a lot of different ways, right? That can be about a radical transformation of the social order, as much as, you know, the ability to climb a set of stairs.

>> Hannah Roussel: Right.

>> Shelly Christensen: Precisely. I always think -- is it -- am I here to make other people feel like they have a purpose? And that -- is exactly what you're speaking of, very much so. We have actually a couple questions in Q&A. I don't want to -- I want to invite people to put their questions in the Q&A, and I think what we'll do is actually go to the Q&A right now, and give space for you, Julia, to talk through these. And if we have more time later, we also have a wonderful -- we've had a wonderful conversation before about Shabbat, and kind of those nuggets --

>> Rabbi Belser: Beautiful.

>> Shelly Christensen: from Shabbat. So let's see how -- we'll be flexible in managing our time, how's that? Ben is back. Hi Ben!

>> Ben Bond: Hello! I'm here to help read through the Q&A questions as a good accessibility measure. I also forgot to mention I'm the Faith Inclusion and Belonging Associate here at RespectAbility, and I'm just really grateful to be on this call, and y'all are incredible thinkers and activists and advocates, and I'm so grateful -- I'm sure everyone -- who is watching is also feeling that, so I just wanted to voice that. So our first question is from one of our guests. They write -- I'm not going to say folks names just for privacy for them -- I struggle with how damaging the wellness movement is. Similar to your discussion of places we can't go, it makes it hard for me to care for myself in positive ways, and it makes me feel guilt and fault when I don't engage in wellness activities. Can Torah study say anything about how to deal with that push and pull?

>> Rabbi Belser: This is such a beautiful, important, complicated question. I think that the -- the expectation to enact or engage in wellness, which let me also just name is often really bound up with particular kind of race class positionalities about -- who can access it, how does it work -- like, there's so much going on here that can make this kind of -- these particular ideas of wellness feel alienating, impossible, difficult. I actually want to hone in on something the question writer says about "it makes it hard for me to care for myself in positive ways." I think sometimes there's an extraordinary pressure on all of us, but especially on disabled folks, to be positive, right? To always be like working on improving ourselves and spinning it up -- into -- make sure it ends on -- an up note, on a positive ending, right? I think this again was one of the really subversive things for me about the land you cannot enter, right, actually saying I would like to dwell in this land without immediately engaging in a kind of rescue enterprise where I tell the reader and myself that it's okay, right, it really is okay that I can't go certain places that I want to go. I think it's one of the ways in which I admire Moses for saying like, no, I want it and I can't have it, and some days I feel badly about it. I think that the -- that one of the places -- Shelly, you mentioned Shabbat, I'll just give a little teaser in for it now. I write a lot about Shabbat and Sabbath practice as a practice that's become very profound for me about honoring rest, and claiming the sacredness of rest is really deep in Jewish tradition. For me that's become a kind of touchstone. But to do that -- to actually do that well has meant detoxing from a lot of the expectations of what good Shabbat rest is supposed to look like, like, a fancy meal and lots of company -- many things which, while I love them sometimes, right, are often really inaccessible, unattainable, and kind of like hard for me to even wrap my head around when I roll as a disabled person sometimes, some weeks bone tired and weary into Shabbat. So I think that that's one of the places that I've been thinking a lot about kind of -- the Torah of allowing disability insights, disability practice to lead the way. I've learned so much from the wisdom and counsel of disabled folks, especially disabled folks with chronic illness and chronic fatigue and chronic pain, about how not to always keep pushing. And that's a kind of sacred source that I want to bring into our spiritual repertoire.

>> Ben Bond: That's so beautifully said. I think kind of in that similar thread, another person has asked are there particular Jewish approaches to support us in self-acceptance of our disabilities?

>> Rabbi Belser: Oh this is such a beautiful question, and a difficult one, I think, because the question of what supports you and what supports me, well they might be very different things. But I'll share a few things -- I'll share one thing that has been really meaningful to me. There's a verse in Torah -- there's a verse where God says to the Israelites -- on the palms I have engraved you, and on the palms -- like, on the palms of your hand, I have engraved my love for you. And that verse is one that has led me to a practice of tracing the line -- like the actual line of my own hand tenderly, lovingly. I do this sometimes -- I set my own hands gently on scar lines, on my knees when they're in pain, my hip when it's in pain, you know, whatever is hurting I actually -- I find sometimes my first impulse is to [growls] stop hurting, and then I think, would I ever say to another living soul -- I would never say to another living soul, stop hurting. So I try to bring that tenderness to my own self, to my own body. I -- love is a very lofty word. Sometimes I cannot always -- I can't always get there, but tenderness, that kind of gentleness, the touch of my own -- my own fingers against my own skin -- that for me has been a kind of invitation to feel a sense of like, I don't know, rightness, trueness? Like, maybe it's just saying I'm here. I'm here. I imagine sometimes like -- the presence of the Holy coming in through my own hands, right, to like, hold myself. I'm here. I can't fix it. I can't make it better. But I'm here. That, for me, has been one of the most durable touchstones of my own spiritual practice.

>> Ben Bond: Thank you for that gift Julia, going to make me cry.

>> Rabbi Belser: Thanks, I know, we probably should stop right there actually. [laughter] I'm not sure -- that I can -- I'm not sure that I can do better than that. That might be -- that might be -- that might be the pinnacle, that's truly -- I mean -- it's -- there's something about writing this book that was, for me, an invitation to actually try to really tell the truth about my own spiritual life, and to tell it in a way that I hope might open up doors for others. I think -- what I just described in terms of practice, maybe that's not yours, like, whatever. Hack it, make it your own, figure it out. My way of finding tenderness might not work for you. I think it can be very risky when we're thinking about spiritual practice to sort of assume there's one path, one way. But this is, right, I mean, this is a place where neurodiversity -- a true deep recognition of neurodiversity means we have to recognize that our body minds are wired and built and made differently. So what lights me up may not do it for you. And I think part of my orientation toward finding support is, rather than saying like, oh, here's what you should do, right, here's your -- here's your smoothie recipe, right -- is actually to say this -- the practice, the project, the invitation to find and claim spiritual support and solace, that belongs to all of us. That's -- we deserve that, and we deserve to help each other find doorways into that. That's really something that I believe deeply. But we got to hold a kind of openness to the fact that yours is not mine, and mine may not be yours. But to hear, really, multiple modes of accessing and entering that place, that presence, that sense of care, and love, and generosity, and sacredness.

>> Ben Bond: Hmm, yeah I think that's -- [laughs] I think that's a good place to just sit and be with. Thank you so much. I will -- pass it on to Shelly to give some wonderful thoughts and reflections, and some information about our next webinar.

>> Shelly Christensen: Wow. I'm kind of blown away as always. This is -- by the way, this is how it is to read your book. And I -- as I read it, I think, what place did Julia go to to be so -- to express vulnerability, and what was that like? That was just -- just an observation, not necessarily something to answer, but I say that with love and with respect and honor. And it feels so much to me that you've -- you've kind of -- you didn't sugarcoat, you didn't make things nice, but -- you made our very lives, and this is for all folks, you made our very lives vulnerable -- and that -- that's okay, and in fact, that's such an important part of growth and understanding and learning and interpreting, and yeah. So I want to thank you for that so much, Julia. We had a few more questions, I just want to just bring those questions to the forefront, just some things that people want to know. How to be -- better educated on how to speak meaningfully to the patient who has an illness or disability without sending the message that they're a burden? And another guest wrote, I was a Lend Family Fellow in pediatric developmental disabilities last year. Despite bringing awareness of gaps in spiritual care for individuals with IDD, I have only received push back and resignation to programs, as they are perceived as religious, not spiritual. What do you suggest I do differently to get buy-in? And I -- I'm kind of feeling like there's another webinar here for us to delve into these things, so stay tuned, I guess. [laughs] But Julia, this has been an incredible hour and I want to thank you, and --

>> Rabbi Belser: Thank you so much to you and to Hannah, and also to everyone on the webinar for really beautiful questions, both the ones that I was able to answer live, and the ones that we hope to offer up to the ether for more conversation to come.

>> Shelly Christensen: Precisely. Here's the cover. Loving Our Own Bones. It's incredible. You can purchase the book from your local independent book seller, or wherever you purchase your books in whatever format that you prefer. By the way, Loving Our Own Bones is one of the many resources you can find on the JDAIM website, and that's at www.RespectAbility.org/JDAIM, and you'll find lots of resources there to build disability belonging, not just for February, but for all year long. Please join us tomorrow for the first RespectAbility AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Network collaboration -- this is our four-part webinar series, and it's called Spiritual Dimensions of Trauma, Healing, and Resiliency. We'll welcome Dr. Karyn Harvey, an acclaimed author and researcher on trauma informed care and resiliency. Dr. Harvey regularly conducts trainings on trauma informed support for people with IDD, trauma informed leadership, and trauma informed behavioral interventions for both state and individual organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada. She is an amazing presenter, and this -- the topic of trauma, of PTSD, of resilience is such an important one, and Dr. Harvey will discuss this in terms of spirituality, in terms of belonging, in terms of community, so I invite you to join us tomorrow. Also coming up, Celebrating Jewish and Disabled Creativity during JDAIM. We've got some amazing guests who will talk about their journey as creatives. They are our former participants in RespectAbility's creative Lab program. And then at the end of the month, on February 28th, we'll be getting a sneak peek at the new film coming out called THIRTEEN, and it's an incredible film. And it's about -- it's about, really, parents -- parent advocacy, an individual advocacy to be -- welcomed, to be supported, to fulfill that obligation through Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, to take one's place, as THIRTEEN describes, as the newest adult member of the Jewish community. So, again, thank you! And we'll see you later. Bye for now.