**Mishy Harman (narration):** Back in June our whole team spent a day at the Jerusalem YMCA, recording what would become our season opener. By the way, if you haven’t yet heard it, I really hope you do. In any event, at some point during that day I was walking outside, in the garden, and I noticed a handmade sign taped to an electricity pole. “Returning a loss,” it said in messy black letters. “A *yad* - a Torah pointer - has been found and you can claim it by calling the following number.” A Torah pointer? Who on earth loses a Torah pointer - you know, those usually silver sticks which help you keep your place while reading from a Torah scroll - in the YMCA’s garden of all places? Always on the hunt for a good story, I had to find out. So I called the number.

**Woman:** Hello?

**Mishy Harman:** Hello.

**Woman:** *[In Hebrew]* Yes?

**Mishy Harman:** Hi, I saw your sign about the… that you found a pointer at the YMCA.

**Woman:** Yes!

**Mishy Harman:** It’s not mine, but I’m just calling to ask, did… did someone collect it? I hope so.

**Woman:** Nobody collected it.

**Mishy Harman:** Oh, wow. OK, well I just saw your sign and I was hoping that someone did so I wish you best of luck.

**Woman:** Thank you very much. Thank you. If you know anybody who lost it, please tell him.

**Mishy Harman:** I’ll… I’ll definitely tell people. For sure.

**Woman:** OK. Thank you so much.

**Mishy Harman:** Bye bye.

**Woman:** Thank you. Bye bye.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** So first of all, here I am telling you - in the most public way I can - if you by any chance lost a Torah pointer in Jerusalem last summer, it has been found. Contact us. Secondly, ever since that phone call, I and the rest of the Israel Story team have been calling numbers on random lost-and-found signs around the country. ‘Cuz, you know, you never know…

**Woman I:** Hello?

**Federica Sasso:** Hello, hi.

**Man I:** Hello?

**Man II:** Hello.

**Skyler Inman:** Hi!

**Zev Levi:** Hi, is that Noam?

**Woman II:** Hello?

**Adina Karpuj:** Hi, Bat-El?

**Elie Bleier:** Hi, Sigal?

**Man III:** Hello?

**Tanya Huyard:** Hi, Or?

**Yoav Orot:** Hey!

**Woman III:** Hello?

**Mishy Harman:** Yes, hi.

**Zev Levi**: I’ve just seen your sign about a lost shoe.

**Elie Bleier:** I saw the post about Bonita, your dog.

**Yoshi Fields:** Did you post about a lost parrot named Kiki.

**Adina Karpuj:** About a gold necklace.

**Woman IV:** A cat, small.

**Elie Bleier:** Yes, cat small, yes.

**Adina Karpuj:** A dog, Shosh.

**Elie Bleier:** Your cat Benny who went missing.

**Skyler Inman:** I’m calling about the I.D. that you lost.

**Naomi Schneider:** You posted about a missing suitcase?

**Woman V:** Did you find it?

**Zev Levi:** Did you ever find your shoe?

**Adina Karpuj:** I wanted to know if you ended up finding it.

**Elie Bleier:** Is the name of the dog Russia?

**Adina Karpuj:** I’m just wondering what the status of the dog is.

**Elie Bleier:** Is he dangerous or is he cute?

**Woman VI:** It just, eh, disappeared.

**Yoav:** Um, yeah I actually found it.

**Woman VII:** No, we didn’t find it. Someone took it.

**Man IV:** I actually found it.

**Man V:** No, I didn’t.

**Woman VIII:** Ah, thank you very, very much! We found him!

**Zev Levi:** Do you think, like if somebody found the shoe, do you think they would keep it?

**Noam:** No, what’s the interest? You know, it’s only one shoe.

**Skyler Inman:** How did you end up losing one?

**Yoav:** So that’s a great question. It’s because I’m an idiot.

**Woman IX:** Thank you so much. It’s very nice from you, you call me.

**Mishy Harman:** OK, well good luck. I hope, I hope somebody does call and claim it.

**Woman X:** Thank you very much.

**Man VI:** Thank you, thank you very much.

**Elie Bleier:** Bye Ina!

**Ina:** *[In Hebrew]* OK.

**Elie Bleier:** *[In Hebrew]* Thank you.

**Ina:** [In Hebrew] Bye bye, thank you thank you.

**Elie Bleier:** Give Bonita a hug for me.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman, and this is Israel Story. Israel Story is brought to you by Tablet Magazine and the Jerusalem Foundation. Our episode today - **Lost and Found - Part II**. Last time,you’ll recall, we told the story of how Steve Gray and Anat Harrel of Kibbutz Hanaton in the Lower Galilee found, then nearly lost, and then found a way to save a two-thousand-year-old *mikveh*, or Jewish purification bath. And our story today also goes back and forth between losing and finding and finding and losing, and ironically, it too is about a core Jewish ritual, just well… from a completely different direction and perspective. But above all, it’s the story of this guy.

**Tamir Levy:** So my name is Tamir Levy from Israel. I'm married. I work in a construction company. We do mostly drywall, paintings.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Tamir’s tale is an unusual one, and we’ve been thinking - for many many months - about how best to tell it. But before we jump in, a warning. This story contains content about about sex and sexuality, and *does* describe sexual experiences in detailed enough a manner that might make some of you feel uncomfortable. It also includes some curse words, which we didn’t bleep out. Mainly, however, it addresses religious taboos and pushes the boundaries of what many might find acceptable within Jewish tradition. So, given all that, if you think you might want to sit this one out, I encourage you to check out any of our seventy-one previous episodes, and rejoin us next time. For all of you who have decided to stay, here’s Yoshi Fields with **Act One - The First Cut is the Deepest.**

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**Yoshi Fields (narration):** ‘Tamir’ means tall in Hebrew, which he is. He’s thirty-eight and looks more or less like what you’d expect from a guy who works in construction: Calloused hands, pecs that bulge through his t-shirt, a large tattoo on his arm. All in all, a picture of quote unquote manliness. We’re sitting in his bedroom, *mostly* because it’s the quietest room in his house. But it also seems fitting given the intimate nature of our conversation. See, Tamir wants to share something pretty private.

**Tamir Levy:** I'm a bit, like, shy about it. Brings a little bit like shame. But, I think, no, I should be the opposite. I should be proud of it, you know?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** It’s a secret. And we’ll get to it in just a bit, but for now I’ll just saythat **-** when it comes to matters of masculinity - Tamir has always struggled. Ever since he started being sexually active, he’s felt he has a problem.

**Tamir Levy:** It's like a vicious circle, you know? When you start you have a sexual encounter and then suddenly things doesn't really begin to work down there. And then instead of being connected to your partner, you are connected to your anxiety. Like how do I now pass this test or how do I pass this moment without like total failure.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Tamir has suffered from erectile dysfunction for as long as he can remember. It's affected his sex life, his relationships and his self-esteem.

**Tamir Levy:** With my first longtime partner, she... eventually she got frustrated, you know? She wasn’t like criticizing me but she was... she did express her frustration.

**Yoshi Fields:** How did… How did that feel?

**Tamir Levy:** When it happened, and when when… No, this is very intimate *[laughs]*. I felt like I really want the ground to bury me. I want to disappear. A feeling of maybe even self-hatred, self-anger. Am I good enough? Am I strong enough? Am I man enough?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The only thing that frightened and troubled Tamir *more* than the condition *itself*, was the thought of other people *knowing* about it. So, he kept silent. When he’d meet up with his buddies, they’d often talk about sex - how great it was, how much they loved it. Tamir would usually smile or crack a joke. Sometimes he’d lie. He remembers this one time, when his friends got together the day after he’d gone out on a date. They wanted to hear all about it, and - when Tamir said that the girl had spent the night (which was true, by the way) - they began slapping him on the back and congratulating him.

**Tamir Levy:** “Wow, wow, you did good in this night, right?” And it's like, “yeah, you won't believe. Wow, was amazing, you know, like like three times?” “Wow, three times?” “Yeah, you know?” It's like I’m lying, you know, but no way I will admit it. For some times… some periods, it was like the hardest feeling I had. It's like I was feeling as if I will have my penis feeling good, it's like it will solve all my problems in life.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Then, in 2011, at the age of twenty-seven, Tamir met Noa Nevo, a twenty-eight-year-old psychology student.

**Tamir Levy:** From the first moment I saw her there was like a aura around her as this energy that really ding… I was like spot on.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Noa felt a similar click.

**Noa Levy:** He’s just a person that completes me.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And with Noa, thingsseemed to get better. In fact, after two years they got married. And a few months after that, Noa was pregnant.

Now, this story is ultimately about how Tamir has tried to solve his issues with masculinity. But that journey actually started off with a totally *different* question. One day, about six months into the pregnancy, Tamir and Noa - who had found out that they were expecting a baby boy - were hanging out with Tamir’s brother, when he randomly asked.

**Tamir Levy:** Are you going to circumcise your son?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** At first the question - “are you going to circumcise your son?” - seemed strange. I mean, the answer was obvious.

**Tamir Levy:** “Yeah, I guess why not? Yeah, I guess everybody's circumcised. I'm circumcised. I want him to be like me, you know?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Noa agreed.

**Noa Levy:** Why wouldn’t I circumcise him? I mean… everyone does it. What, are we special? What are we, hippies from Pardes Chana? You just do it, and that’s it.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Tamir’sbrother explained that he was simply asking because he had just read an article about the potentially negative consequences of circumcision. Tamir and Noa nodded and the conversation then moved on. But Tamir? He couldn’t. His brother’s question surprised him, rattled him even, since he had never even considered it. After all, growing up in Israel, circumcising a child was basically a non-issue. He wasn’t even aware of the debate surrounding the practice. Later that night, once Noa had fallen asleep, he started poking around online.

**Interviewer:** Simple question, simple answer. Circumcision - yes or no?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** There were *many* opinions. Some sounded familiar to him.

**Brian Morris:** Definitely yes.

**Interviewer:** Why is that?

**Brian Morris:** The evidence is very strongly in favor. Minor risks, but enormous benefits. And really for parents it’s a no brainer these days.

**Hayim Leiter:** It's our national identity. It's the thing that still binds most of our… know you, us as a people. If you were to say, ‘I had to move off to a desert island and I can only bring one *mitzvah* with me.’ I would say this is the *mitzvah*, which I think needs to come with.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And then there were points he’d never heard before.

**Marilyn Milos:** Why would you want to demand that you have a right to cut off part of your baby’s body?

**Glenn Callendar:** I genuinely love my foreskin.

**Joe Rogan:** This is a completely unnecessary operation.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** As he clicked on, Tamir found himself ping-ponging between two very different camps.

**Rani Kasher:** Ask the German, ask the Danish, ask the Brazilian, ask the Japanese, ask in all over the world. Ask a doctor “do you think cutting off a foreskin is good?” And he said, “what are you talking about it? It’s nonsense.”

**Angelika Rampal:** Circumcision does result in a small reduction in the risk of urinary tract infections and also a small reduction in the risk of future STD transmission.

**Joe Rogan:** Yeah, people lose their dicks. A lot of kids every year. Do you know children die from that?

**Marilyn Milos:** You hear the screams and your reptilian brain says, ‘oh something is terribly wrong,’ and your heart says, ‘I’ve got to do something about it.’

**Man I:** Aesthetic preferences are one thing, but forcing…

**Edgar J. Schoen:** Women prefer a circumcised penis.

**Man II:** Totally balony!

**Man III:** Painful. It’s harmful.

**Joe Rogan:** Ancient ridiculous ritual.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Tamir shut his computer and lay awake in bed. All those angry, yelling voices were bouncing around his head. Were the supposed health benefits worth it? Was it really just a barbaric ancient custom? But then he immediately thought about his father, and *his* father, and *his* father, and all the countless generations of Jews who had come before them, all of whom had performed this holy ritual. As he tossed and turned and weighed the pros and cons, Tamir kept having a specific vision.

**Tamir Levy:** I imagine like my son going to the toilet, but then go a little bit on the side, the shame of his penis is not like everyone else. And it kind of floated my own feelings, my own memories when I feel like embarrassed or shameful, or feeling bad about myself or about my body.Do I really want to do that to my son?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** On August 16, 2014, that question stopped being hypothetical. Tamir stood in a hospital delivery room. Noa lay exhausted on a bed. And in her arms was the most beautiful and perfect baby boy Tamir had ever seen.

**Tamir Levy:** I looked at it. And suddenly it felt so bizarre.

I don't want to hurt my son. Just a new born baby, so small, so fragile. I mean the most natural thing is you want to protect it.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And almost at once his anguish - to cut or not to cut - seemed to dissipate.

**Tamir Levy:** No way I'm gonna do it. I won't let anyone touch my baby's penis with a knife.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Tamir had made up his mind. Now all he had to do was break the news to Noa. See, the previous months had been somewhat stressful for her. The pregnancy hadn’t been easy, and Tamir had done his best to shield her from any unnecessary anxiety. So he’d kept his thoughts about circumcision - his inner turmoil - all to himself. But all of a sudden, it spilled out of him.

**Tamir Levy:** That’s the part where I said my wife,“you know, we thought about the circumcision. Let's not do it.” You know, I said to her, “let's not do it. I think it's wrong. She was like, “what?!”

**Noa Levy:** Totally shocked. “What do you mean not do it? Where is this coming from? Why are you all of a sudden saying this to me?” I had just given birth, I was in total euphoria, but instead of enjoying it, I’m busy with his thoughts about ‘to cut or not to cut.’ And I was really mad at him.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Noa’s shock was understandable.Pretty much all Jewish men in Israel - from the ultra-orthodox though the religious and traditional all the way to the completely secular - get circumcised. The Ministries of Health and Religious Affairs don’t release official statistics on the matter, but according to most estimates something like 99% of Jewish baby boys in Israel are circumcised, making it - by a very wide margin - the most observed Jewish ritual.

**Noa Levy:** There’s an emotional part that I can’t… Wow, I never spoken about it this way. Look, this is rooted in us, it’s in our DNA - it’s something transgenerational. Breaking something like that is breaking a tradition. And who breaks a tradition like that?!

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Traditionally, the *bris*, the circumcision, occurs on the eighth day. So if Tamir was going to convince Noa, it had to happen fast.

**Noa Levy:** He came to me with a lot of reading materials, all kinds of websites and testimonials.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** It was a lot for her to take in all at once.

**Tamir Levy:** We had some hard days when we came back home.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But the more Noa read, the more she too began to doubt whether circumcision was the right path for them.

**Noa Levy:** And then the debate started to expand to other parts of the family. To my parents, to Tamir’s parents.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Noa’s parents, though not religious, were alarmed.

**Noa Levy:** It’s their first grandchild. My grandfather is a Holocaust survivor. So there’s that baggage weighing on us too. My dad said, “why does this child need to suffer because of your weird decision?” My mom too, she just said, “why? Why do this? Like really, let it go, Noa. Let it go.”

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** On the other side of the family, Tamir’s father, a traditional Yeminite Jew, pleaded with him again and again to change his mind.

**Tamir Levy:** For him, it was also important in a religious way. Yeah, he’s more… he’s more traditional.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But, Tamir stood his ground.

**Tamir Levy:** Judaism has so many things to offer. There's so much wisdom and spirituality about it. But I really don't think that in term of what defines you as a Jewish, like the tip of your penis won’t define you if you are Jewish or not.

**Noa Levy:** Tamir’s dad was very angry at us. He even called my parents to talk to them. It was a high drama. Lots of yelling and crying.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** As is often the case, however, the more his family pushed back, the more certain Tamir felt about his decision.

**Tamir Levy:** Listen, it won’t happen. I won’t let it happen. No matter what. If I need, I will take my son and run away with him.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And then, the fateful eighth day finally arrived. The day in which family and friends would normally gather together, enjoy a smorgasbord of food, and watch as the baby boy takes on the covenant with God and receives his name. But in the Levy household all was quiet.

**Tamir Levy:** The eighth day came, and this was like the climax in a way. Yeah he was in our living room and there was a small crib there.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The new parents just stood there, admiring their creation, and smiling as they listened to the steady breaths of their sleeping baby.

**Tamir Levy:** I remember it was a pretty day. Like blue skies and perfect morning. And we just looked at him and we said, “look how precious little thing this is.”

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The discussion, the debate, the drama, it was all over now. It was clear to both of them that there was no way anyone was going to come perform a circumcision, not on that day, and not on any other day either.

**Tamir Levy:** It’s like, kind of a moment of realization.

**Noa Levy:** I won’t go cut a piece of my child’s genitalia just because I’m scared of being different. It just seems ridiculous to me.

**Tamir Levy:** Yeah, it was just felt like a true thing, you know, in a way. We didn't fall in the trap. We didn't fall for the… doing what everything else think it’s right. We did what it’s right for us. And it's kind of was a moment of acknowledging that.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** There were times, over the next couple years, when they were confronted by the decision they had made that day. When they’d go to the beach, for example, they were hesitant to have their baby walk around naked, fearing that some tactless onlooker would make an unkind remark. But the truth is that they never encountered any unpleasantness. If anything, they were *pleasantly* surprised. Tamir’s father, though obviously not thrilled about the situation, basically swept it under the rug, loving his grandchild fully despite his foreskin. And Noa’s parents? They actually made a one-eighty on the issue and actively supported their daughter and son-in-law’s choice. With that, Tamir thought his phallic crusade was over.

**Tamir Levy:** I managed to not circumcise my son and now we can leave it behind, you know? I continue with my life. I didn’t deal with that at all.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** We’ll be right back.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** And now, back to our episode. We’re hearing the story of Tamir and Noa Levy from Zichron Yaakov, who - back in 2014 - decided not to circumcise their son. But that is most definitely not where the story ends. OK, back to Yoshi.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Shortly after the birth of his son, Tamir began experiencing issues with his masculinity all over again. Things in the bedroom were not going well.

**Tamir Levy:** I felt like my soul wants it. My heart wants to have, you know... unite with my wife and to have sex, but my penis betrays me. It just becoming numb.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** All the old and painfully familiar questions resurfaced.

**Tamir Levy:** Why don't you perform well? Why don't you do what I want you to do? I was like really trying to push it like, ‘you have to do it, you have to do this.’ Like you try to climb a mountain and it's very difficult and it's like go up and he's like struggle. And it’s like, ‘no, you have to try harder and stronger and continue.’ And it's... eventually it doesn't work the harder you try the harder it falls.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** This time around,it was even worse than before.

**Tamir Levy:** I could really literally felt like I’m losing… losing sensitivity.And it's like I had a sense that something cannot be like that. I mean, I'm still young. I'm thirty-three years old.

**Yoshi Fields:** Did you ever go to a doctor?

**Tamir Levy:** No. No. I didn’t go to a doctor.

**Yoshi Fields:** How come?

**Tamir Levy:** I guess it's embarrassing. It’s simply embarrassing, because men are expected to always want to have sex and always perform. And because nobody speaks about it actually, so we are sure that we are the only ones that actually it happens. Everybody else are performing really good. And I'm the only failure, you know? I'm the only one who fails. So it's a lot about... Yeah, the self-image, what I think about myself.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Unlike with previous partners, Tamir was - thankfully - able to talk with Noa about it. But, deep down, he still felt ashamed. And then, in the middle of it all - and somewhat counterintuitively - Noa got pregnant again. They had another boy on the way. This time, Tamir had no qualms. It was clear that their second son wouldn’t be circumcised either. But that got him thinking, for the very first time, about his *own* circumcision.

**Tamir Levy:** OK, that’s really great I didn’t circumcise my children, I’m really proud of it. But, what about me?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Could it be, he began to wonder, that *that* was the root of his issues? It was an uneasy thought and he quickly pushed it away. After all, there wasn’t much he could do about the matter. But like an annoying jingle, that question kept popping up in his thoughts, again and again.

**Tamir Levy:** I remember lying in my bed. I could not deny it anymore, you know? Suddenly, I came into this picture. All those things that I’ve learned about circumcision actually apply on me, because I got circumcised. What does it mean? Does it mean that I have a damaged penis?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** So one night he once again opened up his laptop and went online. Bold claims started jumping out at him from the screen.

**Marilyn Milos:** When you inflict that kind of pain on a baby, that trauma lasts a lifetime.

**John Geisheker:** It's actually the foreskin that is the male’s main erogenous zone, and foreshortening it - or getting rid of it - definitely affects the male’s sexual sensation.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** In fact, he learned that one of the early reasons for circumcision in Western culture was an attempt to stop adolescent boys from masturbating. Some historians argue that it was only much later that doctors started emphasizing health benefits. And while the science is out on whether or not circumcision affects sexual function, some researchers claim that given its many nerve endings, the foreskin is a very important part in terms of increased sexual pleasure. They argue that cutting the foreskin off can also lead to side effects like, wait for it… erectile dysfunction.

**Tamir Levy:** What the fuck. What? What?I mean maybe,OK, not all, but maybe a big part of this journey of pain is due to the fact that I have a cut penis. Maybe if I had a whole penis I would feel whole more, I will feel more enjoyment. Easier to connect and to bond with a partner.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Maybe - he thought - if his foreskin hadn’t been removed, he never would have had these problems. Of course, just like most issues around circumcision, there was a lot of disagreement.

**Hayim Leiter:** I think there are lot of the people who are part of the anti-circumsion movment, that are male, who are missing something in their life when it comes to sex. And they desperately think that what they don't have in their sexual experience comes from their lack of foreskin. And I don't think there's any reason to believe that that's necessarily the case.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Tamir didn’t know whether this was just a desperate way of explaining his insecurities. But he kept on reading.

**Rani Kasher:** You cut off very important part of the penis.

**Eric Cunningham:** The foreskin it is a sensory organ more or less.

**Jonathon Conte:** You’ve rendered a structure that was meant to have moving parts, to being just a static structure.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The most frustrating thing of all was that he’d never know. I mean, there was no control group. You can’t know the feeling of a body part you don’t have, right? So, was he simply stuck with a faulty organ? Would he forever be haunted by ‘ifs’ and ‘what-could-have-beens’?

**Tamir Levy:** I was like lying in the bed feeling kind of really sad and hurt about this. And, then suddenly like a voice, a small voice in my head, popped up and said, ‘but wait, maybe maybe there's something to do, you know? Maybe we can fix it?’ You know, I'm a... I'm a fix-it guy.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Literally. He works in construction after all. He walks around all day with a toolbelt.

**Tamir Levy:** I like to take something which is broken and to fix it. So I thought, ‘OK, maybe we can do something about it.’

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** So he went back to Google. It wasn’t your average search. He didn’t even know what to type in.

**Tamir Levy:** OK, what should I write in Google? So I start to write like ‘foreskin... fix’ or something like that. And suddenly foreskin restoration comes up as the suggestions of search. So I click on it. And then I went to a website about foreskin restoration. And then suddenly like immediately there's like a picture of a penis flashing out from the screen, ‘like oh my God.’ I turned my head and I changed, you know, the... the tab. It like, ‘oh-oh it's too much I cannot…’ Yeah I was feeling a little bit disgusted with. I never like to look at penises.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But sure enough, a few minutes later, he was back on that page.

**Tamir Levy:** I was really curious.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** The images flashing at him were a set of pictures of the same penis, taken from the same angle, over multiple years. And he could see the foreskin was growing little by little until - in the final few photos - it basically covered the tip of the flacid penis. The process, he read, was called ‘foreskin restoration,’ and could take about ten years to complete.

**Tamir Levy:** In a way, it's like science fiction, you know? As if somebody lost his hand and now he grows a new hand, you know? What the fuck? What… Is it possible? It's like what is this like... It's a kind of Frankenstein thing you know?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** It was pretty close. While foreskin restoration would not be able to *recreate* Tamir’s original foreskin, it *would* be able to recover some of its original functions.

**Tamir Levy:** So basically regrowing your foreskin means that you… by applying tension on the skin, the skin actually responds that he needs to duplicate his cells. It's this process called mitosis. That's the medical way to say it and actually the skin grows.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** It’s kind ofsimilar to what happens to the earlobes of people who use a gauge.

The site Tamir visited also had a section of testimonials, and reading through them he discovered that many men who had succeeded in the process, spoke about improved sexual pleasure, a general feeling of wholeness, and of a sense that they had reclaimed something that had been taken away from them. But then again, looking at the pictures and thinking about ten years of tugging, Tamir had his doubts.

**Tamir Levy:** It's like a very kinky thing, you know? And I'm not a very kinky person.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And, if choosing not to circumcise his son was seen by many as an affront to his Jewish heritage, regrowing his own foreskin?! I mean that was a whole other level of blasphemy. Surprisingly, Tamir discovered it wasn’t a new one. The restorationprocess had first surfaced in the Hellenistic period. And who was doing it back then? Jewish men attempting to integrate into mainstream society by stretching their skin with copper weights.

**Tamir Levy:** They are considered like traitors. So some people might see me as a traitor.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** But after so many years of feeling inadequate, of feeling not good enough, here - for the first time - was an actionable solution, right in front of his eyes.

**Tamir Levy:** The fact that it's possible to fix it, it gives hope it gives a goal, it gives like a horizon.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** After about a month of nightly reading sessions, he sheepishly approached his wife and shared his findings.

**Tamir Levy:** She didn’t really, I guess, take it very seriously at the beginning. “OK, whatever,” you know? *[Laughs]*. It’s like ‘OK, do your thing, you know? It's a man thing, you know? They like to deal with their penis all the time so I guess…’

**Noa Levy:** I thought it was just very Sisyphean, you know? I said, “wow, that’s a project! But, like, if that’s what’s going to make you feel good? Great. Go for it.”

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And so, with his wife's… sort-of blessing he continued to entertain the idea.

**Tamir Levy:** I thought about it a lot during the… the next month. I don't have a lot of spare time but when I did have so I immediately like went to those website. I was mapping the whole procedure. I want to understand how it works from the beginning until the end.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** After mulling it over from every possible direction, Tamir decided he was going to go for it.

**Tamir Levy:** And then the second step was, ‘OK, how do I start?’

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** He quickly discovered that the regrowing methods hadn’t made a lot of headway since the time of those Hellenistic Jews. There were many different contraptions, some you could make on your own, some you could buy online. But all of them essentially offered glorified ways to stretch the skin. It’s recommended - he read - to wear the contraption all day, six to seven days a week. There's the *Tapeless Conical Tugger* (TLC-X), the *Dual Tension Restorer* (DTR) and a bunch of others, each with their own acronym. Tamir settled on…

**Tamir Levy:** T-Tape

**Yoshi Fields:** T-Tape?

**Tamir Levy:** T-Tape. It’s actually you take a medical tape and *[goes under]*...

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Basically you fold a piece of tape into the letter T (hence the name). Then you attach the sticky part of the tape to your foreskin and the non-sticky part to a strap. You then tie the tugging strap around one of your thighs or even to your shoulder and well… let the stretching begin. Tamir nervously walked into a local art supply store to get the T-tape essentials - tape, cardboard and rope.

**Tamir Levy:** The seller she asked “what do you want to do with it? So maybe I can help you.” It's like, “oh no, it's something for my son, you know, a school project. I don't know exactly. My wife you just send me like the list.” Yeah, for sure I didn't say, “oh I need it to tug my penis and to regrow my foreskin. “What the fuck? She…” *[laughs]*. Yeah, so I bought everything that's needed. And I came back home I'm like, really excited, you know? It's like, I've been waiting for that moment a long time. I remember the first day I did it. It’s funny, it was actually in the eve of Yom Kippur.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** He chose this day, not because of its religious significance, but simply because he had the day off, and could concentrate on the delicate task at hand. It took a few tries, but eventually, he managed to attach the contraption he had made. He tensed and felt the tug.

**Tamir Levy:** It was very comfortable actually.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Tamir then pulled up his jeans and looked in the mirror. Everything seemed totally normal. He stepped outside as the sun was about to set. His family was waiting for him.

**Tamir Levy:** You know, there's a tradition also in Yom Kippur because there's no cars and everything so everyone go outside. And we went to visit friends, to visit family. You know, Zichron is a small place.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And each time they ran into someone, Tamir grew anxious - did they know? Could they tell? But obviously no one could.

**Tamir Levy:** And then the best part was when I... I went to visit my father in the synagogue. I go inside the synagogue with my *kippah* on the head and I'm thinking, ‘yeah, you know, I’m in the synagogue and I'm tugging my penis to regrow my foreskin due to the circumcision I went through, you know?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** He stood next to his father.The soulful prayers of the *Kol Nidre* service surrounding him - prayers of repentance and prayers promising to do better. Tamir smiled. In a way, he couldn’t have timed the start of his regrowing journey any better.

**Tamir Levy:** It made me reflect in a way about Judaism and tradition. I didn’t feel any anger about the fact that I was circumcised, in a way. It’s like I could understand why it has been done, and I have a lot of respect for the reasons and the tradition. So there was acceptance, and there was like… Yeah, and also I guess forgiveness. I mean it's obvious for me what is right for me and what I should do now. And I'm now looking forward and I kind of accept what happened. I'm very happy with my choices. I'm starting something new. I'm starting to fix myself.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** This past Yom Kippur marked five years since Tamir started regrowing his foreskin. Every morning, before getting dressed and making his morning coffee, he religiously puts on his contraption. *That’s* his secret. That’s why we’re in his bedroom.

**Tamir Levy:** Do you want to see? Do you want to show you? I don’t mind.

**Yoshi Fields:** If you’re comfortable then yeah.

**Tamir Levy:** Yeah.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** We stand there, strangers just a few hours earlier, as Tamir pulls down his pants and begins putting on the regrowing contraption.

**Tamir Levy:** I show you. I push the skin forward, OK?

**Yoshi Fields:** Yeah.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** So far things are going as planned. As he proudly points out, he has regrown his foreskin almost up to the tip of his penis.

**Tamir Levy:** Make a small adjustment, and then Iclose the gripper. And now it is gripped, OK?

**Yoshi Fields:** And that doesn't… that doesn’t hurt?

**Tamir Levy:** Not at all, no. It actually feels nice.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** And - he reports - the process has made a difference.

**Tamir Levy:** I regained a lot of sensitivity. Today I have the best sex of my life. It's the same melody, OK? It's the same song. It's the same notes. But it's so much more rich.

**Yoshi Field:** Do you feel any difference?

**Noa Levy:** *[Laughs].* It’s a complicated answer because it’s not just the physical part of it. It’s not just the sensation, which I think is more significant for him. It’s more than that. It’s the issue of something in his energy. It’s like he has a new confidence in his masculinity.

**Tamir Levy:** With this process with this tugging and everything it's like, being in a couple therapy with my penis, you know? ‘Cuz I had a lot of anger on my penis, or my masculinity.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** He spends a lot of time thinking about the origin of all that anger. About the societal expectations he had internalized for so many years.

**Tamir Levy:** Bigger, faster, stronger, you know, all this.

And there's no place for men to be feeling weak, or feeling sad, or feeling failure.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** After years of shame, frustration, secrecy and late-night Googling, Tamir’s developed a new relationship with himself, a more tender one. He is less angry, and more compassionate.

**Tamir Levy:** When I finish my session of tugging in the end of the day, so I put like a lotion or coconut cream or something like that, to give like vitamins for the skin and to make it also more stretchable and more flexible. So you caress, you know? You caress your partner.

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** Nearly a decadeago, Tamir’s brother’s innocent question about circumcision, sent Tamir down a rabbit hole he didn't even really know existed. A rabbit hole that led to two uncircumcised sons, an altered anatomy and new-found confidence.

**Tamir Levy:** I speak about it with my children, about circumcision, because they look at my penis, and they say, “hey yours is different.” And I say, “yeah, because you know, when I was a baby somebody came and cut a piece of it, but we decided that not the nobody will come and cut your penis.

**Yoshi Fields:** And what do they say in response to that?

**Tamir Levy:** They say, “cool. Great.” I say, “yeah, yeah.” I asked “would you like to have some similar to mine? Do you want somebody to come and cut your penis?” He was like, “oh, no, not at all,” you know?

**Yoshi Fields (narration):** As I pack up my things to leave, and after talking non-stop for several hours, Tamir suddenly gets very quiet. I figure he’s wondering what people might think, now that his secret will be out in the open. Then after a while, a big smile appears on his face.

**Tamir Levy:** It’s funny because if I go back to what I said before, it’s like... I want my son to have the same penis like mine. So now I want me to have the same penis like my son, you know? Yeah, I’m a little jealous *[Yoshi and Tamir laughs]*.

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**Mishy Harman (narration):** Yoshi Fields. Last week, five months after our day at the YMCA, I decided to check in with the Torah pointer lady, hoping to hear some good news.

**Woman:** *[In Hebrew]* Hello.

**Mishy Harman:** Hi, I saw a sign that you had found a *yad* outside of the YMCA a few months ago.

**Woman:** *[In Hebrew]* Yes. I did.

**Mishy Harman:** Yeah, I had called you at the time to ask, just because I… I found that interesting. Did anyone ever claim it?

**Woman:** No, nobody did.

**Mishy Harman:** So you still have it?

**Woman:** I do. Nobody called.

**Mishy Harman:** Oh *[laughs]*. So what are you planning on doing with it?

**Woman:** I don’t know. I’m going to ask my rabbi what to do with it.

**Mishy Harman:** OK, well good luck. I hope, I hope somebody does call and claim it.

**Woman:** I do too.

**Mishy Harman:** Bye bye. Thank you.

**Woman:** Bye.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Zev Levi scored and sound designed this episode with music from Blue Dot Sessions. Sela Waisblum mixed it all up. Thanks to our dubber - Naomi Schneider - and to Rav Hayim Leiter, Rani Kasher, Yotam Gordon, Eric Cunningham, Tyler Drozd, Dror Peretz, Omri Cohen, Judah Kauffman, Joel Shupack, Yoav Orot, Federica Sasso, Tomer Nissim, Wayne Hoffman, Esther Werdiger, Sheila Lambert, Erica Frederick, Jeff Feig and Joy Levitt.

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I’m Mishy Harman and we’ll be back next time with a brand new, and more PG, Israel Story episode. So till then, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye.*

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