Episode Book

EPISODE #5866

When Asking About a Leaky Roof Ends Your Lease

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SYNOPSIS

Israel's Fair Rental Law bars landlords from waiving tenant protections, caps deposits, and makes lock-changing a criminal offense. So why do tenants with flawless records still move every fourteen months? This episode unpacks the gap between a protected lease and a protected home — rent control that was never written in, a 2011 eviction that put 400,000 people in the streets, and why institutional rental housing failed on arithmetic before it failed on anything else. Then it turns to the city itself: construction at eight metres from a bedroom wall, a car park exhaust fan at 66 decibels all night, and the sounds of Jerusalem you cannot wait out or complain away.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

A roof leak, a baby in the house, and a question about when it would get fixed. That is what ended a lease in Jerusalem — not missed rent, not damage, just asking.



Herman

That is the part I keep turning over. The question was the offense.



Corn

Daniel and Hannah have been renting in this city for over a decade, and Daniel wrote in with the whole shape of it. Forced out of the last place when the landlord retaliated over that roof leak question. Forced out of the one before that because the landlord decided to gift the apartment to his daughters. Model tenants, both times. And that is the pattern he is describing, that in a country where he says tenancy will is the law, they still have no security over where they will live.



Herman

Two professionals in their late thirties, a fifteen-month-old, moving their own boxes to save money.



Corn

Right. Then there is the other half of it, which is the couple. Hannah is an architect, she has clients here, she loves the centre — morning coffee, walking to work. Daniel works with tech companies in Tel Aviv and wants quiet, and he says the religiosity of the city has started to feel coercive to him. Those are two different maps of the same city.



Herman

And the places they rented kept matching neither map. Quiet at the viewing, noisy ever after.



Corn

So there are really two questions underneath all of it. One is the practical one — how do you build a shared framework, a living document the two of them can grow over time, so that when the next place comes up they already know what they are looking for. Daniel is picturing something as simple as a folder in a shared Drive. Hannah drops in sketches, he drops in his list of needs and deal breakers.



Herman

And the other question is why following every rule still does not buy you a home.



Corn

That one first. Because Daniel says tenancy will is the law, and he is half right, which is almost worse than being wrong.



Herman

Half right is the whole story here. Israel passed the Fair Rental Law in 2017, an amendment to the Rental and Loan Law, and it inserted fifteen sections, twenty-five aleph through twenty-five samekh, that a contract simply cannot waive. It is strong legislation. The landlord has to hand over an apartment that is habitable. Urgent defects — water, electricity, gas — get fixed within three days. Ordinary ones within thirty. A deposit is capped at the lower of three months' rent or a third of the total contract value, and it has to come back within sixty days.



Corn

Sixty days is not a small thing in a market where people are saving for a down payment out of rent money.



Herman

And there is a clause that voids any contract where only the landlord can terminate without cause unless the tenant has a matching right. Eviction always requires a court order. If a landlord changes the locks or cuts the utilities to push somebody out, that is not a civil dispute, that is a criminal offense under the Penal Law.



Corn

So on paper, this is a tenant's charter.



Herman

On paper it is. And then you look for the rent control section, and it is not there. Attorney Meir Shua puts it plainly — the law was passed without setting rigid rules like government supervision of rental prices. So a landlord cannot raise the rent on you mid-lease. What he can do is wait for the lease to end, decline to renew, and re-let at whatever the market will pay.



Corn

Which is exactly what happened to Daniel. Not once, twice. Nobody broke a contract. Nobody did anything illegal.



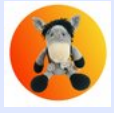
Herman

The law protects the tenancy. It does not protect the tenure. Those are two different things and English does not make that obvious, but Hebrew does — the contract is protected, the home is not.



Corn

Say the second one again.



Herman

The home is not protected. You can have a flawless lease and a landlord who honors every clause of it, and still be moving out in fourteen months because he has decided to sell, or to hand it to his daughter.



Corn

The daughter thing. That is the mechanism Daniel names, and it turns out it is the mechanism that started the biggest housing protest in the country's history. Daphne Leef, 2011, video editor in Tel Aviv. Evicted so the landlord could renovate. She asked about



Corn (continued)

moving back in, and was told no, the landlord's son wanted the apartment.



Herman

A tent on Rothschild Boulevard, and then four hundred thousand people in the streets. Over one apartment, and a mechanism that practically every renter in the country recognized.



Corn

What are the escape hatches? You mentioned the law has exclusions.



Herman

It excludes a few categories. Leases above twenty thousand shekels a month, leases under three months, leases over ten years where the landlord has no early termination right, and protected tenancies, which is a whole separate regime under the Tenants' Protection Law from 1972. Diyur mugan. That one is strong — rent-controlled, effectively permanent, can be passed to family in some cases. It applies to tenants who moved in before 1968, or who meet specific age and condition tests. Most renters today are not protected tenants and never will be.



Corn

So the strongest protection in Israeli law is basically a museum piece.



Herman

It is a window that closed and never reopened. Which is what makes the market behave the way it does. Contracts here are one to two years, almost never longer. There is a Jerusalem agent, Nachi Paris, who explains why — he says unlike the US it is very rare to see a landlord offer three to five years, because selling can be so lucrative that even long-term owners do not want to lock themselves into a long commitment.



Corn

Wait. That is backwards from what I would have assumed. I would have thought selling being lucrative makes a landlord want a longer tenant, steady income while he waits for the price.



Herman

No, the other way. If you have a renter locked in for five years, and a buyer walks up in year two offering something absurd, you cannot sell. So the landlord keeps his options open. Every tenant in the city is a placeholder for a sale that has not happened yet.



Corn

Tenants as an option the landlord is holding.



Herman

That is the structure. And it is not greed in the cartoon sense. It is that the market is priced so that optionality is worth more than rent.



Corn

Which is also why nobody built the alternative. Wasn't there some big institutional rental push?



Herman

Lapid's 2013 plan. Up to a hundred and fifty thousand long-term rental units, the idea being you get the pension funds and the insurance companies to build rental stock the way they do in Germany or the Netherlands. About eighteen thousand got built. Under one percent of the market. The reason is the return — rental complexes here return around two percent, against six or seven in Europe and the US. Camila Meyer Weissberg at Hebrew University laid that out. Nobody is going to build a hundred and fifty thousand units at two percent when government bonds pay more with no tenants.



Corn

So the institutional fix failed on arithmetic.



Herman

It failed on arithmetic before it failed on anything else. Twenty-nine percent of Israelis rent, and that number is going up, and the thing that was supposed to catch them never got built.



Corn

One more thing from the law and then I want to get to the noise. There is something Daniel said that I keep thinking about — that it feels degrading. Not the moving, the asking.



Herman

The asking. He had a roof leaking onto his bed, with a fifteen-month-old in the house, and he asked when it would be fixed. That is a request he was legally entitled to make. Section twenty-five het gives him three days.



Corn

And the answer was effectively: guess you are leaving.



Herman

The remedy existed. Exercising it ended the tenancy. That is the trap — the rights are real, and asserting them is the fastest way to lose the thing they are attached to.



Corn

Now. The noise.



Herman

The noise, yes. Daniel's line about this is the one I want to read back because it is almost a research question disguised as a complaint. He says the places were quiet when they viewed them, and ended up being extremely noisy after. And then he offers two explanations. The cynical one — agents plan when to show you the property. And the statistically informed one — that there is so much construction that the more centrally you live, the harder it is to avoid it for any stretch of time. He calls it a probability.



Corn

He is right, and the second explanation is much stronger than the first.



Herman

It is much stronger, and there is hard data on it. There was a municipal acoustics study for Jerusalem by an acoustician named Broner that documented exactly the situation Daniel describes. The reason is the redevelopment pattern — the two and three storey blocks that make up a lot of central Jerusalem get torn down and rebuilt at five or seven storeys. Which means major construction is happening within five to twenty metres of homes that are still occupied.



Corn

Five metres. That is someone else's wall.



Herman

Broner measured a piling rig working eight metres from an apartment facade, and it hit eighty-six decibels on a five minute average. The allowable figure is seventy-five. The contractor had to stop until a four metre acoustic barrier went up.



Corn

And this is not weather, it is not a one-off. What is the volume of it now?



Herman

Building starts in Jerusalem rose eighty-six percent between the middle of 2023 and the middle of 2024. There are close to five hundred towers of eighteen floors or more in the pipeline, and those add something like fifty-eight thousand units.



Corn

So a coin flip is generous. If you live centrally, the coin has construction on both sides.



Herman

And it is not only construction. The car park exhaust fan case from Broner — a fan a hundred and twenty metres away producing sixty-six decibels at the apartments, against a night standard of forty. That is a piece of machinery you cannot see producing three decibels over what a conversation sounds like, all night, through a wall.



Corn

Mahane Yehuda.



Herman

The Shuk. Residents five to twenty metres from it put up with people talking, shouting, laughing and sometimes loud music on a nightly basis. Music is meant to stop at eleven. Broner's paper is blunt that it often does not, and that when the police come and shut it down, half an hour later the music is back on until the early hours.



Corn

And then the two sources that are not construction and not nightlife at all, and I think these matter most because they are the ones you cannot move away from within the city — the muezzin, five times a day, the first somewhere between half past three and half past six depending on the season. And the synagogue music before Shabbat, which in some neighbourhoods is a public sound system, not an indoor one.



Herman

Those are not noise violations. They are the acoustic texture of the city, and for some people they are the reason they live here. Which is exactly what makes them impossible to plan around, because you cannot wait them out and you cannot complain them away.



Corn

Daniel used a phrase about the religiosity being coercive, and I do not think he meant the muezzin specifically. But when you are living on top of a sound you did not choose and cannot opt out of, five times a day, coercion is not a metaphor.



Herman

There is a Jerusalem Online piece from this spring that describes the centre — King George, Ben Yehuda, the Hamashbir plaza — as a permanent construction zone with no end in sight. The Purim parade route got rerouted around it this year. And the line from it that stuck with me is from David Tzabar, who wrote that people absorb the dust, the noise, the endless digging, and along the way they absorb the feeling that they are being treated like suckers.



Corn

Suckers is the right word for exactly what Daniel is describing. It is not the noise itself. It is that he did everything right and still ended up here.



Herman

And the residents do fight. A twenty-six storey tower in Baka went through over five hundred resident signatures. A forty-two storey building on Herzl Boulevard got approved despite hundreds of objections. The objections do not stop it.



Corn

The institutional answer is: absorb it.



Herman

That is the piece's argument, yes.



Corn

All right. So Daniel has a city that is noisy by structure, a lease that cannot outlast the lease, and a wife whose whole professional life points at the centre while his own nervous system points at somewhere quiet.



Herman

And here is the thing I want to be careful about. It would be easy to frame this as a fight about location. Hannah wants the middle, Daniel wants the edge. But I do not think that is what it is.



Corn

Go on, because I was thinking exactly that and I want to hear you talk yourself out of it.



Herman

The relocation literature gives a cleaner answer. There is a review from Heller going back to 1982 that found involuntary residential relocation frequently produces physical and emotional stress reactions. Farhall and colleagues looked at eighty-one involuntary movers and found a quarter of them met the criteria for what they called relocation trauma. And they found two things reduced it — more pre-move visits and a longer preparation period.



Corn

Preparation reduces trauma.



Herman

Preparation and familiarity reduce trauma. Which is a strange finding until you realize what it is actually measuring. What the movers needed was not a nicer apartment. They needed to not be surprised.



Corn

So Daniel's problem is not that he lives centrally. It is that he never knows how long it is for.



Herman

There is one more paper. Lee, Simpson and Froggatt, a narrative study of relocation, and the four themes that came out of it were control, power, identity and uncertainty. Read that list against Daniel's email.



Corn

Control. Power. Identity. Uncertainty.



Herman

He writes that it is degrading, speaking simply as a human. That is a sentence about power, not about square footage.



Corn

And "I never expected that in my late thirties I would be moving my own boxes." That is identity.



Herman

And the projector stand.



Corn

The projector stand. That is the detail that got me.



Herman

He is waiting on a projector stand to arrive. That is the last item, three months into the tenancy, before he can watch a film in his own home.



Corn

Not his own home. That is the point. Three months to get back to where he was — and where he was, as he puts it, was also a space he did not choose. It was just the best the market offered at the time.



Herman

Repeatedly expending effort just to get back to where you were. That is the sentence I would put at the top of the whole topic.



Corn

And the smart home side of it. Every move, the IP cameras get re-mounted, the network gets re-flashed, the automations get rebuilt. He is not just unpacking boxes, he is re-installing a whole nervous system for a house.



Herman

And getting it wrong twice, because the new place has a different router, a different layout, a different wall material.



Corn

It is an under-discussed cost of renting. The re-setup tax.



Herman

There is a version of this that the moving-cost statistics catch, and a version they miss. The money is well documented — Forbes found that people under-budget a move by an average of seven hundred and twenty-three dollars, and eighty percent of them end up needing extra funds. There is a twelvefold spread in quotes for a standard two bedroom local move. Twelvefold. Five hundred and twenty dollars on the low end, sixty-four hundred



Herman (continued)

on the high, across fifty-five movers.



Corn

Same apartment. Same distance. Twelve times the price.



Herman

And accessorial charges that only appear after the truck is unloaded. That is the money side. What is not in the statistics is the three months of evenings, the evening he spends re-pairing the camera, the router he has to reconfigure, the shelf that has to go up into studs in a wall he cannot drill into.



Corn

That is the part owners cannot visualize. They think moving is a truck.



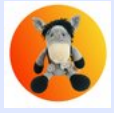
Herman

It is a truck, a weekend, and then three months of evenings.



Corn

So the shared need is predictability. Say it plainly.



Herman

The shared need is predictability. A long-term lease supplies some of it. A purchase supplies more. And a well-prepared criteria document supplies a surprising amount of it, because a big chunk of the stress is not knowing what you are looking for when you get there.



Corn

Which lands us on the framework. And I want to say something about the framing first, because Daniel does something interesting in the prompt.



Herman

He does. He says this is a pragmatic project — search criteria, finances, banks — but also a mental motivator. He says he needs to know deep down that he is working towards something concrete, to recover his mojo.



Corn

That second half is not a soft add-on. That is the mechanism. There is a body of work on this, on what people call the goal-gradient effect — the closer people perceive themselves to a goal, the more effort they put in. The problem with house hunting is that it has no finish line in sight. You save, and save, and the target moves.



Herman

So if the milestones are invisible, you build your own.



Corn

That is what the framework is for. It is not a spreadsheet. It is a set of visible markers so that the years between now and a purchase are not just years of waiting.



Herman

And Daniel has already half-built it. He says he is literally borrowing a chapter from How Warehouses Work. That phrasing is doing real work — the modular storage system, the labelling, the standard bins.



Corn

Let me come back to the storage. There is a punchline there that is coming, but it is not mine to deliver.



Herman

All right. So let's build the thing. Because this is the part of the prompt that is actually a design brief.



Corn

This is not a survey question. This is a build.



Herman

Daniel says be as detailed as possible setting out the idea, so let's be detailed. He has already described the container — a folder in a shared Drive. Hannah sketches, he writes lists. What he is missing is the structure inside it, and there is a reason it should be structured, which is that an unstructured folder becomes a graveyard.



Corn

Unstructured folders always die.



Herman

They die because they have no next action. So I would split it into two layers. The first is the layer that almost never changes — what I would call the Constitution. This has three parts: non-negotiables, deal-breakers, and preferences. The trick is the difference between the second and third. A deal-breaker kills the property on sight. A preference is a scored item in a comparison.



Corn

I have watched you build exactly this for a podcast workflow, so I know how much you care about that distinction.



Herman

The deal-breaker list is the one that has to be short. Ten entries maximum. If it is twenty, it is a preferences list wearing a costume.



Corn

And what goes in it? Give me the Daniel-and-Hannah version, not the abstract one.



Herman

Right. Non-negotiable for him is probably: the lease has to be at least three years, or the unit has to be owned outright. That is a single clause that solves about forty percent of the problem. Non-negotiable for her is probably: within a certain radius of her clients and the centre — she has already drawn that circle during the last search, and it should be drawn again, in ink, so the argument does not happen every time.



Corn

And the deal-breakers are the noise ones.



Herman

The deal-breakers are what is checkable before signing. No construction within a certain radius of the building — which you can check against the city's permit portal, by the way, and check whether the plot next door has an approved plan. Not on a street that is a documented late-night music zone. Those are all pre-signature checks.



Corn

The piece that Daniel cannot check before signing is the third one — the new build across the road that gets approved next year.



Herman

Which is why the second layer matters. That is the living layer. A search log. Every apartment they seriously consider gets one page: date seen, address, asking rent, the three things they noticed, and the decision. Within a year you have a dataset. You can see which of your criteria actually predict the thing you are trying to avoid.



Corn

And then a build layer for Hannah. She is an architect. Let her do what she is good at — plan sketches, sun studies, a mood board. That is not decoration. A layout drawing is a more precise expression of a criterion than a sentence can be.



Herman

There is a fifth folder I would add, and I would add it because of Daniel's own words. He says both of them are aligned in more places than meets the eye. So put that in writing. One page titled "Shared." Both of you have to sign it once, and it stays at the top of the folder, and it is the tie-breaker when a debate gets down to the wire.



Corn

The Shared page is the smartest thing you have said.



Herman

It is the one piece I would push hardest. Because it prevents the failure mode where the framework just becomes Daniel's list against Hannah's list, and the folder is a battlefield.



Corn

One more thing, and I will admit I have a stake in this one. A backup routine.



Herman

Yes.



Corn

A folder in a shared Drive is a very small container for something that is supposed to grow in value for three years. If the shared Drive goes down, or the account gets compromised, or somebody leaves a subscription lapse, the whole thing is gone.



Herman

So export it monthly. A dated snapshot, kept somewhere else. That is a two minute job that has saved me four times.



Corn

I know. I have watched you do it at midnight.



Herman

I have watched you not do it and lose a week's worth of notes.



Corn

That is fair. And it is the reason I trust the framework more than I trust the folder. The framework is a practice, not a document.



Herman

Which leads us back to what it is actually for. I do not think the point is the apartment. I think the point is that once every two weeks, Daniel and Hannah sit down for twenty minutes and talk about what they want, in a register that is not panic.



Corn

The panic register. Yes. The conversation that happens on the phone, in the car, outside the apartment they just saw, with a fifteen-month-old asleep in the back seat.



Herman

That conversation is the worst conversation in any couple's life. It is a decision being made under time pressure, with incomplete information, on a subject that neither of them has prepared for. And they are having it for the fifth time in a decade.



Corn

So the framework, at minimum, means that when the fifth call comes — and there will be a fifth call — they are not starting from zero. They have already decided the answers to forty questions.



Herman

That is the payoff. It is not that it gets them a better flat. It is that it removes the argument from the worst possible moment.



Corn

And the storage system angle. Daniel is proud of that one, and rightly. The modular bins mean the move itself is faster — pick up the labelled bins, put them down, plug the router back in. That is one less thing that has to be figured out every time.



Herman

It is. The one thing I would say as a caveat — a small one — is that the system costs attention too. Maintaining the labelling discipline costs time every week, and it is a tax you pay so the move is cheaper. Daniel has already decided he wants to pay it.



Corn

I want to hear about the card.



Herman

Hang on.



Corn

No, listen. There is a man at the mixing desk who has been holding a laminated card for the entire last hour and I can feel it.



Hilbert

That's not a laminated card, it's a wallet card. Lamination wears out at the fold. I've had a card in my wallet since — I don't know. Nineteen years? No. Eleven. Eleven years. It's a standard business card size, 8.5 by 5.4 centimetres, and it gets a new pencil line whenever I update it, because ink smears and I don't trust a pen on a card that old.



Corn

You carry a card with three columns on it.



Hilbert

Must. Must not. Maybe. That's not the interesting part, Corn. The interesting part is what's in the Must Not column right now. Ground floor. North-facing. Anywhere near a school. Landlords named Avi. There's one Avi on the card and I've never met an Avi who was a landlord. The first Avi was a man at a bus stop on Bar Ilan, maybe 2011, and I don't want to talk about that.



Corn

What did Avi at the bus stop do?



Hilbert

Nothing. Which was the whole problem. He stood there and did nothing while I was carrying a couch.



Corn

You were carrying a couch and a man named Avi watched.



Hilbert

He had a cart. He had a cart and he watched me carry a couch. That's worse than helping. That's the man hiring a cart so he doesn't have to help.



Herman

So you blacklisted all landlords named Avi.



Hilbert

I blacklisted all Avimen. And I'll say this: I haven't rented from one. Card holds.



Corn

How long did you work as a de-clutterer?



Hilbert

I wasn't a de-clutterer, I was a de-clutterer-adjacent. Look — I spent a summer with a family in Katamon who had four thousand books and no shelves, and I built a system for them. I've never moved anyone. I only clear out what people can't throw away.



Herman

Four thousand books is a library.



Hilbert

They had a small apartment and they loved the books. Both of those were true and I had to solve for both. I solved it with a spreadsheet and a colour-coding scheme that they didn't follow after I left. Which is fine. That's the job.



Corn

And the card. The card is your system for the same problem.



Hilbert

The card is my system for the same problem, and I want to tell you, Herman, that Daniel is doing it wrong. He's borrowing the warehouse chapter to organise his boxes. What he needs to organise is his criteria. He's got a warehouse for his things and a shoebox for his life plan.



Herman

That is a fair criticism. He's solved the physical half.



Hilbert

He's solved the easy half. The boxes are the easy half. The card is the hard half. You can buy a bin, you can't buy a decision about what you'll live next to. The card is for that.



Corn

Have you ever used the card to buy a house?



Hilbert

I have never bought a house. The Must column says "not Jerusalem." So I remain in Jerusalem. It's not a perfect system. It has saved me from three apartments and one marriage, though.



Herman

A marriage.



Hilbert

A long-term arrangement, let's say. She had a Must Not column and I didn't respect it. That's all I'll say about that.



Corn

What's in your Maybe column now?



Hilbert

You don't ask a man what's in his Maybe column.



Corn

Why not?



Hilbert

Because it's the column you're not sure about. If I told you, you'd argue with me, and then it wouldn't be a Maybe anymore.



Herman

That's actually a good point. The Maybe column is the one you don't want pressure on.



Hilbert

Thank you, Herman. Corn, take notes.



Corn

I'm taking notes. Can we see the card?



Hilbert

No. It's personal.



Corn

It says "ground floor, north-facing, anywhere near a school, landlords named Avi."



Hilbert

It says more than that. It says more than that and you can't see it. Also I have to go, I have a thing.



Herman

A thing.



Hilbert

It's the day for it. Good show.



Corn

So the card is real. Let's leave the card there and pull the threads together.



Herman

The card is real, and I want to be honest with you about what I take from it. What I take from it is that Daniel is halfway to the right idea and he has not yet noticed he is halfway. He has built a physical system for a set of things he can move, and the thing he has not built a system for is the set of things he cannot move, which is the criteria themselves.



Corn

The criteria are the thing that outlives the apartment. If they buy in five years, the criteria travel with them. If they never buy, the criteria still get them a better rental.



Herman

That is exactly the shape of it. And I'd add one thought that I want to land carefully. The law is not going to fix itself. Twenty-nine percent of Israelis rent and that number is rising. The institutional solution was tried, it was priced out, and it failed. The people who are going to build a personal system for living with this are the renters themselves.



Corn

Which sounds like a bitter thing to say. I do not mean it that way. I mean it as: the tools are real, and they work.



Herman

The tools work. The one I would want them to start with is the Shared page. One page, both signatures, top of the folder. What do we both actually want. It is the sort of thing that gets easier the sooner you start it and harder the longer you wait.



Corn

The forward-looking version of that — the version I keep coming back to — is that the market has started to talk about stability. There is a line from the Housing Ministry's director general that people want stability and long-term living security whether they rent from a company or an individual, and the ministry just has to identify what works. That is not the ministry identifying it. That is a gap being described.



Herman

It is a gap. And the gap closes one of two ways: either the market produces a product that actually offers tenure, or renters build the habits themselves. Right now, the second is the only one moving.



Corn

To Daniel, then. Land in the Shared page. The bins are already done.



Herman

The card says keep the deal-breakers short.



Corn

Thanks to our producer, Hilbert Flumingtop. If you enjoyed this one, try episode forty nineteen, Why Moving in Israel Feels So Brutal; episode thirty-eight twenty-two, Settled But Move-Ready; and episode two thirty, Building a Portable Home in a Brutal Rental Market. This has been My Weird Prompts.



Herman

Send us your own prompt on Telegram at t dot me slash MWP listener bot. We'll be back soon.

SOURCES

What the research for this episode read before the script was written. Primary sources first.

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