

## Yoma 18b

”וַיֵּצֵא אֶחָד אֶל הַשָּׂדֶה לְלַקֵּט אֹרוֹת”, תִּנָּא מִשְׁמִיָּה דְרַבִּי מֵאִיר: זֶה גְרָגִיר. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: לָמָּה נִקְרָא שְׁמֵן “אֹרוֹת” — שְׁמֵאִירוֹת אֶת הָעֵינַיִם. אָמַר רַב הוֹנָא: הַמוֹצִיא גְרָגִיר, אִם יָכוֹל לְאָכְלוֹ אוֹכְלוֹ, וְאִם לֹא — מִעֲבִירוֹ עַל גְּבִי עֵינָיו. אָמַר רַב פֶּפְּא: בְּגָרְגִיר מִצְרָנָא.

“Apropos” (the arugula plant), the Gemara cites a verse: **“And one of them went out into the fields to collect orot”** (II Kings 4:39). It was **taught in the name of Rabbi Meir** with regard to *orot* in this verse: **This is** the plant called **arugula**. **Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Why are these arugula plants called orot?** It is because **they enlighten [me’irof] the eyes**. **Rav Huna said:** With regard to **one who finds arugula, if he can eat it, he eats it, and if not, he passes it over his eyes**, as that too is beneficial. **Rav Pappa said: Arugula** is most effective when it grows **on the border** of the field, where it is unadulterated by other plants.

## Parshat Behar (Leviticus 25: 3-4)

שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כַּרְמְךָ וְאִסַּפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ:

Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield.

וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאֶרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה שְׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר:

But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

When the Talmud goes out on a botanical tangent, do we recognize it as “Torah mi”Sinai”, as a teaching that were passed down to the sages directly from Moses? Sometimes these asides can seem quirky and out of place but is it really fair to treat them as secondary when we believe that the Talmud was divinely inspired?

In Yoma 18b we come across a few lines on Rav Huna’s and Rabbi Yochanan’s opinions that wild arugula is beneficial for vision and that one should either eat it or pass it over their eyes if they come across it growing along the edges of a field. Arugula, particularly the wild cultivars, contain high levels of Vitamin A and C, which are both indeed beneficial for the eyes. Though wild arugula (*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*) has recently regained popularity as a nutrient dense “superfood”, the overwhelming trend in agriculture over the last millennia has been to move away from wild varieties and breed or genetically modify crops for yield, appearance, uniformity, and pesticide resistance rather than nutritional benefits and soil health.

In this week's parshiot Behar and Bechukotai we come across the concepts of Shmita and Yovel- the jubilees of the 7th and 50th years where there will be complete agricultural rest for the land. During this year the wild things take over- such as the beneficial wild arugula mentioned in Yoma 18b. Without our interference the wild ecosystems and the corners of the field can balance themselves and we can step back and appreciate our presence in the perfect order of G-d's creation. If a little, unassuming weed can spark a discussion amongst multiple sages, perhaps we should hold in higher regard the lessons that the wild spaces can teach us- and the lessons we have yet to uncover.

-Hannah Tsimmerman