

Sisterhood Shabbat – D'var Torah

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When I was first asked to write the dvar for today's torah portion, I was honored and excited. I am a bit of a geek. I love diving into text, discussing it, reading different commentaries but most of all I love the challenge of finding the relevancy of the text and connecting it to experiences we can all relate to. Then I read today's parsha, B'har and boy did I feel challenged. B'har is in Leviticus which we know is chock full of laws and short on plot. B'har in a nutshell is about the mitzvah of shmittah, every 7 years farmers are forbidden to work on the land and the land rests. Every 50 years is a Jubilee year and, on this year, in addition to the land resting all slaves are set free.

Finding a way to connect to this parsha was very tricky for me. I am not a farmer, I don't particularly like manual labor or even nature. It took some soul searching, I then came to realize that I kind of actually am a farmer (in a sense), all of us sitting here today are a special type of farmers, and Har Shalom is our land. We **plant** seeds here by raising our children, (and if not raising your own children, I would like to thank all of you who are helping us raise our children). We **plow** and **tend** to the land as we sit on committees, volunteer our time, plan events. We **harvest** the land as we attend these events and programs together, and by the sharing of our spiritual selves. We **reap** the benefits of the seeds we planted and nourished by worshiping, celebrating and mourning together and just by being a present in this incredible community.

What about this idea of shmittah? This commandment that the land must rest. Shmittah is in essence, the Earth's Shabbat, the sabbatical year for the land. Just like we work every day for six days and rest every seventh day for Shabbat, farmers are permitted to work for six years sowing, planting and harvesting, but on the seventh year (the shmittah) the land must be allowed to rest and there is no sowing, planting or harvesting. It is implied that for six years the farmers reap the benefits of their labor and feed their own families, and perhaps even receive a profit for the time, energy and labor they devoted to the land. However, it states in the parsha that on the seventh year when the land is resting, anything that grows, any produce, is available for free, to any person or "beast". It does not matter where the produce grows, if you helped plant, plow or sow, anything that grows from the ground, belongs to whomever wants the produce. This concept gave me pause. It is in stark contrast to the six years prior when everyone worked as individuals. Suddenly you are expected to live communally when previously you were working hard, looking out for yourself and your family. G-d literally created a time and space that you not only have to accept anyone can eat what grows on your land, but you have to trust that the land will provide what you need. This is asking **a lot** of the farmers.

Here at Har Shalom we are one dynamic community (humor me- farm). However, I am going to go out on a limb and say that we are actually a community comprised of micro communities (or, many small farms). If I ask you to reflect on what group you most closely identify with at Har Shalom, I think it would probably be easy for you to identify one or two communities. Perhaps it is the havurah you have been part of since your children were little, sisterhood, or men's club, other families in the ECC or religious school, empty nesters, etc. Each of these groups is their own microcommunity that has their own farm. They plant their own seeds, tend their own crops and often reap their own harvest. It is appropriate and expected that we all look out for our own farms to make sure they are growing and thriving. Each microcommunity is working as an individual (just like the farmers do for the 6 years leading up to Shmittah). Although, I

mentioned at the beginning that Leviticus is short on plot and long on laws, it is lucky to have parameters set for you. The farmers knew that every 7th year they lived communally. We do not have the gift of having such parameters set for us in our community. We need our smaller groups to sometimes take their shmittah, rest, and look at the bigger picture. What happens when we stop focusing on our needs, and offer the produce from our land for free to the other groups? Sometimes it is less about doing, planning and fundraising, and more about resting so that we can pause and listen to what the greater community needs to survive at the moment. I ask you; how often do we need our groups to take this pause to help maintain the health of the community? When do we survive as individual groups and when do we survive communally?

The parsha also reassures us that we do not need to worry about survival during shmittah because the harvest in the sixth year will provide enough sustenance for 3 years; the sixth year (the year before shmittah), the year of shmittah, the year after (because nothing was planted). I feel it is vital to remember that the land the farmers worked so hard to sustain for 6 years, continues to sustain them even when they are not working. As individuals at Har Shalom you may feel overwhelmed at times when we are looking at things through only your own perspective, "I don't have the energy to volunteer at one more kiddush, why don't other people help?" "Why am I always the one volunteering to be on committees?" I believe just like the farmers were provided for during the year of Shmittah, we also can trust that if we need to step back and give ourselves a rest, just like G-d provided for the farmers, our community will continue to provide for you. It is vital that we take our own temperature and make our own Shmittah when we feel we might burn out. The community that everyone of us works hard to sustain, will also sustain you.

The theme of individualism vs. collectivism really struck me as powerful in this parsha. I find it beautiful the harmony that is written into the portion of having the farmers live both ways. I imagine the struggle was frustrating and scary. I learn from this portion that it is incredibly powerful and important to have a balance of individualism and collectivism for the land to be able to rejuvenate and continue providing. Our greater community is so strong because of these many smaller communities, I challenge us to know when we as individuals and when as communities we need our shmittah so that the land is rejuvenated and continues to sustain for generations to come.