

Preparing to mark the next sabbatical year

One of the things I appreciate most about the Jewish calendar is that the flow of time in our tradition is not linear. Rather, time cycles, gifting us opportunities for reflection, readjustment and renewal. One of the rhythms of the Jewish calendar is the weekly cycle of seven: six work days followed by Shabbat, a celebration of sacred time, when we embrace stillness, pausing from creating, thereby energizing the period of creativity that follows. The week is not the only cycle of seven that marks Jewish time: the Torah mandates us to observe a cycle of seven years, culminating in shmittah, a year-long experience of Shabbat for our agricultural,

community and economic structures.

In Shmot (Exodus), immediately following revelation at Sinai, God presents the Israelites with a set of moral codes to live by. Included in the collection of ethical teachings meant to guide our ancestors as they prepared to settle in the land of Israel, is the commandment to observe shmittah, a biblically mandated “sabbatical year” of rest and



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release.

“Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but in the seventh year, you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave, let the wild beasts eat of it. You shall do the same with your vineyards and olive groves.” (Exodus 23:10-11)

From these passages, our rabbis learned that during this year, there

was no seeding or tilling the soil, private land holdings become open to the commons, every Israelite had equal access to food storage and perennial/wild harvests, and foods were not sold as a commodity in the marketplace.

From an environmental and social justice perspective, shmittah is a radical readjustment of our agricultural and commercial systems, meant to ensure an equitable, just and healthy society. Shmittah presents us with a paradigm for a resilient, whole-systems culture, one in which everyone shares in abundance. Shmittah is a blueprint for a value system grounded

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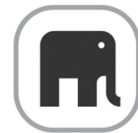
To all of our clients, friends and business associates, we at Goldman Sloan Nash & Haber LLP extend our sincere wishes for a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

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Food issues are Jewish issues

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in vibrant, healthy and diverse relations between community, ecology, economy and spirit.

While observance of shmittah is only mandated in biblical Israel, the great equalizing that is at the core of shmittah is more relevant today than ever. Food today is complicated.

Is it locally grown? Is it sustainably produced? Is it kosher? Does it contain genetically modified ingredients? What is

the packaging made of? Was the farmer paid a living wage? How were the animals raised? How were they slaughtered? Is it organic? Is it too expensive? Is it not expensive enough?

We live in a society where you can eat fresh strawberries in January; where it is illegal to keep chickens in our own backyards; where we often depend on certifying agencies to tell us if something is organic, fair trade, or kosher; where government regulations strongly favour agribusiness over agriculture; where there are people in our community who are hungry and undernourished, not because of a problem with food production, but because we have a real problem with food distribution. Shmittah teaches us that contemporary food issues such as genetic engineering, factory farming, global food systems, environmental degradation and hunger relief are Jewish issues. Jewish texts and teachings are clear – there are rules that govern our relationship with food – how we grow it, how we prepare it, how we eat it and how we share it with others. The shmittah cycle is one piece of the Jewish food puzzle, helping ensure that our community has fair and equal access to resources, while also ensuring the ultimate health and sustainability of the land that sup-

ports us.

The next shmittah year begins Rosh Hashanah 2014. So what does *next* year's shmittah year have to do with making *this* year meaningful? According to Avoda Zara 3a, "One who prepared before Shabbat will eat on Shabbat; but one who didn't prepare before Shabbat, what will he eat on the Shabbat?" Just as one needs to prepare for Shabbat, we as a community need to prepare for shmittah. For those of us living outside of biblical Israel that means thinking about the challenges we face in our current food system and thinking hard about what we as a community can do in 5775 to honour and embrace the balancing energy of shmittah. What would it look like for our community to commit to making 5775 a year of equal distribution of resources, of environmental rest and release? What systems do we need to put in place now in order to support such a radical realignment? How can we as individuals, organizations and a community work to connect



Shoresh's executive director Risa Cooper, bottom right, invited senior kindergarten Leo Baeck students to help harvest the Atomic Red Carrots they planted as junior kindergarten students the previous spring.

the values of shmittah to our world today?

Wishing you all a meaningful 5774 and looking forward to celebrating shmittah together as a community in 5775.

Risa Alyson Cooper is the executive director of Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs and is busy studying the principles of shmittah and considering how Shoresh will mark the next shmittah year.

*Our best wishes
to you for a happy,
healthy and peaceful
New Year.*

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