

Shmitah- Shabbat morning Torah study, 5780

Next Shmita year: 5782 (2021/22).

“If you make a few tweaks to the shutdown, add in spending face-to-face time with friends, hugs, singing together—plus the *Shmitah* rules that guarantee everyone has enough food and no one owes money—then it all looks downright glorious. We are also getting a taste of what the natural world might look like when we really rest, because so many people are getting to see more wildlife and distant mountains and stars, have more quiet, breathe cleaner air.

“The alternative to letting the land rest, as the second *parshah* of this week’s double portion teaches, is grim: famine and plagues and war and exile.

“And we are getting a taste of that too, because this plague of COVID-19 comes in a roundabout way from not letting the land rest....

“The Maharal (Yehuda Loew of Prague) taught: “When there is ‘wasted Torah’ and the crooked distortion of law, these punishments of plague and famine and war and exile are what rightly happen. For the Torah is the order of the world, and so is Justice the repair (*tikkun*) of the order of the world, so that through Justice comes order. And when people depart from the world’s order, the world goes out of order through the four punishments, which are a complete departure from the right order.” (*Netivot Olam, Netiv Hadin* 2:3)

“If that’s just some pious theological mumbo jumbo, if the fertility and security of the land don’t depend on justice, then we have a fantasy covenant, not a real one. But if we do have a real covenant, it cares about strangers and says that we too are strangers. That’s the foundation of justice according to Torah. The alternative, in the words of this week’s Haftarah (Jeremiah 17:4), is that we will be released from the land.

“The rabbis teach that not letting the land rest leads to the Jewish people being exiled from the land. *Rachman lits’lan*, maybe we should stop testing whether that principle is real.”

(Rabbi David Seidenberg,

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/can-covid-teach-us-about-shmitah-irl/>)

“Covid-19 is showing us that when humanity is united in common cause, phenomenally rapid change is possible. None of the world’s problems are technically difficult to solve; they originate in human disagreement. In coherency, humanity’s creative powers are boundless. A few months ago, a proposal to halt commercial air travel would have seemed preposterous. Likewise for the radical changes we are making in our social behavior, economy, and the role of government in our lives. Covid demonstrates the power of our collective will when we agree on what is important. What else might we achieve, in coherency? What do we want to achieve, and what world shall we create? That is always the next question when anyone awakens to their power”.

https://charleseisenstein.org/essays/the-coronation/?_page=2

Preparations for the next Shmita year:

- Where do I see myself in five years? How will I have grown and changed?
- What changes would I like to see take place in my own life? In my family? In my community?
- What practical steps can I take to lead a more sustainable life?
- How can I support a long-term five- or seven-year vision for my personal progress? The progress of my family? The progress of my synagogue (or other communal institutions)?
- Are there actions in which I can engage to provide for the environment and/or the needy in my immediate vicinity?
- What goals can I set for myself to make a plan of action to accomplish this long-term vision?