

YOM KIPPUR DVAR 5782

Let's see...the last time we gathered for a holiday it was...Rosh HaShana, just ten days ago. Remember? People lit up at seeing each other's faces in person or online, at hearing and singing with Azameira and others, of celebrating a new year...AND we noticed the poignancy or not being all in one place...yet again.

We also talked about hope — how to find, and/or regain, and/or maintain, audacious hope in the face of...everything — COVID, the rapidly accelerating pace of climate change, and the ongoing damage caused by acute and chronic racial and economic injustices.

Yes, we talked about hope in the face of all this, and found inspiration in bold and visionary poetry.

And we talked about the *shmita* year, the last year of the seven-year agricultural cycle in the Torah, when farmers were instructed to let the land lie fallow, to let the earth rest. And debt was to be forgiven. And those in need were to be fed, along with the farmer and all the people and animals in their household.

So now, as we begin this Yom Kippur day, as we take stock of our missed marks, our deepest yearnings, our most profound hopes, we have the opportunity to dive still a little deeper.

We do this because our human-ness requires a reset now and then in order for us to be fully aligned with what we want and need and believe. Our *kavannah*, our sacred intention for this day, is to find our way back to our best, most loving, most aligned selves.

But you know, it seems so easy to lose our footing when we're trying to find our way, especially when things are changing quickly, or are unfamiliar.

I've been thinking a lot about losing one's footing when trying to find one's way. As many of you know, I broke my foot two days after arriving in Ithaca just a couple of months ago. Here I was about to start a new job, in a new place, on all new territory. So after a stressful cross country move, and

in a moment when my wife and I were in our new house but without our furniture having arrived yet, and as I was trying to show someone a trip hazard on the far side of the living room from where I was standing, my feet and I didn't remember that there are a couple of stairs going down to the living room of this unfamiliar house, and I fell down those stairs, landed on the floor, and broke a bone in my foot.

Now, the good news is bones heal, and as that healing has happened, I've also met many people in and beyond TVO who've been enormously helpful (thank you!) My wife stepped in to do all the driving and shopping for the household, tasks we'd normally share. Over the days and weeks, we began settling into our house, and getting ourselves oriented here in Ithaca. All of this helped.

Oh, and I was forced to rest — grudgingly at first, I admit. It seemed like there was just so much to do just to feel somewhat normal in a new place. But in order to heal, I had to give my foot, well, myself really, a Shabbat of sorts — which brings me to a little Torah.

The Torah uses the term *Shabbat Shabbaton*, (a great shabbat or a shabbat of total rest) in three ways: (1) to describe Shabbat, the weekly practice of complete rest for each and all of us and in honor of creation); (2) Yom Kippur. That's right, Yom Kippur is also a *shabbat shabbaton*, a Shabbat of rest and release, perhaps for our emotional and spiritual debts; and (3) the *shmita* year is called a *shabbat shabbaton la-aretz* (a complete rest and release for the land. And as we've discussed before, it was also a time of release for those in debt, and a respite for those in need. And in Torah economics, the need for debt to be released was intimately connected to the working and harvesting of the land.

This really isn't so different from our own economic system, in that the way crops are grown, and goods are produced, and debt is accrued, and the wealth gap goes unchecked, and the ways people work throughout the economy to make food and goods available to masses of people, these things are inter-related. A crucial difference, though, is that we don't have a *shmita* to set things back in balance.

But what if we could dream one up and make it happen with all the necessary activism, practices and policies? What if we could figure out as a society just what a *shabbat shabbaton* is in our generations?

Now, I found seven references in Torah to the words *shabbat* and *shabbaton* being used contiguously in the same verse.*

Seven. A fitting number, don't you think? I mean, given the seven days in the creation story, and the seven days of the week, and Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur falling in the seventh month of the year, and the seven years comprising the agricultural cycle. Seven seems an apt number of references to this idea of *shabbat shabbaton*.

Again, these references are all reminders to rebalance ourselves, regularly, in a variety of ways, because we need it, the earth and all that live upon it need it. And it's not that the Source and Force of Life (what we often call God) needs it exactly, but it does seem to be required if we are to be aligned with the needs of Life on this planet.

So anyways, back to my own balancing act, and what that has to do with Shabbat and Shmita.

I've begun, little by little, the ongoing process of reclaiming my balance. A wonderful physical therapist recommended I try doing a walking meditation each day. She suggested walking in slow motion, feeling the bones, muscles and sinews of my foot, the interconnected parts, reconnecting my foot to the ground, or floor in this case, on which I walk. It's been great for my recovery.

But something else has also happened. In the process of reacquainting my foot with the floor, I realized that my whole body was reawakening, my spine moving more fluidly than it had in some time, likely since before COVID times, and although my balance isn't yet fully reclaimed, I can tell that I am moving, or have the potential to move, more consciously than before the fall, to move on the new territory of my life in a new way.

In the times we're in, any of us may feel we are, in some way, finding ourselves in new territory and losing our balance. So how can we make healing happen with a combination of the goodness inherent in the broken pieces, and the transformational potential of our heightened consciousness?

How can we use our feelings, our intelligence, our wisdom, our bones and muscles and sinews, to map out a new mobile pattern onto the floor, onto the

earth, re-minding ourselves of our balance, our weight, our weightiness, our lightness?

How do we remain upright in gravity as needed, our spines sturdy and flexible? How do we build resiliency for the occasional fall? How do we allow for the need for repose? How do we use our missing of the marks to learn and also forgive emotional debt that no longer serves us or others?

How do we build into our lives and consciousness a sense of *shabbat shabbaton*?

Because the question isn't whether or not we'll lose our balance...we almost certainly will...humanness being what it is. The question is, when we find ourselves on the ground, our broken parts hurting, our grief exposed, what needs loving and compassionate attention first?

Is it the pain, the swelling of body or emotion? Perhaps we do this quietly on our own, or perhaps with the help of a loving friend or companion or community member.

Perhaps we need rest, to allow for the healing, not as a stopping point, but as a Shabbat of sorts. [Hint: this may require the support of others, too.]

And then? Perhaps attention to what was off balance before the fall. Reconnecting with our wholeness, in body, mind spirit, whatever in us needs reintroducing to the fertile soil of our humanity.

And what else? Well, there's doing this together sometimes. Finding allies. Working in community. Exploring together how we can walk differently, with increased consciousness, compassion, and the highest regard for ourselves and others?

I'm reminded of Moses here. One day, he was peacefully tending his sheep in Midian, having long since left the pain and suffering of his youth, when he came upon a burning bush that somehow was not consumed by the fire.

Surely, I imagine, he was thrown off by this unfamiliar sight. And as he stood there off balance, staring into the fire, he heard the Source of Life telling him, "Take off your shoes. The place you're standing on is holy ground."

The fire was like a passionate heart catapulting him into compassionate action for the sake of justice. But in order to fully take in the burning need in front of him, in order to fully hear his calling and see the vision before him, he first needed to connect his broken parts with the earth, to physically return to himself. *Teshuvah*.

So I ask, while you've been tending the fields of your life this past year, do you find yourself in new territory, and if so, what have you discovered in this new terrain? What new sights have surprised you? What's thrown you off balance, and how have you regained your equilibrium?

What kind of *shabbat shabbaton* do you need this year? And what sort of *shabbat shabbaton* do you wish to create or encourage in the world?

The world, said the ancient rabbis, rests upon three things — *Torah* (wisdom teachings, which in this case means from all who have wisdom to offer); *avodah* (service, in this case action for the sake of justice, love, vision, healing, and balance); and *gemillut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness). Here in TVO, and probably right inside your home, or just outside your door, there are numerous opportunities to engage with these three things. Let's set our sites on them this year. Let's make a new year's resolution to help each other realign with our clearest visions — our grounded, hopeful, audacious visions.

Let's start today with *teshuvah* — reckoning, and realigning with our best and most compassionate, most earth-loving, and most justice-seeking selves

If not now, when?

Gmar chatima tova.

*I used my trusty Sefaria app to look up references to *shabbat shabbaton*. Ask me if you want to know more. It's a great resource.