

Rosh Hashanah Family Learning

The Jewish year of 5782 is the final year in a seven year agricultural cycle described in the *Torah* called *shmita*- a sabbatical year- where the land lays fallow from agricultural activity. *Shmita* is a time when all debts are forgiven and slaves are set free. Traditionally, *shmita* is a time to rest, reflect, and recharge. This *Rosh Hashanah* text study focuses on answering one important question- **How can each of us observe a *shmita* of our own? How can we incorporate the ideals of *shmita* into our lives?**

Source - *Vayikra* 25: 3-4

שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כַּרְמְךָ וְאַסַּפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ:

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

וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאַרְץ שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה שָׂדֶךְ 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.

Parashat Behar continues to describe *shmita* as a year when nothing can be planted and any food that grows naturally should be free for anyone to take. Within the discussion of *shmita*, there are many details about what happens during that seventh year and verses that talk about how we are supposed to treat people in business, relate to the stranger and help the needy.

Source - *Vayikra* 25: 35

וְכִי־יָמוּךְ אֲחִיךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחַזַּקְתָּ בּוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחֵי עִמָּךְ:

And should your relative come to [financial] ruin and s/he stumbles, you shall uphold her/him as though a sojourning settler, and s/he shall live with you.

The commentator, *Rashi* (**Rabbi Shimon Yitzchaki**), asks, what does the verse mean when it says וְהִחַזַּקְתָּ בּוֹ- you should uphold her/him?

What do you think? Discuss it at your table.

Rashi shares that if we see someone start to fall, we should not wait until they have totally failed to offer help. We should help our friend as soon as we see them having a hard time. *Rashi* shares the image of a donkey carrying an extra-large load.



If someone is there to help the donkey while it starts to stumble, the donkey and its load will be okay. But if a person waits for the donkey to fall over, it will be almost impossible to get the donkey up with all it is carrying. In the same way, if someone starts to struggle financially, we should help them before they lose all of their money.

Questions for discussion:

What does this verse teach us about our responsibility to our community?

How can we incorporate this teaching on a day-to-day basis?

What is the difference between this and tzedaka?

This verse seems to be teaching us that it is important to help people before their situation gets worse. Why is that important?



Points to Ponder

This verse may teach us to be aware of people in our community and make sure they are okay; to not wait until people ask for help but to offer help before it is obviously needed; to be thoughtful and help people maintain their dignity.

This highlights the importance the Torah places on creating a thoughtful and sensitive community. Not only do we let the land rest and behave thoughtfully about how we relate to the land, but we also try to create a community that is thoughtful about its people as well. We do not want to wait for someone to be in dire straits before we help them! Rather, we want people to feel noticed and supported, and in this way create a holistic community of caring.

How can you incorporate this lesson into your daily life? Talk about it at your table.



All You Ever Wanted to Know About Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is the birthday of the universe and the day God created Adam and Eve. It begins at sundown on the eve of *Tishrei 1* (Sept. 6, 2021) and ends after nightfall on *Tishrei 2* (Sept. 8, 2021).

The central observance of Rosh Hashanah is blowing the *shofar* (ram's horn) on both mornings of the holiday (except on Shabbat), which is normally done in synagogue as part of the day's services but may be done elsewhere for those who cannot attend. It is a day of prayer, a time to ask God to grant us a year of peace, prosperity and blessing. But it is also a joyous day when we proclaim God as King of the Universe.

Rosh Hashanah feasts traditionally include round challah (studded with raisins) and apples dipped in honey, as well as other foods that symbolize our wishes for a sweet year.



Together with *Yom Kippur* (which follows 10 days later), it is part of the *Yamim Nora'im* (Days of Awe, or High Holidays).

On the first afternoon of Rosh Hashanah (if it is not Shabbat), it is customary to go to a body of water (ocean, river, pond, etc.) and perform the *Tashlich* ritual. We ceremonially cast our sins into the water. With this tradition, we are symbolically evoking the verse, "And You shall cast their sins into the depths of the sea." The short prayer for this service can be found in your *machzor*.

