

Some of our Class resources between the dates June 16. 2020 – Nov. 3 2020

Eric Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (p.16):

There is a fundamental difference “between a society centered around persons and one centered around things”. [Source sheet from Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/18635?lang=bi>]

R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (p.51):

The Halakhah consider[s] the steady oscillating of the man of faith between majesty and covenant not as a dialectical, but rather as a complementary movement....The Halakhah has a monistic approach to reality and has unreservedly rejected any kind of dualism. The Halakhah believes that there is only one world – not devisable into secular and hallowed sectors....Accordingly, the task of covenantal man is to be engaged not in dialectical surging forward and retreating, but in uniting the two communities into one community where man is both the creating free agent, and the obedient servant of God.

[Source sheet from Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/18635?lang=bi>]

What is *your* Land that you must let go of?

“During the Shmitah, and Israelite lets go of the land, from where he was taken, and to which he will return.... translated into a contemporary tongue, we can say that during the Shmitah year a person must disengage from his day to day, from his daily work, from his computer screen, from his house of business. He should dedicate the year to humanity. To fulfil his social responsibility”

[Aviad HaCohen (2011) Parshiyot U'Mishpatim, p. 264. Tel Aviv.]

Debt and loans:

Rabbi Abba said that Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: One who loans another money is greater than one who gives him charity. And the one who places money into a common purse, i.e., one who enters into a partnership with a needy person, is the greatest of them all, since in that case the needy person is not embarrassed when receiving the assistance. (BT, Shabbat, 63a)

There are eight levels of *tzedakah*, each one greater than the other. The greatest level, higher than all the rest, is to fortify a fellow Jew and give him a gift, a loan, form with him a partnership, or find work for him, until he is strong enough so that he does not need to ask others [for sustenance]. Of this it is said, (Lev. 25:35) [*If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by*

your side. That is as if to say, “*Hold him up,*” so that he will not fall and be in need. (*Rambam, Mishne Torah, Seder Zera'im, Gifts to the poor, 10.7*)

G'mach:

An abbreviation for חסדים גמילות, *gemilut chasadim*, “acts of kindness”, is a Jewish free-loan fund which subscribes to both the positive Torah commandment of lending money and the Torah prohibition against charging interest on a loan to a fellow Jew. ([click here for more](#))

Example:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yad_Sarah

<https://www.jewishedmonton.org/about-us/board/local-partners-beneficiaries/jewish-free-loan-association-of-edmonton>

Prozbul

[A loan secured by] a prozbul is not cancelled. This was one of the things enacted by Hillel the elder; for when he observed people refraining from lending to one another, and thus transgressing what is written in the Torah, “Beware, lest you harbor the base thought, [‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching,’ so that you are mean to your needy kinsman and give him nothing.” Hillel enacted the prozbul.

This is the formula of the prozbul: “I turn over to you, so-and-so, judges of such and such a place, that any debt that I may have outstanding, I shall collect it whenever I desire.” And the judges sign below, or the witnesses. (*Mishnah, Shviit, 10:3-4*)

....A further question raised by the Gemara in *Gittin* 36a is whether the *takkana* (regulation) was instituted by Hillel for all times or only for the generation in which he lived, which was wracked by great political and financial woes. Determining Hillel’s intent is crucial. If he ruled only for his own generation but thereafter people continued the practice of their own volition, then any later *beth din* may alter or suspend his *takkana* as it sees fit. However, if his regulation was instituted as a permanent one, it would require a *beth din* which is “greater in number and in wisdom” than the one which ordained the rule in the first place, to cancel it. It goes without saying that no *beth din* in later generations is greater than the one over which Hillel the Elder presided. Consequently, the *pruzbul* must be considered a permanent regulation, even if the reason for instituting the regulation in the first place no longer applies.¹²

The Gemara concludes that Hillel instituted the *pruzbul* for all future generations, but that it is valid only if executed by a Jewish court of experts, all of whom are well versed in the laws of *shemita* and who have been appointed as judges by the people of their city.¹³ The Meiri¹⁴ opines that since we no longer have judges of this caliber, we should not rely on

^a *pruzbul*. Ramo, however, rules that any *beth din* is qualified to write a *pruzbul*, because it is a rabbinic law.¹⁵ / <https://www.jlaw.co/articles/pruzbul/>

Jul. 28. 2020

Enslavement:

If your kinsman under you continues in straits and must give himself over to you, do not subject him to the treatment of a slave. He shall remain with you as a hired or bound laborer; he shall serve with you only until the jubilee year. Then he and his children with him shall be free of your authority; he shall go back to his family and return to his ancestral holding.— For they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt; they may not give themselves over into servitude.— You shall not rule over him ruthlessly; you shall fear your God. Such male and female slaves as you may have—it is from the nations round about you that you may acquire male and female slaves. You may also buy them from among the children of aliens resident among you, or from their families that are among you, whom they begot in your land. These shall become your property: you may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property for all time. Such you may treat as slaves. But as for your Israelite kinsmen, no one shall rule ruthlessly over the other. (Lev. 25:39-46)

When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod, and he dies there and then, he must be avenged. But if he survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, since he is the other's property. (Exodus 21:20-21)

מכה איש ומת מות יומת:

He who fatally strikes a man shall be put to death.

(Exodus 21:12)

לֹא־תִסְגֹּר עֶבֶד אֶל־אֲדֹנָיו אֲשֶׁר־יִנָּצֵל אֵלָיךְ מֵעַם אֲדֹנָיו: עַמְּךָ יֵשֵׁב בְּקִרְבְּךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחָר בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּטוֹב לוֹ לֹא תוֹנֶנּוּ

You shall not turn over to his master a slave who seeks refuge with you from his master. He shall live with you in any place he may choose among the settlements in your midst, wherever he pleases; you must not ill-treat him. (Deut. 23: 16-17)

Aug. 4 2020: City and Field:

<<city and wild - Enkidu and Gilgamesh.pdf>>

Aug. 18 2020: **Prophetic warning and blessing**

The Therapeutic Power of Gardening

What is Climate Grief?

Sep. 1 2020:

Shmitah as a marker of time:

שְׁנַת יוֹבֵל אֵינָה עוֹלָה מִמִּנְיַן שְׁנֵי הַשָּׁבוּעִים. אֲלָא שְׁנַת תְּשַׁע וָאַרְבָּעִים שָׁמֻשָּׁה וְשְׁנַת חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹבֵל. וְשְׁנַת חֲמִשִּׁים וָאַחַת תְּחִלָּה שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים שֶׁל שָׁבוּעַ וְכֵן בְּכָל יוֹבֵל וְיוֹבֵל (Mishneh Torah, Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee 10: 1-9)

Oct. 6. 2020

From:

Don't Replace - Re-Pace! or: Taking Time: The Secret of (Self)-Renewal by Dr. Jeremy Benstein

3. Sustainability vs. Environment

Many people think that "sustainability" is just another word for "caring for the environment." Sustainable = green. Trendier, for sure, but essentially referring to the same issues and concepts. In other words, the essence of what it means for humans to continue to exist and flourish on this earth is summed up in understanding and improving our relationship to the physical infrastructures of our society: air, water, land, energy, the built environment, and last, and sadly often least, the rest of nonhuman life.

This is mistaken on a number of levels. The first is that equating the two mistakes the part for the whole. A clean, healthy, productive environment is only one of the components of the larger and more inclusive multifaceted vision of the world-that could-be that is sustainability. At the very least, this would also include a robust, democratic economy, a just, egalitarian, interconnected society, and a culture and politics of compassion and inclusion. Clearly, not your usual tree-hugger fare.

More importantly, however, reducing sustainability to matters of environment loses entire dimensions of human existence, and creates a blind spot that might be the greatest obstacle to creating deep, long-lasting and systemic change – what Annie Leonard and others call "game-changing solutions." Allowing the physical environment to take center stage focuses our attention almost exclusively on matters of space and place. These are, of course, important: place-making, and taking care of our homes, communities and larger spatial environments are indeed central to building a sustainable society.

But, again, the spatial is only part of a larger picture. As noted, there are of course the social, economic, political and cultural sides of life that demand attention and "revisioning." Even beyond these, though, the other dimension that is becoming increasingly important in promoting sustainability – often ignored or down-played – is the temporal one. Recognizing the importance of time, time scales, and time cycles is one step in the rehabilitation of the idea of sustainability.

One way in which the idea of sustainability already embodies a deeply temporal insight is in its focus on intergenerational justice and responsibility. Recognizing the importance of this “third dimension” of time is crucial. Look at it like this: economic thought is basically a line, with one question - does the line on the growth graph go up or down? Economic reasoning is one-dimensional. We know though that the rising tide of economic growth doesn't float all boats, and so social concern brings in a much-needed second dimension: how is that wealth distributed in different sectors and classes of society? If wealth is being created, as it is in our growth-oriented society, everybody should be getting a little richer, not just the vastly wealthy becoming more so. Reality, though, is three-dimensional. And even though the idea of “environment” is primarily linked with matters of space and place, a concern for the earth is not only about our common home, but also about our common future. Realizing that we have inherited the world from previous generations and will bequeath it to subsequent ones, means that even a focus on just distribution, if limited to the here and now, is no more than partial.

Sustainability is about sustaining our abilities over time. We must not sacrifice longterm benefit for short-term gains – that is simply robbing our grandchildren to feed our children, and the height of unsustainability. As activist and visionary David Brower was known to have commented: “Environmentalists may make meddlesome neighbors, but they make great ancestors.”

But even that doesn't begin to exhaust the discussion of sustainability and time.

Oct. 3, 2020 / Cheshvan 16 5781

....Rav Yosef bar Abba said: Rabba bar Yirmeya happened to come to our locale, and when he came he brought the following *baraita* with him: One may remove worms from a tree and place manure on a cut in a tree during the Sabbatical Year, but one may not remove worms or place manure on a cut during the intermediate days of the Festival. The *baraita* continues: Both here, in the case of the Sabbatical Year, and there, in the case of the intermediate days of the Festival, one may not prune the trees. But one may smear oil on the previously pruned tree on the place where one pruned it in order to prevent the tree from being damaged, both during the intermediate days of the Festival and during the Sabbatical Year.... (Talmud Bavli, Avoda Zara 50b)

Adonai spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of Adonai. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of Adonai: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce—you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield. (Leviticus 25: 1-7)