

Shabbat Shalom everyone. This week, we read parshat Behar, and it feels fitting that my final parshah at Oseh Shalom is this parshah, for this is the parshah in which we get the injunction to observe shmita. On this shmita year, we read of the commandment to observe and keep the shmita year.

Serving Oseh Shalom as Rabbinic Intern during the shmita year—and as the eco-Judaism rabbinic intern, no less—has felt to be an act of fate. For what better a year to lean into Judaism as environmental praxis than that of the shmita year—when the very act of not acting upon the environment is the ultimate religious task?

So in honor of Parshat Behar, I would like to share the seven lessons I learned from my shmita year at Oseh Shalom:

- 1) Sometimes, rest takes on unexpected forms.

I certainly did not cease from work this year. Far from it, I found myself bouncing between school work, work at Oseh Shalom, work at a hospital, work with b'nai mitzvah students, work on myself... I would say that this year was far from restful in the traditional sense.

And yet have you ever felt the deep sense of rest and satisfaction that comes from being so present in a moment of joy—a moment that you helped to cultivate—that you just had to sigh with relief?

I was gifted with many of these moments during my time at Oseh Shalom. Going on a rites of passage foray into the forest with Rabbi Daria and the 6th graders. Leading shabbat morning services and Torah study on many a Saturday morning and being gifted with all of your Torah. Getting to finally tie tzitzit with students in the sheep-to-tzitzit class after months of build-up.

I did not cease from work this shmita year. But I had the opportunities of sweet pockets and moments to do the work of my soul—work that rejuvenates as it depletes. Work that leaves the cup fuller than from where it began. Work that makes one feel that *cosi revaya*—my cup spills over with blessing.

So my rest took on an unexpected form this shmita year. The form of restful, rejuvenating work.

- 2) Preparation begets improvisation, and improvisation begets presence.

In ancient Israel, the shmita year did not just happen. The ancient Israelites spent six years preparing so that on the 7th year, they could rest. They took on a little extra labor for six years in order for the seventh to be as labor-less as possible.

Yet shmita years weren't labor-less in the way that laborlessness is impossible. For life throws you curve balls you never could have expected and requires that you be nimble. Agile. Able to readjust. Reposition.

Preparation makes this all possible.

Preparing for the time I spent at Oseh Shalom, whether virtually or in-person, allowed me to be fully present and responsive to the moment. By preparing, I could put my plan down, and simply be with you all and respond to your presence, your energy, your needs.

That does not mean that everything always went as planned. Far from it. But by preparing for my visits ahead of time—work that often felt stressful—I turned each of my visits into a shmita—a soft place into which I could rest. A joyous occasion to *just be* with you all.

Which leads me to number 3

3) Sometimes, things don't go as planned, and that is more than okay.

I remember that it was in my job interview with Oseh Shalom that I first pitched the sheep-to-tzitzit experience that I have had the pleasure of offering this year. A class of this sort had been a dream of mine and on my mind for some time. But in my vision of this workshop, we really did create the entirety of our product, from start to finish. We sheared sheep. We processed their wool. We spun that wool into yarn. And we used that yarn to tie our very own tzitzit.

Yet along my journey of turning dream into reality, I realized all that which I did not know, an incredibly humbling experience. And in the not knowing, my dream had to shift.

For example, for most farms, shearing is an activity that happens one day a year. If you miss the day it happens, that is it for the entire year. So what was the likelihood we would be able to join a sheep farmer on the very day they are shearing to participate in this process?

Additionally, the processing of wool and spinning it into yarn is a highly skilled labor, as well as incredibly time-consuming. The commitment of time and energy participants would have to make to build up this skill set, let alone produce a product, was enormous. Learning this gave me such a deeper

respect and admiration for my ancestors, as well as contemporary farmers still choosing to do this work of their hands. And this was humbling. But due to this learning, I had to be agile. I had to adapt.

The workshop we did get to have was not what I originally planned. But it was absolutely beautiful all the same. I got the pleasure to learn with and from so many creative souls and to see your creativity in action as you create and continue to create beautiful and meaningful tallitot beyond my wildest imagination.

#### 4) Kids are smarter than us.

I had the gift this year of getting to lead and participate in such a diversity of activities at Oseh Shalom. Leading Shabbat and High Holiday services. Teaching both text-based and experiential classes and learning series for adults. But among my favorite things that I got to do was work with OSRS.

I've known this for a while, but this year just verified it—kids are absolutely brilliant. Unfiltered, awe-filled, rooted in play, kids have so much to teach us about a stance toward the world that makes life not only better for ourselves, but for everyone around us. I learned so much from getting to be outside with the OSRS kiddos monthly, smelling plants, building fires, exploring the forest, creating ritual objects. They truly taught me what it means to stop and be present, in awe, and in joy with our surroundings. They taught me how to be the rabbi, and more importantly, the Jew, that I want to be.

#### 5) Boundaries are both hard and necessary

When I entered rabbinical school, the seniors at the time kept reciting the line, “rabbinical school is a 5-year lesson in boundaries.” I didn't quite know what they meant. But now, as I find myself about to enter my final year of rabbinical school, I find myself touting this same line to newer students.

I learned this in a new way this year at Oseh Shalom. Working at a congregational internship where I wore many hats and contributed a diversity of offerings—and doing so at a congregation that is two-hours away—and in the midst of a pandemic, no less—was a challenge. It was a deeply humbling lesson in my limitations. I simply couldn't possibly do it all. Not under those conditions. Not under any conditions.

So I learned that, sometimes, the best way for me to serve the congregation—to serve you all— was to say no. I am not able to do that at this time. Or not in that way. I could do this instead. But not that.

But, by having these nos, I was able to carve out space for the expansive unfolding of my yesses. The offerings I did bring could be full and robust—find the sweet spot between your and my needs so that everyone’s needs could ultimately be met. By saying no, I got to say yes, again and again and again.

6) Prioritizing myself, my body and my needs makes me a better rabbi.

Wrestling with how to do this internship from a distance in the middle of a pandemic with all of its spikes and meshugas while immuno-compromised was no easy feat. The whole premise of the internship relied upon a model of visiting in which, I realized early on, I did not feel safe. So we had to pivot. We had to adjust.

This was scary. To ask for what I needed, even when I did not want to do so. To make myself vulnerable in the process. But from this act of listening to my body and advocating its needs, I learned a deep and valuable lesson.

I cannot serve anyone else if I am not first serving myself. I cannot show up for anyone else if I am not first showing up for myself. To be a rabbi requires being rooted in wellspring of resource that exists within and beyond ourselves. If I am in a state of fight or flight due to fear over my own survival, I cannot see that wellspring, let alone access it. I cannot draw its water to sprinkle as a healing balm.

So I must, in the way of the Jewish meditation technique of a shviti, set *myself* before me always. Meditate on my own needs and boundaries. And then advocate for and actualize them. For only then can I be of any help to anyone else.

7) Expect the unexpected.

I did not come into this internship thinking that I wanted to be a congregational rabbi. It felt important to work with a congregation during my time in rabbinical school to gain certain skills, but, ultimately, that was not my calling. I felt called toward other rabbinic paths.

Yet every time I led a service, taught a class, I noticed leaving the experience feeling better than how I entered. Feeling transformed, calmed, and gratified by the experience. Feeling filled rather than depleted.

I remember, after one Shabbat morning service, Alan Rubinstein and I stayed on the call for about an hour afterward, just chatting. He was asking me about my rabbinate and what kind of rabbi I wanted

to become. And I shared with him that I did not think the congregational rabbinate was for me. From that moment on, Alan Rubinstein has made it his personal mission to convince me otherwise.

And you know what, the unexpected happened. Alan, maybe I am a little convinced.

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I want to thank each and every one of you—those who I have had the pleasure of interacting with regularly both in-person and on-screen, and those of you who I know have been there with me on this journey, even when I didn't know. Your presence with me over this last year has been and will continue to be formative in my rabbinic and personal growth. You all shaped me and molded me into the rabbi I am becoming, and for that I will be forever grateful.

So I want to close with a bracha for you all.

May your lives continue to be filled with the juicy goodness of Torah. May this community continue to serve as a wellspring of support, of gratification, of joy, of care to all those who choose to drink its nectars. May each and every one of you know just how beloved you are. And may the goodness that the existence of this community brings into the world radiate outward, touching the lives of those far beyond its bounds. Blessed are you, Holy One, who builds beloved community.