

First, I just want to say what a beautiful job you have both done here this morning. You chanted Torah and Haftarah so well and most especially, you have offered us deep wisdom about your Torah portion, both raising important and necessary questions about our sacred text.

Asher, you laid out the premise of the Shmita year, describing how every 7th year, the people would allow the land to lie fallow, not planting it, threshing it, or harvesting it. And having to trust that there would still be enough to eat. You explored how much anxiety that must have caused for the people, but also considered: what were the benefits of changing our relationship with the land. And you asked: given how challenging it was to resist making the land produce that year - did the benefits of the Shmita year, the good outcomes of releasing the earth from our grips, outweigh what was hard about it? This is a critical question for our world today - when our relationship with the land, with the earth, is very much oriented toward taking and taking and taking from it. Given how challenging it would, or will, be to learn how to rest the land, and transition away from our unrestrained extraction mentalities . . . would the benefits of learning how to do *that* outweigh what is hard about it today? You've raised this morning a truly critical question at the heart of today's climate conversation. For a sustainable future - are we willing to adopt a Shmita mentality about the world even with the challenges inherent in doing so?

And Lizzie, you also demanded answers of our text - a text that surprised you with how comfortable it seemed to be with something as horrific and sinful as slavery - as the enslavement of some human beings by other human beings. And you worked hard to peel the layers of our tradition to discern - was that really acceptable then? And given that it's still in our Torah - is it considered acceptable now? And you discovered and beautifully articulated a key principle of Jewish history and tradition. Judaism changes. It evolves. It always has. Torah is not a static document, which is a big deal to say about something that is 3,000 years old and still gets written on animal skins. That is radical. A religion, a culture, a people, that knows how to reflect on and evaluate its own self, and change and grow toward holiness. When we understood how to cause less injury to other human beings - including when it came to slavery - so our laws, traditions, and morals had to evolve to match that new understanding. It's happened for laws about women, laws about homosexuality and gender, laws about capital punishment, laws about interfaith relationships, and more. So no, you concluded, Jewish law does not permit slavery in any form, even though we see it in our text - and we stand with you in decrying our own country's original sin of enslaving Black people and all of the ways slavery continues to be practiced against the most vulnerable around the world today.

Lizzie and Asher - as sometimes happens when two young people speak from their hearts, your teachings are deeply intertwined. So I want to speak a little bit about the intersection of your *divrei Torah* at this moment in history. On the one hand, Jewish tradition makes it clear that from ancient times, we have been called to be protectors of this earth. In the first chapters of Torah, God commands Adam and Eve *l'ovdah ul'shomrah*, to nurture and protect the earth, to care for it and be its guardians. Midrash talks of God warning Adam not to destroy God's beautiful natural world, because if he does, there won't be anyone who comes after to repair it. And there is extensive halachic discourse regarding the laws of *Ba'al tashchit* - you shall not destroy,

which is tied closely to the preservation of the created world. Guardianship of this planet, a Shmita mentality, is woven into the very identity of the Jewish people.

And . . . we are at an inflection point. We didn't always know the dangers of unrestrained extraction of, and burning of, fossil fuels. We didn't always know how burning fossil fuels would cause a dangerous increase in the temperatures of our planet, how that would lead to glacial melt, and waters rising. We didn't always know the consequences of using oil as our primary energy source. And that energy powered the world through all kinds of inventions and connections and visions of a better future. But, now we know. The unrestrained extraction of fossil fuels - oil and coal and gas - are incredibly dangerous for humanity. For the most vulnerable communities, Black and Brown and Indigenous communities. For the poorest countries facing the worst of climate chaos. And for all of our children for generations to come. So now we know. And now, as Jewish tradition has modeled, we need to evolve our laws and ways of life to make better decisions that cause less injury to living things.

But as you probably know, that change is not coming easy. Some have determined that the financial gain they can make by pressing ahead with massive NEW and unmitigated fossil fuel projects, is more enticing than the difficult steps it would require to transition to clean energy. Even if the future of our planet is at stake.

This week, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicted the highest number of hurricanes and named storms to date, attributing it in part to near record-warm ocean temperatures. Also this week, scientists reported having used new technologies to more closely view the activity beneath the Thwaites Glacier, also dubbed the Doomsday Glacier (which sounds pretty dark, I know), and found seawater flowing underneath it, calling it: "a potentially ominous sign of the coming effects of human-driven climate change from the world's widest glacier." Their new concern is that they have been vastly underestimating the speed at which it is melting and the havoc that will cause, sooner than expected. And we are not yet on course to keep the planet from warming more than 1.5% celsius, as was agreed to by many countries, including our own, in the Paris Accords Agreement of 2016.

In 2006, Al Gore begged us to learn the inconvenient truth that we could not continue down the path we were on, and to see the damage we had done and were still doing by burning fossil fuels. Some listened and evolved and started to develop more of a Shmita mentality, but many did not - for they weighed the inconvenience and determined it was too much, and for the most part, we did not make the changes that needed to be made then.

But we still can. The glacier is called Doomsday, I am not. We can listen, Asher, to the ancient call of our own tradition and let it remind us that even if it's going to be difficult - that the long game of a sustainable earth is so very worth the obstacles to changing how we live on this planet. We can listen, Lizzie, to the wisdom of a reflective tradition that knows how to learn and evolve and grow toward hurting people less. We can listen and we can act. And there is still time and we have the power to make a real difference.

In partnership with a powerful and creative and playful and strategic coalition of organizations, the CBE Climate Team is about to launch a new campaign - which is intended to stop the massive funding that is still flowing toward the biggest fossil fuel companies who have refused to prioritize life over profit. It's about applying pressure to financial institutions who are providing the resources to big oil. It's about getting them to do the right thing - for their children and for ours. For everyone's. And to leave fossil fuels in the ground. It's a really interesting strategy and it's going to take a lot of us to make it work - so if you feel so moved - after this service is over, there will be a couple of Climate Team members standing in the back to tell you more about it, to answer your questions as best they can, and to help you sign up for the launch gathering on June 5th, where we'll all learn more and figure out our next steps.

We've got some complex decisions to make about our modern relationship with the land. With this planet. As Jews, as compassionate human beings. The wisdom implanted within us in the context of the Shmita year endures. And our ability to change persists. And we have a community and a people committed to this moment. All is not lost - far from it. We are just getting started. Look what you have brought us here this morning - your offerings on the altar of humanity, on the altar of history. You have brought us the promise of future. Yashar koach.