Zachary and Levi, yashar koach. You've done a wonderful job here this morning and you have both raised and explored important questions in our double Torah portion, Behar-Bechukotai.

Zachary, you thoughtfully explored this question about why God is so concerned with the idea of rest - rest for our bodies, rest for our land, rest for workers and our children and our animals. And you urged us to think carefully about the ways we tend to work ourselves, and the land, into utter exhaustion, suggesting that that is not the life that God wants for us.

And Levi - you insightfully noticed that the litany of terrible things and punishments outlined in parshat Behar-Bechukotai seem to far outnumber and outweigh the list of good and hopeful things that might come to us, suggesting that it's pretty important that we find ways to amplify the good, so that we don't find ourselves drowning in the overwhelming negative.

I believe that your two insights this morning speak directly, and with wisdom, to this time we are living through. Zachary, it has felt for many just existentially exhausting to try to understand and respond to the intentional overload of news items coming out of our administration and across the world. And Levi, it can certainly feel right now that the ledger of all the bad news and painful things that are happening outnumbers and outweighs the good.

Earlier just this week, there was a horrific antisemitic attack on Sarah Milgrim and Yaron Lischinsky outside a Jewish event in DC. These two young lives were taken, apparently, because the gunman assumed they were Jews and said he did this for Gaza. Sarah was a Jew, and, in fact, a peacemaker, a bridge builder between Israelis and Palestinians. And now we're hearing some voices not only downplaying these murders, but daring to try to justify this hateful and existentially destructive action. That is a very heavy darkness for us to hold on the negative side of the scale.

And there are still 58 hostages being held captive, tortured and starved, in Gaza, now for 596 days. And there are just massive numbers of Gazan children and innocent civilians experiencing starvation and crippling malnutrition every day. And in this country there are destructive executive orders and legislation being passed that will have devastating consequences for elders, the sick, the poor, children, the planet, and democracy as a whole. And Kilmar Abrego Garcia, and hundreds of others who have been kidnapped to El Salvador and now South Sudan are all still there. And so much more we could point to. **Our** terrible verses are multiplied and so heavy on the scales, heavy on our hearts.

Given such an outsized distribution of the negative, it would be possible for us to believe that the future can only unfold from here on a trajectory toward an inevitably darker horizon. It would be possible to let the cruelty of the negative verses crush us, exhausting our bodies and our hearts beyond recovery.

But I want to suggest that we need to find a way to not condemn ourselves to living only there, in that dark place of overwhelm. And, given your teachings today, I suspect that the two of you might agree with that.

So I want to share a perspective on this Torah portion that I think it can be a helpful lens right now - not because the long list of negative things aren't real and in need of our attention, and our condemnation, and our mourning, and our weeping, but because we need a way to think about this world, to live in it, and to remember that - no matter what is happening now - that the future is not yet written and that we are writing it.

So we find in these parshiyot, that God says to Moses:

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 יהוה.

שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךָ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמֹר כַּרְמֶךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ׃

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 . . .

This is the law of the **shmita** year - that when the people arrive in the land, they'll be required to let their fields and their vineyards lie fallow every 7th year.

So a contemporary rabbi, Rabbi Andy Gordon, recently pointed out something kind of amazing about this: while this text seems to merely lay out an agricultural law, imagine, he tells us, the shock that the people must have felt in this moment to learn that they would one day be farmers.

Consider this: when the people hear these words, they're still standing at the foot of Mount Sinai. Just a little while back, they were enslaved in Mitzrayim. But upon hearing these words, certainly one of them must have interrupted and cried out: "Hang on. What do you mean: sadcha? Your field? What do you mean: karmecha? Your vineyard? My field? My vineyard? We'll be farmers one day? We'll have land? A place to call home? And grow our own food? No more relying on the miracle of manna falling from the sky to feed us? No more wandering? Things turn out okay in this future?

That's just wild. To have a picture painted of their future that would have seemed completely impossible from their current angle. Look at us now - lost, unkempt, exhausted, afraid, vulnerable - *they* might have said . . . but you're telling us that there's a future where we have overcome these things, where we're settled and okay and even have enough to share with the hungry from our land?

And that is the magic of Behar-Bechukotai. A reminder that there can be a future that we have not even yet begun to imagine, but which is good and peaceful, and restful, and compassionate,

and abundant in blessing for all people, a future that we would be proud to hand down to our children and our children's children. That is yet available to us.

And so our ancestors, some chapters from now, set out on their journey, on a trajectory toward an entirely different horizon than the one they could imagine before this was articulated to them.

And of course they have doubts - because they are human. And they ask God:

But: "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we can't work our fields?"

They are understandably cynical that this vision would come to fruition at all. It seems pretty unlikely actually. Maybe we can empathize with that.

But the commentator Haamek Davar notes on this verse: "In truth, all this is nothing but **miraculous** — that in a year without any planting, the grain and fruit of the trees will grow enough to satiate the entire population of people and animals." And if we read into his comment, we might hear him saying: this is not just miraculous, but a little naive, no? To believe that we might go from being former slave nomads to living in a land of abundance. But then he continues: In Jewish tradition, "it is known that believing in a path of miracles is **only** appropriate to the extent that one prepares for it."

He's drawing here on a rabbinic tradition that teaches: do not expect a miracle. Don't wait for a miracle. And, Haamek Davar adds: rather, prepare for them, plan for them, in fact - desire them, articulate them, strategize them, find partners for them, workshop them, and then build for them. Participate in manifesting them.

At CBE, we're engaged in the very beginnings of a futuring process in which we as a congregation will dream up together a horizon, or multiple horizons, that are the futures we really want, and would be proud to hand down to our children's children. To you all, and beyond.

And yes, it is harder than we ever thought it would be - this imagination work - but we're slowly figuring out how to articulate a world where the scales are not so heavy on the negative side. And in fact, where rest for our bodies and our land is not just some idealistic fantasy, but is real and attainable. Not by magic, but because we have prepared for it.

A couple of weeks ago, we beta-tested what we called an "Imagination Session" with some parents in our preschool. And after expounding on some very beautiful visions for a more desirable future, one of the parents understandably said: I just don't see how we could possibly get *there* given where we are now. But then another parent responded: I think maybe it starts with this conversation that we're having right here. And I think she's right.

The Talmud teaches that Shabbat is 1/60 of the World to Come. So today, right now, is meant to be a taste of the future world that we want. A taste of rest and being in community and treating each other with kindness and living with the joy of two young people teaching us Torah, and

families celebrating together with so many differences in this room. Because just a taste of it makes us want more of it, and gives us a template for expanding on it. Reminds us that if we want a hopeful world, a healed world, a generous world, a peaceful future for this world, we could start dreaming it up as soon as today, and dreaming it up gets us closer to making it real.

In that same sugya that teaches that Shabbat is 1/60 of the world to come, it also teaches that dreams are 1/60 of prophecy. That if we can dream up a better world, if we can speak it into existence . . . that is 1/60 of making that world a reality. We can't journey toward something that we can't imagine. But if we can say it out loud . . . we are already on our way toward it.

Our ancestors spent a great deal of time in imagination: they imagined the Shmita year where they went from being lost to being home, they dreamt up a land of milk and honey to wander toward. The prophet Micah dreamt up a future in which every person would sit under their own vine and fig tree, with none to make them afraid. And the prophet Isaiah imagined a world in which the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and study war no more. They were bold - even as they were living through exiles and attacks and suffering, they gazed at a horizon and said what they wanted, and how we would have to act in order to get there.

I believe that we need this - this agreement that the future is not inevitable, that our current present is not an immutable harbinger of doom, and that we can disrupt hate and injustice and change our trajectory. It will take all of us, from across the world and the political spectrum. It will take the two of you, Levi and Zachary. To dream up a world where the verses on the scales of good far outweigh the negative. We are so proud of what you both taught today and we look so forward to seeing the future that you will both help us all to write. Yashar Koach and Shabbat shalom.