IN PRAISE OF COMPLEXITY

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Temple Sholom
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This week's Torah portion B'har which Sophia will chant tomorrow morning contains within it the instruction that in the 50th year we shall declare a Jubilee and as we read in the Torah,

You shall make the 50th year sacred and it shall be a jubilee for you. In the fiftieth year, the Jubilee Year, you shall not plant, nor reap. You may only eat the growth direct from the field. In this year of jubilee, you shall not wrong another in buying or selling property… You shall proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants: every possession shall be returned to every person and every person shall be returned to their family."

The Torah goes on: *If your brother is in trouble and has to sell part of his property holdings, the nearest closest relative able to redeem the land shall come to redeem it. If a man has no one to redeem for him or if he lacks sufficient means to recover it, what he sold shall remain with the purchaser until the Jubilee Year. In the Jubilee Year it shall be released and he shall return to his holding.*

We are commanded to: treat our brother who is in trouble fairly and not to charge him interest on a loan, or make him a slave to us. He can work off his debt as an indentured servant but only until the Jubilee Year. Then he and his children shall be free and go back to his family and return to his ancestral land.

It's appears to be a powerful and profound effort by the Torah to remove economic inequality and free people from the burdens of debt and contractual obligations. In fact it's one of the passages that we most often point to as the source of Jewish values of social and economic justice.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the president of the Reform Movement compares the Jubilee year, to the end of the board game Monopoly. In his analogy at the end of Monopoly, a mythical time I personally have never experienced, all of the houses, hotels and money are swept from the board, and redistributed so that everyone starts over from square one, or GO in the vocabulary of the game.