THE FUTURE IS PRESENT

Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – MAY 10, 2014

1. Rabbis can sometimes have a very odd sense of what is funny. The other day I thought what would be reaction if I began dinner party conversation with the question:
    a. "How are the laws of shmitah (agricultural sabbatical laws) relevant to Mount Sinai?"
        i. Dead silence – much like now
    b. The source of the expression is this week's Torah portion. The Jewish people were only a few months out of Egypt, nowhere near conquering or working the land of Israel, & Moses was instructing them on how to let the land rest after six years of working it.

2. **What happens when someone says something completely out of context? How do people react? A moment of awkward silence?**
    a. Puzzled faces wondering what provoked the comment?
    b. I would have loved to have seen the faces of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai when Moses began to transmit these laws!

3. Imagine the conversations:
    a. "What is he talking about?
    b. What land? Don't work the land in the seventh year - we haven't worked the land for one day! We're not anywhere near entering the land now. And what's this about the 49th year and 50th year?
    c. Letting the slaves go free? Whose slaves? We were just slaves! Proclaiming freedom in the land?! And 50 years from now?! How old will I be then? Is he talking about my kids or my grandkids? What's happened to Moses?

d. Aren't there more pressing things to talk about - like finding water in the desert and helping us not get lost?
e. Why doesn't he focus on the present, instead of wandering into some distant future reality that is impossible to relate to? Why doesn't he wait until we enter the land, work the land, and then tell us how to let it rest in the seventh year?
f. Why can't he just focus on the present?"

4. According to the Sforno, a 15th/16th century biblical commentator, its possible at this point Moses really thought that the Jewish people were about to enter the land of Israel. If that were the case, then the laws about the sabbatical year were important to understand now and not later.

5. But perhaps Moses did not really believe that the Jewish people were about to enter the land of Israel. Perhaps, Moses did not want to focus only on the present. For Moses, you couldn't understand the present unless you looked at it through the prism of the future.

6. A major principle in Judaism is being raised here,
    a. our relationship with time
    b. should we strive to be fully mindful in the present moment
    c. **OR** should our consciousness of the present be a product of our relationship with the future?

7. In conversations with people in the community, particularly the spiritual community the idea of mindfulness is very popular, to be fully present in the moment.

a. Meditation and other practices help to gather all of one's awareness and strengthen one's focus on the present moment.
b. In Hebrew we might call this having full kavanah (intentionality). Without it, we sleepwalk through life, never fully seeing the interconnected oneness of reality.

8. This week's portion teaches us a different approach to the sanctity of time.
    a. Our awareness of this moment needs to be a function of the distant idealized future.
    b. In the distant future the shmitah cycle will be realized and the jubilee year will be celebrated. Freedom will be proclaimed.
    c. Until then, I need to live with a profound awareness of the brokenness of the world. Only when I envision an ideal world can I truly begin to understand the brokenness of the present moment and be impelled to heal the world.

9. Think about how being future focused even in the midst of our daily challenges and struggles can help us?
    a. Its about hopes and dreams – not sidelining them and saying when there is time I will dream, I will plan.
    b. I know people that don't like to make appointments or commitments more than a few days in advance.
        i. I appreciate the energy of living with spontaneity.
        ii. Holiness is found in all moments
            1. That is the essence of mindfulness.
    c. But think of Bella & her achievement this morning.

i. Bella started talking to me about planning to read Torah this day on August 8.
    1. With all the caveats of God willing I'll make it and be healthy as Bella so humbly declared. She planned, she dreamed.
        a. If you don't have a destination how will you know when you have arrived where you want to be?

d. Judaism is a system that commands us to be mindful of the present
    i. And still our Torah portion challenges us to plan for the future.

10. Perhaps Moses' mentioning the laws of *shmitah* at Mount Sinai wasn't so irrelevant after all.