

1) Shabbat Shalom.

Today, I'm going to be talking about Parshat Ki Teitzei. Moses is speaking to the people before they enter the promised land, and gives them a lot of miscellaneous laws. For example, we learn that workers need to be paid at the end of the day they work. The parsha also describes how when you harvest a field and miss something, you should leave the part you missed for those who need it. Another miscellaneous law is that you need accurate weights so people are not cheated in financial transactions. If you think about the themes expressed in these laws, it becomes clear that many of our Jewish values come from this Torah portion, such as making sure workers are treated fairly, giving to the poor, and not cheating people.

When you think more about these ideas, you realize why laws are important. Laws can help to create harmony, order, and fairness in everyday life. Out of the three laws listed before, the one I found most interesting was the law about having accurate weights. At first glance, you wouldn't know why this law is needed. Most people probably do have accurate weights and aren't trying to cheat other people. But, even today, some people might try to scam or cheat people out of money. This law could protect that person, and discourage cheaters from cheating.

2) But this Torah portion also contains some laws that people in our day would call offensive. Honestly, the first time I read the Torah portion I was shocked at the harsh way people were treated - especially women. For example, apparently community leaders wanted to stop women from

getting involved in fights to protect their husbands. According to the parsha, the penalty for getting involved might include having the woman's hand cut off - since the hand represents the part of a woman that was intervening in the fight.

Another verse I struggled with, which we didn't read today, says that men and women "should dress according to their gender". I had trouble connecting to this verse because so many of us, whatever our gender is, want to dress however we want.

Reading these laws in our current day, it's hard to know what to do with them. Do we follow them, do we not? Should we believe them, or not? Are there people that would argue that these laws should be read word for word? In different communities, there's different levels of strictness of following these laws. No one would say that a woman's hand should be cut off, but for some Jewish communities, people are supposed to dress according to their gender.

3) So, how *do* we understand these laws here in Berkeley, at Netivot Shalom? One of the laws from this portion helps explain this to us. In 25, 4 we say, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing." Before I read this Torah portion, I did not know what threshing was, and you might not either. Threshing means separating the grain from the plant, for example wheat, corn, or any other plant that grows on a stock.

Interestingly enough, we also need to do some threshing in our time - separating out the "wheat", or what we want to keep, from the "chaff", or

what we don't feel connected to or need. In different times in history, Jewish people have "threshed" in different ways. Maybe there was a time when it made sense for people to dress according to their gender, but now given other understandings, we realize there are some literal words we are going to have to either leave on the plant or find a new way to understand.

How does this threshing work? Well, we have a 2000-year-old Rabbinic interpretation of the Torah, the Talmud. The Talmud guides us in deciding which parts we follow and which parts we don't. In another section of this Torah portion, we hear the story of a "wayward" - or defiant son. The Torah describes what would happen to someone who defies their parents. The people who wrote the Torah wanted to say there was a severe penalty for not listening to your parents. How severe? According to the Torah, the penalty was being stoned to death. But how do we interpret this? We learn from the Rabbis who created the Talmud that wayward children should not literally be stoned to death. That's because the Rabbis talk again and again about the value of every human life.

We also thresh as a Jewish community, not individually. Even the prayers that we choose to sing together this morning are a result of community choice. When we look at the Torah, we see some stuff we may not follow word for word nowadays, but we also see a lot of values and parts of Jewish life that we hold on to as a community.

Today, in becoming Bat Mitzvah, I'm starting to take part in the community by becoming a Jewish adult - even if I'm not actually an adult yet, but still a teenager! By studying and teaching Torah today, I am

threshing along the community at Netivot Shalom —and will do more as I grow.