



Presumptuous Torah for a Cost of Living Crisis

Tense times. I'm capable of putting food on my table and running gas through my boiler. That's not a gift I take for granted. Our texts are full of calls to support the less fortunate and the obligations to prevent destitution. But the central message of this week's Torah portion is also deeply relevant – as dangerous and presumptuous as it feels to preach.

Work the land for six years, then let it lie fallow for the seventh. Let anyone who is hungry come and collect from your land. Glean from your land to eat, but not to store or sell on.

And all of this sabbatical legislation exists so we can understand that the land is not really ours. *Ki li ha-aretz*, says God – the land is Mine.

Sabbatical legislation exists to promote a version of what Eastern faiths and philosophies call non-attachment, and it's a powerful, if provocative, message. If we lose, say, a watch, that experience might bring up feelings of frustration, anger, jealousy, desire But if we can practice non-attachment, if we understand it was never really our watch in the first place, we can walk on, watch-less, but untrammelled by emotions that will never bring us contentment. The material losses we necessarily suffer in life, are almost never as valuable as the emotional, spiritual possibilities of well-being we so easily discard through a lack of an ability to dis-entangle our spiritual health from our possessions. And the way to successfully dis-entangle is to practice non-attachment ... *Ki li ha-shaon*, says God – the watch is Mine.

This is the end of the 'golden era of cheap food,' suggested former Sainsbury's boss, Justin King last week. It certainly feels that way. But the food was never really cheap. I just paid less for it at the supermarket. The underlying realities of costs of production, the draws on the resources of this planet, all these things were always there. It was never really our cheap food. And if we are no longer able to afford as much, may we find ways to detach our material loss from the feelings of frustration, anger, jealousy and desire that will never bring us contentment.

The teaching of non-attachment finds its most powerful advocate in the book of Job. Again, I know how presumptuous a teaching this can be felt to be, but when Job hears that his oxen and asses and camels and sheep and servants and even, most shockingly, his sons and daughters have died, he mourns his unfathomable loss with a verse enshrined in our funeral liturgy, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return. God gave, God took away, may God's name be blessed." These things, they were never, are never and will never truly be ours.

May we never have need of such teaching. May we never forget it.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Jeremy