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| --- | --- | --- |
| [**1**](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9926#v=1). And God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying: |  | **א.**וַיְדַבֵּר יְהֹוָה אֶל משֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר: |
| **[2](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9926" \l "v=2)**. Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall have a Shabbat [a ceasing of work], a Shabbat of God. |  | **ב.**דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ שַׁבָּת לַיהֹוָה: |
| **[3](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9926" \l "v=3)**.  Six years you are to sow your field, and six years you are to prune your vineyard and gather its produce. |  | **ג.**שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךָ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמֹר כַּרְמֶךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת תְּבוּאָתָהּ: |
| [**4**](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9926#v=4). But in the seventh year there will be Shabbat, a Sabbatical [a period free of routine work] for the land; a Shabbat of God; your field you are not to sow, your vineyard you are not to prune. |  | **ד.**וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שַׁבָּת לַיהֹוָה שָׂדְךָ לֹא תִזְרָע וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמֹר: |
| **[5](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9926" \l "v=5)**. The after-growth\* of your harvest you shall not harvest, and the grapes you had set aside you shall not pick. A Shabbat of sabbatical it will be for the land.  *[ \*סְפִיחַ - aftergrowth: Growth that has sprung up on its own without being sown– eg, from seeds that fell last harvest and took root]* |  | **ה.**אֵת סְפִיחַ קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִקְצוֹר וְאֶת עִנְּבֵי נְזִירֶךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שַׁבָּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ: |
| **[6](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9926" \l "v=6)**. And [the produce of] the Shabbat of the land shall be yours, for you to eat and for your male slaves and female slaves, and for your hired worker and resident [non-Israelite] who live with you, |  | **ו.**וְהָיְתָה שַׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם לְאָכְלָה לְךָ וּלְעַבְדְּךָ וְלַאֲמָתֶךָ וְלִשְׂכִירְךָ וּלְתוֹשָׁבְךָ הַגָּרִים עִמָּךְ: |
| **[7](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9926" \l "v=7)**. And for your domestic animals and the wild animals that are in your land, shall be all [the land’s] produce to eat. |  | **ז.**וְלִבְהֶמְתְּךָ וְלַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּאַרְצֶךָ תִּהְיֶה כָל תְּבוּאָתָהּ לֶאֱכֹל: |

**Leading Idea: A Shabbat for the land.**

Vayikra 25:2-7 speaks to the land being given a “Shabbat” – a break from the cycle of being planted, pruned and harvested. Yet what does it mean for land to be given a period in which it doesn’t do work? Is this meant literally or is the land being anthropomorphized? And how should we read the preposition in this case ( שַׁבָּת **לַ**יהֹוָה / Shabbat **of** God): as a Shabbat *belonging to* God? Shabbat *dedicated to* God? Shabbat *for* God?

**Exercise: the meanings of “of” (“...לַ”) in** Shabbat **of** God / שַׁבָּת **לַ**יהֹוָה

*Replace the preposition ‘of’ in the sentences 1-4 with another phrase a-d below. You can only use each letter once.*

1. Picking up the coat, I noticed that it was the coat of Rachel’s father
2. It was a coat of many colors
3. On the pocket was the logo of the company where he worked.
4. Inside the pocket was a small book of moral wisdom
5. dedicated to
6. belonging to
7. symbolizing / representing
8. with/ containing

In the context of שַׁבָּת לַיהֹוָה / Shabbat of God, what do you think ‘of’ means?

**Discussion Plan: When is something considered work?**

For each of these sentences, decide if these actions are a form of ‘work’,

1. A boy delivering papers before school
2. A musician playing music at a restaurant in exchange for a free meal.
3. A horse pulling a cart
4. A bird building nest
5. A flower opening in the sun
6. The field producing a good crop of tomatoes
7. The farmer growing a good crop of tomatoes

Decide whether the word’ work’ is being used *literally* or whether we are using if *figuratively* (e.g.; anthropomorphizing the act of working). What does the word ‘work’ mean in each case?

1. “When he insulted me I worked hard to control my anger”
2. “The printer worked away all afternoon printing the newsletter”
3. “The stream worked its way down the valley”
4. “Leading up to the big game, she worked on her volleyball serve”
5. “A housewife’s work is never done”

**Discussion Plan: Work and Rest.**

1. If your watch ceases working – is it resting?
2. If your heart ceases beating – has it stopped working? Is it resting?
3. If I stop working at 5:00pm, does that mean that after 5pm I am resting? Does it mean that after 5pm I am resting *from my work*? (if so, what might ‘resting’ mean?)
4. If you are doing homework and decide to ‘give it a rest’ – what does this mean? (aren’t *you* the one resting from *it*?)
5. If a bird lands on a branch and stays a while – is it resting on the branch? If so, what is it resting from?
6. Can a dog rest? If so what is it doing when it rests? What is it resting from?
7. If a tree ceases growing in winter, is it resting?
8. When a bear ceases moving in it cave in winter, is it resting? What is it resting from?
9. When a cow produces milk, is it working?
10. When a tree produces fruit – is it working toward the harvest?
11. If someone says they have a ‘working farm’ – what do they mean?
12. Could I rest when I am at work?
13. Can I work hard at resting?

**Leading Idea: Shabbat on the seventh day and Shabbat in the seventh year.**

In Behar the seventh year is designated as the ‘Shabbat of the Land’ – how does this Shabbat parallel the injunction for observing a Shabbat on the seventh day? In Behar we told the seventh year is a ‘Shabbat of God’ – “שַׁבָּת לַיהֹוָה” - a year of rest from farming, but not why it is designated as such. However if we look at the other two references in Torah to Shabbat of the land – Shemot 23 9:12 and Devarim 15:2 we learn more about the seventh year. Taking an inter-textual approach exposes parallels between observing the seventh day as Shabbat (Shemot 20 and Devarim 5) and the seventh year as Shabbat (Behar, Shemot 23:6-10 and Devarim 15:2-15). In the selection from Devarim offered (dealing with Debt, and not dealing with release of slaves or land holdings). One of the nuances of language in dealing with these additional texts of Shmittah involves the difference between ‘letting go’ of something in the sense of releasing it from your control תִּשְׁמְטֶנָּה) ) ; ‘letting go’ in the sense of leaving it alone (leaving it to its own devices – וּנְטַשְׁתָּהּ) and ‘letting something go’ or releasing it in the sense of giving it away (Debt).

Furthermore, in these two passages, there are two reasons offered. One contrasts work and rest (connecting Shabbat of the land to rest on the seventh day of creation) reminding us that we are commanded to rest in recognition that this is a day dedicated to God, the other reason connects the observance of Shabbat to the exodus from Egypt, reminding us that in Israelite society no-one should be in the position we were in Egypt as slaves. On the seventh year we break the cycle of economic and civic oppression.

**Exercise: Finding parallels:**

1. Each of the items on the left hand side parallels an item on the right hand side. Find the pair then enter them into the appropriate quadrant below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * The family celebrates my birthday * You play in a soccer match against another school * You take part in national Clean-up day * You post a picture on facebook * America gives international aid to Africa | * The National Basketball team plays against a team in another country * The country observes President’s Day * You give Tzeddakah * You pick up litter in the school yard * You email a friend a birthday card. |

**Private/public**

**Local/National**

**Personal/Social**

**Other**

1. *Discuss the passages below together: What do you think the parallels are between Shabbat as a day of the week and Shabbat as the seventh year?*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **שמות כ:ח-יא**  זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ: שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָל מְלַאכְתֶּךָ: וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ: כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהֹוָה אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהֹוָה אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ:  **Shemot 20:8-11**  Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it. For six days you are to serve and perform all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Adonai, your God; you are not to make any kind of work, not you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your animals, nor the non-Israelite who is in your cities. For in six days God made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in it, and God rested on the seventh day. Therefore, God blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it. | | **שמות כג:ו-יב**  וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם אֶת נֶפֶשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע אֶת אַרְצֶךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת תְּבוּאָתָהּ:  וְהַשְּׁבִיעִת **תִּשְׁמְטֶנָּה** וּ**נְטַשְׁתָּהּ** וְאָכְלוּ אֶבְיֹנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְיִתְרָם תֹּאכַל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה כֵּן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכַרְמְךָ לְזֵיתֶךָ: שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִּשְׁבֹּת לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ שׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרֶךָ וְיִנָּפֵשׁ בֶּן אֲמָתְךָ וְהַגֵּר:  **Shemot 23:9-12**  The stranger [non-Israelite living amongst you] you are not to oppress, for you yourselves know the feelings of the stranger, since strangers you were in the land of Egypt. For six years you are to sow your land and gather in its produce. But in the seventh [year] you shall **let it go it** and **leave it alone**; that the needy of your people shall eat [it], and what they leave over, the animals [wildlife] of the field may eat. Do this also to your vineyard [and] to your olive-grove. For six days you are to make your work, but on the seventh day you are to cease, in order that your ox and your donkey shall rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed. |
| **דברים ה:יב-טו**  שָׁמוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוְּךָ יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ :שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלַאכְתֶּךָ: וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל מְלָאכָה אַתָּה | וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתֶךָ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל בְּהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ כָּמוֹךָ:וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצִאֲךָ יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרֹעַ נְטוּיָה עַל כֵּן צִוְּךָ יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:  **Devarim 5:12-15**  Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days may you work, and perform all your labor, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall perform no labor, neither you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your ox, your donkey, any of your livestock, nor the stranger who is within your cities, in order that your manservant and your maidservant may rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God took you out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord, your God, commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. | **דברים טו:א-טו (extracts)**  **א**. מִקֵּץ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה שְׁמִטָּה: **ב**. וְזֶה דְּבַר הַשְּׁמִטָּה שָׁמוֹט כָּל בַּעַל מַשֵּׁה יָדוֹ אֲשֶׁר יַשֶּׁה בְּרֵעֵהוּ לֹא יִגֹּשׂ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְאֶת אָחִיו כִּי קָרָא שְׁמִטָּה לַיהֹוָה: ....  **ז.** כִּי יִהְיֶה בְךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאַחַד אַחֶיךָ בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאַרְצְךָ אֲשֶׁר יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ לֹא תְאַמֵּץ אֶת לְבָבְךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאָחִיךָ הָאֶבְיוֹן: **ח**. כִּי פָתֹחַ תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהַעֲבֵט תַּעֲבִיטֶנּוּ דֵּי מַחְסֹרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יֶחְסַר לוֹ: ...  **י.** נָתוֹן תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא יֵרַע לְבָבְךָ בְּתִתְּךָ לוֹ כִּי בִּגְלַל | הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂךָ וּבְכֹל מִשְׁלַח יָדֶךָ: י**א.** כִּי לֹא יֶחְדַּל אֶבְיוֹן מִקֶּרֶב הָאָרֶץ עַל כֵּן אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ לֵאמֹר פָּתֹחַ תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לְאָחִיךָ לַּעֲנִיֶּךָ וּלְאֶבְיֹנְךָ בְּאַרְצֶךָ:  **טו**. וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּפְדְּךָ יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל כֵּן אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם:  **Devarim 15:1-15 [extracts]**  **1**. At the end of seven years you will make a letting-go [a release].  **2.** And this is the manner of letting-go; every creditor is to release from his hand what he lent to his neighbor; he is not to oppress his neighbor or his brother, because the [time of] release of God has arrived...  **7.** When there is among you a needy person, from any-one of your brothers within one of your gates [cities], in the land God is giving you, you are not to harden your heart, you are not to shut your hand to your brother, the needy-one..  **8**. Rather, you are to open an open hand to him, you are to lend him lendings sufficient for his lack, which he is lacking.  **9**.  Take care in case there is a word in your heart, a low one, saying, "The seventh year, the year of release is approaching," and your eye is set on doing ill to your brother, the needy-one, and you not give to him, so that he cries out to God against you, for it will then be a sin to you....  **11**. For the needy will never be gone from within the land. Therefore, I command you, saying, you are to open an open hand to your brother, to your poor one, and to your needy one in your land.  **15.** And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord, your God, redeemed you; therefore, I am commanding you this thing today. | |

**Discussion Plan: Shmittah: Ceasing, Releasing. Letting go and Letting be**

*The seventh year is referred to in different ways – sometimes as a Shabbat of the Land (a ceasing or ‘letting go’ of the activity of farming the land) and sometimes as Shmittah (a ‘letting go’ of ownership, of money owed to us, food, and more). But what is involved in letting go of something? Explore what might be involved in ‘letting go’ in each of the following cases.*

1. *Replace the word in bold with the one that fits best in the brackets.*
2. “At first I checked facebook every day, but after a few months I **ceased** dong that.” (gave up, let go of)
3. “After I **let go** of my anger I no longer felt so bad. (released my anger, stopped feeling angry)
4. “After a while, I stopped nagging my brother and **let him go** to play with his friends (let him be, waived my rights to him, abandoned him)
5. “At first when my baby-brother’s cried all night it upset me, but after a while I learnt to **let it go**. (let it be, ignore It, cease caring about it)
6. “The librarian **released** the computer into my care.” (let go of the control of it, gave up ownership of it / waived her rights to it).
7. “The house next door was in bad shape - the owners were **letting it go** to ruins.” (ceasing care of it, abandoning it, waiving their right to it)

1. What is the difference between:
2. Letting go of the ball, when you throw it

Letting go of the ball so someone else can have a turn playing with it.

1. Letting go of your anger by yelling

Letting go of your anger by breathing deeply until you calm down.

1. Letting go of the chair lift when you get to the top of the mountain

Letting go of a child’s hand

1. Letting go of a fear

Letting go of something that worries you.

*How is the tension between “You shall not eat the produce of your land” and “Everyone shall eat the produce of the Sabbatical year” resolved in the following sources? What does “letting go” of the land mean in each case?*

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| לא תקצור: להיות מחזיק בו כשאר קציר, אלא הפקר יהיה לכל:  You shall not reap: to keep it like a regular harvest, but it must be rendered ownerless, [and available] for everyone [to take at will].   |  | | --- | | **לך ולעבדך ולאמתך:**לפי שנאמר (שמות כג יא) ואכלו אביוני עמך, יכול יהיו אסורים באכילה לעשירים, תלמוד לומר לך ולעבדך ולאמתך, הרי בעלים ועבדים ושפחות אמורים כאן:  **for you, for your male and female slaves:**Since the Torah says [regarding Shemittah], “and the poor of your people shall eat [it]” (Exod. 23:11), one might think that it [the produce of the Shemittah year] is prohibited to be eaten by wealthy people. Torah, therefore, says here, “for you, for your male and female slaves,”-we see that the [wealthy] owners and the male and female slaves are included here [to permit them also to eat of the Shemittah year produce].  *Rashi on Behar* |   *Rashi on Behar* |

פר החינוך

פד. מצות שמטת קרקעות.  
Sefer HaHinuch, 84

ועוד יש תועלת, נמצא בדבר לקנות בזה מדת הותרנות

, כי אין נדיב כנותן מבלי תקוה אל הגמול.

A further benefit from this [letting go] is to acquire the virtue of waiving one’s rights, *because a donor is not equal to the one who gives without any hope of reward*.

ועוד יש תועלת אחרת, נמצא בזה שיוסיף האדם בטחון בשם יתברך, כי כל המוצא עם לבבו לתת ולהפקיר לעולם כל גדולי קרקעותיו ונחלת אבותיו הגדלים בכל שנה אחת ומלמד בכך הוא וכל המשפחה כל ימיו, לא תחזק בו לעולם מדת הכילות הרבה ולא מעוט הבטחון

Yet a further benefit is that a person increases his faith in God as a result.” When someone is able to give away and make ownerless for the entire world all that is grows on his land and his ancestral heritage during an entire year and is taught to do this, neither he nor his family will ever become excessively greedy or mean or lacking in faith.

**

**Leading Idea: For our own sake or for the sake of the other?**

We have a dog – it is my job to take it out each morning for a walk. But what brings me and the dog together at that moment? Do I go for a walk for the sake of the dog? Or do I go for that walk because it is good for me? Furthermore, if I do it for the sake of the dog, is it just an *instrumental* necessity (to keep the dog healthy) or is it something more than that (my dog needs walking for the sake of its own state of being – *to be a happy dog*?). this second explanation might be called an *ontological* explanation; it is to do with its mode of being, or existing, in the world. Indeed we can ask the same question if I am waking the dog for my own sake – am I doing it as an instrumental necessity (if I didn’t the dog would get sick, and that would impact on my enjoyment in having a dog in the house), or am I doing this because going for a walk is good for my own state of being – it offers me the opportunity to show care and responsibility and a way of relating to my neighborhood environment- it brings out a good side of me. We can represent these four variables in the following way:

For the sake of the Other (the dog) For my own sake

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Dogs require walking to stay healthy – as a consequence, I take him for a walk every morning. | I like(and benefit from) having a healthy dog in the house – as a consequence, I take him for walks every morning |
| Dogs need walking – their mode of being is as a walking, sniffing, inquisitive being - and the act of walking my dog (where it can engage in these ways of being in the world) keeps my dog happy as a dog. | Taking the dog for a walk affects my own mode of being in the world. I relate to the world around me differently- it brings out the relational caring, responsible and friendly aspect of being human. |

*Each of these ways of viewing things comes into play in this Parashah around the idea of* ***a******Shabbat for the land****. We can ask - is the Shabbat of the land for the lands sake , or for our sake?, and is it given for instrumental ends or in recognition of its own mode of existence? Like the case with the dog, we can play out four possibilities. These possibilities connect to different voices in our tradition, some of which are provided in the accompanying secondary sources.*

Instrumental account

Ontological

account

Ontological

account

* ***The Shabbat of the land is for the land’s sake*** – the weight here is on the injunction that the land will have a Shabbat every seven years. When it has this status, we are not to engage in our regular cycles of planting, tending to the land and reaping. That is, our ceasing to be able to ’work the land’ is a *consequence* of its Shabbat (in order that we do not interrupt/break its shabbaton).

The call for a Shabbat for the land for the land’s sake can be seen according to instrumental reasons or metaphysical reasons.

* + *An Instrumental reason*: When the land is given a rest from being worked it allows the nutrients to come back into balance – we do this both for the sake of the health of the land - to keep the land healthy and in balance.

*A metaphysical (or ontological) reason*: For the sake of its own mode of being. Resting the land from our labor allows it to just be, to exist, undisturbed by human agendas, as part of God’s creation.

* ***The Shabbat of the land is for our sake*** – the weight is on the injunction that every seven years we are to cease working the land. We cannot plant, tend to the fields or harvest the produce. This ceasing of our labor *constitutes* a Shabbat for the land.

The call for a Shabbat of the land for our sake can also be seen according to instrumental reasons or metaphysical (or ontological) reasons.

* + *Instrumental reasons*: (a) When the land is left fallow it comes back into balance – doing this enables the land to remain productive and we are able to continue to live off the land in the years ahead (for example, letting the animals come and graze means they will naturally fertilize it through their dung). (b) When we cease working the land it also frees us up to pursue other ends during this year (study, creative activity).
  + *A metaphysical (or ontological) reasons*: Experiencing a Shabbat of the land once every seven years leads us to experience and possibly internalize a different mode of being in the world – a different way of relating to other people and to the universe. Our ownership of land and our control over our land establishes a hierarchical social order (the hierarchy of ‘landowner’, ‘worker’, ‘resident’ and ‘slave’; a society of ‘have’s and ‘have not’s). When we cease to control land- and with it the production and ownership of food - we are returned to a natural social order where all of us exist as equals (equally vunerable and equally entitled), capable of living off the produce of the land as equals.

*This is a complex set of ideas – in the High School/Adult curricula this is introduced via a three-step activity – Part A and Part C are critical preparation for looking at the secondary sources, whether Part B is necessary depends on how well the students grasp the four logical possibilities arising from the combinations of these variables when they do Part A.*

*In Primary school the emphasis is on art A and B and only minimally on analyzing secondary sources.*

**........................**

**Leading Idea: The Public and the Private**

**Discussion Plan: (Part A)**

**For our own sake or for the sake of someone / something else?**

Discuss the following situations together and ask yourselves:

1. *For whose sake is this being done? (Is the person doing the action primarily doing it for themselves, or for someone/something else?) If both, which one is stronger?*
2. *Is it being done for instrumental reasons (because it serves their interests to attend to it this way) or as an expression of value ( for instance, so that something /someone can be at its/their best)? If both, which one is stronger?*
3. Your parents throw you a birthday party
4. You agree to wash the family car for extra pocket money
5. Your class goes to a nature reserve to pick up trash on ‘clean-up’ day.
6. You make sure to eat healthily and exercise.
7. You walk the family dog in the morning before school
8. Your friends want to go to a movie - you would prefer to play sports, but you go with them to the movie so that you can all be together.

**Exercise: For our own sake or for the sake of someone / something else? (Part B)**

***Part A*** *had us thinking together about (i) what it means to do something for our own interests, or for the interests of others; and (ii) what it is to do something for instrumental reasons or to express a value. We can use a table to explore this more formally. When two variables intersect, four logical possibilities emerge.*

For my own sake

For the sake of someone or something else

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Instrumental account

Value account

*For the situations below, divide into small groups of 3-4 people. Each group takes one situation (so that all the situations are covered) and fills out the table showing what it would look like to do the action from the perspective of each quadrant. Come back together and share what you have done.*

1. The family car is dirty, so you decide to wash it.
2. You study hard for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah
3. You walk the family dog in the morning before school.
4. The school soccer team needs another player – you are good at soccer and go to the try-out.
5. Your parents are listening to music – you move through the room quietly so as not to disturb them.
6. You keep your room tidy
7. Your friend forgets his/her lunch and you offer his/her half of yours.

*Example: The family car is dirty, so you decide to wash it.*

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| --- | --- |
| I do it for the sake of the family – so that the car has good visibility through the windscreen. | I do it for my own sake – it is safer if the windscreen is clean and it is in my interest to keep the family safe. |
| I do it for the sake of the family – it is a way of expressing how much I care about them. | I do it for my own sake. The condition of the car reflects my values- the fact that I am a responsible person. |

Value Explanation

For the sake of someone or something else

For my own sake

Instrumental

Explanation

**Exercise: For our own sake or for the sake of someone / something else? (Part C)**

In our text there are also two variables going on:

* Is the land given a Shabbat for our sake or for the land’s sake?
* Is ‘not working the land’ done for instrumental reasons or for another reason?

Back in Part A one of the situations was the following: “You make sure to eat healthily and exercise”. This example was different from the rest of them. If we are to consider the four possibilities, then of the first two (for the sake of another or for our own sake), the most obvious answer is that we would do this for ourselves. When it comes to the second set (do we do it for instrumental reasons or for another reason?) the ‘other’ reason seems to be different. We could eat healthily and exercise for instrumental reasons – so that we have the energy to do what we want to do in the day – or because we want our bodies to be capable of *existing in their fullest capacity*. This second reason is to offer an ontological explanation; an explanation in terms of our *mode of being in the world*. We might think about the example of walking the dog in the morning in the same way. What would this look like?

My family has a dog – it is my job to take it out each morning for a walk. But what brings me and the dog together at that moment? Do I go for a walk for the sake of the dog? Or do I go for that walk because it is good for me? Furthermore, if I do it for the sake of the dog, is it just an *instrumental* necessity (to keep the dog healthy) or is it something more than that (my dog needs walking for the sake of its own state of being – *to be a happy dog*?). this second explanation might be called an *ontological* explanation; it is to do with its mode of being, or existing, in the world. Indeed we can ask the same question if I am waking the dog for my own sake – am I doing it as an instrumental necessity (if I didn’t the dog would get sick, and that would impact on my enjoyment in having a dog in the house), or am I doing this because going for a walk is good for my own state of being – it offers me the opportunity to show care and responsibility and a way of relating to my neighborhood environment- it brings out a good side of me.

We might represent these four variables in the following way:

**For the sake of the Other (the dog) For my own sake**

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**Instrumental Explanation**

**Ontological Explanation**

(concerning the mode of existence/ way of being in the world)

*Each of these ways of viewing things comes into play in this Parashah around the idea of* ***a******Shabbat for the land****. We can ask - is the Shabbat of the land for the lands sake , or for our sake?, and is it given for instrumental ends or in recognition of its own mode of existence? Like the case with the dog, we can play out four possibilities. These possibilities connect to different voices in our tradition, some of which are provided in the accompanying secondary sources. Look at the sources – where would you place it in each of these quadrants? Does it understand the ‘Shabbat of the Land’ to reflect a concern about* ***the land as a value****, or a concern about the* ***land’s mode of being*** *in the world?*

**Secondary Sources on ‘Shabbat of the land’**

“The Israelites were therefore commanded to conserve the soil by giving it periodic fallow years and not pursue short-term gain at the cost of long-term desolation”

...

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The dignity of Difference: how to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*” conitinuum: London, 2002 p.167-8



*Rabbi Jonathan Sacks  is the former Chief Rabbi of the UK and the Commonwealth. born in*[*London, England*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London,_England)*in 1948, he is a well known public intellectual and Jewish scholar.*

“Just as the Jewish people give expression to the idea of Divine Creation in their resting on Shabbat, so does the chosen Land bear witness to that same principle by lying fallow in the seventh year.... this land as it were, reflects its holiness in giving expression to the same principle witnessed by the Jewish people through their Sabbaths.”

Abarbanel commentary on Torah.

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The dignity of Difference: how to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations” conitinuum: London, 2002 p.167-8



*Abarbanel: 1437-1508. Born in Lisbon, Portugal, into a family distinguished by their financial, political and Jewish communal leadership achievements. Then in 1483, he was forced to flee to Spain, where he re-established himself till the expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492. Ultimately he made his way to Italy, where he lived in Naples and Venice till his death in1508*

When I read *parashat Behar*, I see a God Who insists that labor be balanced by rest. Just as we balance the hubbub of workweek with a day of Shabbat, so we balance the earth's seven years of producing with a year to lie fallow. Rotating cycles of crops with cycles of rest (or planting something like winter wheat, then plowing it back into the earth) enables land to stay fertile, to remain a source of abundance, and this is not only common sense but holy obligation.



*Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, Ordained in 2011, Rabbi Barenblat is Rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel, MA. She runs a award winning blog called “Vevateen Rabbi”*

**Leading idea: Private versus Public Ownership.**

There seems to be a contradiction in the text – in verse 5 we are told not to farm the land, in verse 6 that, even without farming, we can’t eat the new growth that springs up in the seventh year naturally without our tending it *(“The after-growth\* of your harvest you shall not harvest, and the grapes you had set aside you shall not pick.”).* Yet in the very next Pasukim (verse 7and 8) we are told “*And [the produce of] the Shabbat of the land shall be yours, for you to eat and for your male slaves and female slaves, and for your hired worker and resident [non-Israelite] who live with you. And for your domestic animals and the wild animals that are in your land, shall be all [the land’s] produce to eat.*

If we attend carefully to the language, however, we see a difference – we are not to eat of the after-growth of “**your** harvest” (קְצִירְ**ךָ**) or “grapes **you** have set aside” ( ועִנְּבֵי נְזִירֶ**ךָ),** but we can eat from the produce of “ha’aretz”, **the land.** This points to a difference between *land generally* and *privately owned parcels of land*, a distinction we might understand as a distinction between *public* and *private* spheres, between what is publically available for the use of everyone, and what is privately owned by individuals for their own use.

**Public and private in Western Philosophy**

The idea of a public sphere involves several components. On one hand, it refers to

*a relationship that is socially and politically constituted in a particular space with the active involvement of people sharing a set of traditions (laws, institutions, language and practices).* On the other hand, it refers to *a general idea of some good (value) that is woven into networks (political domains, social practices and institutions).* <http://eurospheres.org/files/2010/08/Eurosphere_Working_Paper_2_Kocan.pdf>

The private sphere involves the areas of one's life in which one works for oneself. The private sphere is one of personal and familial ownership (wealth, land, home, slaves. Objects). We have authority and control over the things we accrue as individuals, whereas in the public realm our authority and control is as a representative of the society (appointed leaders, formal and informal; active citizens; delegates). Furthermore if the public sphere embodies and conveys general ideas of the good and worthy, these in turn impact upon the private sphere (in that our personal lives are held accountable to concepts and laws that are determined in the public sphere.) For instance, if during the Sabbatical year all can eat equally from the produce of the land, then this experience of human equality is understood to be instructional for, and thereby influence, the way we understand who we are in the world once the Shabbat of the Land is over. This idea that the shmittah year is there to communicate something of value to us about how we ought to live our lives – is present in the secondary sources.

Thinking of the Shabbat of the land *in terms of living for a year in the public realm invites us to ask what social, political and cultural role it plays and what idea of the ‘general good’ it embodies.*

**Discussion Plan: What is public? What is private?**

1. If I gather flowers from my own backyard, are they public or private?
2. If flowers are growing on an abandoned block of land, are they public or private? If I collect some of them and put them in a vase in my kitchen, does that change anything?
3. If someone leaves a broken chair out with their trash, is it now public or private?

If I pick the broken chair up and take it home and fix it, is it still public or private?

1. If there is a running track around the local park, is this for public use or private use?
2. If there are cans of soda put out on a table at a birthday party I am invited to,
   1. is it OK for me to take one? Are the cans for guests (public) or for the family (private)?
   2. Once I take it, is it now my can of drink?
   3. If I go into the kitchen and taking one for their fridge, is this different? If so, how?
3. Is the street light on the corner sidewalk for public use or private use?
4. If I go to the dog rescue center and get a dog, whose dog is it before I take it? After I take it?
5. If I bring a box of oranges into the school and leave them with a sign “Please take one” – are they now part of the public domain of the school

or privately owned?

1. If someone walks in off the street who doesn’t have children at the school, is the sign also addressed to them?
2. If you post a comment on someone’s facebook page, is that a private act (between you and them) or a public act?

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| **לך ולעבדך ולאמתך:**לפי שנאמר (שמות כג יא) ואכלו אביוני עמך, יכול יהיו אסורים באכילה לעשירים, תלמוד לומר לך ולעבדך ולאמתך, הרי בעלים ועבדים ושפחות אמורים כאן:  **for you, for your male and female slaves:**Since the Torah says [regarding Shemittah], “and the poor of your people shall eat [it]” (Exod. 23:11), one might think that it [the produce of the Shemittah year] is prohibited to be eaten by wealthy people. Torah, therefore, says here, “for you, for your male and female slaves,”-we see that the [wealthy] owners and the male and female slaves are included here [to permit them also to eat of the Shemittah year produce].  *Rashi on Behar* |

וגם ללמוד מזה שלא יתנשא העשיר על העני, אמרה תורה שבשנה השביעית כולם שווים, יחד עשיר ואביון יש להם רשות בגנות ובשדות לאכול לשבעה

***רבי צבי קלישר:*** *בפירושו לתורה בפרשת "בהר"*

One can learn that a rich man should not be higher than a poor man, the Torah says that in the seventh year they are all equal, both the rich and poor together have a right to gather freely in the gardens and in the fields, and their right to eat their fill...

*R.Zvi Kalisher: Torah Commentary, Behar*

What the Sabbath achieves in its impact on the individual, the Shmittah achieves in its impact on the nation as a whole. A year of solemn rest is essential for both nation and land, a year of peace and tranquility, without oppressor or tyrant. He shall not oppress his neighbor or brother, for a shmitttah has been proclaimed to Adonai, a year of equality and relaxation, There is no private property and no punctilious privilege...

*Rav Kook. (1865–1935)*

*Rav Kook was the first*[*Ashkenazi*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkenazi_Jews)[*chief rabbi*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_rabbi)*of the British*[*Mandatory Palestine*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandatory_Palestine) *and the founder of*[*Yeshiva*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yeshiva)[*Mercaz.*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercaz_HaRav_Kook) *He was a Jewish*[*thinker*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intellectual)*,*[*Halachist*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halacha)*,*[*Kabbalist*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabbalah)*and a renowned*[*Torah*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah)*scholar.*



The Purpose of this law is for the rich man to appreciate how much the poor man suffers, his life consisting of constant uncertainty, his eyes constantly turned up to Heaven to beg his food, constantly wandering and unsettled and thinking only ‘where can I find a little bread for myself, for my wife and for my children?’

The rich man is always happy and contented with his fields and vineyards and the corn that his fields produce, and he pays no attention to the poor man, failing utterly to feel his suffering.

For this reason God instructed that there should be a Sabbatical on the seventh year, so that the rich man should suffer and ask himself “if I do not sow or reap, how can I feed myself in the eighth year and where will I find my food?” The rich man then thinks “If I , who suffer only one year because I do not sow, find that my eyes are in darkness, what about the poor man who suffers and despairs all the time and worries how he can feed himself?” That way he feels the suffering of the poor and feeds them.

*Rabbi Abraham Sava, Tseror Hamor, Leviticus 25.*

**Discussion Plan: Public and Private Values**

*Think together about whether these values are important to the functioning of civic life and whether they are important in your private life. If they are important in both, is there a difference between how they play out in the civic/public and private/family context?*

1. Expecting to be told the truth (e.g; in the government, between you and your friends)
2. Respecting each other’s belongings (e.g; in society, at school, in your home)
3. Trusting that other people have your best interests at heart (e.g; in your family, in society)
4. Showing empathy to someone who is having a hard time coping.
5. Making sure people do not go hungry.

*How might the following situations impact the way you relate to other people and/or to society?*

1. You are falsely accused by your school of cheating in a test.
2. The local gift shop has a policy of giving customers 20% discount on their birthday.
3. Your school has a zero tolerance policy toward bullying.
4. You have a waitressing job at the local café. The shop owners pay you less than the minimum legal amount - they say this is OK because you get to keep the tips.
5. Your parents start to ‘fine’ you if you don’t do your family chores on time – they take it out of your pocket money.
6. When you walk into the classroom in the morning, your teacher always greets you with a smile.

* *Going back to our text – What ‘social good’ do you think the Sabbatical year might achieve? (What positive effect might it have on relations in the society?)*
* *Read the commentaries provided – What values do they see being transmitted through the Sabbatical year? What lasting effect do the authors think the Sabbatical year might have on people? Do you think this is realistic?)*

**Activity:**

Ask a family member or a member of your community to describe something they experienced in civic life when they were growing up that has had a positive impact on how they have chosen to live their lives. Write this up (If the event they refer to was a public event, look up what happened so you can explain it briefly in the report). Take a photo of the person you interviewed and put the photo and report on display.

**Leading Idea: What is the natural state of society? Equality or Hierarchy?**

Removing human ownership and manipulation of resources in the Sabbatical year also raises a question about the ‘natural state’ of the public sphere – Is the ‘natural state’ hierarchical or equal? The text and commentaries suggest that once we put ownership aside we are all equal, as the natural state of the social sphere is equality rather than hierarchy. Is hierarchy an effect of our social sanctioning of private ownership? Or is hierarchy our natural state, and we have to institutionalize our removal of it (with a sabbatical year) in order to mitigate its effects and remain socially conscientious?

**Discussion plan: What is our natural social state?**

1. Do you think we learn to form friendships, or is the capacity to form friendships something that human beings have naturally?
2. Do you think we learn to be aggressive or is aggression part of our nature?
3. Do you think we learn kindness, or is being kind something human beings naturally are?
4. Is it possible that the more we own (money, things), the more control we have over other people?
5. Is it possible that the more we own, the more compassionate we are able to become toward other people?
6. Is it possible that the less we own, the more compassionate we arte able to become toward other people?
7. Is it natural for some people to own more (money, things) than others?
8. Is it natural for some people to have more power than others?
9. Is it natural for people to give some of what they own to others who need it?
10. In what ways would giving up private ownership over the means of production make us more equal? In what ways would it not make us more equal?

**Leading Idea: “Shabbat of the Land” in Contemporary Israel... how is the shmittah year understood and attended to today?**

In Vayikra, the instruction to observe a ‘Shabbat of the Land’ is part of a more encompassing set of instructions concerning how we are to live as a nation in our own land. From a Biblical point of view it is not a commandment that concerns us when we live outside of Eretz Yisrael. This makes it a special concern for contemporary Israel. The following sources provide rich material to explore how a ‘Shabbat of the land” is approached within Israel today. Here the range of responses can be analyzed according to the four logical possibilities described under the Leading Idea “For our own sake or for the sake of the other?” To what extent is Shmittah being approached as a technical or instrumental issue? Towhat extent is it seen as an expression of value? To what extent is it seen as reflecting a certain way of being in the world? Reading this leading ideas will give you additional resources for discussing these contemporary sources.

Furthermore, if the Sabbatical year is, at least in part, for the sake of society: to re-align issues of wealth (the ‘haves’ and ‘have not’s), or to remind us of the sanctity of nature (that God lies behind the capacity of the land to produce food), or to promote social compassion toward those in need (as some of the sources suggest), why is this limited to Jewish practice in Eretz Yisrael? For instance, with the increasing rise of environmental consciousness in general and the establishment of urban Jewish farms as sites for Jewish environmental education, could the observance of a “Shabbat of the Land” have educative value in the diaspora? Does it have something to teach us in the context of Jewish Summer Camps?

**Observing laws of Shmitta in Modern Israel**

*Heter Mechira* literally means ‘Permit of Sale.’ Heter Mechira allows for the symbolic selling of agricultural land to a non-Jew, for the one-year Shmita period. Once the ownership of land has been transferred to someone who is not Jewish, the laws of Shmita no longer apply to the land itself, and food can be grown on it.

*While the state of Israel has developed a successfully strong and secure agricultural sector since its early pioneer days, this method of symbolic land transfer started in the early pioneering days is still the normative practice during a Shmita Year.*

This (heter Mechira) is merely a temporary measure that we implemented only because of the overwhelming need to do so.

God forbid that one should consider annulling a great and central mitzvah [commandment] such as the holiness of the Shmita unless it is a matter of life and death, such that if we do not sell the land, many will die of starvation and the fledging new Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael will be destroyed. However, at a time that a competent Beit Din [Jewish Court] will conclude that the sale is not necessary and that the nation can observe Shmita without endangering lives, then God forbid that the sale should take place in such circumstances.

***Rav Kook (Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi, Israel, 1921-35)***



Every seven years, an increasing number of farmers defy economic logic and leave their lands fallow for the agricultural sabbatical. In the 1950s and '60s, only about 1,000 dunams (250 acres) of land lay fallow. Seven years ago, in 2001, it was about 220,000 dunams. And next year, 3,000-3,500 farmers will observe shmita, and 400,000 dunams will lie fallow, according to Keren Shvi'it.

"This is very exciting," said Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, executive vice president of Agudath Israel of America. "We are hopeful that with the proper support, close to 40 percent of arable land in Israel will be resting this year." Over the last few decades agriculture in Israel has moved from a mom-and-pop based system, in which individual families tilled a plot of land, to one made up of

large-scale operators who work thousands of dunams. On his recent visit in preparation for the coming shmita, Bloom said he spoke to farmers who gross $1.5 million a year who were willing to shut down operations for Shmita.

–**Michal Lando, Mitzva Makers, Jerusalem Post, July 24, 2007**



Yochay Sorok and thousands of his fellow farmers should be taking the year off right now, allowing their land, and themselves, to rest in observance of a Jewish tradition that dates to Leviticus. But Sorok, customer relations manager for the Chubeza organic farm outside Jerusalem, is working—as are the vast majority of Israeli farmers. Just before the start of the Jewish New Year on Sept. 13, Sorok signed papers at the offices of his local chief rabbi, technically selling the farm to a non-Jew. He never met his farm’s “buyer” and doesn’t need to. Next September, the purchase check will be torn up and everything will return to normal. “It’s a trick. But it’s a smart trick,” Sorok said of the nominal land sale. “That’s the Jewish way of dealing with the Torah. You reinterpret—not for small, selfish reasons but for good reasons. . . . Giving people a living is a higher cause.”

“In Israel, It’s Temple vs. State Over Farming”***, Los Angeles Times*** Dec. 7, 2007

**Excerpts of the responsum of Rabbi David Golinkin, approved by the law committee of the Masorti (Conservative) Movement in Israel for Kibbutz Hannaton:**

**Question:**

How are we, a recently established kibbutz, to observe the shmita year? Being a young

agricultural community, we must now already plan next year's crops. We are also in the process of developing our public gardens, lawns and flowerbeds; this is not merely for our pleasure, but also in order to strengthen the ground, thus preventing erosion during the rainy season, which could damage our houses' sidewalks. Is it permissible to plant gardens and to build an irrigation system during the shmita year? To what extent may one water the ground during a shmita year? What is the argument in favor of observing the shmita year in our time, and is the fact that our kibbutz was established a mere two years ago of any relevance?

**Responsum:**

…Since the vast majority of Israeli society today lives in urban centers and far from

agricultural areas, and since agricultural products are grown mainly for export, the shmita restrictions of ancient times which reflect a simple, small-scale agricultural society, cannot serve us appropriately in our time. Moreover, both methods used in Israel today owe their success to the vast, secular majority of Israeli farmers, who serve as a “shabbess goy” for the religious public. This is an unacceptable situation, especially for the Religious Zionist and Masorti populations.

An investigation of the Rishonim (Medieval rabbis) reveals that a large group of Rishonim - those of Provence - ruled that shmita in our day is neither biblical nor rabbinic but a midat hassidut, an act of piety. Therefore, we rule that the shmita year be observed as a midat hassidut, as follows:

1. Sowing the winter crop before Rosh Hashanah;

2. Sowing grass and trees for gardens before Rosh Hashanah;

3. Whenever possible, avoid Biblically forbidden work, such as sowing, pruning, harvesting and ploughing. However, if one must carry out any of these tasks, one should try to do them with a shinui, i.e by a different method than otherwise used;

4. Avoiding the planting or tending of gardens which are not otherwise required forpreventing erosion during the rainy season. It is also advisable to perform various symbolic and educational acts to enhance theawareness of the year being a shmita year, such as:

* + Planning the agricultural cycle to fit the six years between two shmita years.
  + Leave one field as a "shmita corner" where all the laws of shmita will be observed.
  + Hold public study sessions of the laws of shmita in the Mishnah, Maimonides and other sources.
  + One of the ultimate goals of the shmita year is "that the poor of thy people may eat"

(Exodus 23:11). It would be most appropriate for the Kibbutz to donate a part of the shmita year's profits to indigent people.

[](http://www.hazon.org/)

[](javascript:%20void(0);)

http://hazon.org/shmita-project/overview/

# Overview

## Reimagine society. Renew Jewish Life.

****The Shmita Project is working to expand awareness about the biblical Sabbatical tradition, and to bring the values of this practice to life today to support healthier, more sustainable Jewish communities.

### What is Shmita?

Commonly translated as the ‘Sabbatical Year,’ *Shmita* literally means ‘release.’ Of biblical origin, this is the final year of a shared calendar cycle, when land is left fallow, debts are forgiven, and a host of other agricultural and economic adjustments are made to ensure the maintenance of an equitable, just, and healthy society.  The questions about how Shmita actually worked – if it actually worked – are enormous. The possibilities for social change are thrilling.

The next *Shmita* year starts Rosh Hashana 2014. The Shmita Project invites you to explore the following questions: **What might this *Shmita* year look like in a modern context? In Israel and beyond? And not just for farmers, but for businesses, for families, for communities, for each of us individually? How can we best prepare for it? And how might the wider *Shmita* cycle hold the key to approaching the economic, environmental and societal challenges we are facing today?**

http://hazon.org/ejp-shmita-funding/

# Shmita: A Paradigm for Funding

#### Written by Charlene Seidle  for a session at the recent Jewish Funders Network Conference

#### Posted on [eJP](http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/shmittah-a-paradigm-for-funding/) on March 20, 2014

### As funders, the onset of shmittah offers a good opportunity to test our assumptions and think about opportunities to support the organizations and issues we care about through a different, more holistic lens.

*Six years you will sow your land, and gather in the land’s produce, but in the Seventh Year you will release it from work and abandon it, that the poor of your people shall eat.*

Sh’mot 23:10-11

*And this is the manner of the release. Every creditor shall release that which he has lent to his neighbor; he shall not demand the debt from his neighbor and his brother.*

Devarim 15:2

The shmittah sabbatical year kicks off in September 2014. One of the core tenets of halacha and traditionally only observed in the land of Israel, shmittah also offers a useful and meaningful model for our lives, our relationships with each other, our responsibilities to those less fortunate than we are, and our systems for community, justice and equality. The word shmittah, exactly translated, means release. More than just one year of release, shmittah is actually the pinnacle of a seven-year cycle that sustains healthy society, community and individuals. Shmittah teaches us that our land – and our resources – do not truly belong to us, that our lives can be enriched and changed in powerful ways through releasing control. Opening ourselves to the shmittah experience inspires us to reinvest or recalibrate our relationships.

As funders, the onset of shmittah offers a good opportunity to test our assumptions and think about opportunities to support the organizations and issues we care about through a different, more holistic lens.

Here are (four of ) seven ideas for shmittah-inspired funding (in no particular order): For the rest go to:

http://hazon.org/ejp-shmita-funding/

1. Support the gift economy. Sharing, reusing and recycling improves the environment and builds sustainable community. The gemach, a hallmark of many Jewish communities, has traditionally served as a center to lend items which are generally temporarily needed, such as baby gear and now meet a wide variety of needs. Seek out gemachs and other exchange programs in your community. Learn more about them. Help create new ones...
2. Focus on networks and systems that encourage collaboration. The ultimate manifestation of shmittah is a community paradigm which is only possible if we all work together... Through building a culture of trust and collaboration we can achieve the “everything”.
3. Support organizations and efforts that connect with a local food system and ensure equal access to fresh and healthy food. When commenting about shmittah, the Rambam says that the produce of the shmittah year may not be transported anywhere beyond the Land of Israel. This focus resonates today as we see large-scale farming moving farther away from the end consumer. Fresh, healthy food is often priced beyond the means of families struggling to get by, and “fresh food deserts” in our communities rob many from even the ability to access these resources. Our Torah teaches that all shall have equal rights to the produce of the shmittah year, and that fresh food should not be reserved for only those with significant resources. In honor of shmittah, let’s find out which organizations work to address food security and access issues in our communities and advocate for a more, just equitable food system.
4. Support initiatives that provide financial and credit education and give people the tools they need to get and stay out of debt. By commanding us to release our neighbors and brothers from debt during the shmittah year, the Torah acknowledges the heavy, lasting and debilitating burden debt can wield. And in our society this burden starts earlier than ever. The average undergraduate college student graduates with about $2,500 in credit card debt that often takes years to pay off, especially when compounded by interest and late fees. Basic financial education can be critical to helping individuals of all ages make better money-related decisions.

**What ideas do you have for observing shmittah in your organization? Like many of our Jewish principles, practices and teachings, shmittah provides us all with a wonderful opportunity to connect deeply with our ancient traditions and reignite them for today.**

*With thanks to Rabbi Andy Kastner, Director of the Leichtag Foundation’s Jewish Food Justice Fellowship and Yigal Deutscher, founder of the Seven Seeds Project and manager of the Shmittah Network for their help with this article.*

*Charlene Seidle is the Executive Vice President of the Leichtag Foundation and a senior consultant to the Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego*

Also look at:

<http://www.thejc.com/judaism/judaism-features/116770/the-fruits-shmittah-do-not-only-grow-trees>

<http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/117167/lying-fallow-during-shmittah-year-%E2%80%94-way-avoid-%EF%AC%81nancial-meltdown>