

Section 1

Judaism and Sustainability

ACT 1: CREATION

A Model for Work and Rest

Day 1: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. And God said: 'Let there be light.' And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day...

Day 2: And God said: 'Let there be a sky in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.' And God made the sky, and it separated the water below the sky from the water above the sky; and it was so. And God called the sky Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day...

Day 3: God said, 'Let the waters beneath the heaven be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land 'Earth,' and the gatherings of water, God named 'Seas.' And God saw that it was good.

And God said: 'Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit trees that produce their own kinds of fruit with seeds shall be on the earth.' And it was so.

And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and trees bearing fruit containing their own kind of seeds. God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

Day 4: And God said: 'Let there be lights in the heavenly sky divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the heavenly sky to shine upon the earth.' And it was so.

And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars. And God set them in the heavenly sky to shine on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

Day 5: And God said: 'Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let fowl fly above the earth on the face of the heavenly sky.' And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creeps, with which the waters teem after their kinds, and every winged fowl of every kind; and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.' And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

Day 6: And God said: 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind.' And it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after its kind, and the cattle after their kind, and every thing that creeps upon the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

And God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

And God created human in God's own image, in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them. And God blessed them; and God said unto them: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creeps upon the earth.'

And God said: 'Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed--to you it shall be for food; and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creeps upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, I have given every green herb for food.' And it was so. And God saw every thing that God had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Shabbat: Thus the heaven and the earth were completed, and all their array. By the seventh day God completed God's work which God had done, and God abstained on the seventh day from all of God's work which God had done. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it God abstained from all of God's work which God created to make.

Breishit (Genesis) 1-2:3

Discussion Questions

1. Why does God take six days to create the world rather than creating it in an instant?
2. Describe God's creation process? Come up with at least four attributes of God's methods.
3. What strategies for sustainability do you see in the creation process?

Learning from the Objects of God's Creation

A Foundation for Ecological Design

From my designer's perspective, I ask: why can't I design a building like a tree? A building that makes oxygen, fixes nitrogen, sequesters carbon, distills water, builds soil, accrues solar energy as fuel, makes complex sugars and food, creates microclimates, changes colors with the seasons and self-replicates. This is using nature as a model and a mentor, not an inconvenience. It's a delightful prospect.

William McDonough

The Next Industrial Revolution

A Retroactive Design Assignment: The Industrial Revolution

I'd be asking you to create a system that puts billions of pounds of highly toxic material into your soil, air and water, [to measure] prosperity by how much natural capital you can cut down, dig up, bury, burn or otherwise destroy, [to measure] progress by the number of smokestacks and if you are especially proud to put your name on them, [to measure] productivity by how few people are working, [to design and implement] thousands of complex [environmental] regulations to keep [people] from killing each other too quickly, [and to] destroy biological and cultural diversity at every turn. Can you do this for me?

William McDonough

The Next Industrial Revolution

The Sabbath

Technical civilization is man's conquest of space. It is a triumph frequently achieved by sacrificing an essential ingredient of existence, namely, time. In technical civilization we expend time to gain space. To enhance our power in the world of space is our main objective. Yet to have more does not mean to be more. The power we attain in the world of space terminates abruptly at the borderline of time. But time is the heart of existence.

To gain control of the world of space is certainly one of our tasks. The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space, we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time. There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Sabbath, 3.

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money...is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath?

Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Sabbath, 28.

Discussion Questions

1. Heschel poetically describes the importance of Shabbat in the larger context of the week. How do you understand the last line, "is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath?"
2. Do you have a personal Shabbat practice?
3. Do you ever face any obstacles to truly observing Shabbat?

ACT 2: MISHKAN

A Community Building Project

Commandment to Build the Mishkan

They shall make a sanctuary for me-so that **I may dwell among them**-like everything that I show you, the form of the Tabernacle and the form of all its vessels; and so shall you do.

Shemot (Exodus) 25:8-9

God's Presence in the Mishkan

And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud abode on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys; But if the cloud was not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

Shemot 40:33-38

A Collective Project

Take you from among you an offering to the Lord; **whoever is of a willing heart**, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord; gold, and silver, and bronze, And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, And rams' skins dyed red, and goats' skins, and shittim wood, And oil for the light, and spices for anointing oil, and for the sweet incense, And onyx stones, and stones to be set for the ephod, and for the breastplate. And every wise hearted among you shall come, and make all that the Lord has commanded;

Shemot, 35:5-10

The people of Israel brought a willing offering to the Lord, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for every kind of work, which the Lord had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses.

Shemot: 35:29

“You shall accept contributions for me from every person whose heart so moves them [to give].” This teaches that every person must contribute whatever is good in his or her heart. For the Mishkan is built out of the goodness found in each individual, the “gold and silver and copper, the blue, purple and crimson yarns, the fine linen and goats’ hair” (Exodus 25:3). Each one brings the particular good thing that he or she has to offer, in his or her particular way.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Discussion Questions

1. What purpose is the Mishkan to serve?
2. What is noteworthy about the process of constructing the Mishkan?

Connections to Creation

There are four main parallels in the description of God creating the world and the instructions to create the Mishkan.

- The verb “*aseh*,” to make, is found in each.
- The verb “*kalah*,” to complete, is found in each.
- Upon completion, both God and Moses “saw” that the work was done; on the 5th and 6th days of creation, God blesses the creatures that were created, just as Moses blesses the Israelites for completing the Mishkan.
- Finally, each story contains six sections describing work being done and then a seventh section regarding Shabbat.

One explanation of the parallels between the construction of the Mishkan and the creation story is that it reflects the mutuality of our relationship with God. Just as God created the world for us, we create the Mishkan as a home for God’s presence on this world.

Why the Juxtaposition of Shabbat and the Mishkan? Rashi explains that it is to teach us that despite the transcendental importance of the Mishkan, it cannot be built on Shabbat. Other commentators explain that the juxtaposition reveals a frame of reference for life: labor is of value only if it can have both a sacred and secular purpose. In other words, the most valued forms of labor are those that work towards creating a space for holiness in the world.

Constructing the Mishkan

They shall **make** a sanctuary for me-so that I may dwell among them-like everything that I show you, the form of the Tabernacle and the form of all its vessels; and so shall you **do**...You shall **make** a table of acacia wood...you shall **make** a menorah of pure gold.

Shemot (Exodus) 25:8-9, 23, 31

All the work of the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed...Moses **saw** the entire work, and behold! They had done it as God had commanded, so they had done. And Moses **blessed** them.

Shemot 39: 32, 42-43

God Creates the World

God [thus] **made** the sky...God [thus] **made** the large lights...God said "Let us **make** man in our image...

Breishit 1:7,16,25

And God created the great sea giants and every living being that creeps, with which the waters teemed after their kinds; and all winged fowl of every kind...and God said, "let us make human in our image...God **blessed** them...

Breishit 1:20-28.

God **saw** all that God had made, and behold, it was very good...Heaven and earth, and all their components, were

[thus] completed with the seventh day, God finished all the work that God had done.

Breishit 1:31-2:1-3

Discussion Questions

1. How are the creation story and the construction of the Mishkan related? Why might this be important?
2. How can the creation story and the construction of the Mishkan serve as models for the work we do?

The Deeper Meaning of the Mishkan

Building a True Mishkan

The only way to understand the sin of the Golden Calf is to compare it to the Sanctuary/Mishkan, for the building of the Mishkan is the context for this story. The drama of the Golden Calf is inserted smack in the middle of the Mishkan text. The main difference between a golden calf and a Mishkan is that the Mishkan exists for the space within it. It is a structure that is built to send us to that holy inner-ness. All of its beauty, color and design are dedicated as a nexus point between the Human and Divine, between Heaven and Earth. The important part is not the outer form, but what's inside, for that is where God speaks to us. The further within you get, the more holy is the space. The further within you get, the more you touch a shared mystery. Not only is it the meeting place between Human and Divine, it is also the place where we meet each other, where the differences between us dissolve.

In contrast, The Golden Calf is solid, existing of and for itself. We supply the gold, but then the Calf seems to take on a life of its own. Aaron describes the process saying, "I cast the gold into the fire and out came this Calf!" The Calf has no interior space. It glorifies itself. It is "full of itself." It represents the most dangerous hindrance in the life of spiritual practice: that of worshipping and staying attached to the forms, rather than allowing those forms to send us to the essence that they might point towards. The difference between building a Mishkan or a Golden Calf is sometimes very subtle.

Rabbi Shefa Gold

Tshuvah - From the Golden Calf to the Mishkan

ACT 3: SHMITA

Social and Environmental Sustainability

A Sabbath for the Land, a Sabbath for God

And six years you shall sow your land, and you shall gather in its produce. And the seventh year you shall release it from work and abandon it, and the poor among your people will eat.

Shemot (Exodus), 23:10-11

And the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to children of Israel and say to them: When you come to the land which I am giving you, then the land shall rest, a Sabbath for the Lord. For six years you shall sow your fields and for six years you shall prune your vines and you shall gather in their produce. And in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath for the Lord; you shall not sow your field, and you shall not prune your vineyard, and the Sabbath produce of the land shall yours to eat; for you and your manservant and your maidservant, and for your settler who resides with you.

Vayikra (Leviticus), 25:1-6

Social Equality

At the end of seven years you shall celebrate the Shmita year. And this is the manner of the Shmita; every creditor shall remit any debt owed by his neighbor and his brother when God's Shmita year comes around...

...If there be among you a needy man, one of your brothers, within any one of your gates, in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart and you shall not shut your hand from your needy brother. But you shall surely open your hands to him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks.

Devarim (Deuteronomy), 15:1-8

It [the Shmita year] teaches us further that the rich should not lord it over the poor. Accordingly, the Torah ordained that all should be equal during the seventh year, both the rich and the needy having access to the gardens and fields to eat their fill.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer
Sefer Habrit, Behar

Liberation from Materialism

Yet another reason: in order that they should not always be preoccupied with working the soil to provide for their material needs. For in this one year, they would be completely free. The liberation from the yoke of work would give them the opportunity for studying Torah and wisdom. The unlettered (illiterate) will be occupied with crafts and building and supply these needs in Eretz Israel. Those endowed with special skills will invent new methods in this free time for the benefit of the world.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer
Sefer Habrit, Behar

Discussion Questions

1. What are the reasons given for the Shmita year and do they make sense to you?
2. How can these laws shape the nation of Israel's collective priorities?
3. What kind of environmental impact can these laws have?

The Importance of the Shmita Year

The treasure of the nation, the Divine blessing that is implanted in it, the order of the world, the righteous and good life, lived in harmony with justice and honesty, peace and tranquility, grace and courage, permeated by the all-embracing contemplation of the Divine purpose, as it exists in the national soul—none can be activated in the day-to-day life. The very nature of this life obfuscates the spiritual majesty of the Divine soul (which dwells in the nation) and prevents its bright and shining light from penetrating the profane reality.

Life can only be perfected through the affording of a breathing space from the bustle of everyday life. The individual shakes himself free from ordinary weekday life at short and regular intervals—on every Sabbath...What the Sabbath achieves regarding the individual, the Shmita achieves with regard to the nation as a whole.

A year of solemn rest is essential for both the nation and the land, a year of peace and quiet without oppressor and tyrant...It is a year of equality and rest, in which the soul reaches out towards divine justice, towards God who sustains the living creatures with loving kindness. There is no private property and no punctilious privilege but the peace of God reigns over all in which there is the breath of life. Sanctity is not profaned by the exercise of private acquisitiveness over all this year's produce, and the covetousness of wealth stirred up by commerce is forgotten. For food – but not for commerce.

Rav Kook

Introduction to *"The Sabbath of the Land"*

Repercussions for not Observing Shmita

Exile comes upon the world on account of the failure to observe the Shmita.

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers), 5:11

Sustainable Land Stewardship

In our relationship to the land, we are ruled by a number of terms and limits set not by anyone's preference but by nature and by human nature:

- I. Land that is used will be ruined unless it is properly cared for.
- II. Land cannot be properly cared for by people who do not know it intimately, who do not know how to care for it, and who cannot afford to care for it.
- III. People cannot be adequately motivated to care for the land by general principles or by incentives that are merely economic—that is, they won't care for it merely because they think they should or merely because someone pays them.
- IV. People are motivated to care for land to the extent that their interest in it is direct, dependable and permanent.
- V. They will be motivated to care for the land if they can reasonably expect to live on it as long as they live. They will be more strongly motivated if they can reasonably expect that their children and grandchildren will live on it as long as they live. In other words, there must be a mutuality of belonging: they must feel that the land belongs to them, that they belong to it, and this belonging is a settled and unthreatened fact.
- VI. But such belonging must be appropriately limited. This is the indispensable qualification of the idea of land ownership. It is well understood that ownership is an incentive to care. But there is a limit to how much land can be owned before an owner is unable to take proper care of it. The need for attention increases with the intensity of use. But the quality of attention decreases as acreage increases.
- VII. A nation will destroy its land and therefore itself if it does not foster in every possible way the sort of thrifty, prosperous, permanent rural households and communities that have the desire, the skills, and the means to care properly for the land they are using.

Wendell Berry

Conservation and Local Economy, Art of the Common Place

Discussion Questions

1. Rav Kook writes that the Shmita year allows for the true holiness of the nation to shine. Do you agree that this holiness cannot be “activated in the day-to-day life”?
2. When the Shmita year was observed in its completeness, it required an enormous amount of community organization and cooperation; harvesting, preserving and storing communal food in preparation and distributing the food throughout the year. Kook implies that private commerce brings out competitiveness and jealousy among people, but that during the Shmita year this is forgotten. How can this utopian vision of the Shmita year manifest in contemporary economic structures? Can you think of any examples?
3. Why is the punishment for neglecting the Shmita year so severe?
4. Read the passage above from Wendell Berry’s “Conservation and Local Economy.” Berry states that a person needs to have an intimate relationship with the land in order to care for it properly. How might a Shmita year fit into Berry’s view of our relationship to the land? Consider the final point in Berry’s argument through the lens of the passage from *Pirkei Avot* regarding repercussions for not observing Shmita.
5. Take a moment to imagine what you would do with a year in which you were forbidden to work, but in which your survival was dependent on communal resources.
6. Take a moment to imagine what our society would look like if all the people who are responsible for making things move faster (architects, engineers, builders, etc.) had to take a sabbatical every seven years.

ACT 4: YOVEL

An Economic Equalizer

A Jubille for You

And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and you shall call out liberty in the land to all who dwell in it; it shall be a Jubilee for you; and you shall return every man to his heritage, and shall return every man to his family... You shall perform My statutes, keep My ordinances and perform them then you will live on the land securely. And the land will then yield its fruit and you will eat to satiety, and live upon it securely...The land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the land is Mine; for you are foreigners and aliens with me.

Vayikra (Leviticus), 25:11-25

Whose Land is it?

In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.

The Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

We didn't inherit the land from our ancestors; we're borrowing it from our descendents.

Native American Proverb

From Generation to Generation

We Conservatives have always passed our values from generation to generation. I believe that personal prosperity should follow the same course. I want to see wealth cascading down the generations. We do not see each generation starting out anew, with the past cut off and the future ignored.

John Major (Former Prime Minister of UK)

Discussion Questions

1. The laws of the Yovel only apply when the tribes of Israel are living on their inherited lands in the land of Israel. Why does the nation need to be whole in order for the Yovel to take affect?
2. What is the significance of the line, "...for the land is Mine; for you are foreigners and aliens with me," and how might this concept affect the way we relate to the earth and make use of its resources?
3. Consider the Native American proverbs and the quote from John Major. How are these ideas similar and how are they different? Are there drawbacks to "wealth cascading down the generations?"
4. The global movement to cancel the debt of developing nations roots itself in the concept of the Jubilee year. Do you think these ideas apply to the contemporary global economy?