

reimagine society
renew Jewish life
release the land
forgive debt
rethink farming

The Hazon שמיטה SHMITA WORKBOOK

First Edition

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INTRO TO SHMITA

Shmita, like Shabbat, exists in a cycle of seven. As Shabbat happens every seven days, Shmita is celebrated every seven years. As it was first intended, on every seventh year, the people of Israel, following the same collective rhythm, would practice a cultural ‘release’ (the English meaning of the Hebrew word Shmita). This particular release was rooted in agricultural and economic systems: during this period of time, debts would be forgiven, agricultural lands would lie fallow, private land holdings would become open to the commons, and staples such as food storage and perennial harvests would be freely redistributed and accessible to all.

Shmita traditionally applied in the land of Israel alone. However, the values presented in the tradition are timeless, and are especially ripe for application in our modern-day context and the environmental, economical, and social issues we are facing.

For one, Shmita provides a positive, Jewishly rich, socially engaged vision that connects personal identity and activists energies with Jewish identity and community, and the values of Jewish peoplehood. In particular, Shmita engages both a sense of shared tradition and a sense of current and future responsibility. Shmita challenges all who learn about it to think about what our obligations are to land and people in general, and to land and people within the Jewish world and in Israel, in particular.

In addition, the environmental degradation and economic instability we are globally experiencing make it important to reevaluate our cultural practices and norms, to really strive for sustainability and resiliency for the sake of future generations. The values inherent in the Shmita tradition challenge a contemporary world striving for continual growth, development, and individual gains. Perhaps there is a message embedded within Shmita that we can use right now to strengthen the movement for creating a healthier, more holistic and sustainable culture.

The current Shmita year runs from Rosh Hashanah, September 24, 2014/Tishrei 5775 to Rosh Hashanah, September 13, 2015/Tishrei 5776.

INTRO TO SHMITA WORKBOOK

The practice of Shmita is an opportunity to dedicate a year to releasing that which does not serve us. This tool aims to help you think through how to do this on a personal, communal and global scale. An addendum to the Hazon Shmita Sourcebook, we hope that it serves as a resource to motivate and inspire action. We encourage you to complete the workbook alongside a chevuta (one on one) or in a mishpacha (small, intimate) group, and use it as a tool to reflect, dream and act together. This can also serve as a tool to think through how your institution or organization will incorporate the practices of Shmita.

Since there is no halachic requirement to observe Shmita outside the land of Israel, we have chosen to be creative in our interpretations. We are also thousands of years removed from the biblical era, and culture has changed dramatically. The guiding questions have been framed to reflect our current-day reality.

In it's most modern day application, the values of Shmita today might be recognized within the professional paid sabbatical leave. Such opportunities represent a core element of what Shmita offers us: the opportunity to leave a regular routine and create space and time for creative exploration and learning. Just as the soils of the field are left to rejuvenate and renew on the Shmita year, so too we are able to give ourselves this opportunity of creative renewal. However, the values of Shmita go well beyond this aspect. In this workbook, we present a few of these avenues you might want to explore, as you bring Shmita to life in your own ways.

The workbook is organized by the 3 core concepts of Shmita with space for reflection as well as action steps on a personal, communal, and global level. We encourage you to explore each section. That being said, feel free to choose your own adventure.

We want to hear how you're planning to put Shmita in to action! Please visit the Hazon Shmita website in the coming weeks to upload your action plan!

For more resources, please visit the Shmita Project and the Shmita Facebook group.

This workbook was made in collaboration between Margot Seigle and Yigal Deutscher with
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RELEASE OF...?

Shmita provides us with a framework for release: release of cultivated foods, property, and debts. This workbook provides space to reflect and take action on these three core concepts. We must first root ourselves in this concept of release so that we are nourished as we move towards action.

“At the end of seven years, you are to make a Release [*shmita*].”

-Deuteronomy 15.1

REFLECTION: When you see or hear the word ‘release’ what comes to mind? How, if at all, do you feel this in your own body? What new ways would you like to invite a sense of ‘release’ into your life, on this Shmita Year? In your personal or communal life, are there habits or patterns you especially would like to let go of?

ACTION: What actions or steps can you take to begin releasing these patterns and habits that no longer serve you? What support would you need to strengthen these efforts?

RELEASE OF CULTIVATED FOOD

“In the seventh year, you shall leave it untended and unharvested.”

-Exodus 23.11

“For six years you are to sow your field, for six years you are to prune your vineyard, then you are to gather in its produce, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of the Sabbath- ceasing for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord: your field you are not to sow, your vineyard you are not to prune, *the after growth of your harvest you are not to harvest*, the grapes of your consecrated-vines you are not to amass; a Sabbath of Sabbath-ceasing shall there be for the land! *Now the Shabbat-yield of the land is for you, for eating*: for you, for your servant and for your handmaid, for your hired-hand and for your resident-settler who sojourn with you; and for your domestic-animal and the wild-best that are in your land shall be all its produce, to eat.”

-Leviticus 25.1-7

The after growth of your harvest you are not to harvest: With the intention of taking possession and ownership of it, like other harvests. Rather it shall be *hefker* [ownerless] for all to take freely.

Now the Shabbat-yield of the land is for you, for eating: Although I have prohibited the produce of the Shmita Year to you, I did not prohibit you from eating it or deriving benefit from it- only that you should not treat it as its owner. Rather all should have equal rights to the produce of the seventh year, you, your hired worker, and those who reside with you.”

-Rashi 25.5-6

On this year, there is a strong emphasis on eating foods from perennial and wild plants; eating locally and in season; making food-access equal and fair, and, honoring the sanctity of food (not wasting the harvest).

REFLECTION - Personal: Shmita directly impacts farmers, but the effects of this year reach through the channels of food distribution, affecting all of us who may not grow or harvest or own food. What is your strongest relationship to food: growing, shopping, cooking, eating, cleaning? What are the patterns that are healthiest in these relationships? What are some patterns that are less healthy, for yourself, for the land, for the wider ecology, for the community/society you are a part of?

ACTION - Personal: What is one practice you can take on in the year of Shmita to deepen and strengthen your personal relationship to food in alignment with Shmita values? In what ways will this activate a sense of 'release'?

REFLECTION - Communal: Who in your community has access to healthy food? Who doesn't? What's this got to do with race and class? What are people who lack access to healthy food doing to shift this disparity?

ACTION - Communal: How can you begin to get involved in supporting a more socially just and equitable food system in the community in which you live? Is there an action you can take on a weekly or monthly basis?

REFLECTION - Global: What do you know about where your food comes from? Where do you purchase most of your food? Can you trace the journey of most of your food, from seed to table?

ACTION - Global: Are there ways you can shift your food choices in the year of Shmita to deepen into relationship with your local food shed and honor farmers? Food vendors? Restaurant workers?*

*For more information, see “The Hands That Feed Us Report” [<http://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Hands-That-Feed-Us-Report.pdf>]
and “The Welcome Table: Gathering for a Responsible Food System” [<http://thewelcometable.net/>]

RELEASE OF PROPERTY

“The land is not to be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are sojourners and resident settlers with me, throughout all the land of your holdings, you are to allow for redemption of the land. If your brother sinks down in poverty and has to sell some of his holding, his redeemer nearest-in-kin to him is to come and redeem the sold- property of his brother. Now a man- if he has no redeemer, but his hand reaches means and finds enough to redeem with, he is to reckon the years since its sale, returning the surplus to the man to whom he sold it, and it is to return to his holding.” -Leviticus 25.23-26

REFLECTION - Personal: What is your connection to the land your ancestors are from? The land your parents are from? The land you are from? Where do you feel at home?

ACTION - Personal: How can you build a sense of home within yourself in the year of Shmita? What are some ways you can deepen into a relationship with the land you now call home? How can you serve and support this land as a steward, rather than as an 'owner of property'?

REFLECTION - Communal: What are the trends in your community in terms of house/land ownership and rental? How is this related to race and class? What are the struggles of those who do not own property? What are some efforts being made locally by those most impacted to alleviate these struggles?

ACTION - Communal: Are there ways you can begin to get involved in supporting a more equitable distribution of land/property in the community in which you live? Is there one action you can take on a weekly or monthly basis?

REFLECTION - Global: What is the relationship between property ownership and power? How does this take shape today in our modern economic reality? How does this interact with people's historical and spiritual connection to land? Do you know the history of the land you now live on? Who were the peoples that first called this land home, and what was their story? How are these peoples represented in your community, and on this land, today? What is their current relationship and connection to this land?

ACTION - Global: What are ways you learn more about the history of the land you live on? What is a step you can take to begin to mend relationships with native peoples who have been displaced from their ancestral land?

*For more information, see Idle No More Campaign [<http://www.idlenomore.ca/>] and Via Campesina [<http://viacampesina.org/en/>]

RELEASE OF DEBT

Now this is the matter of the Release: he shall release, every possessor of a loan of his hand, what he has lent to his neighbor. He is not to oppress his neighbor or his brother, for the Release of the Lord has been proclaimed!..When there is among you a needy- person from any-one of your brothers, within one of your gates in the land that the Lord your G!d is giving you, you are not to toughen your heart, you are not to shut your hand to your brother, the needy-one. Rather, you are to open, yes, open your hand to him, and are to give-pledge, yes, pledge to him, sufficient for his lack that is lacking to him

– Deuteronomy 15.1-2,7,8

REFLECTION - Personal: What is your relationship to money? In what ways is it healthy? In what ways is it unhealthy? In what ways does this express itself when it comes to lending and borrowing? What are examples of interpersonal debts that believe you owe others or that others owe you?

ACTION - Personal: Is there a practice you can take on to heal your relationship to monetary giving and receiving? What are some practices you might take on to give more generously or to receive with more gratitude? What are some ways that you can forgive interpersonal debts?

REFLECTION - Communal: Is there a strong divide in your community between those with access to money, and those in debt? Do these lines intersect with race and class?* What communal systems exist, if any, to link these divides?

ACTION - Communal: How can you begin to get involved in creating a more equitable distribution of wealth in your community and connecting available resources to those in need? Is there an action you can take on a weekly or monthly basis?

*For more information on the racial wealth divide, see “United for a Fair Economy” [<http://www.faireconomy.org/>]

REFLECTION - Global: How does our current economic structure contribute to the unequal distribution of wealth? What alternatives exist? Which feel exciting to you?

ACTION - Global: How can you invest (time, resources, and/or money) into alternative, regenerative economies*? How can you begin investing in, and strengthening, your local economy?



*For more information on regenerative economies, see ReGenerative Finance's Core Values of a ReGenerative Economy [www.regenerativefinance.org/regen-core-values]