

## Shmita Project: Connecting the Values of Shmita to our World Today

Shmita, literally translated as the 'year of release,' and more widely known as the Sabbatical Year, is a biblical Jewish tradition, which, once every seven years, simultaneously re-adjusted agriculture and commerce to ensure an equitable, just and healthy society. Many may recall the year of Shmita as a time when agricultural lands were collectively left fallow. Take a moment to realize just how radical and audacious that sounds. As an equivalent, since most of us are not farmers in this age, imagine a year when every shopping mall and bank would be closed, or a year when everyone would stay home from work. How might that sound to you?

The Shmita year had a depth that reached into every aspect of society and culture. This was only an 'agricultural' year in the sense that it directly involved food and land, something which affects all of us, not just farmers. If we were really celebrating this tradition, here is how it would look: On the final year of a seven year calendar cycle, there will be no seeding or tilling of the soil, private land holdings will be open to the commons, everyone will have equal access to food storage and perennial/wild harvests, foods will not be sold as a commodity, and all debts will be forgiven. Everyone will share in widespread abundance, as resources are redistributed and shared equally. Repeat this all again seven years later, and on every seventh year that follows.

Can you envision this? The Shmita Cycle presents a way of being, a blueprint for a resilient, whole-systems culture, one grounded in vibrant, healthy and diverse relations between community, ecology, economy, and spirit. To truly celebrate this cycle is not simply to mark our calendars. Rather, it is to genuinely embrace a value system which calls for a paradigm transition from global to local, from profit to wellness, from the realm of the private to the realm of the communal, and from short term thinking to long term visioning.

It has been many generations, many cycles of sevens, since we can collectively say we have celebrated this tradition, with its true intention and cultural significance. Shmita is by no means at the forefront of our collective consciousness or cultural priority list. It does not define Jewish life as rituals like Shabbat or Passover may. When Shmita is recalled, it is usually referred to as an archaic notion or simply brought up as romantic idealism. To be fair, traditionally this custom was meant for the land of Israel alone. And after thousands of years of a Jewish faith developing while separate from the land of its origins, Shmita has been somewhat lost to us.

Let's be honest. Today, in a world so heavily influenced by the dominant systems of agribusiness, real estate, banking, and the global marketplace, the idea of working with the rhythm of the Shmita Cycle may be more impractical than ever. Then again, this may precisely be the perfect time to connect to, and bring to life, a story so old and ancient we have forgotten just how much we need it today, for our own survival, and for our own growth. As we begin to re-imagine the Shmita Cycle, these are the questions to ask: What would a culture look like if it actually did prepare itself to fully celebrate this year? How would their food systems function? How would their economic systems function? How would their communities be organized? And how might we apply such value systems to our cultural practices today?

Shmita has been dormant for thousands of years. In its rebirth it will look different, it will feel different. It will be whatever we will make of it. Will you join this journey? The reimagination of the Shmita Cycle begins with you, at home, with family, with friends, and with neighbors, at the most local, grassroots level. This process will actively take shape as a community effort, on our streets, in our synagogues, in our schools, and in our community commons. To support and strengthen this process, the Shmita Project has been created as a shared educational platform for individuals and communities working towards establishing a new vision for the Shmita tradition. To learn more, please visit [www.shmitaproject.org](http://www.shmitaproject.org) and join the Shmita Network. We'd love to share this journey together with you.

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