

The Israeli Shmita Initiative seeks to reestablish the Shmita year as a time of personal reflection, meaningful learning, social involvement, and environmental responsibility in Israel.

With the return to the land of Israel in the last century, Shmita has once again become a practical reality. In the modern State of Israel, the Shmita year experience typically revolves around agricultural practices and Jewish dietary laws, and is often characterized by dispute between religious factions. Yet beyond its agricultural and legal significance, the Shmita year presents an opportunity to learn about the important links between social justice, environmental responsibility, and Jewish life. Today's Israelis, who are increasingly open to exploring and creatively applying the ideas and values found in Judaism, are in a unique position to experience Shmita as a medium for both personal and societal transformation.

Our goal is to ensure that every person in Israel knows that the upcoming year is a Shmita year, and to empower all who seek to bring Shmita into their lives to do so in a way that is relevant and meaningful.

The Israeli Shmita Initiative is a platform of individuals, NGOs, government officials, and corporate executives from all points on the Jewish spectrum. The Initiative President is Rabbi Michael Melchior, a former MK and well-known public figure. The Initiative is coordinated by Einat Kramer, Director of [Teva Ivri](#), who works together with a wide range of organizations that share both the deep values of Shmita and a strong desire for change in Israeli society.

Israeli Shmita – Where do we stand today?

Launch Events

In the past several months, after a lot of hard work, two major conferences marked the launch of the Israeli Shmita Initiative through two significant conferences:

“The First Israeli Shmita” Conference – Over 50 social, environmental, and Jewish identity organizations and businesses committed to promote the Shmita year as one of environmental responsibility, social engagement, and personal reflection.

Lobby for Jewish Renewal Conference in the Knesset – the Ministries of Education, Environment, and Welfare committed to promote Shmita ideas in collaboration with Israeli non-profits. The Knesset session was led by MK Ruth Calderon, a member of Yesh Atid and the head of the Lobby for Jewish Renewal, together with MK Yitzchak Herzog.

- Listen to what Shmita means to these conference participants [here](#).
- View MK Ruth Calderon's address to the Knesset [here](#).
- Join the Chief Rabbi of Israel and other supporters in signing the online [Israeli Shmita Declaration](#). The English version can be viewed [here](#).

Publicity Campaign – Einat Kramer and former MK Rabbi Michael Melchior, coordinators of the Israeli Shmita Initiative, feature in this entertaining [video clip](#) designed to introduce the general public to the concept of Shmita.

Government Ministries on Board

The **Ministry of the Environment** is working to restore attachment to nature, through projects such as a proposed plan to allow free admission to nature reserves during the Shmita year. The Ministry is also considering a moratorium on open sea fishing in the Mediterranean, which will allow fish stocks to regenerate while compensating fisherman for their monetary loss during the regeneration period.

The **Ministry of Education**, in partnership with Jewish renewal groups, is working to implement the ethical principles of Shmita year in both the formal and informal education systems.

The **Ministry of Welfare**, together with financial rehabilitation organizations and banks, is working on a debt relief and financial recovery program for the nation's poorest citizens.

Work Teams – Coming together for Collaborative Thought and Action

After the launch events, we established work teams to spearhead Shmita projects in all areas of life in Israel. The list below reflects some of the work team activities:

Education

[Tevel B'Tzedek](#), [Ma'aglei Tzedek](#), [Midreshet](#), [Torah V'Avodah](#), and [Teva Ivri](#) collaborated to create a series of **workshops for high schools** that links Jewish values and social-environmental activism.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, director of the [Halacha Education Center](#), is creating of an educational center focusing on Shmita values in the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens. The Center invites students in both religious and secular frameworks to a transformative **“Journey to the Land of Shmita.”**

Elementary school educators are working to integrate Shmita into a new **national Citizenship initiative**, which addresses various issues in Israeli civil society from a Jewish angle.

[The Israeli Shmita Initiative](#), the [State Religious Education](#) movement, and the Ministry of Education are planning a **national educational conference on the topic of Shmita**, during which many of the above-mentioned initiatives will be introduced. The conference, targeting teachers, rabbis, administrators, and other educators, will take place the day after Shavuot (May 6).

The **Shmita in Academia** group, comprised of academics, deans of universities, and corporate responsibility experts, is exploring ways to integrate Shmita values in academic institutions. Topics for discussion have included the accessibility of higher education for students on the periphery of Israeli society, global release of patents and research, and other means of equalizing the educational system.

A Shmita study page has been developed in partnership with [Kolot](#) and [Teva Ivri](#). View it [here](#), on the [Midreshet](#) website.

Agriculture and Environment

Directors of agricultural farms throughout Israel have developed a Shmita work team to develop projects that focus on sustainability, community, and new educational programs that will attract wider audiences during the Shmita year.

The Shabbat Ha'aretz work team is focusing on expressing Shmita values within the environmental field. The group is promoting cultural and spiritual events in urban community gardens, workshops about composting Shmita produce, and activities designed to help the public to view natural resources as treasures, not expendable commodities.

Projects in Action

Debt Forgiveness for Thousands of Families in Need

The Ministry of Welfare, [Pa'amonim](#), and the [Institute for Torah and the Land of Israel](#) are collaborating to actualize the mitzvah of releasing others from their debts. Designated funds will support a unique Shmita year economic recovery program, in which debt forgiveness is the first step on the road to financial rehabilitation for Israeli families in severe need. Approximately 10,000 benefitting families will agree to undergo a process of employment placement and financial counseling designed to help them to return to a normative, debt-free life.

Hovevei Shvi'it Leadership Course

A talented group of activists, educators, and leaders – graduates of Teva Ivri and Ma'aglei Tzedek programs – recently completed a four-month course to gain ideas and tools for observing Shmita in their schools and communities. Course activities included text study, field trips, and meetings with local experts. The course is designed to foster grassroots Shmita initiatives through intensive training and mentoring, as well as the administration of micro-grants to small-scale local projects.

Municipal Shmita Observance

The [Nitzanim](#) initiative of the Jewish Renewal movement in various municipalities started a working group on the topic of Shmita, in partnership with Teva Ivri and [Kolot](#). The group includes senior leaders of local governments, directors of Jewish programs, and social activists who are designing local Shmita projects.

Behar: Shmita Awareness Week

The [Siach Network](#) has marked the week preceding Shabbat Behar, when we read the commandment to observe the Shmita year, as a time to host events, teachings, and activities all focused on the possibilities of bringing the Shmita tradition to life. The Israeli Shmita Initiative is planning Israeli events to correspond with the activities in North America and Europe during the week of May 4-10.

Kolot Graduates

The [Kolot](#) Beit Midrash, which attracts many influential leaders and educators, held a Shabbat reunion for its graduates that was dedicated to the topic of Shmita. Aside from studying relevant texts, participants discussed the idea of cycles of seven and explored ways to manifest Shmita on the personal and communal levels.

49 Shades of Shmita

Yossi Tzuria, co-founder and former Chief Technology Officer of digital security pioneers NDS, organized a group of hi-tech professionals to compose the “49 Shades of Shmita” document, which outlines a variety of potential projects – mostly geared toward the hi-tech industry – for the Shmita year.

Be In Touch!

For more information please contact Einat Kramer at einat.kramer@gmail.com.

Find us on Facebook (Hebrew) at www.facebook.com/goshmita.

Visit the Israeli Shmita website (Hebrew) at <http://ishmita.org.il/>.