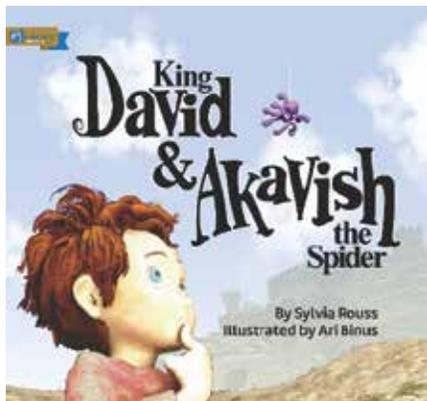




Global Day of Jewish Learning

Curriculum — Under the Same Sky: “The Earth is Full of Your Creations”



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Facilitator's note: This class can be taught in either a 60-minute or a 75-minute session, depending on your time limitations. For a 75-minute class, include the text and discussion framed with ** within the Conclusion.

Introduction (5 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning.

We are commanded to rest on *Shabbat*, the seventh day. More than merely a chance to rest, *Shabbat* offers an opportunity for reflection and renewal, and to reassess our relationship with the day-to-day. *Shabbat* establishes the end of one week and the beginning of the next, in a cycle by which we can measure the passage of time.

The Bible also contains a commandment to work the land for six years and let it rest for a seventh year — the *Shmita* year — forming another cycle of seven culminating in a period of deliberate rest. The Hebrew word *Shmita* (שמיטה) means “to let it drop” or “to release”. *Shmita* provides the opportunity to reassess our relationship with what we are “growing”; whether literally or figuratively, our work is “fruitful” because of the effort we put into it, and we “reap” the rewards of deeds we “sow”. Even in our modern, urban times, we still use agricultural terms of planting, tending and harvesting to describe our work. *Shmita* can hold meaning for us as a marker of cycles, as a time for personal renewal, and as a reminder that the world around us also needs rest.

➤ Ask:

1. What is a cycle that is significant in your life? How do you mark it? How does it change your experience of the time before it and after it?

During the *Shmita* year the Torah prohibits various agricultural activities such as plowing, sowing and reaping. Produce does still grow during the *Shmita* year — fruit trees don't simply stop bearing fruit when humans stop harvesting them, and there are “volunteer” crops that sprout on their own. Fruit, grains and other edibles that ripen in *Shmita* years are considered to have a kind of sanctity (*kedushah*) of their own, and the Bible places restrictions on how such produce can be used. One such instruction is that all produce that is ripe in the *Shmita* year should be declared ownerless (*hefker*), so that anyone may gather the produce from anyone else's land. In addition, the Bible commands that we should forgive any outstanding debts that we are owed.

Facilitator's Note: *Shmita* is an agricultural commandment to be fulfilled in the Land of Israel, with many specific legal considerations that we will not be discussing today. If you would like to further define *Shmita* please feel free to do so. For more information and excellent study materials on *Shmita*, explore Hazon's *Shmita Sourcebook* at www.hazon.org.

Part One: Shmita, Shabbat and The Stranger (20 minutes)

We will now dig in to two Biblical texts that introduce the concept of *Shmita*.

► Ask participants to read Texts #1 and #2 in *chavruta* and consider the questions below the texts. *Chavruta* is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you learn.

Text #1: Exodus 23:1–12. (Bolding added for emphasis)

שמות כ"ג:א'-י"ב

א לא תשא, שמע שוא; אל-תשחך ירך עם-רשע, להיות עד חמס. ב לא-תהנה אחר-רבים, לרעת; ולא-תענה על-רב, לנטות אחרי רבים--להטות. ג ודל, לא תהדר בריבו. ד כי תפגע שור איבד, או חמורו — תעה: השב תשיבנו, לו. ה פי-תראה חמור שנאד, רבץ תחת משאו, ותדלת, מעזב לו — עזב מעזב, עמו. ו לא תטה משפט אבינה, בריבו. ז מדבר-שקר, תרחק; ונקי וצדיק אל-תהרג, כי לא-אצדיק רשע. ח ושחד, לא תקח: כי השחד יעור פקחים, ויסלף דברי צדיקים. ט וגר, לא תלחץ; ואתם, ודעתם את-נפש הגר — כי-גרים הייתם, בארץ מצרים. י ושש שנים, תזרע את-ארצה; ואספת, את-תבואתה. יא והשביעת תשמטנה ונטשתה, ואכלו אביני עמך, ויתרם, תאכל חית השדה; כ-תעשה לכרמה, לזיתך. יב ששית ימים תעשה מעשיך, וביום השביעי תשובת — למען ננות, שורך וחמרה, וינפש בן-אמתך, והגר

1 You must not carry false rumors; you shall not join hands with the guilty to act as a malicious witness. **2** You shall neither side with the mighty to do wrong — you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute so as to pervert it in favor of the mighty — **3** nor shall you show deference to a poor man in his dispute. **4** When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him. **5** When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him. **6** You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes. **7** Keep far from a false charge; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer. **8** Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the clear-sighted and upset the pleas of those who are in the right. **9** **You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.** **10** **Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; 11 but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.** **12** **Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed.**

Text #2: Leviticus 25:1–2, 18–23.

ויקרא כ"ה:א'-ב', יח-כג

א וידבר ה' אל-משה, בהר סיני לאמר. ב דבר אל-בני ישראל, ואמרת אליהם, כי תבאו אל-הארץ, אשר אני נתן לכם — ושבתה הארץ, שבת לה...

יח ועשיתם, את-חקתי, ואת-משפטי תשמרו, ועשיתם אתם--וישבתם על-הארץ, לבטח. יט ונתנה הארץ פריה, ואכלתם לשבע; וישבתם לבטח, עליה. כ וכי תאמרו, מה-זאכל בשנה השביעת: הן לא נזרע, ולא נאסף את-תבואתנו. כא וצויתי את-ברכתי לכם, בשנה הששית; ועשית, את-התבואה, לשלש, השנים. כב וזרעתם, את השנה השמינית, ואכלתם, מן-התבואה ישן; עד השנה התשיעת, עד-בוא תבואתה--תאכלו, ישן. כג והארץ, לא תמכר לצמתת--כי-לי, הארץ: כי-גרים ותושבים אתם, עמדי. לצמתת--כי-לי, הארץ: כי-גרים ותושבים אתם, עמדי.

1 The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: **2** Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the LORD.

18 You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; **19** the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. **20** And should you ask, “What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?” **21** I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. **22** When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating the old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in. **23** But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me.

➤ Ask:

1. What do each of these Biblical passages imply about the purpose or function of *Shmita*? What other instructions immediately precede and follow *Shmita*?
2. *Shmita* was juxtaposed with instructions about *Shabbat* in Text #1, and Text #2 describes *Shmita* by saying, “The land shall observe a sabbath.” What do you think we can learn from this connection between *Shmita* and *Shabbat*?
3. In Text #1 (Exodus 23:11) the verb “let it rest” comes from the same root as *Shmita*, which means to let go or release. In Text #2 (Leviticus 25:2) we read that the land “will observe a sabbath”. The verb here, which comes from the same root as *Shabbat*, literally means to pause or cease activity. What might be the connection between letting go and ceasing activity? How might the two be different?
4. In Text #1 the commandment of *Shmita* immediately follows a reminder that we were once strangers in Egypt. Text #2 also describes us as strangers — “you are but strangers resident with Me [God]” — even when we are residing in our own land. How is the idea of being a stranger connected to observing *Shmita*?

➤ Reconvene the group and ask each *chavruta* pair to share an insight.

There is a remarkable amount of emphasis on the connection between the social obligations we have towards the “stranger” and the commandment of *Shmita*. Those who do own land let the trees and the fields rest, and, as Text #2 spells out, they eat food that has been set aside in advance from the sixth year’s harvest. The farmers get to rest, the land gets to rest, and everyone has food to eat — even the “strangers”.

Part Two: “Let the Needy Eat of It”: With Ownership Comes Responsibility (15 minutes)

Let’s look more closely at what “ownerlessness” really means, and at the connection between ownership and obligations to those in need.

In Text #3 Maimonides writes about the legal concept of ownerlessness. The concept of ownerlessness (*hefker*) applies specifically to an object that has no owners. This is different from something that is public property, which belongs to the community and whose use is controlled by the collective. Something that is *hefker* can be acquired by anyone who comes along and finds it. Maimonides (also known as Rambam) lived in Spain and Egypt in the 12th century; he was a physician and philosopher whose extensive works have been an essential influence within Judaism.

Text #3: Maimonides. *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee, Chapter 4 Halakha 24.*

מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה לְהַשְׁמִיט כָּל מַה שֶׁתּוֹצֵיאַהּ הָאֲרֶזׁ בַּשְּׁבִיעִית שְׁנֵאַמֵּר (שמות כג-יא) “וְהַשְׁבִּיעַת תִּשְׁמָטָנָה וְנִטְשָׁתָה”. וְכָל הַנוֹעֵל כְּרָמוֹ אוֹ סָג שָׂדֵהוּ בַּשְּׁבִיעִית בְּטַל מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה. וְכֵן אִם אָסַף כָּל פְּרוֹתָיו לְתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ. אֲלֵא יִפְקִיר הַכֹּל וַיַּגִּד הַכֹּל שְׁוִין בְּכָל מְקוֹם שְׁנֵאַמֵּר (שמות כג-יא) “וְאָכְלוּ אֲבִינֵי עִמָּךְ”. וַיֵּשׁ לוֹ לְהַבִּיאַ לְתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ מֵעֵט כְּדָרֵךְ שְׁמִבִּיאִין מִן הַהֶפְקֵר: ...

It is a positive commandment to release everything that the land produces during the seventh year, as it is said, “But in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow” (Exodus 23:11). And anyone who locks up their vineyard or fences in their field during the seventh year is neglecting a positive commandment. And the same is true of one who gathered all their fruit into their house. Instead, one should declare it all ownerless and everyone should have equal access everywhere, as it says “Let the needy among your people eat of it” (*Ibid*). One may bring a little into one’s house the way one would bring from ownerless produce...

➤ Ask:

1. Declaring produce ownerless is a positive action. Why might it be important to do this rather than simply refraining from harvesting in the normal way, and allowing others to come claim it?
2. Is there anything you regularly declare (e.g., an affiliation with a political party, or saying “I love you”)? How does the act of declaration influence your experience?

In Text #4 Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz describes the nature of the obligation to give to the needy. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentary on the entire Talmud and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

Text #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. *“Gemilut Hasadim”. A Dear Son to Me.*

The Torah commands us to give tithes (10% of agricultural produce) to the poor twice every seven years (in the third and sixth year of every seven-year cycle). Nowadays, many people give 10% of all their earnings to *zedaka* — a common practice that according to many opinions is a binding law. [Historically, the tithes] did not belong to the landowner; they were the property of the poor. The landowner only had the right to choose which poor he wanted to give it to...

The underlying idea is that giving to the poor, or helping the needy, is not something that the poor and needy need so much as something that must be done by those who have. Helping others is not seen as a social measure to prevent disasters in the community, but as an obligation imposed on each and every individual. The poor have the right to demand and receive. The giver, on the other hand, does not give because he is kindhearted, or because he’s under some kind of public pressure, but because it is his duty. A person must first give, and only then search for needy people to give to.

➤ Ask:

1. What are some ways that the duty to declare produce ownerless could be fulfilled in today's world — especially considering the fact that we do not all grow crops?
2. Rabbi Steinsaltz clearly states that tithing is not about *showing kindness to poor people*; it is about responsibility. How does thinking about tithing as an obligation affect your understanding of how to meet the needs of others? How is the obligation to tithe similar or dissimilar to the obligation to declare *Shmita* produce ownerless?

It seems that ownership — of land or of things — is actually a responsibility rather than a privilege. According to the Torah, those who have the means are obligated to help those who are in need. It is worth exploring how we can best fulfill that obligation in the modern world, where our connection to land is weaker, and what we “own” is increasingly portable or even nonmaterial.

Shmita reminds us we are “but strangers resident with Me [God]”. In this light, *Shmita* becomes a reflective time during which we remember what it is to endure without our “own” land. It puts us in the shoes of the poor, the homeless, and the ones in need. It reminds us that the more we think we own, the more obligated we are to help others. In addition, it offers us the opportunity to consider: If we are no longer owners, who is the real owner?

Part Three: Who is the Real Owner? (10 minutes)

The Babylonian Talmud, in Tractate *Sanhedrin* 39a (Text #5), comments on the Bible and provides us with a way to understand who really owns the land. In Text #6 Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon (b.1968), an author of *halakhic* works, faculty member of Yeshivat Har Etzion and the Community Rabbi of Alon Shvut South, Israel, offers an additional perspective on this issue.

➤ Ask participants to read Texts #5 and #6 in *chavruta* and consider the questions below the texts.

Text #5: Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 39a.

סנהדרין לט ע"א

אתא ההוא תלמידא א"ל מ"ט דשביעתא א"ל... אמר הקב"ה לישראל זרעו שש והשמיטו שבע כדי שתדעו שהארץ שלי היא.

A certain disciple came and said [to Rabbi Abbahu]: “What is the reason for the Sabbatical year?” He said to him...“The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: ‘Sow six [years], and the seventh [year] let it lie fallow, so that you know that the land is Mine.’”

Text #6: Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon. *Shmita*.

אמנם, ייתכן שישנו טעם אחד לשמיטה: "כי לי הארץ" (ויקרא כ"ה כג). הארץ שייכת לקב"ה, והאדם איננו בעלים עליה. מכח טעם זה, נגזרים גם הדברים האחרים: האדם אמור בשנת השמיטה להראות שהוא איננו בעלים, ולכן היבול מופקר. בדומה לכך הוא גם מפסיק את עבודתו כדי שלא תהיה לו תחושה שהוא יצר את היבול...
...שנת השמיטה תלמד את האדם שלמעשה בכל השנים אין הוא הבעלים האמיתי. זהו המוקד של איסור "בל תשחית":
אסור לך להשחית כי אינך הבעלים.

However, it is possible there that there is a single reason behind the sabbatical year: "For the land is Mine" (Leviticus 25:23). The land pertains to the Holy One, blessed be He, and the human being is not its owner. For this reason, other things were decreed: a person is supposed to demonstrate that he is not the owner, and therefore produce is made ownerless. Similarly, he also pauses his work that he shouldn't feel that he [himself] generated the produce...

The sabbatical year teaches a person that in practice, every year, he is not the true owner. This is [also] the focus of the prohibition "Do not waste": it is forbidden for you to waste because you are not the owner.

➤ Ask:

1. How might observing the laws of *Shmita* transform your sense of ownership?
2. How might cultivating a sense that the land belongs to God, and that we are not the owners, relate to the reasons for *Shmita* described in Parts One and Two?
3. How do you treat items you borrow differently from items that you own? How might you act if you realized that you are not "the owner"?

Thinking of ourselves as a smaller part of something greater changes the way we treat the world. For example, by acknowledging that we are "strangers" residing in another's land we might become more mindful, and use the world with greater care. If you borrow someone's shirt, would you return it damaged and dirty? If you borrow someone's money, would you return only part of it? As with things, the land — the earth and all its resources — is on loan to us. We are "strangers" resident here, and as individuals, we do not have the right to destroy what does not belong to us.

Conclusion (10 minutes or **25 minutes**)

**Our final text comes from *The Book of Education (Sefer HaChinukh)*, a systematic work that enumerates and expounds on all 613 commandments and first appeared in Spain during the 13th century. It offers an additional explanation for the purpose of *Shmita*.

Text #7: *The Book of Education: Mitzvah 84.*

ולכן ציוה ברוך הוא להפקיר כל מה שתוציא הארץ בשנה זו מלבד השבייתה בה, כדי שיזכור האדם כי הארץ שמוציאה אליו הפירות בכל שנה ושנה לא בכוחה וסגולתה תוציא אותם, כי יש אדון עליה ועל אדוניה. וכשהוא חפץ הוא מצוה אליו להפקירם. ועוד יש תועלת נמצא בדבר לקנות בזה מדת הותרנות, כי אין נדיב כנותן מבלי תקוה אל הגמול. ועוד יש תועלת אחר נמצא בזה שיוסיף האדם בטחון בשם ברוך הוא, כי כל המוצא עם לבבו לתת ולהפקיר לעולם כל גדולי קרקעותיו ונחלת אבותיו הגדלים בכל שנה אחת, ומלומד בכך הוא וכל המשפחה כל ימיו, לא תחזק בו לעולם מדת הכילות הרבה ולא מיעוט הבטחון.

And therefore, He commanded (may He be blessed) that we render ownerless (*hefker*) all that the land produces during this year, besides resting on it, in order that a person should remember that the land which brings forth produce for him, each and every year, does not produce it through its own strength and virtue. Rather, there is a Lord above the land and above the landlord, and when He desires, He commands him to render them ownerless. There is another benefit found in the matter, to acquire the attribute of relinquishing, for there is none so generous as one who gives without hoping for a reward. And there is another benefit found in it, that a person should have increased trust in Hashem, may He be blessed, because everyone who finds it in his heart to give and to render ownerless forever all the growth of his land, and the inheritance of his fathers, all that grows in a single year, and experiences this together with his family all his days, neither excessive stinginess nor lack of faith will ever take hold of him.

➤ Ask:

1. What is the purpose of *Shmita* according to the *Book of Education*? What does it cultivate within us?

The Book of Education proposes that *Shmita* serves to cultivate faith in God and a generous, non-possessive disposition. It reminds us that by fulfilling the commandment we are then blessed when we realize that we do not actually “own” anything. By trustingly, willingly, gladly becoming “strangers” again, we consequently become generous and full of faith.**

We have reflected upon the importance of *Shmita* as part of a larger cycle of responsibility to the land, of rest and release. We have considered the underlying principle of ownerlessness — that the land and the fruit of the land are not really ours but God’s. The rules of *Shmita* force us to relinquish our usual “control” over the land. We are commanded to let the fields lie fallow and not to harvest fruit in order to sell it. We are forced to “let go” of the fruit of our land, declaring it ownerless and letting anyone eat it. Beyond agriculture, the underlying values of these rules can extend to modern cycles of life, our interpersonal relationships, and our use of natural resources.

➤ Ask:

1. In our mostly urban lives now, what is “ownerlessness”, practically and spiritually?
2. What lessons from *Shmita* can we apply to the ecosystem of human behavior? In cultivating relationships with people and society, what can we “release” and how might that change our perspective on respect and obligations to others?

Part One: Shmita, Shabbat and The Stranger

Text #1 Exodus 23:1–12. (Bolding added for emphasis).

שמות כ"ג:א'-י"ב
א לא תשא, שמע שוא; אל-תלשך ירך עם-רשע, להית עד חמס. **ב** לא-תהיך אחר-רבים, לרעת; ולא-תענה על-רב, לנטת אחר-רבים--להטות. **ג** ודל, לא תהדר בריבו. **ד** כי תפגע שור איבך, או חמרו' — תעה: השב תשיבנו, לו. **ה** כי-תראה חמור שנאף, רבץ תחת משאו, וחדלת, מעזב לו — עזב תעזב, עמו. **ו** לא תטה משפט אבינך, בריבו. **ז** מדבר-שקר, תרחק; ונקי וצדיק אל-תהרג, כי לא-אצדיק רשע. **ח** ושחד, לא תקח: כי השחד יעור פקחים, ויסלף דברי צדיקים. **ט** וגר, לא תלחץ; ואתם, ידעתם את-נפש הגר — כי-גרים הייתם, בארץ מצרים. **י** ושש שנים, תזרע את-ארצך; ואספת, את-תבואתה. **יא** והשביעת תשמטנה ונטשתה, ואכלו אביני עמך, ויתרם, תאכל חית השדה; כן-תעשה לכרמך, לזיתך. **יב** שישת ימים תעשה מעשיך, וביום השביעי תשבת--למען ינוח, שורך וחמורך, וינפש בן-אמתך, והגר

1 You must not carry false rumors; you shall not join hands with the guilty to act as a malicious witness. **2** You shall neither side with the mighty to do wrong — you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute so as to pervert it in favor of the mighty — **3** nor shall you show deference to a poor man in his dispute. **4** When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him. **5** When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him. **6** You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes. **7** Keep far from a false charge; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer. **8** Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the clear-sighted and upset the pleas of those who are in the right. **9** **You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.** **10** Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; **11** but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves. **12** Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed.

Text #2: Leviticus 25:1–2, 18–23.

ויקרא כ"ה:א'-ב', יח-כג
א וידבר ה' אל-משה, בהר סיני לאמר. **ב** דבר אל-בני ישראל, ואמרת אליהם, כי תבאו אל-הארץ, אשר אני נתן לכם — ושבתה הארץ, שבת לה'...

יח ועשיתם, את-חקתי, ואת-משפטי תשמרו, ועשיתם אתם--וישבתם על-הארץ, לבטח. **יט** ונתנה הארץ פריה, ואכלתם לשבע; וישבתם לבטח, עליה. **כ** וכי תאמרו, מה-נאכל בשנה השביעת: הן לא נזרע, ולא נאסף את-תבואתנו. **כא** וצויתי את-ברכתי לכם, בשנה הששית; ועשית, את-התבואה, לשלש השנים. **כב** וזרעתם, את השנה השמינית, ואכלתם, מן-התבואה ישן; עד השנה התשיעת, עד-בוא תבואתה--תאכלו, ישן. **כג** והארץ, לא תמכר לצממת--כי-לי, הארץ: כי-גרים ותושבים אתם, עמדי.

1 The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: **2** Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the LORD.

18 You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; **19** the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. **20** And should you ask, "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?" **21** I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth



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year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. **22** When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating the old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in. **23** But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me.

Part Two: “Let the Needy Eat of It”: With Ownership Comes Responsibility

Text #3: Maimonides. *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee, Chapter 4 Halakha 24.*

מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה לְהַשְׁמִיט כָּל מָה שֶׁתּוֹצֵיאַהּ הָאָרֶץ בְּשָׁבִיעֵית שְׁנֵי־אָמָר (שמות כג-יא) “וְהִשְׁבִּיעַת תִּשְׁמְטֶנָּה וְנִטְשָׁתָה”. וְכֹל הַנוֹעֵל כְּרָמוֹ אוֹ סֵג שְׂדֵהוּ בְּשָׁבִיעֵית בְּטַל מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה. וְכֵן אִם אָסַף כָּל פְּרוֹתָיו לְתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ. אֲלֵא יִפְקִיר הַכֹּל וְיַזְדּ הַכֹּל שְׂוִין בְּכָל מְקוֹם שְׁנֵי־אָמָר (שמות כג-יא) “וְאָכְלוּ אֲבִינֵי עִמָּךְ”. וְיֵשׁ לוֹ לְהִבְיֵא לְתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ מֵעֵט כְּדָרְךָ שְׁמִבִּיאִין מִן הַהֶפְקֵר: ...

It is a positive commandment to release everything that the land produces during the seventh year, as it is said “but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow” (Exodus 23:11). And anyone who locks up their vineyard or fences in their field during the seventh year is neglecting a positive commandment. And the same is true of one who gathered all their fruit into their house. Instead, one should declare it all ownerless and everyone should have equal access everywhere, as it says “Let the needy among your people eat of it” (*Ibid*). One may bring a little into one’s house the way one would bring from ownerless produce...

Text #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “*Gemilut Hasadim*”. *A Dear Son to Me*.

The Torah commands us to give tithes (10% of agricultural produce) to the poor twice every seven years (in the third and sixth year of every seven-year cycle). Nowadays, many people give 10% of all their earnings to *tzedaka* — a common practice that according to many opinions is a binding law. [Historically, the tithes] did not belong to the landowner; they were the property of the poor. The landowner only had the right to choose which poor he wanted to give it to...

The underlying idea is that giving to the poor, or helping the needy, is not something that the poor and needy need so much as something that must be done by those who have. Helping others is not seen as a social measure to prevent disasters in the community, but as an obligation imposed on each and every individual. The poor have the right to demand and receive. The giver, on the other hand, does not give because he is kindhearted, or because he’s under some kind of public pressure, but because it is his duty. A person must first give, and only then search for needy people to give to.

Part Three: Who is the Real Owner?

Text #5: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 39a.

סנהדרין לט ע"א

אתא ההוא תלמידא א"ל מ"ט דשביעתא א"ל... אמר הקב"ה לישראל זרעו שש והשמיטו שבע כדי שתדעו שהארץ שלי היא.

A certain disciple came and said [to Rabbi Abbahu]: "What is the reason for the Sabbatical year?" He said to him..."The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: 'Sow six [years], and the seventh [year] let it lie fallow, so that you know that the land is Mine.'"

Text #6: Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon. *Shmita*.

אמנם, ייתכן שישנו טעם אחד לשמיטה: "כי לי הארץ" (ויקרא כ"ה כג). הארץ שייכת לקב"ה, והאדם איננו בעלים עליה. מכח טעם זה, נגזרים גם הדברים האחרים: האדם אמור בשנת השמיטה להראות שהוא איננו בעלים, ולכן היבול מופקר. בדומה לכך הוא גם מפסיק את עבודתו כדי שלא תהיה לו תחושה שהוא יצר את היבול...
...שנת השמיטה תלמד את האדם שלמעשה בכל השנים אין הוא הבעלים האמיתי. זהו המוקד של איסור "בל תשחית": אסור לך להשחית כי אינך הבעלים.

However, it is possible there that there is a single reason behind the sabbatical year: "For the land is Mine" (Leviticus 25:23). The land pertains to the Holy One, blessed be He, and the human being is not its owner. For this reason, other things were decreed: a person is supposed to demonstrate that he is not the owner, and therefore produce is made ownerless. Similarly, he also pauses his work that he shouldn't feel that he [himself] generated the produce...

The sabbatical year teaches a person that in practice, every year, he is not the true owner. This is [also] the focus of the prohibition "Do not waste": it is forbidden for you to waste because you are not the owner.

Conclusion

Text #7: *The Book of Education: Mitzvah 84.*

ולכן ציוה ברוך הוא להפקיר כל מה שתוציא הארץ בשנה זו מלבד השביתה בה, כדי שיזכור האדם כי הארץ שמוציאה אליו הפירות בכל שנה ושנה לא בכוחה וסגולתה תוציא אותם, כי יש אדון עליה ועל אדוניה. וכשהוא חפץ הוא מצוה אליו להפקירם. ועוד יש תועלת נמצא בדבר לקנות בזה מדת הותרנות, כי אין נדיב כנותן מבלי תקוה אל הגמול. ועוד יש תועלת אחר נמצא בזה שיוסיף האדם בטחון בשם ברוך הוא, כי כל המוצא עם לבבו לתת ולהפקיר לעולם כל גדולי קרקעותיו ונחלת אבותיו הגדלים בכל שנה אחת, ומלומד בכך הוא וכל המשפחה כל ימיו, לא תחזק בו לעולם מדת הכילות הרבה ולא מיעוט הבטחון.

And therefore, He commanded (may He be blessed) that we render ownerless (*hefker*) all that the land produces during this year, besides resting on it, in order that a person should remember that the land which brings forth produce for him, each and every year, does not produce it through its own strength and virtue. Rather, there is a Lord above the land and above the landlord, and when He desires, He commands him to render them ownerless. There is another



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benefit found in the matter, to acquire the attribute of relinquishing, for there is none so generous as one who gives without hoping for a reward. And there is another benefit found in it, that a person should have increased trust in Hashem, may He be blessed, because everyone who finds it in his heart to give and to render ownerless forever all the growth of his land, and the inheritance of his fathers, all that grows in a single year, and experiences this together with his family all his days, neither excessive stinginess nor lack of faith will ever take hold of him.



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