

“Of the Fruit of the Land”  
5782 – Shmitah year at KKL-JNF

“And in the seventh year... it shall be a year of rest for the land”  
(Leviticus 25:5)

**The Shmitah year is one of the most wondrous commandments in the Jewish tradition.**

Giving the land a rest by ceasing agricultural activity for an entire year is a “wonder” in our times, too, even though the majority of modern society is not agricultural in nature. Although the commandments of the Shmitah year entail some challenges, this year can have significant impact on the character of the nation.

The word “Shmitah” means “releasing”, desisting, laying down tools. In the Shmitah year the farmer is forbidden to engage in any active initiative in relation to his plot of land. Shmitah forces us, once every seven years, to stop what we are doing, to let go, to exit our busy routine and to allow nature the opportunity of a year of rest and rehabilitation. In this year we show our appreciation for the “fruits” that we enjoy and allow the land and its produce to exist without any active intervention on our part.

**The commandment of Shmitah has four main components:**

1. **Shmitah of the land** – cessation of agricultural work for a year
2. **Fruits are ownerless** – the produce of the fields and orchards is free for all
3. **“Shmitat kesafim”** – outstanding debts are cancelled
4. **Sanctity of the fruits** – the fruits and produce that grows during the Shmitah year may not be sold commercially, nor may it be destroyed

The agricultural activities forbidden during the Shmitah year include any artificial human intervention in the natural development of the land’s produce. The only activities that are permitted are those that maintain the existing state of the plant and prevent disease or wilting away.



As we shall see, the commandment of Shmitah embodies values that relate to all areas of life, on both the individual and the national level, such that there is room to suggest that **"this commandment is the root and foundation of all the commandments"** (Ketav Sofer, a 19th century biblical commentary, on Leviticus 25:1).

The values represented by Shmitah may be divided into four categories:

- Faith
- Ecology
- Social action
- Personal empowerment

The Shmitah year uplifts the life of the entire nation, in all its narrower and wider circles. As Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak ha-Kohen Kook (Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel prior to the establishment of the State of Israel) writes, in the introduction to his book *Shabbat ha-Aretz*: **"The same action that is effected by Shabbat on the individual, is effected by Shmitah on the nation as a whole."**

Let us review the verses describing the Shmitah year and then consider them in relation to each of the above categories:

Shmitah in the Biblical sources:

ויקרא כה: 1-7

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תְבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבַתָה הָאָרֶץ שְׁבַת לַיהוָה: שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כְּרֶמֶךְ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת תְּבוּאָתָהּ: וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שְׁבַת שְׁבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שְׁבַת לַיהוָה שָׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכְרֶמֶךְ לֹא תִזְמַר: אֶת סְפִיחַ קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת עֵנְבֵי נִזְיָרְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שְׁבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ: וְהִיְתָה שְׁבַת הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם לֶאֱכֹלָה לָךְ וּלְעֶבְדְּךָ וּלְאִמְתְּךָ וּלְשִׁכְיָרְךָ וּלְתוֹשְׁבֵי הַגְּרָיִם עִמָּךְ: וּלְבַהֲמֹתֶיךָ וּלְחַיָּה, אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרְצְךָ תִּהְיֶה כָּל תְּבוּאָתָהּ לְאָכֹל.

Leviticus 25:1-7

"And God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, When you come to the land which I give you, the land shall observe a Shabbat unto God. Six years shall you sow your field, and six years shall you prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce. But in the seventh year there shall be a Shabbat of Shabbat rest for the land; a Shabbat unto God. You shall neither sow your field, nor prune your vineyard. That which grows on its own of your harvest you shall not reap, nor shall you gather the grapes of your untreated vine; it shall be a year of rest for the land. And the Shabbat produce of the land shall be food for you — for you and for your manservant and for your maidservant and for your hired servant, and for your stranger who dwells with you; and for your cattle and for the beast that is in your land shall all its produce be, for food."

ויקרא כה: 20-22

וכי תאמרו מה נאכל בשנה השביעת הן לא נזרע ולא נאסוף את תבואתנו: וצויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה הששית ועשית את התבואה לשלש השנים: וזרעתם את השנה השמינית ואכלתם מן התבואה ישן עד השנה התשיעת עד בוא תבואתה תאכלו ישן.

Leviticus 25:20-22:

“And if you shall say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year? For we shall not sow, nor gather in our produce!’ - I will command My blessing to you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And you shall sow the eighth year, and still eat of the old fruit until the ninth year; until its fruits come in shall you eat of the old store.”

דברים טו: 1-10

מקץ שבע שנים תעשה שמיטה: וזה דבר השמיטה שמוט כל בעל משה ידו אשר ישה ברעהו: לא יגש את רעהו ואת אחיו כי קרא שמיטה לה: את הנכרי תגש ואשר יהיה לך את אחיך תשמט ידך: אפס כי לא יהיה בך אביון כי ברך יברכך ה' בארץ אשר ה' אלהיך נתן לך נחלה לרשתה: רק אם שמוע תשמע בקול ה' אלהיך לשמר לעשות את כל המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום: כי ה' אלהיך ברכך כאשר דבר לך והעבטת גוים רבים ואתה לא תעבט ומשלת בגוים רבים ובך לא ימשלו: כי יהיה בך אביון מאחד אחיך באחד שעריך בארץ אשר ה' אלהיך נתן לך לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפץ את ידך מאחיד האביון: כי פתח תפתח את ידך לו והעבט תעביטנו די מחסרו אשר יחסר לו: השמר לך פן יהיה דבר עם לבבך בליעל לאמר קרבה שנת השבע שנת השמיטה ורעה עינך באחיד האביון ולא תתן לו וקרא עליך אל ה' והיה בך חטא: נתון תתן לו ולא ירע לבבך בתתך לו כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך ה' אלהיך בכל מעשך ובכל משלח ידך.

Deuteronomy 15:1-10

“At the end of each seven years shall you make a Shmitah (release). And this is the manner of the Shmitah: every creditor who lends anything to his neighbor shall release it. He shall not demand it of his neighbor, or of his brother, because he has proclaimed a release unto God... Beware that there not be an unworthy thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the Shmitah year, is approaching’ — and your eye be evil against your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cries to God against you — for it shall be counted against you as a sin. You shall surely give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your endeavors and in all that you undertake.”



## Shmitah values:

### 1. Faith

The verses of the Torah in parashat Behar (Leviticus 25:1-7) emphasize the dimension of faith entailed in the commandment of Shmitah:

“And the land shall observe a Shabbat unto God... But in the seventh year there shall be a Shabbat of Shabbat rest for the land; a Shabbat unto God.”

#### ספר החינוך, מצווה פד

משרשי המצווה לקבוע בלבנו ולצייר ציור חזק במחשבתנו עניין חידוש העולם ... ולכן צוה 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 מצוה עליו להפקירם ... ועוד יש תועלת אחר נמצא בזה, שיוסיף האדם ביטחון בשם יתברך, כי כל המוצא עם לבבו לתת ולהפקיר לעולם כל גידולי קרקעותיו ונחלת אבותיו הגדלים בכל שנה אחת ומלמד בכך הוא וכל המשפחה כל ימיו, לא תחזק בו לעולם מידת הכילות הרבה ולא מיעוט הביטחון.

#### Sefer ha-Hinukh, commandment 84

“Among the reasons for the commandment [of Shmitah] is to implant in our hearts and impress upon our minds the concept that the world was created... Therefore, God commanded us to declare ownerless all produce of the land in this year, in addition to having the land lie fallow. This is so that we should remember that the land which produces fruit every year does not do so on its own. Rather, it and its owners have an Owner, and when He so wishes, He commands the owners to declare the produce ownerless.

Yet another benefit exists here, that a person should increase his faith in God, Blessed be He, because anyone who is able to control his hearts to give and to render all his produce and his ancestral land ownerless for an entire year, and who does this along with his family [every seventh year] their entire lives, will never become overly greedy and will never be lacking in faith.”



## 2. Ecology

רמב"ם, מורה נבוכים, חלק ג, פרק לט

"... כל המצוות אשר ספרנום ב"הלכות שמיטה ויובל" מהם לחמלה על בני אדם והרחבה לבני אדם כולם, כמו שאמר "ואכלו אביוני עמך ויתרם תאכל חית השדה וגו'" ושתוסיף הארץ תבואתה ותתחזק בעמדה שמוטה."

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, part III, chapter 39

"... All the commandments that we have enumerated as being included in the laws of Shmitah and Yovel (the Jubilee year, every 50 years) involve compassion towards our fellow man and generosity towards everyone, as it is written, '... that the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave, the beasts of the field shall eat' (Exodus 23:11), and that the land will increase its produce and gather strength by being left alone."

Maimonides lists several reasons for Shmitah. One of them is the ecological consideration: because of the cessation of agricultural activity for a year, there is an increase in produce during the years that follow. In the practical sense, this rest does indeed allow the ground to rehabilitate itself, and as a result its fertility is enhanced.

It would seem that beyond this practical advice, there is also an important educational message. The real fear of destroying the soil through overuse arises from the fact that man regards the ground, and nature in general, as a means for satisfying his various needs. Shmitah comes to teach that nature and the land have their own inherent value. Nature is an ecological creation, and therefore it must be used in a balanced and controlled manner.

During the Shmitah year it is permissible to eat the fruit and produce of the land, but it is forbidden to destroy them. Shmitah teaches us to protect and conserve the world: not to waste and throw away; to appreciate all the good things that we have, and thereby to come to conserve nature during regular years, too.

These principles sit well with the core principles of KKL-JNF – the national institution of practical Zionism, leading the sphere of ecological Zionism and sustainable development in Israel – which maintain that natural resources must be conserved, with consideration for man's needs. The Shmitah year presents an educational opportunity to consider the "fruit of the land" in the broader sense – the soil, the water, nature, and forests in Israel. All of these are given to us, human beings, as a pledge, which we are to use for our needs.

## 3. Social activism

### • Charity and kindness

רמב"ם, מורה נבוכים, חלק ג, פרק לט

"... כל המצוות אשר ספרנום ב"הלכות שמיטה ויובל" מהם - לחמלה על בני אדם והרחבה לבני אדם כולם, כמו שאמר "ואכלו אביוני עמך ..."



**Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, part III, chapter 39**

“All the commandments that we have enumerated as being included in the laws of Shmitah and Yovel (the Jubilee year) involve compassion towards our fellow man and generosity towards everyone, as it is written, ‘... that the poor of your people may eat...’”

A person lives in his own world, and therefore he is preoccupied and concerned, first and foremost, with himself and his own needs.

There are a number of commandments in the Torah that cause a person to cast his gaze a little further, and consider others as well. In the Shmitah year, a farmer must make the produce of his land (and access to it) ownerless, free for all, such that on any day anyone who wishes to may enter the field and take fruits and vegetables growing there. (It is nevertheless preferable that the visitor first ask the owner’s permission; this is an educational approach that keeps in mind their future relations.) This law inculcates very deeply the value of giving and of concern for others.

In addition to giving up the produce of the field for the benefit of the poor, in the Shmitah year there is a special commandment of “shmitat kesafim” – the cancelling of debts, a sort of socio-economic “reset” button for society. There are people who, as a result of a medical emergency or even a joyous family occasion, fall into debt, and may end up stuck in debt for the rest of their lives. “Shmitat kesafim” once every seven years comes to erase debts. Everyone can start afresh. Shmitah is a new point of departure; owing a debt does not continue forever.

• **Class equality**

**צרור המור (פירוש על ספר החינוך, מצווה פד)**

”ובענין השמיטה והיובל, רצה ה' יתברך שיהיו שוים עניים ועשירים.”

**Tzror ha-Mor (a commentary on Sefer ha-Chinukh, commandment 84):**

“With regard to Shmitah and Yovel (the Jubilee year), the blessed God wanted the destitute and the rich to be equal.”

**רב יצחק ניסנבוים, קנייני קדם, חלק ב, פרשת בהר, עמ' 60:**

”יכולים להתפתח בעם כעין שני מעמדות: מעמד עשירים ... ומעמד עניים ... ודבר זה יכול להביא גם לידי התפתחותם של רגשות אדנות ועריצות אצל הראשונים ורגשות התפרסות ושפלות הרוח אצל האחרונים: וכדי לשמור על השוויון הפסיכולוגי של העם העברי באה השמיטה.”

**Rabbi Yitzhak Nissenbaum, Kinyanei Kedem part II, parshat Behar, p. 60:**

“[The existence of] a wealthy class... and a poor class... can lead to the development of feelings of supremacy and high-handedness among the former, and obsequiousness and mortification among the latter. Shmitah comes to maintain psychological equality amongst the Jewish nation.”

The regular commandment of charity causes a poor person to feel that he is on a lower level than the rich person who is giving of his abundance, while the rich person feels superior to the poor person to whom he gives. During Shmitah, the perception of the land as ownerless creates equality between the classes. There is no "giver" or "receiver"; no "employer" or "employee"; all are equal before the Creator. This is a sublime experience of charity since it involves no shame.

#### 4. Personal empowerment

##### • Opportunity for personal development

Over the course of six years, the farmer and his workers are busy growing and marketing fruit and vegetables. The effect of the Shmitah year is to create "down time", and this is no coincidence: leaving the field fallow, aside from being an objective in its own right, also gives rise to another possibility and a highlights a different aspect of the situation: a person has time to engage in spiritual pursuits.

##### רב שאול ישראלי, טעמא דשביעתא, עמ' 61

"והנה עוד דבר רב ערך במצות השמיטה, והוא- שחרורו של האיכר לשנה אחת מהעבודה החקלאית השוטפת ומתן אפשרות להתכנסות בבתי מדרש לשם התרעננות רוחנית, הזכרות במה שנלמד מאז גירסא דינקותא, ואפשרות של השתלמות נוספת בלימוד, במחשבה ובמידות. מה נפלא הדבר בעמוד האדם על ההכרה כי לא נקרא כשור לעול וכחמור למשא, כי גם לו שמור מקום בבית מדרש, כי גם לו ניתנה תורה, לא רק מצד ה"לשמור ולעשות", כי אם גם מצד ה"ללמוד וללמד".

##### Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli, Ta'ama de-Shevi'ata, p. 61

"And there is another most valuable aspect to the commandment of Shmitah: it frees farmers for a year from routine agricultural labor and provides an opportunity for them to gather in study halls for spiritual rejuvenation, revision of what they learned in their youth, and a possibility of acquiring additional knowledge, deepening their faith and working on their character. How wonderful it is when a person comes to the realization that his ultimate purpose is not to be like an ox under its yoke, or like a donkey under its burden, but rather that he, too, has a place in the study hall; that the Torah was given to him, too – not only in terms of 'to observe and to do' but also in terms of 'to study and to teach'."

##### • Working on character

##### מדרש תנחומא, ויקרא, סימן א

"ברכו ה' מלאכיו גיבורי כח עושי דברו לשמוע בקול דברו (תהל' קג כ) ... רבי יצחק נפחא אומר: אלו שומרי שביעית. ולמה נקרא שמם גיבורי כח? רואה ששדה מופקרת ואילנותיו מופקרים והסייגים מפורצים ורואה פירותיו נאכלים, וכובש את יצרו ואינו מדבר. ושנו רבותינו: איזהו גיבור, הכובש את יצרו.

### Midrash Tanhuma parshat Vayikra section 1

“Bless God, you angels of His, you mighty ones who perform His bidding...’ (Psalms 103:20)... R. Isaac Nafha said, ‘This refers to those who observe [the laws of] Shmitah. And why are they called ‘mighty ones’? Because they see their fields abandoned, their trees untended, their fences breached, and their fruits being eaten – and [yet] they repress their [natural] inclination and say nothing; and our rabbis taught us, ‘Who is mighty? He who overcomes his inclination.’”

The challenge of Shmitah goes beyond the economic or material dimension. This year prompts a person to work on his character and become truly “mighty”. The following are some of the character traits that are influenced by Shmitah:

- Humility

כתב סופר, ויקרא כ"ה, א'

“על ידי השמיטה יכניע האדם לבו ולא יאמר כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה ... ויש להוסיף כי התורה ניתנה בסיני שהוא הר קטן להורות נתן שלא יגבה לב האדם כי ה' שוכן את דכא וזה כלל גדול בתורה שאל יתגאה האדם ועל ידי השמיטה יכניע את לבבו, וזו כוונת 'שמיטה נאמרה בסיני'.”

### Ketav Sofer, Leviticus 25:1

“Through Shmitah a person makes his heart submissive, so he will not say, ‘My [own] power and might of my [own] hand has achieved me this wealth’ ... And it should be added that the Torah was given at Sinai, which is a small mountain – to teach that a person should not be haughty, for God dwells with the humble. This is an important principle in Torah – that a person should not be arrogant. By means of Shmitah he makes his heart submissive, and this is the message alluded to in the teaching, ‘[The commandment of] Shmitah was given at Sinai.’”

- Altruism

ספר החינוך, מצווה פד

ועוד יש תועלת נמצא בדבר, לקנות בזה מידת הוותרנות, כי אין נדיב כנותן מבלי תקוה אל הגמול.

### Sefer ha-Hinukh, commandment 84

“Another benefit concerns the acquisition of the trait of altruism, for there is no-one so generous as he who gives with no hope of repayment.”

רב יוסף צבי רימון, ספר שמיטה, עמ' 29

פרט למעשי חסד כלליים, אפשר לעשות גם דברים המזכירים את הפקרת הקרקע בשמיטה. למשל בעלי מקצוע (עורך דין, רופא, מורה, אינסטלטור וכדומה) יכולים לתת בשנה זו שירותים מקצועיים בחינם או במחיר סמלי לאנשים נזקקים. ... מעבר לתרומה המקצועית, ניתן גם "להפקיר" חלק מהזמן שלנו: מבוגרים וילדים יכולים להעניק מזמנם למעשי עזרה וחסד מיוחדים בשנה זו.”





Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, Sefer Shmitah, p. 21 (5768 edition)

“Aside from general acts of kindness, one may also perform actions that recall the release of the land during Shmitah. For instance, professionals (lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc.) might, during this year, offer their professional services to the needy for free or for a nominal fee... We might also ‘release’ some of our time: adults and children alike might devote some of their time to special acts of kindness and aid during this year.”

## Shmitah year at KKL-JNF

The moment we turn our attention to look, the goodness – the “fruit” of the land – is visible and apparent in all KKL-JNF initiatives:

**“Green” fruit** – the forests, parks, and “green lungs” that KKL-JNF plants and develops throughout the country, from the north to the south, from the sea to the desert

**“Blue” fruit** – rehabilitated rivers, water reservoirs, and the limans in the Negev that collect every drop of water and give it back to the ground and to man

**“Brown” fruit** – agricultural fields, land for communities, roads, agricultural R&D, walking and biking paths crossing the country’s length and breadth, bringing benefit to man while showing consideration for the ground

As the largest ecological body in Israel, KKL-JNF operates in accordance with principles of sustainable development, which conserves the goodness of the land for the generations to come, while taking into consideration man’s needs. Building water reservoirs, paving roads, establishing communities, and developing forestry are just some of the spheres in which KKL-JNF is careful not to demand of the ground more than it is able to give, and to conserve natural resources with a Zionist orientation towards the future of our nation and our land.

**Two fundamental principles of KKL-JNF activity connect it, in its essence and values, to the ideas that form the foundation of the commandment of Shmitah:**

- **The principle of equality:** in accordance with Israel’s Scroll of Independence, KKL-JNF works to develop and enhance the land for the benefit of all its inhabitants. The forestry enterprise, the development of parks, making forests accessible, and caring for natural resources are undertaken on behalf of everyone, with no discrimination.

• **The principle of ecological rehabilitation and giving the ground a rest:** KKL-JNF activity is always accompanied by consideration and care to conserve natural resources and to maintain a balance between human intervention and the natural environment. In this way, our natural resources will remain sustainable and available for future generations, too.

## How does the Shmitah year impact KKL-JNF activity?

- During the Shmitah year the usual planting events do not take place, saplings are not distributed, and no planting ceremonies are held. Instead, KKL-JNF runs modified educational activities, including special Tu Be-Shvat 'seders', Shmitah tours, and activities integrating work that contributes to the preservation and maintenance of the forests.
- A virtue tree can be planted on our website ([http://salkkl.kkl.org.il/haklek\\_veta/e\\_yaar.aspx?lang=en](http://salkkl.kkl.org.il/haklek_veta/e_yaar.aspx?lang=en)) At the end of the Shmitah year, KKL-JNF will plant the tree in one of its forests throughout the country.
- The KKL-JNF forestry department conducts itself in accordance with the laws pertaining to the Shmitah year, with the guidance of Rabbi Eli Shelav.
- Labor to preserve and maintain existing forests, including treatment for pests and diseases, and preventing and reducing risk of fires, is carried out in full cooperation with the Chief Rabbinate.
- The replanting of trees in order to salvage them (removal of trees from areas where construction, development, paving of roads, or security-related activity that cannot be postponed is going on) is undertaken with the approval of the Chief Rabbinate.
- At KKL-JNF nurseries, sowing and transplanting activities take place on artificial surfaces that are unconnected to the ground, and without soil. Work is undertaken to create a barrier, consisting of concrete and special sheeting, between the ground and the trays and tables where sprouting and rooting takes place. A closely woven netting shade is spread over the plants.
- The olive harvest in KKL-JNF areas is carried out within the framework of Otzar Beit Din. Families are invited to take part in the harvest, where they receive information about the sanctity of the fruits of the Shmitah year.