



## *Shemita—The Sabbatical Year Hebrew/English Source Sheet*

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Translations from Judaica Press unless otherwise noted

### **Outline of Topics**

1. Hidden Light
2. The Shemita Commandments in the Torah
3. Making the Land Ownerless
4. Living Securely on the Land
5. Appeasing the Land
6. To let the Land Rest

### **1. Hidden Light**

תלמוד בבלי מסכת חגיגה דף יב עמוד א

דאמר רבי אלעזר: אור שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא ביום ראשון - אדם צופה בו מסוף העולם ועד סופו, כיון שנסתכל הקדוש ברוך הוא בדור המבול ובדור הפלגה וראה שמעשיהם מקולקלים - עמד וגנזו מהן, שנאמר +אויב ל"ח+ וימנע מרשעים אורם. ולמי גנזו - לצדיקים לעתיד לבא שנאמר וירא א-להים את האור כי טוב, ואין טוב אלא צדיק, שנאמר +ישעיהו ג'+ אמרו צדיק כי טוב. כיון שראה אור שגנזו לצדיקים שמה, שנאמר +משלי י"ג+ אור צדיקים ישמה. כתנאי: אור שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא ביום ראשון אדם צופה ומביט בו מסוף העולם ועד סופו, דברי רבי יעקב. וחכמים אומרים: הן הן מאורות שנבראו ביום ראשון ולא נתלו עד יום רביעי.

### **Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Chagigah, p. 12a, Translation by Soncino Press**

But was the light created on the first day? For, behold, it is written: "And God set them in the firmament of the heaven" (Genesis 1:17), and it is [further] written: "And there was evening and there was morning a fourth day" (Genesis 1:19) — This is [to be explained] according to R' Eleazar. For R' Eleazar said: The light which the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, one could see thereby from one end of the world to the other; but as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, beheld the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion, and saw that their actions were corrupt, He arose and hid it from them, for it is said: "But from the wicked their light is withholden" (Job 38:15). And for whom did he reserve it? For the righteous in the time to come, for it is said: "And God saw the light, that it was good" (Genesis 1:4); and 'good' means only the righteous, for it is said: "Say of the righteous that he is good" (Isaiah 3:10). As soon as He saw the light that He had reserved for the righteous, He rejoiced, for it is said: "He rejoices at the light of the righteous" (Proverbs 8:9).

**The Gaon of Vilna, Aderet Eliyahu, Bereshit Aleph, al derekh ha'remez, p. 37 old editions. Translation by Rabbi Avraham Sutton**

The light that was created on the first day was the light with which Adam saw from one end of the creation to the other. This original light is the light of consciousness (*ohr ha'sekhel*), the light which illumines the mind. It is through this that Adam perceived and grasped the entirety of the universe.

## ספר הבהיר - המיוחס לרבי נחוניא בן הקנה ז"ל

קס. ישב ר' ברכיה ודרש מאי האי דאמרינן כל יומא העולם הבא, ולא ידעינן מאי קאמרינן, העוה"ב מתרגמינן עלמא דאתי, מאי עלמא דאתי, מלמד שקודם שנברא העולם עלה במחשבה לבראות אור גדול להאיר, ונברא אור גדול שאין כל בריה יכולה לשלוט בו, צפה הקב"ה שאין יכולין לסובלו, לקח שביעית ושם להם במקומו והשאר גנזו לצדיקים לעתיר לבוא, ואמר אם יזכו בזה השביעי וישמרו אתן להם זה לעולם אחרון והיינו עולם הבא שכבר בא מקודם ששת ימי בראשית הה"ד (תהלים ל"א כ) מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך וגו':

**The Bahir. Attributed to Rabbi Nehunia ben Hakaneh. Translated by R' Aryeh Kaplan.** York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1979, Section 160, page 58

Rabbi Berachiah sat and expounded: Each day we speak of the World to Come. Do we then understand what we are saying? In Aramaic, the "World to Come" is translated "the world that came." And what is the meaning of "the world that came"? We learned that before the world was created, it arose in thought to create an intense light to illuminate it. He created an intense light over which no created thing could have authority. The Blessed Holy One saw, however, that the world could not endure [this light]. He therefore took a seventh of it and left it in its place for them. The rest He put away for the righteous in the Ultimate Future. He said, "If they are worthy of this seventh and keep it, I will give them [the rest] in the Final World." It is therefore called "the world that came," since it already came [into existence] from the six days of creation. Regarding this it is written (Psalm 31:20), "How great is Your good that You have hidden away for those who fear You."

### Questions:

1. How do you understand this idea of hidden light intended for the righteous?
2. Have you ever experienced a moment of recognizing this light?
3. How does this light relate to Shabbat and Shemita?

### שמות פרק כג פסוקים י-יא

י. וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תַּזְרַע אֶת אֲרֶצְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת תְּבוּאָתָהּ: יא. וְהַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּשְׁמְטֶנָּה וְנִטְשָׁתָה וְאָכְלוּ אֲבִינֵי עַמְּךָ וַיִּתְּרָם תֹּאכַל חֵיט הַשָּׂדֶה כִּן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכַרְמְךָ לְזִיתְךָ:

## 2. The Shemita Commandments in the Torah

### Exodus 23:10-11

**10.** Six years you may sow your land and gather in its produce. **11.** But in the seventh [year] you shall release it and abandon it; the poor of your people shall eat [it], and what they leave over, the beasts of the field shall eat. So shall you do to your vineyard [and] to your olive tree[s].

### רש"י שמות פרק כג פסוק יא

תשמטנה - מעבודה:

ונטשתה - מאכילה אחר זמן הביעור. דבר אחר תשמטנה מעבודה גמורה, כגון חרישה וזריעה. ונטשתה מלזבל ומלקשקש: ויתרם תאכל חית השדה - להקיש מאכל אביון למאכל חיה מה חיה אוכלת בלא מעשר, אף אביונים אוכלים בלא מעשר, מכאן אמרו אין מעשר בשביעית:

כן תעשה לכרמך - ותחלת המקרא בשדה הלבן, כמו שאמור למעלה הימנו תזרע את ארצך:

### Rashi to Exodus 23:11

*you shall release it:* from work.

*and abandon it:* from eating it after the time of the removal (see Mechilta). Another interpretation:

*you shall release it:* from real work, such as plowing and sowing,

*and abandon it:* from fertilizing and hoeing.

*and what they leave over, the beasts of the field shall eat:* [This is written in order] to liken the food of the poor to the food of the beast. Just as the beast eats without tithing, so do the poor eat without tithing. From here [we derive] that there are no tithes in the seventh year. -[From Mechilta]

*So shall you do to your vineyard:* And the beginning of the verse is speaking of a grain field, as is stated above [verse 10]: "You may sow your land."

## ויקרא פרק כה

- (א) וידבר יקוק אל משה בהר סיני לאמר:  
(ב) דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כי תבאו אל הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם ושבתה הארץ שבת ליקוק:  
(ג) שש שנים תזרע שדך ושש שנים תזמר כרמך ואספת את תבואתה:  
(ד) ובשנה השביעת שבת שבתון יהיה לארץ שבת ליקוק שדך לא תזרע וכרמך לא תזמר:  
(ה) את ספיח קצירך לא תקצור ואת ענבי נזירך לא תבצר שנת שבתון יהיה לארץ:  
(ו) והיתה שבת הארץ לכם לאכלה לך ולעבדך ולאמתך ולשכירך ולתושבך הגרים עמך:  
(ז) ולבהמתך ולחיה אשר בארצך תהיה כל תבואתה לאכל:

### Leviticus 25:1-7

1. And the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, 2. Speak to the children of Israel and you shall say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to the Lord. 3. You may sow your field for six years, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce, 4. But in the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest a Sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field, nor shall you prune your vineyard. 5. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest, and you shall not pick the grapes you had set aside [for yourself], [for] it shall be a year of rest for the land. 6. And [the produce of] the Sabbath of the land shall be yours to eat for you, for your male and female slaves, and for your hired worker and resident who live with you, 7. And all of its produce may be eaten [also] by your domestic animals and by the beasts that are in your land.

## רש"י ויקרא פרק כה

לשש השנים - למקצת הששית מניסן ועד ראש השנה, ולשביעית ולשמינית, שיזרעו בשמינית במרחשון ויקצרו בניסן:

### Rashi to Leviticus 25:21

*for three years* for part of the sixth year from Nissan [when the crop is reaped] until Rosh Hashanah, for the [entire] seventh [Shemittah] year, and for the eighth [year, namely,] for they will sow [a new crop] in Marcheshvan of the eighth year and reap [this new crop] in Nissan [while still eating of the sixth year's crop].

### Questions:

1. What specific rules are given regarding the Sabbatical Year?
2. What affect would these rules have on society and its hierarchies?
3. What does it mean for land to rest?

## 3. Making the Land Ownerless

### רש"י ויקרא פרק כה פסוק ה

את ספיח קצירך - אפילו לא זרעתה והיא צמחה מן הזרע שנפל בה בעת הקציר, הוא קרוי ספיח:  
לא תקצור - להיות מחזיק בו כשאר קציר, אלא הפקר יהיה לכל:

### Rashi to Leviticus 25:5

*the aftergrowth of your harvest:* although you did not sow it, but it grew by itself from seeds that [inadvertently] had dropped on [the ground] at the time of harvesting. This is called סְפִיחַ [safiach].

*You shall not reap:* to keep it like a regular harvest, but it must be rendered ownerless, [and available] for everyone [to take at will]. — [Be'er Basadeh]

### רש"י ויקרא פרק כה פסוק ו

היתה שבת הארץ וגו' - אף על פי שאסרתים עליך, לא באכילה ולא בהנאה אסרתים, אלא שלא תנהוג בהם כבעל הבית, אלא הכל יהיו שוים בה, אתה ושכירך ותושבך:

### Rashi to Leviticus 25:5

*And [the produce of] the Sabbath of the land, shall be [yours to eat]:* Although I have prohibited the produce

[of the Shemittah year] to you, I did not prohibit you to eat it or to derive benefit from it, only that you should not treat it as if you were its owner. Rather, everyone is deemed equal [regarding the use of the Shemittah year's produce]-you, [your slaves,] and your hired worker and resident.

#### Questions:

1. According to these sources, what does it mean for the land to be ownerless?
2. What is the difference between ownership and value?
3. How does Shemita help us distinguish between these two ideas?

### 4. Living Securely on the Land

#### ויקרא פרק כה

(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 השביעית הן לא נזרע ולא נאסף את תבואתנו:  
(כא) וצויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה הששית ועשת את התבואה לשלש השנים:

#### Leviticus 25:18-21

18. You shall perform My statutes, keep My ordinances and perform them then you will live on the land securely. 19. And the land will then yield its fruit and you will eat to satiety, and live upon it securely. 20. And if you should say, "What will we eat in the seventh year? We will not sow, and we will not gather in our produce!" 21. [Know then, that] I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield produce for three years.

#### רש"י ויקרא פרק כה

וישבתם על הארץ לבטח - שבעון שמטה ישראל גולים, שנאמר (ויקרא כו לד) אז תרצה הארץ את שבתותיה והרצת את שבתותיה, ושבעים שנה של גלות בבל, כנגד שבעים שמשות שבטלו היו:

#### Rashi to Leviticus 25:18

*Then you will live on the land securely* because it is through the transgression of [the laws of] Shemittah that the Israelites are exiled [from their land], as the verse says, "Then, the land will appease its Sabbaths. [All the days of desolation while you are in the land of your enemies -] the land will rest and appease its Sabbaths" (Lev. 26:34). And the seventy years of the Babylonian exile [when the land remained forcibly at rest], corresponded to the seventy years of Shemittah not observed by Israel, [and thus came to rectify and "appease" them]. [see Rashi Lev. 26:25 where the calculation is explained; *Shab.* 33a; and see II Chron. 36:21]

#### ויקרא כו:לג-לה

לג. ואתכם אָזְרָה בגוים והרילתי אתריכם חרב והייתה ארצכם שְׁמָמָה וְעָרֵיכֶם יִהְיוּ חָרְבָה:  
לד. אֲזַי תִּרְצֶה הָאָרֶץ אֶת שְׁבֻתֶיהָ כֹּל יְמֵי הַשְּׁמָמָה וְאַתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲיִבֵיכֶם אֲזַי תִּשְׁבֹּת הָאָרֶץ וְהִרְצַת אֶת שְׁבֻתֶיהָ:  
לה. כֹּל יְמֵי הַשְּׁמָמָה תִּשְׁבֹּת אֶת אֲשֶׁר לֹא נִשְׁבְּתָה בְּשְׁבֻתֵיכֶם בְּשְׁבֻתְכֶם עָלֶיהָ:

#### Leviticus 26:33-5

33. And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you. Your land will be desolate, and your cities will be laid waste. 34. Then, the land will be appeased regarding its sabbaticals. During all the days that it remains desolate while you are in the land of your enemies, the Land will rest and thus appease its sabbaticals. 35. It will rest during all the days that it remains desolate, whatever it had not rested on your sabbaticals, when you lived upon it.

#### Questions:

1. According to these sources, what does it mean to live securely?
2. What do these sources teach us about the consequences of our actions?
3. How do these sources illuminate the relationship between good behavior and environmental outcomes?

## 5. Appeasing the Land

רש"י לויקרא כו:לד

אז תרצה: תפייס את כעס המקום שכעס על שמטותיה:

### Rashi to Leviticus 26:34

*Then, the Land will be appeased:* [This verb is in the reflexive form and the meaning is: Then, the Land will be appeased, and in turn,] appease the anger of the Omnipresent, Who had been angry regarding the Land's Shemittah years (Mizrachi) [and thus appease [God regarding them].

רש"י לויקרא כו:לד

והרצת: למלך את שבתותיה:

### Rashi to Leviticus 26:34

and thus appease: [This verb is in the causative form, meaning: The Land will appease] the King regarding its sabbaticals (Mizrachi).

רש"י לויקרא כו:לה

את אשר לא שבתה: שבעים שנה של גלות בבל הן היו כנגד שבעים שנות השמטה ויובל שהיו בשנים שהכעיסו ישראל בארצם לפני המקום ארבע מאות ושלושים שנה...ועליהם נגזר שבעים שנה שלמים. וכן הוא אומר בדברי הימים (דה"ב לו כא) עד רצתה הארץ את שבתותיה למלאות שבעים שנה:

### Rashi to Leviticus 26:35

*whatever it had not rested on your sabbaticals:* The seventy years of the Babylonian exile [i.e., between the destruction of the first Temple and the building of the second,] corresponded to the seventy years of Shemittah and Jubilee years that took place during the years that Israel angered the Omnipresent while in their Land, [a total of] 430 years... And for these [unobserved sabbaticals], a full seventy years [of exile] were decreed. And thus is it stated in (II) Chron. (36: 21), "until the Land was appeased regarding its Sabbaths; [for all the days of its desolation it rested,] until the completion of seventy years."

דברים פרק לא פסוקים י-יב

י. ויצו משה אותם לאמר מקץ שבע שנים במעד שנת השמטה בחרג הסכות

יא. בבוא כל ישראל לראות את פני ה' א-להיך במקום אשר יבחר תקרא את התורה הזאת נגד כל ישראל באזניהם:

יב. הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגרד אשר בשעריך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו ויראו את ה' א-להיכם ושמרו לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת:

### Deuteronomy 31:10-12

10. Then, Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of [every] seven years, at an appointed time, in the Festival of Succoth, [after] the year of release, **11**. When all Israel comes to appear before the Lord, your God, in the place He will choose you shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears. **12**. Assemble the people: the men, the women, and the children, and your stranger in your cities, in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear the Lord, your God, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah.

### Questions

1. What is the relationship between Shemita, the land, and G-d? How do you think G-d is appeased by our observance of Shemita?
2. How does appeasing the land affect our personal and communal success? What can this idea teach us today?
3. Why is the end of the Shemita year the time to gather everyone together to hear the Torah?

## 6. To Let the Land Rest

רש"י ויקרא פרק כה  
שבת לה' - לשם ה', כשם שנאמר בשבת בראשית:

### Rashi to Leviticus 25:2

*a Sabbath to the Lord:* For the sake of the Lord, just as is stated of the Sabbath of Creation (see Exod. 20:10) [i.e., just as every seventh day is a holy Sabbath day, acclaiming that God Himself rested on the seventh day and thus acclaiming that God is the Supreme Creator of all existence, likewise, man must rest from working the land on the seventh year, for the sake of God, not for the sake of the land, so that it should gain fertility by lying fallow for a year]. — [*Sifthei Chachamim ; Torath Kohanim 25:7*]

רמב"ם, ספר מורה הנבוכים חלק ג פרק לט  
ואמנם כל המצות אשר ספרנום בהלכות שמיטה ויובל... ושתוסיף הארץ תבואתה ותתחזק בעמדה שמוטה

Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, III:39, p. 553, translation by Shlomo Pines, 1963

With regard to all the commandments that we have enumerated in Laws concerning the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee... some of them are meant to make the earth more fertile and stronger through letting it lie fallow.

Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations

Continuum: London, 2002, p. 167-8

The Israelites were therefore commanded to conserve the soil by giving it periodic fallow years and not pursue short-term gain at the cost of long-term desolation.

### Questions

1. According to these sources, what was the purpose of the Sabbatical Year?
2. What do you make of the apparent disagreement in our sources about the meaning of Shemita and the purpose of its rest?

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