

Rosh HaShannah Day 2 Text Study  
Beth Israel Congregation  
2014/5775  
Texts from [Hazon's](#) Guide to Shemita

### **Social Justice and Shmeita: Economic and Spiritual Lessons for Today**

The year of Shmita...promotes a sense of fellowship and peace...for one is not allowed to exercise over any of the seventh year produce the right of private ownership. And this is undoubtedly a primary factor in promoting peace since most dissension originates from the attitudes of 'mine is mine,' one person claiming 'it is all mine' and the other also claiming 'it is all mine.' But in the seventh year all are equal, and this is the real essence of peace.

– Kli Yakar, on Devarim 31.12 (16th Century)

The matter of Shmita and Yovel correspond to the way of acting, mentioned in the Pirkei Avot [Ethics of the Fathers, 5:10]: 'One who says "What's mine is yours, and what's yours is yours," this is a righteous person'.

- Mei Shiloach (19th Century)

The Shmita Year teaches us further that the rich should not lord it over the poor. Accordingly, the Torah ordained that all should be equal during the seventh year, both the rich and the needy having access to the gardens and fields to eat their fill... Yet another reason [for Shmita]: in order that they should not always be preoccupied with working the soil to provide for their material needs. For in this one year, they would be completely free. The liberation from the yoke of work would give them the opportunity for studying Torah and wisdom. Those who are not students will be occupied with crafts and building and supplying these needs in Eretz Yisrael. Those endowed with special skills will invent new methods in this free time for the benefit of the world.

– Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, Sefer Habrit, Behar (19th Century)

The seventh year serves to rectify the social ills and inequalities that accumulate in society over the years. When poorer segments of society borrow from the wealthy, they feel beholden to the affluent elite. "The debtor is a servant of the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). This form of subservience can corrupt even honest individuals in their dealings with the rich and powerful.

The Sabbatical year comes to correct this situation of inequality and societal rifts, by removing a major source of power of the elite: debts owed to them.

– Rav Kook (early 20th century), adapted by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

According to Jabotinsky socialism was not the biblical answer to income inequality and concentration of wealth. Rather, the bible seeks to preserve economic liberty, but restrain exploitation and inequality

through mandatory rest on the sabbath, leaving a portion of the harvest to the poor, tithing, and the Jubilee. During a Jubilee certain debts are forgiven and slaves are freed, like an ax cutting away excesses and restoring balance to society. Unlike socialist revolutions that happen once and are designed to permanently prevent the ills of economic liberalism, the Jubilee revolution occurs at regular intervals, preserving full economic liberty but cushioning society from the adverse effects of free markets.

Something miraculous happens when we stop. We get to experience the power that nature knows called dormancy. Dormancy, that which is holding; the heartbeat that rests; the hibernating animals, all of winter; waiting and waiting... There are seeds inside each and every one of us, inside this culture, that cannot emerge because we do not know that dormancy does not mean death, resting does not mean disappearing. What keeps us from stopping is that we are terrified of resting. We are afraid of the imaginative terrible things we will feel in the quiet. We fear that when we stop, even for a moment, the sheer enormity of our lives will overwhelm us. Our outspoken and unspoken fears, they speed up our lives. Like a stone being thrown over a lake, we've learned to skip so we don't get too wet, and we are terrified that if we let the stone fall, we will disappear. And so we think that our speed will save us from the void. We dance around the security that is offered from touching what is underneath the speed. Can we let go of the obsession of finishing what can't be finished?

– Rabbi David Ingber, Shabbat Behar sermon, Romemu