# Limmud Online Chavruta Project – 5774 – Shmita

**Introduction to the *Limmud Online Chavruta Project***

***Chavruta* learning** (learning in pairs) is one of the oldest and most powerful Jewish learning techniques. The *Limmud Chavruta Project*, now an international collaboration, is also one of Limmud's oldest and best-loved traditions, at Limmud Conference in the UK and at Limmudim around the world. Teams from different countries put together a Chavruta source book, filled to the brim with traditional and modern Jewish and secular readings for study which hundreds of Limmudniks use for studying in pairs. It is a wonderful, formative experience, opening people's eyes to new concepts and ideas, and helping people to forge life-long friendships.

Now, you can continue the Limmud chavruta experience into your daily life!

Try studying it at home, with your family, with colleagues at work during a break, with friends, during your commute, or by Skype or internet.

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**Shmita – The Sabbatical year**
**This year (2013-2014/5774)**, spread over 10 months (October-July), the Limmud Online Chavruta Project will be investigating the theme of **Shmita (the sabbatical year)**. This is particularly pertinent as the next Jewish year (2014-2015/5775) is a shmita year and this raises a lot of questions in modern Israel, as you will see in this series. The shmita is a biblically mandated once every seven year rest for the land – it is forbidden to plough the fields or reap the harvests. As a radical and difficult idea, many Jewish sources over the generations have a lot to say about this and the concepts that lie behind it, as we will explore.

We are blessed to have supporting this year's project with their expertise, **Hazon**, a New York based Jewish organisation trying to help create healthier and more sustainable communities in the Jewish world and beyond. Thus this series was created jointly with Limmud volunteers and Hazon Shmita Project staff and we are very excited about this collaboration. To learn more about the Shmita Project, visit www.shmitaproject.org

Over the next 10 issues of the Limmud Online Chavruta Project, the following key questions will be explored in depth:

# KEY QUESTIONS:

- *The word 'Shmita' means 'release'. What is the 'release', on a personal and societal level, that the Shmita is trying to instill?*

- *What are the values at the core of the biblical sabbatical tradition? What are the challenges that might be associated with the implementation of the sabbatical tradition in this time?*

- *Can we make the sabbatical vision relevant today, adapted for a modern society? If so, how?*

# 2. Communal Harvest

**Leviticus 25:5-7**
[5]You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. [6]But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce – you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, [7]and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

**ויקרא כה:ה-ז**
[5]אֵת סְפִיחַ קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִקְצוֹר וְאֶת־עִנְּבֵי נְזִירֶךָ לֹא
תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שַׁבָּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ: [6]וְהָיְתָה שַׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ
לָכֶם לְאָכְלָה לְךָ וּלְעַבְדְּךָ וְלַאֲמָתֶךָ וְלִשְׂכִירְךָ
וּלְתוֹשָׁבְךָ הַגָּרִים עִמָּךְ: [7]וּלְבְהֶמְתְּךָ וְלַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר
בְּאַרְצֶךָ תִּהְיֶה כָּל־תְּבוּאָתָהּ לֶאֱכֹל:

**Rashi on Leviticus 25:5-6**
*"You shall not reap"* with the intention of taking possession and ownership of it, like you would with other harvests. Rather, this harvest shall be ownerless for everyone...

*"And it shall be a sabbath of the land."* Although I have prohibited the produce to you, I did not prohibit you from eating it or deriving benefit from it – only that you should not treat it as its owner. Rather all should have equal rights to the produce of the seventh year – you, your hired worker, and those who reside with you.

**רש"י על ויקרא כה:ה-ו**
"**לא תִקְצוֹר**". לִהְיוֹת מַחֲזִיק בּוֹ כִּשְׁאָר קָצִיר, אֶלָּא הֶפְקֵר יִהְיֶה לַכֹּל...

"**וְהָיְתָה שַׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ**" וְגוֹמֵר. אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁאֲסַרְתִּים עָלֶיךָ, לֹא בַּאֲכִילָה וְלֹא בַּהֲנָאָה אֲסַרְתִּים, אֶלָּא שֶׁלֹּא תִנְהוֹג בָּהֶם כְּבַעַל הַבַּיִת, אֶלָּא הַכֹּל יִהְיוּ שָׁוִים בָּהּ, אַתָּה וּשְׂכִירְךָ וְתוֹשָׁבֶךָ:

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Sanctity is not profaned by the exercise of private acquisitiveness over all this year's produce, and the covetousness of wealth stirred up by commerce is forgotten. For food – but not for commerce.

**Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), *Shabbat Ha'Aretz***

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The world produces enough food to feed everyone. World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase. This is enough to provide everyone in the world with at least 2,720 calories per person per day. The principal problem is that many people in the world do not have sufficient land to grow, or income to purchase, enough food.

**World Hunger Education Service, *2012 World Hunger & Poverty Facts***

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**Points to consider**
Do you agree that a normal 'harvest' implies the intention of ownership & possession? Do you consider your garden produce, or even the produce you buy in the market, your own property?

Once food is no longer marked with a price tag, and is no longer bought in a marketplace, how might your perspective of food change? How much of your relationship to food is determined by its price?

Beyond the actual intention of shared ownership, what are some tangible ways you might consider expanding affordable, fair, and healthy food access for all peoples, inspired by Shmita-values?