



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.

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?*

3. Wild and perennial foods

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years 4:1-3

1. All that grows [unsown and uncultivated] from the earth in the seventh [sabbatical] year, whether it grew from seeds that fell into the earth before the seventh year, or it grew from roots whose plants were harvested previously, but nevertheless grew again – in both instances such produce is referred to with the term *Safich*, grasses and vegetables that grew on their own accord [in the sabbatical year]. These are all permitted to be eaten according to the Torah, as it says, “It will be a sabbath of the land for you to eat” (Leviticus 25:6)...

2. According to Rabbinic decree, all the *sfichim* are forbidden to be eaten. Why was a decree established concerning them? Because of the transgressors, so that they could not go and sow grain, beans, and garden vegetables in one’s field discreetly and when they grow, partake of them, saying that they are actually *sfichim*.

3. Thus we have learned that the only [fresh] produce of the Shmita year of which one may partake are the harvest of fruit trees and vines [which are perennial plants], as well as wild plants that *are not typically sown in a garden*, such as rue, amaranth, and the like [wild plants].

NOTE: Perennial & wild plants do not require seeding or sowing, so they are not affected by Shmita laws. Most vegetables (annual plants) do require seeding and sowing each year, and are thus forbidden to be cultivated during the Shmita. The plants that are called sfichim are common vegetables that are found growing during a Shmita year, feither rom seeds that dropped in the previous season and grew again on their own, or from roots which continue to produce a stem/leaf body after a harvest before Shmita began.

Most of what volunteers in my garden is wild and rangy, common weeds. And the field greens that self-sow, the mustards and arugula, have learned few manners from their domestication. Some gardeners want nothing to do with any of them. But one person’s weeds are another’s pot herbs, pungent additions to soups and salads that have kept kitchen gardeners company since the Middle Ages.

Aileen Hewitt, *Eat Your Weeds (But Get To Know Them First)*, NY Times, March 25 2009

Points to consider

Do you think you would be able to sustain yourself for a full year on a diet of perennial, wild or uncultivated foods?

What do you think the benefits may have been – for the body and the land – in consuming such foods for a year? And what would some of the challenges have been?

How many fruit trees are growing on your block? In your local park? On your school/synagogue/ community center land? How might the local landscape shift if we had fruit trees growing all around us, especially on public lands?

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות שמיטה ויובל

1. כָּל שֶׁתּוֹצֵיאַ הָאָרֶץ בְּשָׁנָה שְׁבִיעִית - בֵּין מִן הַזֶּרַע שֶׁנָּפַל בָּהּ מִקֶּדֶם שְׁבִיעִית, בֵּין מִן הָעֵיִקָּרִים שֶׁנִּקְצְרוּ מִקֶּדֶם וַחֲזָרוּ וְעָשׂוּ, שְׁנִיָּהֶם נִקְרְאוּ סְפִיחַ, בֵּין מִן הָעֵשְׂבִים וְהַיִּרְקוֹת שֶׁעָלוּ מֵאֲלֵיהֶן וְאִין לָהֶן זֶרַע-הַפֶּל מִתָּר לְאָכְלוּ מִן הַתּוֹרָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְהִיְתָה שְׁבִית הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם, לְאֹכְלָהּ" (ויקרא כה:ו)...

2. וּמִדְּבַרֵי סוּפְרִים, שֶׁיְהִיוּ כָּל הַסְּפִיחִים אֲסוּרִין בְּאֹכְלָהּ. וְלָמָּה גִזְרוּ עֲלֵיהֶם: מִפְּנֵי עוֹבְרֵי עֲבָרָה שֶׁלֹּא יֵלְךְ וַיִּזְרַע תְּבוּאָה וְקִטְנִיּוֹת וְזֵרַעוֹנֵי גִנָּה בְּתוֹךְ שְׂדֵהוּ בְּסֵתֵר, וְכִשְׂיֻצְמָחוּ יֹאכְל מֵהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר סְפִיחִים הֵן.

3. הֵיא לְמַדְתָּ, שֶׁאִין אוֹכְלִין מִפְּרוֹת שְׁבִיעִית אֶלָּא פְּרוֹת הָאֵילָנוֹת, וְהָעֵשְׂבִים שֶׁאִין זֹרְעִין אוֹתָם רַב הָאָדָם, כְּגוֹן הַפִּיגָם וְהַיִּרְבוּזִין הַשּׁוֹטִיִּים וְכָל כִּיּוּצָא בָהֶן.