



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?*



4. Eating local and seasonal

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years 5:13

The produce of the Sabbatical year may not be transported from Eretz Yisrael to the Diaspora, not even to Syria.

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות שמיטה ויובל ה:יג

פְּרוֹת שְׁבִיעִית אֵין מוֹצִיאִין אוֹתָן מֵהָאֶרֶץ לְחוּצָה לְאֶרֶץ, וְאֶפְלוּ לְסוּרְיָה.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years 7:1

We may only partake of the produce of the Sabbatical year as long as that species is still found [growing] in the field, as it says, "the cattle and beasts in your land may eat all of its yield" (Leviticus 25:7) – as long as a beast can be eating from this species in the field, you may eat from what you have at home. When there are no longer any of that species in the field for the beasts to eat, a person is obligated to remove that species from his home...

רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות שמיטה ויובל ז:א

פְּרוֹת שְׁבִיעִית אֵין אוֹכְלִין מֵהֶן אֵלָּא כָּל זְמַן שְׂאוֹתוֹ הַמֵּין מִצּוֹי בַשָּׂדֶה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְלִבְהֶמְתֶּךָ - וְלַחֲיָהּ, אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶצְךָ: תֵּהֵיָה..." (ויקרא כה,ז): כָּל זְמַן שֶׁחֲיָהּ אוֹכְלֶת מִמֵּין זֶה מִן הַשָּׂדֶה, אֵתָּה אוֹכֵל מִמָּה שֶׁבְּבֵית; כָּלָּה לַחֲיָה מִן הַשָּׂדֶה חָיֵב לְבַעַר אוֹתוֹ הַמֵּין מִן הַבַּיִת...
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According to the New Oxford English Dictionary, the word *locavore* refers to a "person who endeavors to eat only locally produced food." In 2007, *locavore* was chosen as the "word of the year."

Most people of my grandparents' generation had an intuitive sense of agricultural basics: when various fruits and vegetables come into season, which ones keep through the winter, how to preserve the others. On what day autumn's frost will likely fall on their county, and when to expect the last one in spring. Which crops can be planted before the last frost, and which must wait. What animals and vegetables thrive in one's immediate region and how to live well on those, with little else thrown into the mix beyond a bag of flour, a pinch of salt, and a handful of coffee... This knowledge has largely vanished from our culture.

Barbara Kingslover

The *mitzvah* of *Shmita* was intended for a simple agricultural society. Most Jews in the Land of Israel in biblical and Talmudic times grew the food they required. During the *Shmita* year, it was relatively easy to stop working the land and eat whatever grew on its own. The crops in the field were left unclaimed, and the poor and the city dwellers could come and eat. If we lived in such a society today, we could probably observe the *mitzvah* of *Shmita* as it was legislated. But, today, 95% of the country's inhabitants live in cities, far from food sources. If all the *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* observed *Shmita* as it was legislated, a life-threatening situation would develop. In addition, at the present time, most of Israel's agricultural produce is destined for export. Agrexco - the Israel Agricultural Export Company - exports 4 billion shekels (1 billion dollars) of produce every year. If all the farmers were to observe the *mitzvah* of *Shmita* according to biblical law, Israeli agriculture would collapse and this could bring disaster to the State of Israel.

Rabbi David Golinkin, *Jerusalem*, 1985 (excerpt from extensive halachic teshuva on keeping *Shmita* today)



Points to consider

In the United States, the most frequently cited statistic is that food travels 1,500 miles on average from farm to consumer. What type of agricultural and economic systems would need to be in place to ensure a vibrant 'foodshed' without relying on a global food trade?

Rambam is quoting a source from the Torah that links the eating patterns of humans with animals on the Sabbatical year, in regards to seasonality of our diets. How do you understand this connection?

If you were creating a local, seasonal diet for the Shmita year, what would you have to sacrifice? Where would you be willing to make a compromise? How would you seek creative alternatives for what you'd be missing out on?