



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?*



5. Waste reduction

Babylonian Talmud, *Pesachim* 52b-53a

Rabbi Elai cut down date-berry [trees] of the sabbatical year. How could he do this? For the Torah states, "[It . . . shall be] for food" (Leviticus 25:6), but *not* for destruction...

From when may you not cut down trees in the Sabbatical year? The Academy of Shammai say: 'All trees [may not be cut down] from when they bring forth [fruit];' but the Academy of Hillel say: 'The carob trees from when they form chains [of carobs]; the vine trees, from when they form kernels; olive trees, from when they blossom; and all other trees, from when they bring forth [fruit].'

Translation: Based on Soncino

Since 1974, U.S. per capita food waste has progressively increased to more than 1400 calories per person per day, or 150 trillion calories per year. During this same period, food waste has increased from about 30% of the available food supply to almost 40%. Food waste now accounts for more than one quarter of total freshwater consumption and about 300 million barrels of oil use per year.

The Progressive Increase in Food Waste in America, 2009 study

What's driving all this food waste? Every hand that touches food, from farmer to shopper, is partly responsible. For instance, low commodity prices on certain foods can mean that it's cheaper for a farmer to leave a field unharvested than to pay for labor, packaging, and shipping to a distributor. Grocery stores follow the "pile it high, watch it fly" philosophy, which means they stock shelves to overflowing in an effort to get people to buy more food. Restaurants serve enormous portions, and 55 percent of diners' leftovers are left behind. However, we the people waste the most food waste. The average family of four wastes 25 percent of its purchased food. That's \$1,365 to \$2,275 we spend every year on food that winds up in the garbage. The USDA offers a more conservative estimate that each consumer spends \$390 on wasted food. Whichever figure you believe, it's good money being funneled straight to landfills.

Emily Main, *Food Waste Statistics*, Rodale News, June 2013

OO WA OO WA OO WA OO OO (X2)
Each day I go to breakfast
Put oatmeal in my bowl
Fill up my glass with O.J.
Eat half my jell roll.
I can't believe I took more than I ate
That's why I have so much psolet [waste] on my plate.
OO WA OO WA OO WA OO OO
Take two bites of an apple
Drop raisins on the trail
Pull breadcrusts off my sandwich
I say it's cause they're stale.
Each night I ask the stars in the sky (Hey stars)
Why does the food on my plate pile up so high?
OO WA OO WA OO WA OO OO

תלמוד בבלי, פסחים נ"ב ע"ב - נ"ג ע"א

רבי אילעאי קץ כפנייתא דשביעית. היכי עביד הכי?
"לאכלה" (ויקרא כה:ו) אמר רחמנא, ולא להפסד!...

מאימתי אין קוצצין את האילנות בשביעית? בית שמאי
אומרים: כל האילנות משיוציאו. ובית הלל אומרים:
החרובין משישרשו, והגפנים משיגריעו, והזיתים
משיניצו, ושאר כל האילנות משיוציאו.



But now I'm feelin' happy
I'm peaceful and serene
I'm a ba'al bal tash'chit
Because my plate is clean!
It's true, I took no more than I ate
That's why you'll never find psolet on my plate.
OO WA OO WA OO WA OO OO (X2)

Psolet (food waste) Song, Teva Learning Alliance

Points to consider

Why should the Talmud think that cutting down trees would be forbidden during the sabbatical year?
Why do the academies of Hillel and Shammai think so?

This principle of not using cut-down trees, especially concerning for use as firewood, has been absorbed over the years into the principle of *Kedushat Shevi'it*, the sanctity of the seventh year, that food should not be used to produce non-food items during the sabbatical year. Why do you think this is a value during the sabbatical year?