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?*

6. Yearlong shabbat

Exodus 23:10-12

[10]Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; [11]but in the seventh year, you shall let it rest and lie fallow. And the needy among your people shall eat of it, and what they leave, let the wild beasts eat of it. You shall do the same with your vineyards and olive groves.

[12]Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed.

שמות כג:י-יא

[10]וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע אֶת־אַרְצֶךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ׃
[11]וְהַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּשְׁמְטֶנָּה וּנְטַשְׁתָּהּ וְאָכְלוּ אֶבְיֹנֵי עַמֶּךָ
וְיִתְרָם תֹּאכַל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה כֵּן־תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכַרְמְךָ לְזֵיתֶךָ׃

[12]שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִּשְׁבֹּת
לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ שׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרֶךָ וְיִנָּפֵשׁ בֶּן־אֲמָתְךָ וְהַגֵּר׃

Translation: NJPS

The 50- or 60-hour workweek has begun to raise ethical questions: Are employers respecting the contractual arrangements they make with their employees? Are employees placing too much value on work and the material things work makes possible? What impact do such long workweeks have on families and, through them, on the common good?

Miriam Shulman, *Time To Go Home*, Center For Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University

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We can't live with growth, and we can't live without it. This contradiction is humankind's biggest challenge this century, but as long as conventional wisdom holds that growth can continue forever, it's a challenge we can't possibly address.

Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Economies Can't Just Keep On Growing*, Foreign Policy, Feb 2011

Points to consider

In what ways is Shmita an extension of the weekly Shabbat? How are they similar? In what ways are they different?

What is your personal relationship to this rhythm of creation and rest? Is this a rhythm you feel in-tune with? How often to you experience a personal 'fallow' period?

Have you considered taking a Sabbatical? Do you feel a need for one? If so, what was that like? How would you infuse this intention into your work week and work year on a regular basis? What would our society, family lives and personal lives look like if we had a more balanced relationship with the work we do?