



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?*

8. Slavery release

Leviticus 25:8-10, 39-42

⁸You shall count off seven weeks of years – seven times seven years – so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. ⁹Then you shall sound the horn loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month – the Day of Atonement – you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land ¹⁰and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release [others: liberty] throughout the land and all of its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee [Hebrew: *yoveil*, ram's horn] for you: each of you shall return to his family...

³⁹If your kinsman under you continues in straits and must give himself over to you, do not subject him to the treatment of a slave. ⁴⁰He shall remain with you as a hired or bound laborer; he shall serve with you only until the jubilee year. ⁴¹Then he and his children with him shall be free of your authority; he shall go back to his family and return to his ancestral holding – ⁴²For they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt; they may not give themselves over into servitude.

Translation: NJPS

ויקרא כה:ח-י, לט-מב

⁸וּסְפַרְתָּ לְךָ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וְהָיָה לְךָ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתֹת הַשָּׁנִים תִּשְׁעַת וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה: ⁹וְהִעֲבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשְׂרֵי לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים תִּעְבְּרֻוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּכָל־אַרְצְכֶם: ¹⁰וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרָאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאַרְצְ לְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹבֵל הוּא תְהִיָּה לְכֶם וְשַׁבְתֶּם אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִזְתּוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תִּשְׁבוּ...

³⁹וְכִי־יִמּוֹךְ אָחִיךָ עִמָּךְ וְנִמְכַר־לְךָ לֹא־תַעֲבֹד בּוֹ עֲבָדַת עֶבֶד: ⁴⁰בְּשָׂכִיר כְּתוּשָׁב יִהְיֶה עִמָּךְ עַד־שְׁנַת הַיּוֹבֵל יַעֲבֹד עִמָּךְ: ⁴¹וַיֵּצֵא מֵעִמָּךְ הוּא וּבְנָיו עִמּוֹ וְשָׁב אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וְאֶל־אָחִזְתּוֹ אָבִיתִיו יָשׁוּב: ⁴²כִּי־עֲבָדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יִמְכְרוּ מִמִּכְרֹת עֶבֶד:

The food chain provides employment for millions of workers in other sectors, some unseen to the eye of the consumer, such as processing and distribution. A movement based on holistic understanding of food justice needs to encompass the chain of food production that connects seeds to mouth...Often workers in the food chain suffer low wages and exploitative conditions. Farm labor, for example, has a higher rate of toxic chemical injuries than workers in any other sector of the U.S. economy, with an estimated 300,000 farmworkers suffering from pesticide poisoning annually. Service workers in the restaurant industry, which serves food to consumers at the end of the food chain, face unfair labor practices ranging from employees withholding wages to not getting paid for overtime. Also, many sectors of the food chain are excluded from the protection of federal labor laws. This includes farmworkers, tipped minimum wage workers, such as those working in restaurants, and the formerly incarcerated. These workers fall under the rubric of excluded workers, who lack the right to organize without retaliation, because they are excluded from labor law protection.

***The Color of Food*, Applied Research Center: Racial Justice Through Media, Research, and Activism, February 2011**

At its heart, slavery is an inhuman perversion of a simple economic principle: the best way to maximize profits is by minimizing the cost of labor. In today's global economy, the seemingly inexhaustible demand for cheap goods and services has created a vast, largely invisible market for easily replenished supplies of men, women and children who are forced to work against their will, for little or no pay, and under constant threat of violence or intimidation. An estimated 12-27 million people are caught in one or another form of slavery. Between 600,000 and 800,000 are trafficked internationally, with as many as 17,500 people trafficked into the United States.

The enslaved work as field hands harvesting crops, as seamstresses in back-alley sweatshops, as kidnapped fisherman or child soldiers, and as common laborers so deeply in debt that their obligation



can never be repaid. Increasingly, the enslaved are women and children – mostly teenage girls and younger – caught up in the global sex industry of prostitution, pornography and pedophilia.

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

Points to consider

Did you know the verse on the US Liberty Bell is from the section of the Torah that speaks of the Jubilee: “And you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land...(v.10)?” Liberty is the English translation used for the Hebrew word, *Dror*, which also means freedom. What is the connection between the ideals of liberty and freedom with the Shmita? In what ways does Shmita make us free? Why do you think the entire Shmita cycle culminates with this specific manifestation?

What is the link between the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt and the freeing of slaves?

What is the link between human release of debts and slaves and the release of the land from the burden of agriculture?