

Shmita: Ancient Tradition, Modern Imperative

*Sources prepared by Rabbi Pamela Gottfried and Myrtle Lewin
for Yom Kippur Afternoon (10 Tishre 5782-16 September 2021)*

Jewish Climate Action Network of Georgia (JCAN-GA)

<https://gipl.org/jcan-ga/>

<https://www.facebook.com/JCANgeorgia>

JCAN-GA aims to promote environmental stewardship through Jewish community building.

We seek to:

- Sound out an urgent and visionary Jewish voice on the crisis of climate change.
- Build relationships with environmental and justice leaders in Jewish and other communal organizations.
- Inspire and mobilize Jewish communities to take leadership and participate in bold climate campaigns
- Develop and provide informational resources to allies working on climate change action to promote environmental stewardship through Jewish community.

Everything we do is rooted in Jewish principles.

Leviticus 25:1-7

(1)YHWH spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: (2)Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the Lord. (3)Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. (4)But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. (5)You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. (6)But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce—you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, (7)and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

ויקרא כ"ה:א'-ז'

(א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי
לֵאמֹר: (ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ
אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תֵבְאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן
לָכֶם וְשָׁבַתָה הָאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה:
(ג) שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים
תִּזְמַר פְּרִמָּה וְאִסַּפְתָּ אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָה:
(ד) וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן יִהְיֶה
לְאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה שְׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע
וּכְרָמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר: (ה) אֵת סִפְיַח קִצְיֶיךָ
לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת-עֵנְבֵי נִזְיֶיךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר
שָׁנַת שַׁבְּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאָרֶץ: (ו) וְהָיְתָה
שַׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם לְאֹכְלָהּ לָהּ וּלְעִבְדֶיהָ
וּלְאִמָּתָהּ וּלְשִׁכְיֶיךָ וּלְתוֹשְׁבֵי הַגְּרָמִים
עִמָּךְ: (ז) וּלְבִהֶמְתְּךָ וּלְתִיָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרְצְךָ
תִּהְיֶה כָּל-תְּבוּאָתָה לְאָכְלָהּ:

Isaiah 58:11-14

(11)And the Lord will guide you always, and will satisfy your thirst in arid places, and give strength to your bones. You shall be like a well-watered garden, and like a spring whose waters do not fail. (12)And from you they shall rebuild ancient ruins, foundations laid long ago you shall raise; and you shall be called repairer of the breach, restorer of paths for dwellers.

(13)If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your affairs on My holy day, and if you call the sabbath a “delight,” the Lord’s holy day, “honored,” and honor it by not going about your ways nor pursuing your affairs and speaking of business,* (14)then you shall delight in the Lord, and I will set you astride the heights of the earth and let you enjoy the heritage of your father Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

*Alter’s translation: “speaking in vain”

ישעיהו נ"ח:י"א-י"ד

(יא) וְנָחַדְךָ יְהוָה תְּמִיד וְהַשְׂבִּיעַ
בְּצִדְקָתְךָ וְנִפְשֶׁךָ וְעֲצְמוֹתֶיךָ יַחְלִיץ
וְהָיִיתָ כְּגֵן רְוָה וְכַמְּוֹצֵא מַיִם אֲשֶׁר
לֹא יִכְזָבוּ מִיָּמָיו: (יב) וּבְנִוּ מְמָךְ
חֲרֻבוֹת עוֹלָם מוֹסְדֵי דוֹר-וָדוֹר
תְּקוּמָם וְקָרָא לְךָ גִּידָר פְּרִץ מְשַׁבֵּב
נְתִיבוֹת לְשָׁבֶת: (יג) אִם-תִּשְׁשִׁיב
מִשְׁבֶּת רְגְלֶךָ עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶךָ בְּיוֹם
קָדְשִׁי וְקָרָאתָ לְשַׁבֶּת עֲנָג לְקַדּוֹשׁ
יְהוָה מְכַבֵּד וְכַבְּדָתוֹ מֵעֲשׂוֹת דְּרָכֶיךָ
מִמְצוֹא חֲפָצֶךָ וְדִבֵּר דְּבָר: (יד) אֲזֹ
תִתְעַנֵּג עַל-יְהוָה וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל-
בְּמֹתַי [בְּמֹתַי] אָרֶץ וְהֵאֲכִלְתִּיךָ
נִחְלַת יַעֲקֹב אָבִיךָ כִּי פִי יְהוָה דִּבֵּר:

“One of the reasons I find shmita so incredibly important is that it is, frankly, astoundingly provocative. It is not soft, it is not friendly, it is not easy. It is *challenging*. It provokes us to think through the notion of ownership. It obligates us to help others not from our kindness but because what we think of as ours isn’t really ours in the first place. It places land and wild animals on close to the same plane as human beings, and thus critiques the anthropocentric presumption that is so deep in us that we hardly know how to stand apart from it.”

—Nigel Savage, founder and former CEO of [Hazon, the Jewish lab for sustainability](#)

“Shmita tells us to put limits on our activities because we are not the center of the universe, because we are in relationship to something larger than ourselves. One way to look at this is to say that shmita reminds us that whereas the ethos of our times is to move forward unceasingly, in a more sane and interconnected world there are rhythms.”

—Rabbi Natan Margalit, from [Shmita: The Rhythms of Life](#)

“Too many of us lack intimacy with the natural world and with our souls, and consequently we are doing untold damage to both.” —Bill Plotkin, from [DailyGood: News that Inspires](#)