Pe'ah, Leket, Shikh'cha
The corners of the field & gleanings

Leviticus 19:9-10
(9) When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges (pe'ah) of your field, or gather the gleanings (leket) of your harvest. (10) You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I YHVH am your God.

Deuteronomy 24:19-22
(19) When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook (v'shakhachta) a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—in order that YHVH your God may bless you in all your undertakings. (20) When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. (21) When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. (22) Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I command you to do this.

Discussion questions:
➢ Imagine yourself an Israelite farmer. How, in practice, would the limitations of pe'ah and gleanings affect the way you walk through your field or vineyard at harvest time? What would it be like to consciously leave a portion of your harvest in this way? How might these practices affect both your relationship to the land, and to the poor and landless in your community?

➢ Imagine yourself a beneficiary of these practices. What might the experience of collecting sustenance in this way be like? How would it affect your relationship both to the land and towards the landowners in your community?
Radical Rest - Sabbath Year/Šmittah

Exodus 23:10-11

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

Leviticus 25:1-7

(1) YHVH 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 YHVH. (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 YHVH: 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 indentured servants, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, (7) and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

Deuteronomy 15:1-10

(1) Every seventh year you shall practice release of debts (šmittah). (2) This shall be the nature of the release: every creditor shall release his authority over what he claims from his neighbor. He shall not force it from his neighbor or his brother, for God’s šmittah has been proclaimed.
Throughout the land that you hold, you are but strangers resident with Me. (8) Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. (9) Beware, that you may harbor the thought, “the seventh year is approaching,” so that you are mean to your needy brother and give him nothing. He will cry out to God against you, and it will be your guilt. (10) Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return, YHVH will bless you in all your efforts and all your undertakings.

Leviticus 25:18-24

(18) You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; (19) the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. (20) And should you ask, “What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?” (21) I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. (22) When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in. (23) But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. (24) Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land.
Leviticus 25:8-17

(8) You 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. (9) Then 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 (10) and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding.

(11) That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, (12) for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field. (13) In this year of jubilee, each of you shall return to his holding. (14) When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. (15) In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the jubilee; and in selling to you, he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years: (16) the more such years, the higher the price you pay; the fewer such years, the lower the price; for what he is selling you is a number of harvests. (17) Do not wrong one another, but fear your God; for I YHVH am your God.
Commentary on Shemittah & Yovel

1) *For the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with me:* Do not resent these laws [of the sabbatical year] for it [the land] does not belong to you. (Rashi, 11th c.)

2) For the Shemittah year also gives rise to solidarity and peace. This occurs because one does not sow seed and grow [crops], while the poor can eat whatever grows by itself, for one is prohibited from acting as the land-owner and taking hold of the seventh year’s grain. All of this doubtlessly causes peace, since all conflicts derive from the trait of "mine is mine," i.e., "it is all mine." All of this is less evident in the seventh year, because while action [i.e. agricultural production] involves inequality, all are equal in inaction, and that is really what peace is about. (Kli Yakar, Ephraim Solomon of Luntschitz, 16th c.)

3) Life can only be perfected through the affording of a breathing space from the bustle of everyday life. The individual shakes himself free from ordinary weekday life at short and regular intervals on every Shabbat…What Shabbat achieves regarding the individual, the Shmitta achieves with regard to the nation as a whole. A year of solemn rest is essential for both the nation and the land, a year of peace and quiet without oppressor and tyrant…It is a year of equality and rest, in which the soul reaches out towards divine justice, towards God who sustains the living creatures with loving kindness. There is no private property and no punctilious privilege but the peace of God reigns over all in which there is the breath of life. (R. Abraham Isaac Kook, Shabbat Ha’aretz, early 20th c.)

4) In the Biblical outlook, what today we call “social justice” was treated as one aspect of rest, social repose, if you will. “Work” was not just physical labor but the scaffolding of institutional structures of domination and control. These institutions are not work merely because of the economic roles they play, but because domination and control are themselves a kind of “work.” The exertion of effort over others that these institutions require is, in the Biblical mind, closely akin to the work of plowing the earth and reaping its produce. So the structures themselves, not merely the physical efforts that they carry, must be periodically dissolved in order for a true Shabbat to happen. That is why debts must be annulled and land must be redistributed, for the shmittah and the Jubilee to be carried out…This is Shabbat. It re-creates the Shabbat of the beginning, the Shabbat that seals Creation, because at that Shabbat all was free, loving, and in a state of plenitude, sharing, and repose. For adamah and adam, earth and earthlings, to act in this way is most fully to honor and imitate the Creator. And for the Creator to act again in this way—as in the liberation from Egypt and from every time of slavery—is most fully to repeat the act of Creation. (Arthur Waskow, Down-to-Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex, and the Rest of Life)

5) Shmitta is a check on the market economy. It is a pause from loans and debts; a break in the hegemony of private land ownership; a year in which everyone is to live equally and equitably off the land that is temporarily owned by none and shared by all. It is a form of gift economy, or perhaps better, Gifted Economy – that is, an economy based on the primordial vision that the earth and all its bounty are gifts from God that are to be used by us all but not otherwise possessed, amassed or hoarded by just some of us. It
is a time when the work of the marketplace is held in check, when the dominant economy is one of enough-ness and delight as opposed to ever-more and constant desire…

For one year, the rules of commercial engagement, exchange, social boundaries, private property, perceived worth and value all change. Land – with all its natural resources – is seen as the ultimate gift given by God and thus an unbounded commons to be shared, not a commodity to be sliced up, sold and consumed. Shmita is a time when everyone – despite their status and wealth during the other six years – has equal standing and equal claim to the blessings of the earth. Not more and not less than anyone else.

It is through this temporarily changed relationship to land and property that we experience a temporary return to the world of Eden, and a changed sense of self, of purpose and each other. If we are lucky, we will have become habituated to that renewed sense of purpose and satisfaction, and take it back with us when we re-enter the six years of market economy. (R. Nina Beth Cardin, “The Gifted Economy,” Sh’mah 2014, emphasis added)

6) It is in a land where Shmitah is observed that human beings will learn to respect the Earth herself, by remembering that none of us can own her. “For the land is mine,” God declares, ”and you are strangers and settlers with me” (Leviticus 25:23). And if none of us can own the land, cannot sell it and buy it, then what we do own is ultimately not ours; then the difference between rich and poor is not ”just the way things are”; then a person cannot be owned and the difference between slave and master is not real and not loved by God…

Only in such a society, where ”property” does not designate the right to use up what one owns, but rather a kind of fleeting relationship to what one cares for, can people learn the true meaning of justice. Only in such a society can people learn to share their wealth, nurture the poor alongside everyone else, relieve debts, end hunger and respect the fundamental human right to be free. The Sabbatical year was the guarantor and the ultimate fulfillment of the justice that Torah teaches us to practice in everyday life, and it was a justice that embraced not just fellow human beings, but the land and all life. The Sabbatical year was the ultimate meaning of rest, which we practice every week in the observance of shabbat. It was the Sabbath of sabbaths, Shabbat shabbaton. (R. David Seidenberg, “Shmita: The Purpose of Sinai,” emphasis added)