



THE SHEMITTA EXPERIENCE



EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR SHEMITTA

Merkaz HaHalacha (The Halacha Education Center), under the leadership of **RAV YOSEF ZVI RIMON**, is offering two informative and experiential educational opportunities to learn about and be inspired by the mitzvot of **SHEMITTA**.

THE FIRST is a 32-page full-color booklet for students to study and analyze some of the basic shemitta sources, engaging with the messages that shemitta has to offer the Jewish people and the world at large. The basic halachot of shemitta are understood as part of an overall vision which provides not only an agricultural year of rest for the farmer, but a year to question and re-examine what type of society and economy is best and what type of person one aims to be. The rebirth of Jewish agricultural and commercial life in the Land of Israel is understood against the backdrop of shemitta, which calls all Jews worldwide to inculcate the lessons of shemitta.

The student booklets are divided into four classes of materials, ideal for a yom iyun, weeklong session or mini-semester. There is an accompanying teacher's guide which also provides material for school projects that will beautify the classroom and ensure that the messages of shemitta remain with the students in a powerful way.

THE SECOND (which can be used in conjunction with or independently of the first) is a powerful seminar regarding the experience of shemitta. Each informative discussion and lecture is based on a video which aims to impart not only knowledge, but an unforgettable experience, especially for those who have had little exposure to the actual halachot of shemitta. The presentation addresses:

- **SHEMITTA'S** various areas of **IMPACT**
- **ACCOUNTS** of non-Jewish individuals who took a "**SHEMITTA-TYPE SABBATICAL**," completely stopping their routines and closing down their businesses, and what they feel they gained
- **THE SHEMITTA EFFECT**: The Life of a Shemitta-Observant Jew — short clips from interviews with farmers and consumers regarding what the shemitta year means for them
- **FIRSTHAND** accounts of great **BUSINESSMEN** and **ECONOMISTS** (both Jews and non-Jews) who were so enamored by shemitta and its messages that they were willing to change their lives and their economic views
- **AN** appreciation of the stakes for **SHEMITTA OBSERVANCE** through the **PROPHETIC WORDS** of the Torah, as understood through commentary coming to life
- **TESTIMONIES OVER TIME** — from the great writers to Arab leaders
- **POWERFUL FOOTAGE** of the **AGRICULTURAL REBIRTH** of the Land of Israel, expressed through shemitta's practical significance for the Jewish people
- **SHEMITTA** in My Father's Vineyard, a **VIDEO** produced by Merkaz HaHalacha in conjunction with the Jewish National Fund, illustrating the **REALITIES** of **SHEMITTA**
- **OPPORTUNITIES** for the students to inculcate these messages and initiate class-wide and school-wide **PROJECTS** that will bring the lessons home

Second Presentation Available: The **PRACTICALITIES** of **CONSUMPTION** — the shemitta-observance controversy, then and now; the joy of eating foods with shemitta sanctity; the options and their respective halachot.

For more information please contact: Yitzchak Bodner at yitz.mhalacha@gmail.com



INTRODUCTION

The booklet, designed for students' needs and the ways they learn best, includes guided study of the sources of shemitta as they appear throughout the Torah, encompassing all the various aspects of Jewish life.

The booklet is our newest addition to the innovative From the Source: With Spirit series, which has already seen great success. Our From the Source: With Spirit — Hilchot Kashrut student and teacher's books became available this past year (after its successful pilot program in the Ida Crown Jewish Academy), and it is currently being studied by over 1,000 students in 13 schools across the USA.

Our second book, From the Source: With Spirit — Hilchot Shabbat is currently undergoing a pilot program in the Ida Crown Jewish Academy, and will become available to the general public next year.

All sources are color-coded according to their time period, and instruction is guided in a way that makes the booklet usable either for in-classroom instruction or for independent study.

The teacher's guide includes all the answers and background information for the material in the student book, as well as expanded sources and information for further study or for advanced students. It also includes materials for classroom projects displaying the values of shemitta.

Going forward, we will see that among the lessons of *Shemitta* are the importance of aiding the weaker sectors of society and how to develop a more generous character in the process.

First, though, we will put some thought into it ourselves, regarding what can be done to help one develop a generous character, and what is the ideal way to help a person in need.



1.3 WHAT DO YOU THINK?

If you could do any two things you wanted to help the weaker sectors of society, what would you do?

If you could require all members of society to share with others in a meaningful way, what is the wildest thing that you would do?



Now that we have put on paper what *Shemitta* means to us and how we would go about helping the needy, let's take a closer look at what *Shemitta* is all about.

1.4 WHERE TO START?

Would you be willing to give a poor neighbor a key to your house so that he could take any food he wanted from your kitchen?

If you had fruit trees or a vegetable garden, would you be willing to let your neighbors come and take whatever they wanted?



In order to correctly understand any *mitzva* or *Torah* concept, we have to start by going straight to its source: the *Torah*. When there are several sources in the *Torah*, we need to analyze what unique messages and *halakhot* each one has to offer, while taking into account the particular context of each passage (the *parasha* and *sefer*, what passages comes before and afterward).

As we will see, *Shemitta* is mentioned in the *Torah* a number of times. Why would a *mitzva* be mentioned in the *Torah* more than once? After all, the *Torah* does not waste words: if we have been told to observe a *mitzva*, we already know it is obligatory. Why should it be repeated?

What if a topic appears in more than one place in the *Torah*, but the different *parashiyot* where it is mentioned refer to it by different names or focus on different *mitzvot* associated with a day? What should we conclude from such a presentation?

When we look at the *pesukim*, we should pay careful attention not only to how many places *Shemitta* is discussed, but also how it is described in the different *parashiyot*. Where there are differences, we will have to identify the different themes of *Shemitta* that emerge from the different *parashiyot*.



1.5 STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCES

Now let's read through the *parashiyot* one by one with your highlighter in hand. Afterwards we will classify and summarize each *parashiya* and the *halakhot* that emerge from it.



A. AGRICULTURAL, FINANCIAL, OR SPIRITUAL: For each mention of *Shemitta* in the *Torah*, write down whether the parasha is discussing agricultural, financial, or spiritual elements of the year.

B. TITLE: Give each *parashiya* a title that conveys the nature of *Shemitta* as expressed there. (While thinking about a title for a *parashiya*, consider how the *Torah* refers to the seventh year. Would *Shemitta* be the most fitting name for the seventh year in this context or would you use a different name?)

C. MITZVOT AND HALAKHOT: Within each *parashiya*, please highlight each individual *mitzva* or *halakha*.

Mitzvot aseh (positive mitzvot) should be highlighted in red, mitzvot lo ta'aseh in blue.

D. REASONS AND RATIONALES: Wherever the *Torah* expresses a benefit of *Shemitta*, highlight it in yellow. *(If you have more highlighters, highlight benefits for the needy in orange, benefits for Eretz Yisra'el in green, and benefits for man's relationship with Hashem in pink, and use yellow to mark benefits for animals.)*



THE PARASHIYOT OF SHEMITTA

The *Shemitta* year is first mentioned in *Parashat Mishpatim*.

1	PARASHAT MISHPATIM (שמות כ"ג, י"ד-ב)		
TITLE: _____	 <p>(י) וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע אֶת-אֲרָצְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ: (יא) וְהִשְׁבִּיעַתָּ תְּשַׁמְטָנָהּ וְנִטְשָׁתָהּ וְאָכְלוּ אֲבִינֵי עַמְּךָ וְיִתְּרָם תֹּאכַל חֵית הַשָּׂדֶה כֹּךְ תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכַרְמְךָ לְזִיתְךָ: (יב) שְׁשַׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִּשְׁבֹּת ...</p>		
<div data-bbox="65 1108 140 1388">FINANCIAL</div> <div data-bbox="140 1108 215 1388">SPIRITUAL</div> <div data-bbox="215 1108 292 1388">AGRICULTURAL</div>	<p>And six years shall you plant your land and harvest its produce, but [in] the seventh you shall release it and let it lie fallow, and the poor of your nation shall eat, and what they leave over the beasts of the field shall eat. Thus shall you do with your vineyard [and] your olive grove. Six days shall you do your work and on the seventh day shall you rest ...</p>		

When you have finished highlighting the pesukim, please answer the following questions:

What words in the *pesukim* describe the actions that a Jew is required to perform during the *Shemitta* year and must be understood to appreciate what *Shemitta* calls for?

What do you think is the purpose of the *halakhot* found in the *pesukim* above?



in the *Torah* more than once? After all, the *Torah* does not waste words: if we have been told to observe a *mitzva*, we already know it is obligatory. Why should it be repeated?



On the simplest level, if a *mitzva* is repeated, this is because of its importance. In *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* (Shorashim), Rambam says that if a *mitzva* is repeated, it should not be counted more than once toward the 613 *mitzvot*, because the repetition serves to show its significance, rather than to invoke a new *mitzva*. For example, the *mitzva* of *Shabbat* is mentioned many times, at least in part to bring home its importance.

What if a topic appears in more than one place in the *Torah*, but the different *parashiyot* where it is mentioned refer to it by different names or focus on different *mitzvot* associated with a day? What should we conclude from such a presentation?



Repetition of a *mitzva* in different contexts not only highlights the *mitzva's* importance, but also expresses that the *mitzva* is multifaceted. We will see that the *Torah* never actually repeats itself regarding *Shemitta*: it is described differently each time it is mentioned.

The two primary *parashiyot* that discuss the agricultural aspects of *Shemitta* are found in *Mishpatim* and *Behar*; another *parashiya*, in *Re'eh*, discusses forgiving loans at the conclusion of the year. There also is a *pasuk* in *Ki Tissa* that refers either to the sabbatical year or to the weekly *Shabbat*, depending on a *machloket* *Tanna'im*. Finally, *Shemitta* appears prominently in *Bechukotai* and in *Vayelekh*, as well as in the continuation of *Behar*, which sets out the relationship between *Shemitta* and *Yovel*.

When we look at the *pesukim*, we should pay careful attention not only to how many places *Shemitta* is discussed, but also how it is described in the different *parashiyot*. Where there are differences, we will have to identify the different themes of *Shemitta* that emerge from the different *parashiyot*.



1.5 STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCES



(If students do not have highlighters, the teacher may substitute other markings. For instance, the teacher may assign circles for *mitzvot aseh* and rectangles for *mitzvot lo ta'aseh*.)

Now let's read through the *parashiyot* one by one with your highlighter in hand. Afterwards we will classify and summarize each *parashiya* and the *halakhot* that emerge from it.

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THE PARASHIYOT OF SHEMITTA



For simplicity's sake, since the *halakhot* of *Shemitta* involve not only agriculture but also a fresh look at the economy, we will order the *parashiyot* so that we discuss the agricultural aspects first, then the financial aspects, and finally the spiritual ones. (It is desirable afterward to point out the order in which they appear in the *Torah*.)

We will begin with the two primary agricultural discussions of *Shemitta*, while pointing out the differences between them. Even from a rudimentary look at these two *parashiyot*, it will become clear that they present very different ideas of what *Shemitta* is.

The *Shemitta* year is first mentioned in *Parashat Mishpatim*.

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TITLE:			<p>(י) וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע אֶת־אֲרָצְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֹתָהּ תְּבוּאָתָהּ: (יא) וְהִשְׁבִּיעַתָּ תְּשֻׁמְתָּנָהּ וְנָטַשְׁתָּהּ וְאָכְלוּ אֲבִינֵי עַמְּךָ וְיִתְּרָם תֹּאכַל חֵית הַשָּׂדֶה כֹּן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכַרְמְךָ לְזִיתְךָ: (יב) שְׁשַׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִּשְׁבֹּת ...</p>	
FINANCIAL SPIRITUAL AGRICULTURAL				
			And six years shall you plant your land and harvest its produce, but [in] the seventh you shall release it and let it lie fallow, and the poor of your nation shall eat, and what they leave over the beasts of the field shall eat. Thus shall you do with your vineyard [and] your olive grove. Six days shall you do your work and on the seventh day shall you rest ...	



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שמות כ"ג, י"ב

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When you have finished highlighting the *pesukim*, please answer the following questions:

What words in the *pesukim* describe the actions that a Jew is required to perform during the *Shemitta* year and must be understood to appreciate what *Shemitta* calls for?

What do you think is the purpose of the *halakhot* found in the *pesukim* above?





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