



**MIZRACHI**  
120 YEARS OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

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# הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

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## Shemitta in a Modern Society

THE DEEPER MEANING OF THE SABBATICAL YEAR

TU BISHVAT 5782

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in tribute to the legacy of Sam and Arie Halpern z"l

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120 YEARS OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

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## INSIDE

**“At the heart of our observance of Shemitta is our statement that everything belongs to Hashem”**

Our in-depth interview with **Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon** on Shemitta **PAGES 10–13**



**The Revolution of Rest**  
How Shemitta holds the power to rejuvenate our lives and alter the future of Jewish history  
**PAGES 22–28**

**JEWS**  
with  
**VIEWS**

**PAGES 30–31**



**Shivat HaMinim Salad with Naomi Nachman** **PAGE 60**

### Regulars

- 4 Rabbi Doron Perez
- 14 Rabbi Reuven Taragin

- 15 Rabbanit Shani Taragin
- 32 Rav Kook's Teachings
- 38 What's In A Word?
- 44 Rabbi Hershel Schachter

- 54 Sivan Rahav Meir
- 58 Aliyah Diaries
- 61 Crossword
- 62 Hallel and Shammai

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# FROM THE

# Editor

I'm going to be honest. For the first 40 years of my life, I rarely thought about Shemitta. Living in America, the day-to-day practicalities of Shemitta – the rules of the kitchen and garden, the dizzying array of *halachic* views regarding fruits and vegetables – seemed foreign and irrelevant. As a pulpit rabbi in America, I thought about Shemitta. once each year as I prepared my speeches for *Parashat Behar*, the Torah portion most dedicated to the *mitzvah* of Shemitta. But even then, Shemitta was merely an interesting *idea*; it remained theoretical, like the many *mitzvot* we hope to fulfill one day when the Temple is rebuilt.

Looking back, I believe there is another reason why I avoided thinking and learning about Shemitta while we lived in America. Like other “Israel-only” *mitzvot*, Shemitta was yet another reminder that I was living a “second class” Jewish life in exile, another reason to feel guilty for not living in Israel. And so I studiously avoided learning about Shemitta; there were plenty of other *mitzvot* I could study together with my community!

When we arrived in Israel on *Aliyah* this past August, only weeks before the beginning of the new Shemitta year, my years of Shemitta-avoidance meant that our family faced a steep learning curve. Could we hire a

gardener to remove the overgrown bushes taking over our yard? When will zucchinis have Shemitta status?

But as we've struggled to keep track of the ins and outs of Shemitta grocery shopping, I keep thinking of the words of the late American jazz singer, Peggy Lee: “Is that all there is?”

Even as we begin to grasp the *laws* of Shemitta, the deeper purpose of this extraordinary *mitzvah* remains a mystery.

What is Shemitta meant to accomplish in a society that is no longer agrarian, where only a small percentage of Jews work the land? Is it possible to fulfill the higher purpose of Shemitta when we continue to work at our white-collar jobs, like any other year? What meaning does Shemitta have for Jews living outside the Land of Israel? And most of all, how is the renewal of Shemitta in modern Israel bound up with redemption and miracles of our time?

In 1909, as Rav Kook experienced his first Shemitta year in the Holy Land, he sensed that the resurrection of our people's observance of Shemitta was a sign of national rebirth:

הנה שנת הקדש באה, ורחשי קדשה לעם קדוש  
על אדמת הקדש הולכים ומתקדמים בהשאי, גם  
בנשמות אשר לא ידעו את מעמקי עצמון.

*The holy year [of Shemitta] has arrived, and stirrings of holiness are secretly forming among the holy nation in the holy land, even in the souls of those who do not yet*

*understand the depth of their own holiness...*  
(Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, *Iggrot HaRa'ayah*, #208)

For the first time in 2,000 years, the people of Israel had not only returned to live in the land, but also to *work* the land. As Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman explains in his book, *The Shemitta Sensation*, Rav Kook perceived the people's desire to resettle the land as an expression of the “exalted spirits of this long-suffering people that had generally forgotten the ways of physical existence.” The renewal of agriculture in Israel, the precondition for observing Shemitta, was a sign that the Jewish people were awakening from their long slumber, that the collective Jewish heart had begun, once again, to beat on its own.

In this edition of *HaMizrachi*, we are honored to feature Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon and Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman, two leading thinkers working to elucidate the depth and meaning of Shemitta in our generation. May we soon see the day when all of Israel will celebrate this year of holiness, together in our land!

Elie Mischel

**Rabbi Elie Mischel**  
Editor





# Human ‘Havings’ or Human Beings

## THE SABBATH AND SABBATICAL YEAR

Rabbi Doron Perez

**R**emarkably, since the turn of the twenty-first century, shopping malls in the Western world occupy more real estate than schools.

G.K. Chesterton once said that “education is the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to the next.” Our privileged and affluent generation invests more time and resources in the myriad tastes and preferences of the body than it does in the needs and aspirations of the soul. Before our eyes, material gratification has trumped spiritual meaning; consumerism has superseded education.

### Human ‘havings’

In recent years, shopping malls have been supplanted by internet consumerism, a shift speeded by the pandemic. In the comfort of our home and with the click of a button on Amazon, Ali-Express and the like, we can order any product from almost anywhere in the world and have it delivered to our doorstep within a few days. We have become human “havings,” as what we have and possess becomes ever more central to our core identities. Some social commentators have termed our current state of affairs as “affluenza”

– an all-consuming ailment and “a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more.”<sup>1</sup>

Incredibly, there is no Hebrew word for the English word “have”; the closest equivalent is *יש לי*, literally translated as “there is to me.” Why is Hebrew missing such an elemental word? It seems that Judaism has a radically different attitude toward the things we own. The word “have” implies that what I own is *part* of me, that it is *mine*. But in the Torah’s view, we must never be defined by what we own, for what we have is not truly ours. Ultimately, everything in the world belongs to G-d – *לה' – הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוּכָהּ* – “The entire world and all in it belongs to Hashem.”<sup>2</sup>

G-d, of course, has bestowed upon us the right to property – to legally own property and possessions as part of the course of normative human interaction. This right, however, comes with terms and limits. The Torah cites two powerful examples of these limits – the Shemitta year and the Yovel (Jubilee) year. During the Shemitta

year, all agricultural land owned by Jews is rendered ownerless, allowing everyone to partake of its produce. And at the end of the Shemitta year, all money that we have lent to others is relinquished and the debts are wiped away.<sup>3</sup> An even stronger limitation on property ownership is implemented during the Yovel year, when all land acquired from others is returned to its original owners, *כִּי לִי כָל הָאָרֶץ*, “For the whole world belongs to Me.”<sup>4</sup>

Shemitta and Yovel underscore the need to regulate private wealth and consumerism and to ensure they do not become the dominant values in a Jewish society. We must never be defined by what we have. We are merely the custodians of our possessions, transient caretakers called upon to use our possessions for G-dly causes greater than ourselves.

### Human ‘doings’

As we have all too often become human “havings,” caught up in a culture of consumerism, we have also allowed ourselves to become human “doings.” In our market and industry-driven economy,





there is a premium placed on productivity. The quicker we are able to manufacture and produce at industrial levels, the more successful we become. The technological interconnectedness of the global economy has only exacerbated our frenetic work pace, as colleagues and clients throughout the world reach out to us day and night with the expectation of an immediate response. Our output-driven lives are dictated by urgency, deadlines and performance. We have become human “doings,” constantly on the go. You snooze, you lose!

It is true that little in life is accomplished without hard work, dedication, toil and a proactive focus on getting things done. The great challenge of life, however, is to achieve balance. It is the transformative concept of Shabbat which aims to restore this critical balance.

### Human ‘beings’

To ensure that the dual impulses of consumerism and productivity, of having and doing, are not all-consuming, we are blessed – every single week – with the opportunity to be human “beings,” to simply *be*. By prohibiting all acts of creative work and shaping the world for material gain, Shabbat celebrates this state of simply *being*. It allows us to experience one day each week without producing or procuring, transforming us from human “havings” and human “doings” into human “beings.” Shabbat alters our mindset, focusing us not on what is yet to be done but rather on what has already been achieved; not on what we lack, but on what we already have. Shabbat prohibits us from dwelling on our concerns for the future,

demanding that we be fully present. It calls upon us to give full attention to that which is important and meaningful as opposed to that which is urgent and pressing. We focus not on results but on the relationships that truly matter – with Hashem, ourselves, our spouses and family and friends.

How do we achieve this state of mind? Our Sages offer a remarkable insight which is hinted to in the Ten Commandments: “Six days you shall labor and complete all your work but the seventh day is a Shabbat to Hashem.” The verse states that we must complete *all* of our work before Shabbat. Our Sages point out that this is an impossible task. When do we ever complete everything we set out to do? We *always* have unfinished tasks that we need to continue working on after Shabbat! They explain that there is only one place in which you can, indeed, “complete all your work” – in the precincts of the mind. G-d has commanded us to enter Shabbat *as if* all of our work is done. Shabbat calls upon us to alter our frame of mind, to transcend the daily vicissitudes of life and enter into an oasis in time and a wellspring of mindfulness.<sup>5</sup>

### Shabbat & Shemitta

One of many gifts that the Jewish people have given the world is the magical concept of Shabbat. It is a time to balance our proactive, producing and procuring selves with our mindful and spiritual selves.

This is precisely the focal point of both the weekly Shabbat as well as the sabbatical year. Indeed, the Torah refers to the sabbatical year as “Shabbat” far more frequently than it uses its other names such as Shemitta

and *shevi’it*.<sup>6</sup> Only Shabbat and Shemitta are called by the unique term שַׁבָּתָהּ, “Shabbat to Hashem,” for both are unique times dedicated to G-d and heavenly pursuits.

For millennia, Shabbat gave our people the strength and perspective to survive in exile. Today, in the Land of Israel, Shabbat and Shemitta are shaping our future. Every seven days, the economy comes to a standstill, as Jews across the Land pause and spiritually reboot. Every seven years, the Land of Israel itself and the entire agrarian economy come to a grinding halt for an entire year. It is a time for societal recalibration.

The weekly Shabbat and Shemitta year are times for resetting our spiritual compass, an opportunity to give primacy to our cherished relationships and to reconnect with our core values. It is a critical time of perspective, wholeness and restoration of balance, when our self-worth stems not from what we *have* and what we *do*, but from who we *are*. It is a time to be truly redeemed as human beings.

<sup>1</sup> *Affluenza*, John de Graaf, David Wann and Thomas H. Naylor, Berrett-Koehler Publishers (2005).

<sup>2</sup> Tehillim 25:1.

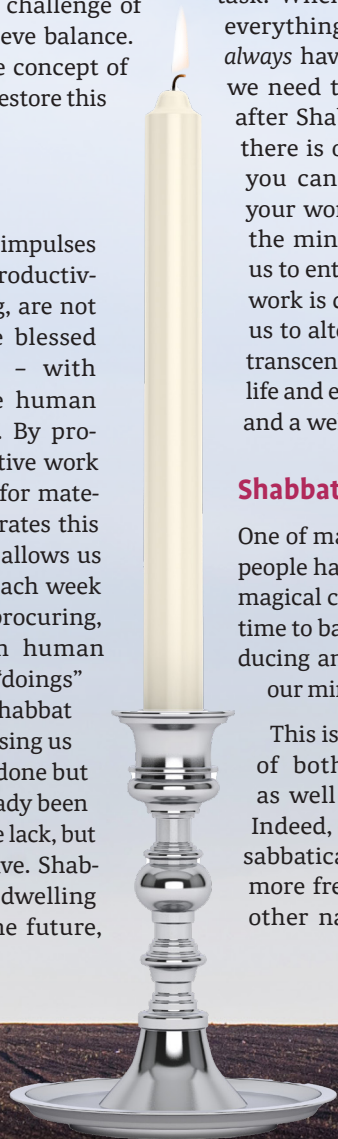
<sup>3</sup> When people stopped loaning money to the poor because of this law, Hillel instituted the *Prozbul* to circumvent this law (see page 12 for an explanation of the mechanics of the *Prozbul*).

<sup>4</sup> Vayikra 25:23.

<sup>5</sup> The Midrash from the Mechilta is cited in Rashi, Shemot 20:9.

<sup>6</sup> See Shemot, 25:1–8.

**Rabbi Doron Perez** is the Executive Chairman of World Mizrahi.







# A Time to Reap and a Time to Plant Once More!

Rabbi Ari Rockoff

**A**lmost 2,000 years ago, the Mishnah taught us that the new year for trees – the date that determines tithing – is the 15th of Shevat, or, as we’ve come to call it, Tu BiShvat. Trees are a surprisingly central symbol in Judaism. The very center of Adam and Chava’s experience in *Gan Eden*, indeed the first moral and religious dilemma faced by human beings, was a tree! Amazingly, in *Avot D'Rebbi Natan*, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai teaches that if one is planting a sapling when Mashiach arrives, one should finish planting it before greeting him.

It is appropriate, then, that Mizrachi’s 120th anniversary celebration is beginning now, at the time of Tu BiShvat. It is said that a tree’s strength lies in its roots, and Mizrachi’s roots run deep. In this issue of *HaMizrachi*, we have the opportunity to reflect on some of those roots, including the contributions of Arie and Sam Halpern, *zichronam livracha*.

Arie and Sam were born to devout Chortkover *chassidim* in pre-war Poland. As teenagers, the brothers became active in the Zionist group HaNoar HaTzioni and dreamed of seeing a Jewish state one day. Despite losing almost 60 members of their family in the Holocaust, the brothers survived ghettos, labor

camps and concentration camps. After the war, they immigrated to America, established their families and built successful businesses.

The harrowing experience of the Holocaust did not diminish Arie and Sam’s strong character and values. In 1957, the brothers sold their supermarket chain and entered the real estate market to be able to keep Shabbat. And after their families, the brothers’ deepest love was the State of Israel. They never stopped supporting its institutions, and both went on to serve in key leadership roles with RZA-Mizrachi.

In Masechet Ta’anit, the Talmud poses an interesting question – how does one properly bless a tree from which they have benefited?

*Tree, tree, how shall I bless you? If I say that your fruits should be sweet, your fruits are already sweet; if I say that your shade should be pleasant, your shade is already pleasant; if I say that a stream of water should flow under you, a stream of water already flows under you. Rather, I bless you as follows: May it be G-d’s will that all saplings which they plant from you be like you (Ta’anit 6a).*

Mizrachi’s history is a storied one. We begin the celebration of its 120th year by highlighting some of those who planted our roots deep in the soil. Like

the tree’s strength that lies in its roots, Arie and Sam Halpern are planters who understood that we must plant trees to provide shade and fruit to the next generation.

After 120 years, we are blessed to stand beneath an extraordinary tree of Religious Zionism. But we are not done planting. Like the parable of the Talmud, the greatest blessing that can be given to Mizrachi is that its current and future iterations – its “saplings” – continue in its founding spirit.

This Tu BiShvat marks 120 years of planting the Jewish future in Eretz Yisrael and in the Diaspora, 120 years of fulfilling Mizrachi’s mission of inspiring commitment to Torah, the Jewish people, and the Land of Israel. Without planters like the Halperns, we could not have made it to this monumental milestone. But now more than ever, our people need more trees. As you read through this issue, and as we celebrate an extraordinary past and a bright future, ask yourself how you can plant a tree for Mizrachi this Tu BiShvat.

*Tu BiShvat Sameach!*

**Rabbi Ari Rockoff** is the Executive Vice President of RZA-Mizrachi. [rockoff@rza.org](mailto:rockoff@rza.org)





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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## No more blame game

**I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED** your special tribute to Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l edition (Vol. 4, No. 6).

However, I must take exception to one of David M. Weinberg's comments. While he is certainly correct that many Religious Zionists (myself included) were perplexed that Rabbi Sacks chose not to make *Aliyah* after his retirement, his theory that this was due to the narrowness of the Chief Rabbinate seems to me an easy way out. No doubt, had Rabbi Sacks come to Israel, he would certainly have been welcome to teach

at Bar-Ilan University and any number of Yeshivot Hesder. We don't know what prompted Rabbi Sacks' decision to remain in the UK, but blaming everything on the "Charedi-influenced Rabbinate" can't be our go-to answer whenever we are stuck.

**Rabbi Dr. Zvi Leshem**  
Jerusalem

## An active choice

**I'VE BEEN WANTING** to share my deep appreciation for your lovely issue on Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks' legacy. It was clear

from the essays how respected and beloved he is to so many. My copy of that issue is dog-eared and marked up and I continue to derive great inspiration from it.

I had the privilege of meeting this great man just once and only for a minute. I'd heard him give a touching talk about his father in a Jerusalem shul on a Shabbat morning some six years ago.

Encountering the rabbi on a stairwell enroute to *kiddush*, I asked "Do you want to know why I choose to use the Koren Siddur?" He expressed both surprise and curiosity. I flipped open my copy to the page of the *Shema* and explained: "Your siddur says, 'Listen, Israel,' not 'Hear O Israel.' I said, showing him the page. "Because *listening* is an active choice, not a passive experience. I love that." He grinned broadly and thanked me. I remain grateful I was given this sweet little walk-on role in the life of this great man.

**Deborah Fineblum**  
Writer, Jewish News Syndicate

## Corrections

**THANK YOU FOR** a very interesting issue (Vol. 4, No.7) concerning the history of the Mizrachi movement. A few corrections: In the article "Yeshivah Students at War" by Rabbi Shlomo Brody, he refers to Rabbi Moshe David Glasner as being from Germany. In fact, Rabbi Glasner was the Rav of Klausenberg, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the First World War and part of Rumania after that war. In his old age, Rabbi Glasner lived in



Jerusalem and was *niftar* there. Rabbi Glasner was one of very few Hungarian rabbis who supported Zionism and was bitterly criticized for this by his colleagues, despite his being a grandson of the Chatam Sofer.

The second photo accompanying Yehuda Geberer's article, "Mizrachi in the Interwar Second Polish Republic", is also mislabeled; it is in fact a photo of the Central Committee of the 1919 Mizrachi conference in Poland. The men in the picture include *Gedolei Yisrael* who were leaders of Mizrachi. Seated at left is Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, who later became the chief rabbi of Tel Aviv. Standing at left is Rabbi Yehuda Leib Zlotnick, a well-known author, folklorist and communal rabbi. For details about the men in the picture, see *A Movement in a Period of Transition* (Hebrew) by Abraham Rubinstein, Ramat Gan: 1981, p.333-334 and fold-out photo reproduction.

Thank you again for a well-produced issue!

#### Zalman Alpert

Librarian, Mendel Gottesman Library,  
Yeshiva University (Retired)

### The greatest gadol

**I REJOICE IN** seeing Mizrachi resuscitated and reborn as a vibrant world institution. In the latest issue of *HaMizrachi* (Vol. 4, No. 7), there is a picture accompanying Rabbi Doron Perez's article, *Trailblazers of Partnership*, picturing participants in a convention of Chovevei Tzion groups in Katowice in 1884. Many may not realize that the greatest *gadol* to associate with the new movement is the little rabbi in the first row, Rabbi Dovid Friedman of Karlin. Rabbi Friedman was the author of the *Sheilat David* and *Yad David*, significant contributions to *halachic* literature. For some evaluation of the awe in which he

was held, see *Making of a Godol*, by Rabbi Noson Kamenetsky *zt"l*.

#### Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeff

Professor of Rabbinic Literature at  
Yeshiva University's Caroline and Joseph  
S. Gruss Institute in Jerusalem

### Compost

**I ENJOYED RABBI** Yosef Zvi Rimón's article, "Operating the Kitchen During Shemitta" (Vol 4, No. 5), in which I learned that "one is permitted to eat [Shemitta produce]... but not to destroy or waste." As Rav Rimón writes, there will inevitably be some leftovers and inedible trimmings, such as orange peels and the like. Rav Rimón explains that these leftovers and peels should be placed in a separate Shemitta can and ultimately in the trash.

Personally, I think that the injunction against wasting Shemitta produce would be best fulfilled by establishing a compost system on the household grounds. This will prevent much valuable organic material from ending up in a smelly landfill. The Shemitta leftovers will eventually break down and produce new soil to nurture the next season's growth.

Rotting vegetative material in landfills is a prime cause of excess methane emissions, which promote global warming.

#### Steve

Central Illinois

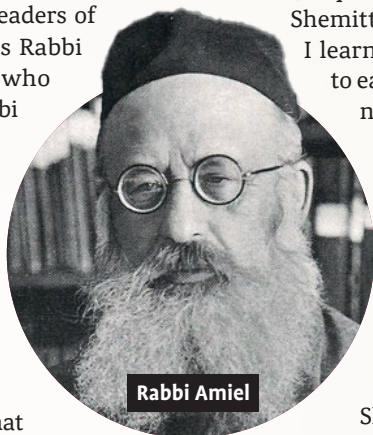
### Editor's Note (based on the guidelines of the Torah VeHa'aretz Institute):

The challenge with using a composter during Shemitta is that peels and leftovers are added daily, which directly causes the Shemitta peels from earlier days to rot. This is forbidden, as one may not directly spoil Shemitta produce.

It is permissible to place peels and leftovers in a paper bag or newspaper (and thus not directly cause rotting) in the compost bin/pile, but one must wait a week after the last fruit or vegetable peels/leftovers are added before mixing the content of the composter. At this point, it is permissible to add materials that accelerate the decomposition process (red worms, etc.).

It is permissible to place scraps and peels of food without Shemitta sanctity together with sacred Shemitta leftovers - provided that the former do not cause the Shemitta produce to spoil.

When the compost is ready, it is permissible to remove it from the composter, bag it, and place it in storage in an organized fashion. However, one should not pile it in the yard. It is permissible to add dry twigs to the compost pile since their purpose is to keep the compost from drying out.






(PHOTO: DAVID STEIN)

# SHEMITTA: WHEN HOLINESS COMES TO US

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
**RABBI YOSEF ZVI RIMON**

BY  
**RABBI ITAMAR SEGAL**





**I**n previous editions of HaMizrachi, Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon has written about the practical *halachot* of observing the Shemitta year. This interview has a different focus, diving into the broader societal and philosophical aspects of the Sabbatical year. Rabbi Rimon, who serves as the head of Mizrachi's Rabbinical Advisory board and who has published extensively about Shemitta, is the perfect person to help us see the forest as well as the trees, dreaming of a Shemitta that resonates with meaning for all Jews.

**Rabbi Itamar Segal:** What is the goal of Shemitta, and why does the Torah require all farming in the Land of Israel to shut down once every seven years?

**Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon:** At the heart of our observance of Shemitta is our statement that everything belongs to Hashem. This point is always important, but it takes on added significance after two years of Covid. Before Covid, we thought we were in charge and had unlimited power. But suddenly, a tiny creature brings the whole world to its knees and clarifies Who really runs the universe.

Letting the land be idle isn't just about letting the soil rest. There's no such *mitzvah* in New York, France, or Egypt. Here there's a special connection between humanity and the soil, between the people and its land, and this connection requires us to let go for a year to give our holy land its rightful place. This stems from the land's holiness; it isn't just agricultural. Rav Kook also discussed the connection between Shabbat and the Shabbat of the land. He explained that what Shabbat does to the individual, Shemitta does to the nation. It's not just a time to rest, but a time to stop everything, to try to understand where I'm running to and how my life is significant.

## WHAT IS OTZAR BEIT DIN?

Otzar Beit Din means that the court acts as the field owner. The court appoints agents to harvest the crop. They are permitted to harvest the entire crop simultaneously and in the usual manner because they are agents of the court and as such, their actions do not involve a display of ownership. The court then distributes the produce to the community as a gift, but it may collect money for the labor performed by the workers.

Think about it. For an entire year, the whole country stops – no commerce, no competition, and no making money. There's a full year of *chessed*, of helping the poor. The Torah says, “the destitute of your people shall eat.” For the entirety of Shemitta, the whole country is busy with spirituality and *chessed*. People charge themselves up spiritually. This is intended to profoundly affect the nation, so the next six years will be totally different. Shemitta is meant to transform us into a nation that carries the banner of spirituality and *chessed* and our Divine mission.

**RIS:** How does all of this find expression today?

**RYZR:** On the one hand, it's correct that Shemitta today does not yet find expression in all its glory. Where do we encounter it? For farmers, Shemitta is challenging, and there are a lot of farmers who find a way to elevate themselves through Shemitta. Even though it's difficult, many of them experience excitement and transcendence. By carefully observing the laws of Shemitta, they sense that they are in a holy land and have the privilege of being partners in the process of redemption. Thank G-d, many farmers feel this way.

(PHOTO: DAVID STEIN)



## WHAT IS A PROZBUL?

**What is a Prozbul? The Mishnah in Shevi'it (10:3) states that when Hillel realized that many people refused to lend money in the time leading up to the Shemitta year because they were afraid that they would not get their money back, he instituted the Prozbul, a document which transfers private loans over to the court, thereby allowing loans to be collected after the Shemitta year (proz = enactment; bul = rich - an enactment for the rich so that they would lend to the poor).**

The court guarantees a salary to some farmers who work with *otzar beit din*. Quite a few farmers have come along and said, "During Shemitta, we were much calmer. We were at home more because we couldn't do many of the

activities we do every year and knew that we had a base salary in any event."

Sometimes there are indeed farmers who don't receive that base salary because a part of the community has concerns about *otzar beit din*. The public needs to partner in this holy *mitzvah*, buy *otzar beit din* and other domestic produce grown according to the rules of Shemitta and help our outstanding farmers.

But it's not just farmers who can have the Shemitta experience; also if there's a garden in a private home or in an apartment building's yard. There are rules for how to garden, and you need to prepare. It affects the heart too. Inside the home, the idea of the sanctity of Shemitta produce comes across. Without the *Beit HaMikdash*, we don't have sacrifices, *ma'aser sheni*, or *neta reva'i*. The only holy food we have is Shemitta produce! It's a privilege to bring Shemitta produce into the home.

It should help us feel the approach of the final redemption.

To experience other types of holiness, Jews would traditionally leave their homes and go up to Jerusalem. But during the Shemitta year, the holiness comes home to us! We eat the holy produce and take care not to ruin it; we remember to Whom the produce really belongs.

**RIS:** One of the most significant *halachic* conflicts in the history of Zionism was the debate about *heter mechirah*. This device circumvents the laws of Shemitta by selling land to a non-Jew right before the year begins. Even today, there are debates about whether the circumstances that brought about *heter mechirah* still exist or have become even more pressing, or if there is no longer any justification for this leniency. What are your thoughts on *heter mechirah*?

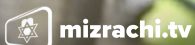
**RYZR:** Some argue that *heter mechirah* be fully utilized. In contrast, others argue there is no justification for *heter mechirah* today because we have the financial means to observe Shemitta without it. I say it's not black-and-white. Reality is complex. On the one hand, *heter mechirah* works; Rav Kook did not question its validity. On the other hand, Rav Kook said that it is a temporary measure for when the nation is under duress and that it is only acceptable when the obligation to observe Shemitta is rabbinic and not biblical.

There are industries where there's no choice in the matter in practice. They need *heter mechirah*, because, without it, they would disintegrate. But it's not only the potential economic damage; it's also because the State of Israel needs Jewish Israeli agriculture to keep Israeli land in Jewish hands. However, the more *otzar beit din* and *matza'im menutakim* (detached bedding) can be used, the better. That needs to be the aspiration.



(PHOTO: RABBI ALEX ISRAEL)





## SHEMITTA IN SHORT

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**RIS:** According to *halachah*, all debts are forgiven at the end of the Shemitta year. Today's common practice is to write a *Prozbul* so that debts are not erased. Is there any reason today to follow the biblical law and forgive debts entirely?

**RYZR:** Of course there is. Some people have real problems. I'm not a wealthy person myself, but before the last Shemitta year, I had loaned significant amounts of money to a few people. At the end of the Shemitta year, I realized they were in bad shape, financially, and so I told them I was relinquishing the loans.

People shouldn't be educated not to pay debts, G-d forbid, but they should be educated to think of those who have real problems. The goal of the *mitzvah* is to rebalance and reset society, to make it possible to start anew. We have a responsibility for all of society, to let people get out of the hole. That was the

idea of JobKatif: To help people stand on their own two feet. By the same token, our organization, which today is called La'Ofek, helps people who lost their work due to Covid."

**RIS:** How can those who are not farmers strengthen our connection to Shemitta?

**RYZR:** There are other ideas that you can adopt, things that don't belong to the laws of Shemitta but carry the message of Shemitta. For example, try adopting a "Shemitta hour." What does that mean? In the past, everyone was a farmer. Today not everyone is, so let's "relinquish" an hour every week for *chessed*. If everyone in Israel gave an hour of their week to *chessed*, we would revolutionize Israeli society! And perhaps, in addition to a Shemitta hour, we should also institute a "family hour" in all of our homes. The goal is to leave Shemitta with a unique flavor for the following years, a flavor of holiness,

exaltation, a flavor of unity and good and lofty values.

● This interview was originally published in Hebrew in Olam Katan.

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# Shifting Our Perspective

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

## Making Shemitta meaningful

**M**ost of us are not farmers and do not work in agriculture, and so we can easily miss the opportunity to learn and internalize the messages of Shemitta. This would be very unfortunate, as the Torah teaches that the violation of Shemitta laws will ultimately cause our people to be exiled from the Land of Israel. Our continued presence in Eretz Yisrael hinges on understanding Shemitta's significance and appreciating its lessons.

## Letting go

Shemitta is a time of letting go.<sup>1</sup> When the Shemitta year arrives, we are commanded to let go of the land and its fruits as well as monetary debts owed to us.<sup>2</sup>

The Torah explains that the release of debts and the free access to crops are meant to help the poor and give them a fresh financial start. But why are we also commanded to stop working the land? If anything, working the land would make more crops available for the poor. Why is cultivating it prohibited?

## Why we let the Land go

The Rambam explains that we must stop working the soil in order to restore the balance of essential nutrients in the soil. However, most commentators explain that the Torah's phrase *Shabbat Lashem*, "a Sabbath for G-d," and the severe punishments associated with this law's violation indicate that this *mitzvah* also possesses deep spiritual significance.

The Ibn Ezra and Ramban explain that Shemitta, like Shabbat, is meant to remind us of Hashem's role as the world's Creator. We live in a world that superficially appears to have always existed on its own. By not working the land during Shemitta, we remind ourselves that Hashem created us and our

world. Still, if we already commemorate Hashem's creation every seventh day, why is it necessary to refrain from working the land for an entire year?

Hashem not only created the world but also continues to maintain and direct it. We rest every Shabbat not only to remind ourselves of Hashem's role in the past but also in recognition of His continuous role in the present. By following Hashem's lead in limiting our work to six days and resting on the seventh we demonstrate that even with all of our efforts, we still require His assistance.

The Chinuch and Kli Yakar explain that Shemitta extends the lessons of Shabbat to the land we use to create. When a farmer plants and reaps he can easily reach the mistaken conclusion that he alone is responsible for the produce he reaps. By not working the land in the seventh year and by relying on Hashem's promise to provide for the farmers during Shemitta, the farmer expresses his recognition of Hashem's critical role in the growth process. The land not only belongs to Hashem but is also managed by Him, bringing forth its bounty only to the degree that He dictates.

Shemitta is to land what Shabbat is to work. We cease work every seventh day to demonstrate that the success of our efforts require Hashem's assistance. We stop working the land in the seventh year to demonstrate that the land's production depends on that same assistance.

The Akeidat Yitzchak sees the cessation of work as having an additional goal – to put our work into perspective. People can easily come to see work as life's goal and essence. By taking off each seventh year from work, we remember that we must maintain a healthy balance of work and personal development.

## Proactive Shemitta

The Sforno learns from the term *Shabbat Lashem* that Shemitta helps us

appreciate the importance of personal development and aims to allow us to devote our time and energy to it. The Shemitta year is a time to focus on our service of and relationship with Hashem.<sup>3</sup> This may be why the Torah schedules the *hakhel* Torah gathering right after the Shemitta year. The best time to reenact the receiving of the Torah is after a Shemitta year, during which we can focus on Torah learning.<sup>4</sup>

Like Shabbat – which has both prohibitions and positive *mitzvot* – the Shemitta *Shabbat Lashem* is also observed not merely through prohibitions but proactively as well. When we cease work for Shabbat and Shemitta, we are meant to focus on the deeper meaning of our lives and recalibrate how we will live in the coming days and years.

Like the modern academic sabbatical year (a notion derived from Shemitta), the Shemitta year is a time to refocus the energies we normally use to develop the world towards developing ourselves. Irrespective of whether we own a farm or a garden, let's do our best to internalize the teachings of Shemitta and maximize this year for personal growth. And in this merit, may Hashem continue to bless our efforts here in the Land of Israel!

<sup>1</sup> This is how most commentators translate the word 'Shemitta' (Shemot 23:11, Devarim 15:1-2).

<sup>2</sup> See Gittin 36a, where Rebbe links between the two.

<sup>3</sup> See Ibn Ezra (Shemot 20:8), who understands this as the goal of Shabbat. See Tanna D'vei Eliyahu (1) and the Tur (Orach Chayim 290), who speak about how Shabbat is a time meant for learning Torah. See also Zohar (3:171b) for its powerful description of the spiritual level of life in Gan Eden during the Shemitta year.

<sup>4</sup> This can help explain why the Torah stresses that the laws of Shemitta were given at Sinai.

**Rabbi Reuven Taragin** is Educational Director of Mizrahi and Dean of the Yeshivat Hakotel Overseas Program.

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# Bringing us Back to the Future

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

**T**he Torah's first reference to the laws of Shemitta appears in *Parashat Mishpatim*, where it is juxtaposed to the laws of Shabbat (23:10–12). In *Parashat Behar*, the relationship between these *mitzvot* is made even more explicit when the Torah refers to the Shemitta year as “Shabbat.” These *mitzvot* share a deeper meaning; they are not merely times of rest and relaxation but also remind us that Hashem is the Creator of the world. Both *mitzvot* recall the ideal *Gan Eden* state of creation, in which G-d provides human beings and animals with sustenance in perfect equilibrium and the fruit of the trees and produce of the fields are available to all as food to eat, “לָכֶם לְאֶכְלָה”:

*I have given you every herb yielding seed on the face of all the earth and every tree which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creeps upon the earth, that has a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for food.’ (Bereishit 1:29–30)*

*And the sabbath-produce of the land shall be for food for you, your servant and your maid, and for your hired servant and for the settler by your side that sojourns with you, and for your cattle, and for the beasts in your land, shall the produce be for food. (Vayikra 25:6–7)*

The Ramban (Vayikra 25:2) emphasizes that Shemitta is not only a testimony to the creation of the past but also testifies to the continued existence of the world and the ultimate goal of the Shabbat of Hashem we will experience in the future:

*The [seven] days [of the week] allude to that which He created in the process of creation, and the [seven] years [of the Sabbatical cycle] refer to that which will occur during the creation of all “the days” of the world. It is for this reason that Scripture was more stringent regarding [the transgression of the laws of] the*



Rabbanit Taragin addressing the Mizrahi-TVA Lapidot Educators' Program in Jerusalem

*Sabbatical year than with respect to those guilty of transgressing all other negative commandments, and made it punishable with exile... This stringency of punishment is because whoever denies it [i.e., the law of the Sabbatical year], does not acknowledge the work of creation and [life in] the World to Come.*

Shabbat and Shemitta enable us to reflect upon the weeks and years gone by and to chart our goals for the future. Shabbat is a taste of the *Gan Eden* of the past, when we remember how G-d rested after creation, while Shemitta is a taste of the *Olam Haba* of the future, paralleling Hashem's future rest in the seventh millennium and our yearning for an exalted moral state.

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l beautifully depicts this ideal: “In the society of the Shemitta year, equality reigns, produce has no owners, there is no employer and no employee, but rather all share the same status. Such a society acquires new and revolutionary qualities that can change the nature of that society, at least during the Shemitta period.”<sup>1</sup>

The social revolution of Shemitta restores our pre-banishment state from *Gan Eden* and provides a glimpse of the future, when “the wolf shall lie down with the lamb” (Yeshaya 11:16). This was

the idyllic condition at the beginning of human history, before the Earth was cursed with thorns and thistles and animals began to tear each other apart for food. The *mitzvah* of Shemitta is not only a command, but also a promise. “And for your cattle, and for the beasts in your land, shall the produce be for food” (Vayikra 25:7). If you keep the Shemitta and abandon your produce to the beasts of the field, the time will come when man will no longer have to earn his bread through the sweat of his brow and the wild animals will no longer harm the cattle of the fields. “Whoever observes the *mitzvot* which signify this, will be privileged to experience all of these things” (Rabbi Saul Mortera, 1596–1660, *Sefer Giv’at Shaul*).

This Tu BiShvat, as we enjoy produce infused with *kedushat shevi’it*, may we reflect upon this year’s special opportunity to recreate the past and build a magnificent future through Shabbat and Shemitta, renewing our days and years, חַדֵּשׁ יְמֵינוּ בְּקָדָם!

<sup>1</sup> <https://etzion.org.il/en/halakha/yoreh-deah/eret-z-yisrael/conceptual-foundations-shemitta>.



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# The Humanity of Trees

Rabbi Shalom Hammer

**T**he Talmud (Shabbat 67) offers two suggestions regarding how one should react after finding an infected tree in danger of dying. First, one should hang weights from the tree's branches. Farmers have explained to me that when weights are placed on its branches, the tree concentrates and directs its energies exclusively towards its roots, enabling it to revive itself and heal.

The Talmud continues and explains that one should also mark the tree with red paint, "so that passers-by will notice the sickly tree and pray for its well-being".

This suggestion is difficult to understand. While no one would question the significance of trees in general, are there not more important causes to pray for than the health of a random individual tree? World peace, security in the Land of Israel, and the good health of mankind – there are so many more important issues to pray for than trees!

Although praying for a sickly tree seems strange, the Talmud is conveying an important message. By sensitizing us to show concern for all G-d's creations – even a tree! – the Rabbis are demonstrating the type of sensitivity we must show to all who surround us. If we are expected to pray for the health of a tree, how much more so must we pray and focus upon the health of our fellow man and the development of our society! The sickly tree painted red is meant to be a reminder, a means of awakening mankind to be more compassionate and sensitive to one another.

In a similar vein, the Torah commands: "When you besiege a city for many days



The Carmel mountain (PHOTO: LEV TSIMBLER/ISTOCK)

to wage war against it to seize it, do not destroy its trees by swinging an ax against them, for from it you will eat, and you shall not cut it down" (Devarim 20:19).

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains the premise of this *mitzvah*. During wartime, soldiers often exhibit aggressive and even barbaric tendencies. By taking care not to destroy any fruit trees, the soldiers are reminded of their own humanity. They remember that these trees provide humanity with sustenance and the means for survival. Once again, preservation of the fruit trees remind the soldiers that even in a time of war, man's purpose is not to attack and destroy, but to advance life

and perpetuate civilization by being more thoughtful and caring towards their fellow man.

Tu B'Shvat is not so much a celebration of the "new year for trees," as much as a time to reflect on the lessons we learn from trees. There is no better way to celebrate the day than with acts of kindness for our surroundings, our environment, and, most important of all, our fellow man.

**Rabbi Shalom Hammer** is an IDF educator and Founder and Director of Makom Meshutaf educational programming, under the auspices of World Mizrachi. He has authored five books. [www.rabbihammer.com](http://www.rabbihammer.com)



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# SHEMITTA: THE FARMERS'

to do everything possible to properly observe the laws of Shemitta.

## Hefker!

Alongside the farmers who rely on the *heter mechirah* or join the *Otzar Beit Din* are those who have chosen to simply stop working their land, despite (or perhaps because of) the difficulty in doing so. Aryeh Bramson, a resident of Tel Aviv who has owned a vineyard in Yitzhar for the past 20 years, is one of these farmers.

"We are letting the vineyard rest, just like that," he says with the satisfied smile of one who has clearly been waiting for this moment.

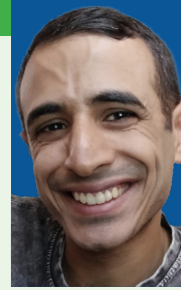
How does it work? "As of Rosh Hashanah, there was and will be no work in the vineyard other than rescue and damage prevention. We do almost nothing. The crop does not belong to us but to all the people of Israel. It is not a *heter mechirah* that sells the land to Arabs."

Aren't you afraid that the vineyard will be damaged? "There are always concerns in the vineyard here," Bramson reassures. "Every year, there are diseases in the vineyard. Each growth stage stands on its own and needs a lot of prayer and effort. Any mishap or special events such as heat or something unexpected is a problem. There are many surprises in the vineyard, and everything can easily go down the drain. We have no hesitation in

With all due respect to the home garden, the Shemitta bin and the supermarket dilemmas, Shemitta is first and foremost the year of the farmers, those who have to decide every seven years where they are headed: Sell the land according to the *heter mechirah* and continue working the land almost as usual, without the holiness of Shemitta (*kedushat shvi'it*), join *Otzar Beit Din* (in which the *Beit Din* acts as the owner of the field) with all the complexities it entails or to simply keep Shemitta in the most direct fashion, by letting the field lie fallow throughout the entire seventh year.

In recent years I have gotten to know a few dozen land-loving farmers who feel deeply connected to the Land. Though some struggle with Shemitta or do not fully understand its importance, there are many pious farmers who choose





# EXPERIENCE

Nadav Gedaliah

observing special *mitzvot*, especially the *mitzvah* of Shemitta. From the first day of Shemitta, every Jew who wants to is welcome to come and pick grapes for himself, though not for commercial purposes of course. People do come.”

What will you do to pass the time during Shemitta? “I am a teacher, and in any case, I am not always on-site at the vineyard even in a normal year, so that is what I will continue to do during Shemitta as well.”

“When we planted the vineyard, we hadn’t thought much about the particular place we would choose to plant our vineyard. But then we realized that 20 meters from this location there is an ancient winepress from the Hasmonean period – a whole system of ancient wineries! We were deeply drawn to this place where over 2,000 years ago, Jews were cultivating a vineyard and making wine!”

“It’s a special feeling to engage in the pursuit of *geulah* (redemption). When Yirmiyahu saw the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* and the terrible destruction of that time, he said there would be a future here, that ‘again you shall plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria.’ It sounds impossible, but here, thousands of years later, it’s happening!”

This year, Bramson will happily and without fear observe Shemitta. He also plans to visit shuls around Israel to deliver an inspiring lecture on his personal Shemitta.

The Lifshitz family farm, now in its fourth generation of farmers in Moshav Kfar Pines, grows oranges, avocados, etrogs and olives – all using Jewish workers. They too decided to keep the Shemitta in the simplest way by allowing their land to lie fallow.



The farmer works at his job the same as almost every year and loses out on the essence of the Shemitta year, which is the opportunity to dedicate oneself to Torah study. It is a pity to miss this opportunity.

Why not rely on one of the *halachic* solutions? “In the past, we did so, but this year we decided to fulfill the Shemitta year as the Torah commands for several reasons. First, when you delve deeper into the laws of *otzar beit din*, it is perfect for the general public, who have access to fruits and vegetables. Still, in practice, the farmer works at his job the same as almost every year and loses out on the essence of the Shemitta year, which is the opportunity to dedicate oneself to Torah study. It is a pity to miss this opportunity.”

In addition, those in the field say that “a farmer is accompanied by his faith, as a ‘believer and sower,’ that he will be

successful all year round. In the Shemitta year, we exercise this muscle.”

“The main reason is the desire to keep the *halachah*, just as we were commanded. While Shemitta is still only a rabbinic obligation at the national level, we chose to begin practicing this *mitzvah* personally. We believe and hope that this will be the last year Shemitta will not be obligated by the Torah – next Shemitta, G-d willing, the majority of *Am Yisrael* will be here in *Eretz Yisrael* with us.”

## Otzar Beit Din

Many other farmers have chosen to fulfill Shemitta with *Otzar Beit Din* as part of the Otzar HaAretz project. One of them is Ran Tzadok, 40, who is in charge of agriculture at the cooperative association in Naveh, a national-religious *moshav* in the Hevel Shalom region, near the border with Egypt. The settlement was established in 2008 by families expelled from Atzmona. Other families from around the country later joined them.

The settlers decided to establish their settlement in Halutza Sands due to the area’s proximity to the agricultural cultivated regions of the cooperative farm.

“In the locality itself, we grow leafy vegetables in greenhouses,” says Tzadok. “In the fields around the *moshav*, we grow potatoes, onions, watermelons, melons, sweet potatoes, citrus groves, avocados and mangoes.”





(PHOTO: DOV KRAM)

How did you get into farming? “I am one of the deportees from Gush Katif. In the bloc itself, by the way, I did not work in agriculture even though many of my neighbors did. After the disengagement and the establishment of Naveh, I started working in agriculture. I did not think it would become the center of my life, but I was sucked in, and since then, I have been a farmer with all my soul. Agriculture connects me to the Torah, the Land and Zionism, and it gives me a sense that I am fulfilling my dreams and ideals.”

“Here we also connect to the legacy of Ben-Gurion, who said: ‘It is in the Negev that the people of Israel will be tested. For only with a united effort of a volunteering people and a planning and implementing State will we accomplish the great mission of populating the wilderness and bringing it to flourish. This effort will determine the fate of the State of Israel and the standing of our people in the history of mankind.’”

Isn't it challenging to be a farmer? “In the beginning, everything was difficult and complicated,” says Tzadok. “It's not easy to suddenly start being a farmer. It's hard work physically and mentally, but thank G-d I found myself in the field, and I enjoy every moment.

“Agriculture is a very complex field that involves a lot of trial and error. Everything here is relatively new. Nothing is obvious. Every new leaf or fruit that comes out makes me happy, as if it is the first fruit I grew. It all involves

a lot of investment, hassle and labor and many variables such as climate changes. But even with all the complexity, we see a blessing in our hard work, thank G-d.”

Why do you participate in Otzar HaAretz? “We have chosen the *Otzar Beit Din* approach in order to experience the year of the Shemitta most elegantly. *Heter mechirah* is possible and correct, but through *Otzar Beit Din*, we will experience the Shemitta itself in all its laws and without circumvention.”

Tzadok admits: “Of course, there is a fear of what will happen and how we will manage, but if the Torah itself promised that we would not be harmed, I am less concerned: ‘I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years’ (Vayikra 25:21).”

How are you going to manage financially during Shemitta? “Everyone who grows crops for *Otzar Beit Din* is *halachically* defined as an employee of the *Beit Din* and receives a salary. This year, I am honored to observe the *mitzvah* of Shemitta, to be an emissary of Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael, and receive a salary. G-d willing, we will be okay.”

### Farmers under fire

Michael Amar, 45, cultivates fields and orchards in the Gaza Envelope area (populated areas of Israel within 7 kilometers of the Gaza border), and he also chose to fulfill Shemitta through *otzar*

*beit din*. He grows potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, peppers, baby cucumbers, watermelons, onions, peanuts, wheat, citrus and avocados.

“I came here 24 years ago, as part of *Garin Nachal*. I met my wife here, we fell in love with the kibbutz, and we have been here ever since. Farming is our life, our livelihood and our truth. We live, breathe and work the land to the last furrow.”

Why did you choose *otzar beit din*? “Very simple: *Otzar Beit Din* is the perfect solution to preserve Israeli agriculture, prevent imports and provide a solution for the religious public while preserving *halachah* and the land according to Torah laws.”

Amar talks about life in the Gaza Envelope in the shadow of the rockets: “During the last operation in Gaza, we had to evacuate the children and women to Kibbutz Kfar Etzion, where we received terrific hospitality. During the fighting, we continued to supply produce to markets, mainly carrots and other small vegetables. A few forklifts here rushed and loaded and shipped produce to the markets between sirens. Several farmers ran and checked the fields between sirens.

“We are very proud of them for the courage and desire to continue to give soul to the business. It's not just about farming. One milkman here, Stevie, took care of the whole dairy alone; he milked the cows and took care of everything necessary for the dairy to continue to function. This is true Zionism. It must not be given up because of political whims or hardships.”

**Nadav Gedaliah** is an Israeli journalist, blogger and writer.

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# The Revolution of Rest

Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman

**In this feature article, the head of World Mizrahi's Musmachim Semicha program and author of *The Shemitta Sensation* explains how Shemitta holds the power to rejuvenate our lives, and alter the future of Jewish history**

**N**ot too long ago, a five-day workweek was unheard of. The idea of refraining from work on Shabbat was novel. Struggling immigrant Jews in America faced heart-wrenching decisions weekly, as observing Shabbat often meant there would be no job to return to on Sunday. Even in contemporary society, many face similar dilemmas in the winter, when Shabbat begins earlier on Friday (although, at least on paper, laws are more protective of religious needs).

The seventh year of the agricultural cycle in Israel, often called Shemitta but more often referred to in the Torah as *Shabbat haAretz*, multiplies this resting from work considerably. *Shabbat haAretz*, literally “the Sabbath of the Land,” calls for far more than a year of letting the land rest, as it requires all agricultural workers to rest from planting and harvesting for an entire year. With little to tend to in the fields,

they are given a “year off.” But what is this rest all about?

For a farmer, this means a year without production. Another meaning of the word *shevitah* in Modern Hebrew is a strike. It almost seems as if one is “striking” from performing agricultural work for an entire year! How is that possible? This question is multiplied when one recognizes that unlike in our times when only two percent of the Israeli population works in agriculture, in the past, this was the primary line of work. Imagine a year with no farm production. Could the Jewish nation possibly support itself financially? What were the implications of refraining from work for an entire year? What did they do with their time? How did they cope?

## The power of rest

The seventh year of the agricultural cycle, known as *shevi'it*, is much more than a year of resting and holding

back. The Torah promises Divine blessings for *shevi'it* observers, including a blessing during the sixth year, which assures at a minimum basic food sustenance during the years directly affected by *shevi'it*. When an entire nation takes that break at once, Hashem, the “hidden partner” in our economy, promises to pick up the slack.

Moreover, although a year of resting from normal production might seem like financial suicide in the short run, there is good reason to believe that it might actually herald economic benefits. In what might seem paradoxical, taking a break can help us take a fresh look at our activities and thus breeds success.

We live in an age where rest is often denigrated: “You snooze, you lose.” Studies show that a quarter of office workers never leave their desks except for lunch. After all, the more time people spend doing, the more they achieve. But is that true?





Can you think of life without weekends, summer breaks, and holidays? If we had that kind of life, would we be more successful at achieving our academic, financial, or personal goals?

Studies have shown that people are most effective when taking breaks in the middle of their work or study. Summer vacations and shorter work-weeks increase productivity. There are business people who have gone even further, closing their businesses for a year to rethink and re-explore – not because they had no work to do, but because they had an overabundance of it. They felt they were losing themselves in their work and were growing out of touch with their creative and spiritual selves. By taking a year off, they gave themselves many years of success, finding themselves again in the process.

A recent study by the World Health Organization attributes hundreds of thousands of deaths a year to long

working hours.<sup>1</sup> Besides the danger involved, psychology professor Alejandro Lleras' analysis indicates that prolonged attention to a single task actually hinders performance: "We propose that deactivating and reactivating your goals allows you to stay focused... From a practical standpoint, our research suggests that, when faced with long tasks (such as studying before a final exam or doing your taxes), it is best to impose brief breaks on yourself. Brief mental breaks will actually help you stay focused on your task!"<sup>2</sup>

These studies indicate that Hashem created the human mind and body in such a manner that they are more healthy and productive when they rest. **Rest allows us to replace stress and exhaustion with productivity and creativity while engaged in our goals.**

Science writer Ferris Jabr summarizes the benefits of taking breaks in an article in Scientific American: "Downtime replenishes the brain's stores of attention and motivation, encourages productivity

and creativity, and is essential to both achieve our highest levels of performance and simply form stable memories in everyday life... Moments of respite may even be necessary to keep one's moral compass in working order and maintain a sense of self."<sup>3</sup>

In other words, physical and mental fatigue can mitigate our ability to make ethical decisions because we're too exhausted to remember who we are and what we value.

Over the course of 2020–2021, the Covid-19 pandemic has given the world economy and the environment some rest. Satellite pictures of pollution levels before and after Covid-19 aren't even comparable. In the words of Dr. Stuart Pimm of Duke University: "[This global pandemic] is giving us this quite extraordinary insight into just how much of a mess we humans are making of our beautiful planet. This is giving us an opportunity to magically see how much better it can be."<sup>4</sup>

What all these studies are uncovering may be a small aspect of the beauty





The weekly Shabbat marks the day that Hashem rested when creating the world, and it is the day when we rest from our physically creative pursuits. It is a time when we disconnect from the world around us in order to connect to bigger things – to Hashem, our family, and our community.



of our Shabbat and *Shabbat haAretz* – a little time off to recharge our batteries (in an eco-friendly manner) and return to greater productivity. The Torah promises that the *shevith* of the *shevi'it* year will provide untold benefits to society and individuals. It is a year to deactivate to enable a much more powerful reactivation at the year's end. Maybe our difficulty understanding its need is another proof of its necessity.

### From Sabbath to Sabbatical to Sabbath of the Land

But it is not only the break from our routine that can be so important and effective; it is also the question of what we opt to do with our time.

The weekly Shabbat marks the day that Hashem rested when creating the world, and it is the day when we rest from our physically creative pursuits. It is a time when we disconnect from the world around us in order to connect to bigger things – to Hashem, our family, and our community. Essentially, it is a time to do the things that our weekly routine makes difficult. Besides the leisure time, one who observes Shabbat gets to disconnect from the routine that prevents connecting to broader goals. Imagine if one could do that for an entire year!

The concept of a sabbatical, standardized in academia and some other fields, is built on the understanding that providing individuals with a year off to think and pursue their intellectual and other interests and dreams, will actually enhance productivity. The term is a direct derivative of the rest of *Shabbat haAretz* once every seven years, which allows for an inspiring, purposeful, and creative rest time. But does it work beyond the field of academia?

Designer Stefan Sagmeister (known for creating album covers for famous musicians) suggests that it does. Every

seven years, he closes his business down while he and his staff take a year's sabbatical. In his TED Talk, he explains that his decision to take a year off to focus on personal projects was initially done to shake off staleness, but he says it actually was better financially: "Financially, seen over the long term, it was actually successful. Because of the improved quality, we could ask for higher prices."<sup>5</sup>

While the sabbatical has not been adopted universally, the concept of a weekend "Shabbat" has been embraced by most countries. The seven-day workweek has been replaced by a five or six-day one, as people realize that life is not simply a race to the finish line. We can live life rather than race through it. The realization has begun to set in that time is a currency worth more than money. Many would opt for a job with lower pay but more leisure time.

Not everyone could immediately think of a project to devote oneself to for a sabbatical year. But *shevi'it* calls for a sabbatical that impacts all of agricultural society simultaneously. Since no one is working the land, the entire agrarian society moves from focusing on the crops and land to concentrating on individuals and relationships. The sabbatical is a once-in-seven-year opportunity to give our minds and bodies a much-needed restart, to reconnect with long-term goals, reinforce our sense of self and ensure that ethical concerns will guide our decision-making.

### Maximizing society's sabbatical

Besides the mindfulness that comes with a year that is not driven by strict deadlines or dependent on the weather or society-imposed norms, the year of rest gives the inner soul the chance to come back to life. On the simplest level, *shevi'it* guides us to take a break from the physical and enjoy the spiritual.

The Talmud Yerushalmi explains that Shabbat provides ideal time for Torah study:

לֹא נָתַנוּ שְׁבֻתוֹת וַיָּמִים טוֹבִים אֶלָּא לְלַמֵּד בָּהֶם תּוֹרָה.

*"Shabbatot and holidays were only given in order to learn Torah."* (Yerushalmi, Shabbat 15:3)

The Torah's longest description of the sabbatical year is described as being taught at Har Sinai, the mountain where the Torah was received by the Jewish nation. Much of this seventh year connects us to the glorious mountain and the acceptance of the Torah. Like Shabbat, the sabbatical break from farming provides a year-long opportunity to re-engage with Har Sinai and learn Torah. In modern-day Israel, there are a number of yearlong learning programs for farmers who let their land rest for the entire year of *shevi'it*. They describe it as a wonderful opportunity and recommend it to others.

For those who do not work in agriculture, it is necessary to rethink our approach to rest and the sabbatical year. Dr. Jeremy Benstein describes how *shevi'it* should be viewed as a solution for contemporary society, rather than a problem:

*What if we looked at Shemitta not as a problem, but as a solution, and then considered what problems it's meant to solve? In that light, Shemitta becomes a political statement of social and environmental import, raising deep questions about the nature of a healthy and sustainable life, for individuals, society and the land.*

*For instance, currently only academics have a sabbatical year. Why? Our "affluent" society actually decreases leisure and family time, as more people not only choose to work to fulfill what they want to be, but feel compelled to work in order to afford what society says they should have. Consumerism necessitates "producerism" to keep both supply and demand high. Yet as Shemitta hints,*

people are indeed like the land, in ways that are more obvious in the modern world: For both, when overwork leads to exhaustion, we engineer continued “vitality” not with true renewal, but with chemicals.

*But just as silence is an integral part of speech, punctuated periods of fallowness are crucial for guaranteeing continued fertility. There's no reason why only an intellectual elite should benefit from a year of learning, reflection, and regeneration. The original sabbatical was for farmers, not physicists...*

*The sabbatical principle, dictating periods of enforced restraint, rededication and redistribution, presents a compelling alternative to business as usual. Limiting the share that production and consumption have in our lives will create the space for higher pursuits. The economy must not be an engine that runs by itself, disengaged from social and environmental concerns, but a conscious expression of our spiritual and moral values. Wealth, both money and land, are not personal property to be accumulated, but Divine abundance channeled through us to be shared for the benefit of all.<sup>6</sup>*

A year of rest, besides the unique goals of shevi'it, could enable a world-wide societal reassessment of what is truly important in our lives.

### Rav Kook's perspective

In his introduction to *Shabbat haAretz*, Rav Kook explores the role of Shemitta in fundamentally transforming Jewish life in Israel. Rav Kook does not deny the practical role that shevi'it can play in helping refocus one's energies, but he notes that as thinking Jews, we must try to look more deeply:

*What makes the Jewish nation special is that it looks at all of life through the illuminating lens of holiness. With all its life force, it recognizes that life is worthwhile only if it is infused with the Divine, and life lacking the Divine is worthless...*

*The potential of the nation, the Divine good which is embedded in it... cannot be actualized within mundane life. Such life, with its constant chaos, hides the spiritual glory of*

*the Divine soul... The urgency of developing and enhancing life needs to be actualized by taking a break and getting a rest from the chaos of normal life.*

After this introduction, Rav Kook identifies how both Shabbat and shevi'it allow for an escape from the mundane:

*Shemitta accomplishes for the nation what Shabbat accomplishes for the individual. This nation has a special need... Periodically, it needs to have the Divine light within it revealed in all its splendor. This light must not be suppressed by daily mundane life – with all its toil and worries, anger and competition – so that the purity of its collective soul can be revealed within it...*

Rav Kook describes the natural good of the world and the Jewish nation that often finds difficulty expressing itself, and even finding itself, amidst the secular realities of existence:

*This national treasure (segulah) that is imprinted deep within us, the image of a world that is good, upright, and G-dly – aligned with peace, justice, grace, and courage, all filled with a pervasive Divine perspective that rests in the spirit of the people – cannot be actualized within a way of life that is purely businesslike. Such a life, full of frenetic action, veils the glory of the Divine soul, and the soul's clear light is blocked from shining through the overpowering mundane reality. The impulsive push toward growth and self-realization needs space to come to fruition, by stopping the routine and awakening, while shaking off the wildness of daily life.*

Shabbat serves the role of creating the medium for every individual to take one day a week off his weekly routine and to invest it with spirituality:

*The individual is able to shake off the secular mundane routine of life frequently once a week, for “when Shabbat comes, repose comes” (Rashi, Bereishit 2:2). The soul begins to be freed from its harsh chains, as “G-d has given you rest from your sorrow and trouble, and from the hard service that you were made to serve” (Yeshayahu 14:3), and [the soul] seeks more elevated pathways of spiritual desires, consonant with its natural*

*spiritual core... [Shabbat is] a holy day, on which the innate inclination of the people for a G-dly life emerges in each individual, as a sign for the nation that it possesses a treasure (segulah) in its soul, and has a need and an ability to rejoice in G-d, in the pleasure of the Divine.*

Rav Kook writes that this concept is reflected in the idea of the *neshamah yeterah*, the extra soul granted on Shabbat. The “segulah” is in the soul of the nation and its ability to rejoice through the spiritual. This is concentrated and gathered into the spiritual point of the *neshamah yeterah*, which dwells within each and every individual. With this in mind, Rav Kook explains his initial comment: That which Shabbat does for the individual, Shemitta does for the collective nation:

*The same effect which Shabbat brings about upon the individual, Shemitta brings about upon the nation as a whole. There is a special need for this nation, in which the G-dly creative force is deeply implanted in its essence, in a distinct manner, to periodically reveal its G-dly light with its full illuminating intensity, in a manner in which the secular and mundane climate of society, with all its toil, anxiety, anger and competition, won't entirely suffocate the creative force of the nation; but it will be able to reveal [through Shemitta] the pure collective soul [of the nation] as it truly is.*

Rav Kook continues by describing the tension of remaining conscious of our inner spiritual core while we are busy with the day-to-day pressures of the marketplace. The challenges we face when involved in the mundane aspects of existence can also rob us of our morality and our connection to our spiritual core, if we are not given a system of checks and balances.

*The once-a-week individual Shabbat and the once-every-seven-years national shevi'it are built into the fabric of time, to allow the nation the reprieve that will enable it to appreciate its core and learn how to exhibit the moral teachings of the Torah in a mundane reality that militates against it. The land and its spiritual character must*



*express itself in the merging of the physical and spiritual, not with the corruption of either or both.*

For this reason, *shevi'it* is referred to as *Shabbat haAretz*, and much like the weekly Shabbat, it is a *Shabbat Lashem*, a Shabbat for Hashem.

### Shemitta today

The Covid-19 pandemic that caught the world off guard has had massive repercussions for society, and as of this writing, continues to impact the world. Who could have imagined that lockdowns, masking, and social distancing would become part of our daily lives and that what we once considered necessities would become off-limits? Society has been turned upside down through anxiety, illness, death, unemployment, and loneliness, and the world economy has taken a massive

beating. In some ways, there has been a Shemitta of sorts, as society as we know it has ground to a halt.

But while it is true that one can identify some positive effects of Covid-19, including a temporary lapse in pollution and numerous social initiatives that brought out the best in people, how many of them will remain in the long term? As masks (hopefully) come off and the locks are opened, society still lacks a mechanism to ensure these values aren't short-lived.

Shemitta, in contrast, allows the world to take a time out. In an agricultural society, Shemitta not only calls for more limited agricultural production but a year off for everyone, a rest period for the rich and poor alike. Preparation in the preceding years is an integral part of ensuring successful accommodation during *shevi'it*, but it also allows

for a buildup. Coupled with the Divine *berachah* of increased yield in the sixth year, there is an understanding that there will be a break, a year when the wheels of progress push towards another form of advancement – when the economy can be set aside for the sake of growth in realms other than business.

The centrality of *shevi'it* has led some to search for ways in which even the non-agricultural sectors of society can experience the *mitzvot* of Shemitta, and how can Jews throughout the world connect to some of Shemitta's themes? Some advocate buying agricultural land in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of letting it lie fallow. This does not, however, provide a full experience of the *mitzvah*. After all, those who buy tiny plots of land and fail to cultivate them can hardly be described as *giborei ko'ach*, “mighty in strength,” the appellation of

Olive trees in the Hinom Valley,  
overlooking Har HaBayit  
(PHOTO: BEN GOLDSTEIN)





Shemitta-observant farmers, as doing so does not require much faith.

Many recent initiatives have focused on inculcating Shemitta values into other sectors as well. Debt-relief and debt-forgiveness ventures are an expansion of the values of *shemittat kesafim*, the financial Shemitta requiring loan remittance at the end of the agricultural sabbatical year. Some rabbis have called for an expansion of *shevi'it* to other sectors of the economy. There are business people who have adopted moderate forms of Shemitta for their businesses.

Indeed, a year to stop, dedicate our time to learning, and focus on family, other people, and our spiritual lives seems like a dream. Even if we are unable to dedicate an entire year to the endeavor, whatever time we can commit to our loftier goals can be our “Shemitta time” over the year. The more meaningful we make it, the more likely we will be to find more “Shemitta time,” and its impact will become more and more pronounced.

It seems to me that there is also another way to strengthen Shemitta and its values. We have seen that Shemitta observance is a significant factor in our exile and subsequent return to the land. The land is impacted by every Jew who steps foot on it, and even those who long to do so. Every Jew counts; indeed, the reinstatement of Yovel (and the Biblical obligation of Shemitta) depends on the nation as a whole living in the land according to their ancestral plots. If Shemitta is to succeed in connecting us to our land and strengthening our connection with Har Sinai and Torah study, it seems that one of the most tangible ways of connecting to *shevi'it* values is by strengthening Torah communities in Eretz Yisrael – especially those conducive to *olim* – by ensuring affordable housing and shared resources, as well as continuing to build up Eretz Yisrael physically and spiritually.

In a powerful letter (dated 24 Sivan 5675/1915), Rav Kook writes that we must anxiously await that moment when Shemitta will be transformed,

while at the same time recognizing the inner spiritual calling that Shemitta exhibits even in our day:

*Let my master believe me that all these great and lofty things that were stated regarding the holiness of the seventh [year] in the present era were not stated specifically regarding fulfillment of particular deeds, for this holiness pertained even at such time as [the people of] Israel were not in the Land of Israel and the mitzvah of the seventh [year] was not fulfilled at all. Principally, it is a function of the gradual spread of holiness through the ages, with the light of the Messiah drawn from potential into reality as they come and go, so that the name of G-d, may His name be blessed, will be sanctified from one end of the earth to the other and all will form a single group to fulfill His will wholeheartedly. As for [the people of] Israel's preparing themselves with faith and anticipation of the salvation of the light of the Messiah and the full return of the holiness of the Land of Israel, at which point Shemitta and Yovel will return in full force, all of the spiritual reparations that are performed in the higher realms, at all levels, draw sustenance from this light. Thus whoever performs an action to broaden the borders of Israel so as to expedite the ingathering of Israel to the Land of Israel, which hastens the redemption – for the ingathering of exiles... precedes the coming of the Messiah, and the light of Israel becomes brighter little by little, as they of blessed memory said of the comparison to “the break of dawn” – he indeed rehabilitates the holiness of the supreme oneness of the principle of the seventh [year], and there is no end to the holy, supreme delights that are thus multiplied, and they are influenced by the root of his soul and the soul of all Israel...*

*One who fears G-d ought to pursue both avenues, by endeavoring practically to bring to life all the aspects of the holiness of the seventh [year] – even in the present era, as much as is possible – and by endeavoring as well to expedite, with his deeds and influences, the rise of the horn of salvation and the revelation of the light of our righteous Messiah, so that these occur sooner, as the lights are operative in their plentiful holiness even if, G-d forbid, one's deeds are not effective in practice, because the spiritual power of a good intention regarding these holy and lofty things has no limit and no measure...*

We are privileged to partake of some of the Shemitta realities that impact the lives of those who dwell in Israel, yet we also long for the day when all Shemitta observance will be complete with the arrival of the *Mashiach*. Until that day, may it speedily come, we hope that these lessons of Shemitta, alongside the opportunities to fulfill the laws of Shemitta in practice, continue to grow, illuminating our perspective on Shemitta and beyond.

● This article is adapted from Rabbi Zimmerman's book *The Shemitta Sensation: A Deeper Look into the Jewish Sabbatical Year* (Mizrachi Press, 2021).

<sup>1</sup> Global, regional, and national burdens of ischemic heart disease and stroke attributable to exposure to long working hours for 194 countries, 2000–2016, Environment International, Volume 154, September 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Brief diversions vastly improve focus, researchers find, Illinois News Bureau, February 8, 2011, <https://news.illinois.edu/view/6367/205427>.

<sup>3</sup> Ferris Jabr, “Why Your Brain Needs More Downtime”, Scientific American, October 15, 2013, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mental-downtime>.

<sup>4</sup> World Earth Day: How coronavirus lockdowns changed the world's most polluted cities, Independent, April 22, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/coronavirus-lockdown-pollution-earth-day-climate-change-india-italy-us-a9477801.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Stefan Sagmeister, “The Power of Time Off”, TEDGlobal 2009, [https://www.ted.com/talks/stefan\\_sagmeister\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_time\\_off](https://www.ted.com/talks/stefan_sagmeister_the_power_of_time_off). Winston Chen, a computer executive, followed this advice. During that year, he took up a hobby that became the multi-million dollar company VoiceDream. In Chen's words, “the secret to success is a sabbatical in the Arctic Islands.”

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Jeremy Benstein, “Stop the Machine! The Sabbatical Year Principle,” The Jerusalem Report, May 21, 2001, 35.

**Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman** is the head of World Mizrachi's Musmachim Semicha (rabbinic ordination) program. He also serves as a senior educator at the Zomet Institute and director of H.E.S.B.E.R. (Hebrew English Source Based Educational Resources) and is the author of *The Shemitta Sensation*, *From the Source* and the *With Spirit* series of educational books for middle and high schools.



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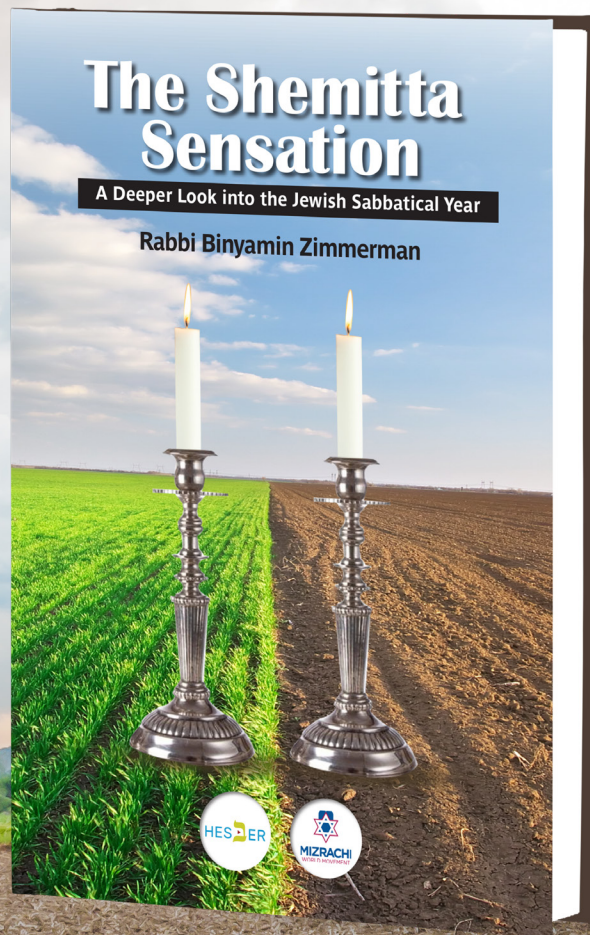
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# JEWS with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world to reflect on how we can make Shemitta meaningful for Jews today – both in Israel and the Diaspora



## Rabbi Gideon Shloush

I once heard Senator Joe Lieberman say: “G-d was the first Zionist. Our job is to continue His work.” And what a job *Am Yisrael* has done over the past 120 years. With little blue *tzedakah* boxes around the world, they raised the money needed to redeem the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. The return of the Jewish people and the establishment of *Medinat Yisrael* after 2,000 years of exile is an absolute miracle; that half the Jews in the world live here today is breathtaking.

Shemitta is a year of profound faith, when the miracle of our people’s return and the holiness of our nation are amplified. Traveling around Israel, it is remarkable to see farmers who are careful not to work their fields, confident that G-d will provide for them. It is mesmerizing to see signs in the fields – *כָּאן שׁוֹמְרִים שְׁמִיטָה* – “Here, we keep Shemitta” and signs in front of schools – *כָּאן לֹמְדִים שְׁמִיטָה* – “Here, we learn about Shemitta.”

We must ask ourselves: How many Shemitta years will we get to experience? How can we absorb its lessons of faith and trust in G-d? Let us be inspired by the Jews who have made their way back home, demonstrating faith in the Torah, in the words of the Prophets and choosing to be a part of the unfolding destiny of the Jewish People.

*Rabbi Gideon Shloush is the Director of the Department of Jewish Heritage at Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael in Jerusalem. He and his family made Aliyah to Israel this past summer after serving for the past 25 years as the rabbi of Congregation Adereth El in Manhattan. Rabbi Shloush previously served as Executive Vice President of RZA-Mizrachi.*



## Rabbanit Sharon Rimon

On a near-daily basis, farmers feel dependent upon Hashem. Agriculture depends on many uncontrollable factors, such as the climate, rain and pests. This is true primarily in Eretz Yisrael, which is dependent on rainfall and where, even more so, one feels a connection to G-d.

The Torah commands us to stop working the land during Shemitta and to be utterly dependent on G-d: “And should you ask, ‘What are we to eat in the seventh year?’... I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year” (*Vayikra* 25:20–21).

This dependence is still felt today by Israeli farmers during Shemitta. However, most people today are not farmers. Additionally, in the modern world, we try to control everything in our lives, particularly when it comes to financial matters. To a certain extent, we prevent ourselves from feeling dependent on Hashem.

But the truth is that we all depend on G-d, at every moment, in any place and in any field. Shemitta invites us to become aware of our dependence and encourages us to think further: At what points in our lives do we feel most dependent on G-d? How can we extend this feeling to other aspects of our lives?

Can we feel our existential dependence on G-d even when our finances are stable?

By considering these questions, even those of us who are not farmers can tap into the power of Shemitta!

*Rabbanit Sharon Rimon teaches Tanach and is Content Editor for the HaTanakh website.*





## Rabbi Alan Haber

**T**he *mitzvah* of Shemitta presents us with an inspiring vision: A national Shabbat that lasts an entire year, during which the land itself rests, the economy slows down significantly, and everyone – rich and poor alike – are equals, united in their faith and trust in Hashem, and sharing the bounty given to us directly by Him.

Attempting to achieve this uplifting ideal is also a significant challenge. Frankly, we never wholly fulfilled the Torah's demands; Shemitta was often honored more in the breach than the observance. In today's global post-agricultural economy, the challenges take a different form. Conversations about Shemitta are usually limited to debates about the *kashrut* of Israeli-grown produce. Those discussions are meaningful, but it's important not to think of this as a common *kashrut* question. Instead, the question we all need to ask is, "What can I personally do to help *Am Yisrael* keep this *mitzvah* better?"

One suggestion is to financially support farmers who keep the *mitzvah* by buying permissible products from them or through donations. Also, we should study and discuss this *mitzvah*'s powerful messages and work to implement those values in our communities. Finally, Shemitta also helps remind everyone that Eretz Yisrael is the center of the Torah's world.

*Rabbi Alan Haber serves on the faculty of Midreshet Torah V'Avodah and has taught at several other Jerusalem-based institutions, including Matan and Nishmat. He is a licensed tour guide and lectures widely in Israel and around the world. Many of his shiurim and publications can be seen on [www.rabbihaber.net](http://www.rabbihaber.net).*



## Rivka Alter

**T**he Mishnah in Avot (5:9) lists four sins that cause exile: murder, adultery, idol worship and the failure to observe Shemitta properly. While the first three apply equally to those in Israel or the Diaspora, the fourth, forsaking Shemitta, has no application in the Diaspora as it speaks to the inherent connection between *Am Yisrael* and Eretz Yisrael. As such, the Shemitta year serves as a stark reminder to those of us in the Diaspora of our distance from the Land of Israel.

If we do not merit living in Israel, the next best option is to ensure a strong connection from a distance. The Gemara (Menachot 110a) states that one who studies the laws of the *korbanot*, it is as if he has brought *korbanot*. While this may not literally apply to Shemitta, connecting to a *mitzvah* by learning about it is a helpful model for those living in the Diaspora.

Studying the laws of Shemitta, including *halachic* discussions about contemporary Shemitta observance, modern controversies in this area, and current technologies used to further Shemitta observance, is a fascinating and intriguing way to connect to Shemitta. Learning from and speaking to leading Israeli rabbis, farmers, educators, and lay people learning how to manage their gardens and kitchens brings Shemitta to life and draws us closer to the land and people of Israel.

*Rivka Alter has taught Tanach and Halacha for over 20 years. She is a member of the Judaic studies faculty and 12th grade dean at Yeshiva University High School for Girls (Central). She is a yoetzet halacha serving the Riverdale, NY and Stamford, CT communities and a teacher for Nishmat's kallah teacher training program.*



## Rabbi Dr. Seth Grauer

**O**ur schools have vastly increased their mental health staff and resources. Adults regularly seek help from professionals. We have witnessed an explosion of disciplines associated with positive psychology and resilience.

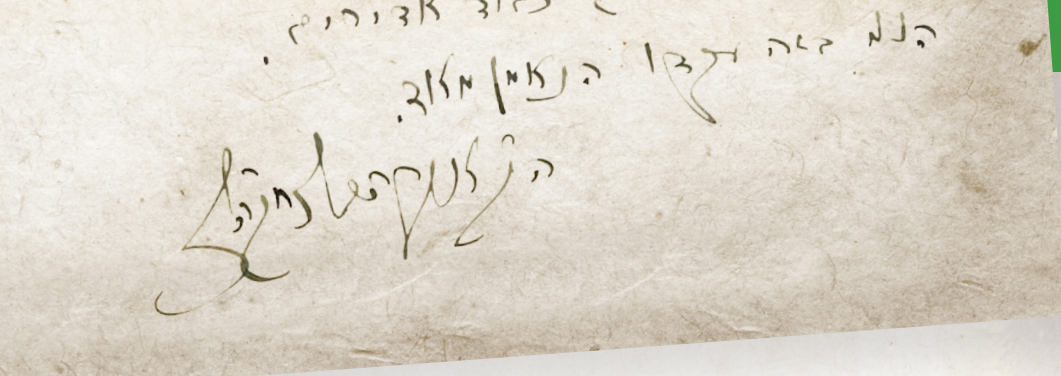
Shemitta is all about rest and rejuvenation – two activities essential to positive mental wellness. Each of us needs a “sabbatical” every once in a while to be productive, just as a land that is allowed to lie fallow will become more effective and high-yielding. Encouraging individuals to find time for a personal Shemitta to foster greater religious, spiritual, emotional and even physical growth will help them succeed in all areas of life.

This applies to people of all ages, particularly during times of transition. Before beginning university, students should take gap years to learn in seminary or *yeshivah*; young adults could consider volunteering following their post-secondary studies before entering the job market. Those already working full-time need to make time for self-care days and mini-sabbaticals. Hashem built such practices within creation by mandating Shabbat. We rest from our normal weekday activities to spend more time focusing on *tefillah*, learning Torah, and spending time with family and friends.

Practically speaking, to connect world Jewry to Shemitta, we should encourage Jews of all ages to use the year to nurture their mental health and wellbeing. Find an activity to do that you never had time for. Learn something new. Connect with family in ways that you haven't. Find ways to do more *chesed*. Ultimately, Shemitta is meant to help others, but we may also find that is the greatest way to help ourselves.

*Rabbi Dr. Seth Grauer is the Rosh Yeshivah and Head of School at the Bnei Akiva Schools of Toronto – Yeshivat Or Chaim and Ulpanat Orot. He is also the Honorary Chairman of Mizrahi Canada.*





## RAV KOOK'S TEACHINGS

# Connecting the Land and the People

In these paragraphs, from Rav Kook's introduction to his book *Shabbat HaAretz*, Rav Kook discusses the ideal relationship between *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* and our return to that relationship after a long *galut*.

וְכַשֵּׁם שֶׁנֶאֱמַר בְּשַׁבַּת בְּרֵאשִׁית "שַׁבַּת לַה'" כִּן נֶאֱמַר בְּשַׁבְעִיטָה: שַׁבַּת לַה'. סִגְלַת הָאָרֶץ וּסְגֻלַּת הָאָמָה מִתְאַיִמוֹת יַחַד... נִשְׁמַת הָאָמָה וְהָאָרֶץ יַחְדָּו פּוֹעֲלֹת אֶת יְסוֹד הַנִּיחָו, תּוֹבְעוֹת אֶת תְּפָקִידוֹ, לְהוֹצִיא אֶל הַפֶּעַל אֶת עֲרִיגַת קִנְיָנוֹ, בְּשִׁנַּת שַׁבָּתוֹ. הָעַם פּוֹעֵל בְּכַחוֹ הַנִּפְשִׁי עַל הָאָרֶץ, זְרוּעַ ה' מִתְגַּלֶּה עַל יְדֵי הַשְׁפָּעָתוֹ הַרוּחָנִית, וְהָאָרֶץ פּוֹעֲלַת עַל הָעַם, לְהַקְשִׁיר אֶת תְּכוֹנָתוֹ לְפִי חֹפֶץ מַיִם אֱלֹקִים שְׁלֵמִים בְּתִבְנִיתָם. שַׁנַּת שַׁבָּתוֹ מְכַרְסֶת הִיא לָאָמָה וְלָאָרֶץ!

שַׁנַּת שְׁקֵט וְשִׁלְוָה, בְּאֵין נוֹגֵשׁ וְרוֹחַ, "לֹא יִגֹּשׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְאֶת אָחִיו כִּי קָרָא שְׁמִטָּה לַה'", "שַׁנַּת שְׁוִיוֹן וְסִרְעָה... וְשִׁלּוֹם אֱלֹקִי שׁוֹרֵר עַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמָה בָּאֶפֶס... רוּחַ קְדוּשָׁה וְאַצִּילוֹת שְׁפוּךְ עַל פְּנֵי כָל, "שַׁנַּת שַׁבָּתוֹ יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ - שַׁבַּת לַה'". בְּשָׁנָה זוֹ מִתְגַּלֶּה צְבִיוֹנָה שֶׁל הָאָמָה בְּכָלֵל הוֹדָה, בְּמִקְוֵה רוּחָה הָאֱלֹקִי. וְהָאָרֶץ זֹה, הַבָּצָה אִמָּת לְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים, מוֹשְׁכַת אֲחִירָה עֲלִיּוֹת אִיִּדְיָאֲלוֹת אֱלֹקִיוֹת.

"Just as it was said about the Sabbath of creation, 'it is a Sabbath for G-d,' so, too, it was said about the Sabbath of Shemitta, 'it is a Sabbath for G-d.'" (Rashi, Vayikra 25:2). The distinctive character of the people and the land dovetail with each other... The soul of the people and the land intertwine, working from the basis of their being to bring into existence the intricate patterns of inner holiness that lie within them during the sabbatical year. The people impact with its soul force on the land, such that the Divine seed can be revealed through its spiritual influence; the land, too, impacts the people, refining their character in line with the desire for a completely Divine life that is inherent in their makeup. The Shemitta year is necessary for the nation and the land!

It is a year of quiet and serenity, without oppressor or tyrant, "One shall not oppress his friend or his brother [by claiming payment for a loan], for he calls out Shemitta to G-d." It is a year of equality and calm... and a Divine peace rests on all living creatures... a holy and noble spirit is poured onto everything, "A Sabbatical year should be for the land - a Sabbath for G-d"... In this year the character of the nation is revealed in the entirety of its beauty, in the source of its Divine spirit. This light, which comes once every seven years, draws even afterwards the heights of the Divine ideals [into our lives].

Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook



# The Return of Shemitta: A New Era in Jewish History



Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein

## The ideal

**T**he Jewish people and the Land of Israel have a symbiotic relationship. The mission of the Jewish people is to create a G-d-infused society in which wherever we turn – be it agriculture, business, culture or politics – we see and experience G-d. The desire and ability to live all of life in the pleasantness of G-d's presence is innate to the Jewish soul. However, this inner nature can only be actualized when the Jewish people are in their natural place – the Land of Israel. *“The land impacts the people to reveal their inner characteristic of desiring a life completely infused with divinity.”*

Similarly, the Land of Israel is a physical land that brims with the Divine Presence. Even in its natural state, the Land itself is holy and wherever one turns in it, one is close to G-d (*Orot HaTechiyah*, chapter 28). But this sanctity can only be experienced when the Jewish people are present and living righteously in the Land. *“The people impact the Land such that the seed of G-d can be revealed.”*

The synthesis of the Jewish people and the Land is apparent during the Shemitta year when the Land experiences a “Shabbat to G-d,” and His active ownership of the Land is clear to all. All food that grows in G-d's land is automatically imbued with sanctity. People cannot engage in competitive commerce nor lord over their fellow Jews as all are equal before G-d. These values, once imbibed during the Shemitta year, can be drawn into the following six years of work, creating a Jewish society that is vibrant, accomplished, and G-dly.

## The real

This grand vision can only be actualized when the Jewish people dwell in their land. Tragically, the long exile



A wedding in Gush Etzion (PHOTO: DONI COHEN)

severed our people from our land and both suffered as a result. Our people could no longer infuse the mundane world with sanctity and retreated to the oases of the synagogue and study hall. Correspondingly, the Land of Israel hid its uniqueness. Controlled by one foreign invader after another, it remained desolate for close to two millennia.

Writing in 1909, Rav Kook posited that his generation was the beginning of an historical pivot. The Jewish people were experiencing a powerful yearning for the land, and for the first time since the Roman exile, were beginning to return to the Land en-masse. Before their eyes, the Land was responding to the presence of its children and agriculture was beginning to flourish once again.

But Rav Kook understood that this was only the beginning of a process. The ideal vision of a G-d-permeated society in the Land remained a distant goal. While Jews felt a deep connection to the Land, many misinterpreted their souls' signals and tried to excise G-d and His Torah from the People-Land relationship. Unfortunately, we are not yet able to actualize the full promise of Shemitta.

## Returning to the ideal

But this gap between the real and the ideal should not lead to despair. Instead, we should joyfully throw ourselves into

the degree of *mitzvot ha'teluyot ba'Aretz* that we can fulfill in our current state. These *mitzvot* will deepen our connection to the Land and breathe new life into our souls. Slowly, with time, we will regain faith in ourselves, the Land and, most importantly, in the beauty and splendor of a life connected to G-d that results from the People-Land connection (*Orot HaTechiyah*, chapter 33). If we allow these *mitzvot* to impact us, G-d will grant us the ability to fulfill even more of these land-oriented *mitzvot* (*Igrot HaRe'iyah*, letter 208).

Simultaneously, we must delve deeply into the laws of the Land. Throughout the long exile, when the spiritual connection between the People and the Land was sublimated, the laws of the Land and its produce were a neglected topic of study. Now, however, as we feel a renewed connection to Eretz Yisrael, we must actively deepen our relationship with the Land through the study of its laws. In addition to being practically important, studying these laws will deepen our awareness of the Land's holiness and help us actualize the Torah's ultimate vision (*Introduction to Mishpat Kohen*).

Though we have made great strides in the ensuing century, Rav Kook's message still rings true today. We are delighted by the increase in our connection to the Land and our ability to keep the *mitzvot ha'teluyot ba'Aretz*. However, we cannot be satisfied with our current situation. We must deepen our connection to the Land and its *mitzvot* until G-d permeates every corner of the Land and our lives. May that day come soon!

**Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein** is a faculty member of *Michlelet Mevasseret Yerushalayim* and *Yeshiva University*.





# From Flatbush to Ra'anana

Rabbi Reuven Boshnack

**T**his year, I began learning on Zoom with a friend from Brooklyn's Flatbush neighborhood and an *oleh* living in Ra'anana. Searching for a topic that might appeal to everyone, I suggested Rav Kook's introduction to *Shabbat Ha'Aretz*, in which he explains the deeper purpose of Shemitta. The conversation went something like this:

**Reuven:** What do you think – should we learn about Shemitta?

**Flatbush:** Yeah, I've been seeing ads asking for money to help the Israeli farmers for the last six months.

**Ra'anana:** We've been wondering what Shemitta will be like this year. Last time we only bought our fruits and vegetables from one store in the neighborhood.

**Flatbush:** One store? That's crazy! Why?

**Ra'anana:** It was the only store that sold produce grown in a place that wasn't part of biblical Israel and so the laws of Shemitta didn't apply to that produce. That way, we got around the whole problem.

**Flatbush:** Last year, we rented a bit of land in Israel through *Keren Hashviis* to keep Shemitta ourselves by not working the land we rented. What else is there to know?

**Reuven:** Rav Kook had a lot to say about the meaning of Shemitta for us and the entire world; he believed Shemitta is our nation's love song to its Land! He wrote this book while he was the Rav of Yafo and the surrounding agricultural communities.

**Flatbush:** What does this have to do with those of us who don't live in Israel?

**Reuven:** It has everything to do with us! Rav Kook believed that the Zionist pioneers returning to the Land were not just people who needed a place to live and make a living. They were a sign that the Jewish people were coming back to life, to live in their ancestral land. Hashem's plan, and the purpose of His covenant with our forefathers, was to create a holy *nation* – with police officers, soldiers, farmers, doctors (and even lawyers!) – that would serve Him in the Holy Land. Shemitta is also a sign our nation is being reborn.

**Flatbush:** What's the difference between that and Flatbush?

**Reuven:** In Flatbush, we're loyal citizens of the United States, but it's not truly *our* country. Israel was promised to our forefathers, and there is a fulfillment of that promise in every part of life. It's an organic connection between body and soul.

**Ra'anana:** It's different in Israel; Judaism doesn't feel like an artificial appendage here.

**Flatbush:** Are we still talking about Shemitta?

**Ra'anana:** Yeah, I thought we would talk about the *heter mechirah*, where we sell the Land like *chametz* so it can still be worked during Shemitta.

**Flatbush:** Are you kidding, like Pesach?

**Ra'anana:** Some people accept the sale and some don't. That's why they try to raise money for the farmers who won't rely on this leniency.

**Flatbush:** Shouldn't they stop farming on Shemitta? That's the law, right?

**Reuven:** Ideally, yes, but not everyone would or could. When Rav Kook was the Chief Rabbi of Yafo, the early *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* had a problem. Shemitta was coming and the pioneers were simply too poor to stop farming. Some money was collected to support them, but it wasn't enough. If all of the farmers stopped working, would this new *Yishuv* survive? Would people starve? Rav Kook explained that the exile had made the Land and our people fragile. We are living in historic times when our nation and our Land are in the process of returning to their full strength. And so, for now, we must rely on the *heter mechirah*.

**Flatbush:** I still can't understand why this is ok. I can't sell my business on Shabbat, even if it's hard to make a living!

**Reuven:** But you can drive on Shabbat or call Hatzalah if someone's life is in danger. Rav Kook saw the flowering of the Land and its settlers and concluded that during this time, when we're still a shadow of our former selves, we need to rely on this leniency. In the future, the Land and the people will grow and fully come back to life, and they will keep Shemitta together.

**Rabbi Reuven Boshnack** is the co-director of OU-JLIC at Brooklyn College with his wife for the last 13 years. He received his semicha from RIETS, and holds a Masters in Education and a Masters in Mental Health Counseling. A talmid of Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, he has taught Chassidut, Jewish thought and Jewish Law for the last 20 years in Brooklyn and Boca Raton. Rabbi Boshnack has written three books on Jewish thought, on the writings of the Sfatai Emet, the Izhbitzer and the Maharal.



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# BLAST

## From the Past

During this 120th anniversary year of the Mizrachi World Movement, we are delving into the HaMizrachi archives. Here's a piece from 1919.

### לחמשה עשר בשבט.

(רעיונות והרהורים)

יהודים בני הגלות ו"ראש השנה לאילנות"? ... ילדי הגיטו וחג  
לכבוד הטבע ותחית? ! אנו, שהרחיקנו והתרחקנו מאם-הארץ הכרוכה,  
ששמי-תכלת ימים רחוקים וזרים לנו, שושפת הכוכבים ורמזיהם מוזרים  
לנו, וכבדה האוון להקשיב דומית הליף ולחשויו ורזו-רוזו; לא לנו השדות  
המזרחיים מלאי-בר, האילנות המלבלבים, העשב והירק החי; לא לנו  
הפרחים והורדים גורפי רוח-בשמים, ואנו – חוגגים חג מיוחד להטבע,  
הקצענו יום לראשית התחדשות התולדה, ועוד בשעה שכל היקום  
מסביב נגדד ונגרש, נובל ונוע, תודו וריק!...

האם אין זה דומה לאותו המנהג לקרוא את הפרק הפיוטי הנפלא  
והנשגב "ברכו נפשו", "העושה אור בשמלה" בימי-שבתות קצרים, מעוננים  
מעורפלים?...

### Yitzchak Rivkind

**J**ews of the Diaspora and the "Rosh Hashanah for trees?" Children of the ghetto and a holiday in honor of nature and its rebirth? We, who have distanced ourselves and been distanced from the blessed land, to whom the beautiful blue skies of our land are far away and unknown to us... not for us are the golden fields, the blooming trees and grass; not for us are the flowers and roses whose scent blows in the wind.

And yet [tomorrow] we are celebrating Tu BiShvat, the holiday of nature; we have set aside a day for the beginning of its renewal, even as all that surrounds us is frozen and dead, chaotic and

empty! Is this not similar to our custom to recite the beautiful poem of *Barchi Nafshi* [in celebration of G-d's world] on Shabbatot that are short, cloudy and dark?

No! We have not always been distant from nature and its magic! The Tanach is our witness; our Book of Books testifies eternally to our people's longing for nature, our love of nature and the lives bound up with nature that we lived in earlier generations. We are the children of the ancient nation which came to faith through nature. Unlike the other nations, we did not treat the forces of nature as gods but instead used nature to perceive G-d's providence and unity.

"The heavens declare the glory of G-d, and the firmament shows His handiwork." "How many are Your works, Hashem! In wisdom have You made them all." "Lift up your eyes on high, and see Who has created these!"

● Originally published in *HaMizrachi*, no. 5, 14 Shevat 5679 (Warsaw, 1919).

**Yitzchak Rivkind** was born in Lodz, Poland, and he studied in Yeshivot in Volozhin and Ponevezh. He was one of the main organizers of Mizrachi in Poland, through which he published a book detailing the Netziv's connection to the Hibbat Zion movement. He moved to New York in 1920.





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## WHAT'S IN A WORD?

# The Sabbatical Year

David Curwin

### Shemitta

Let's start with the word שְׁמִיטָה itself, which derives from the root שָׁטַח, meaning “to let drop, leave out.” The Torah uses this word to refer to two different *mitzvot* that occur during this year.

One is the cancellation of debts: “Every seventh year you shall practice remission of debts [שְׁמִיטָה]. This shall be the nature of the remission: every creditor shall remit [שָׁטַח] the due that he claims from his fellow; he shall not exact it from his fellow or kinsman, for the remission proclaimed is of the L-rd” (Devarim 15:1-2).

It is also used to refer to the commandment to let the fields lay fallow every seventh year: “Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but in the seventh, you shall let it rest [שְׁמִיטָה] and lie fallow...” (Shemot 23:10-11).

Today, the root is most often used in the form הִשְׁמִיטָה – “to omit, skip over.” We also find the reflexive form, הִשְׁמָטָה – “to shirk, evade one's obligations” (literally, to release oneself).

### Shabbaton

Other verses in the Torah use a different root when describing the seventh year: שָׁבָת.

“When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe [וְשָׁבָתָה] a sabbath [שָׁבָת] of the L-rd. Six years you may sow your field... But in the seventh year, the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest [שְׁבַת שְׁבָחוֹן], a sabbath of the L-rd... it shall be a year

of complete rest [וְשָׁבָתָה] for the land” (Vayikra 25:2-5).

The parallel between the weekly Shabbat and the Shemitta year is clear. For six days we work, and on Shabbat, we rest. The same is true of Shemitta; for six years, we work the land and on the seventh, we let the land lay fallow. The root שָׁבַח, “to cease, desist; to rest,” applies to both *mitzvot*.

The word *shabbaton* is either an adjective referring to Shabbat or, as translated above, an intensifier, meaning “complete rest.” In English, it is rendered as “sabbatical.” Initially, that word meant either “recurring in sevens” or “suitable for the Sabbath.” In the 19th century, it took on the meaning “a year of paid leave granted to professors or researchers,” often the seventh year of work. That sense was borrowed back into modern Hebrew, where שְׁבַת שְׁבָחוֹן more often refers to the sabbatical year of a university employee than to the Shemitta year.

The Hebrew word *shabbaton* took on a different meaning in English-speaking countries. It refers to an educational retreat held on Shabbat, often for youth movements or synagogue groups. In Israel, however, a day of *shabbaton* refers to an official day off of work for a specific occasion, like national elections.

### Yovel

In Biblical time, the nation would mark the *Yovel* (jubilee) year after seven Shemitta cycles. The Sages debated if *Yovel* was observed in the 49th or 50th year. In that year, property would return to its original owners.

The sounding of the shofar proclaimed the advent of the year, and that blast gave the name to the year: “Then you shall sound the horn; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month – the Day of Atonement – you shall sound the horn throughout your land. And you shall hallow the 50th year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee [יובל] for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family” (Vayikra 25:9-10).

In the description of the giving of the Torah, the word *Yovel* is used for shofar: “...When the ram's horn [הַיֵּבֶל] sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain” (Shemot 19:13).

In addition to meaning “ram's horn,” *Yovel* is also used simply for “ram”: “Seven priests carrying seven ram's horns [שִׁפְרוֹת הַיֹּבֵלִים] preceding the Ark” (Yehoshua 6:4).

The English word jubilee derives from the Greek rendering of the Hebrew *Yovel*. But jubilee in English has a different connotation – “a celebration of an anniversary.” This is due to influence from a similar-sounding word, the Latin *jubilare* – “to shout for joy” (the source of the English “jubilant.”) Modern Hebrew has adopted this sense of the word as well, and today a *Yovel* can refer to any significant anniversary, not just the 50th.

David Curwin is a writer living in Efrat, and the author of the Balashon blog, [balashon.com](http://balashon.com).





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# Mighty Builders Planting Seeds

## Reflecting on the Extraordinary Story of Sam and Arie Halpern

**S**am and Arie Halpern z”l were two of the most impactful American Jews of the post-Holocaust era. Born to a Chassidic family in Chorostkov on the Polish-Ukrainian border, the brothers lost their parents, brother and most of their family and friends in the Holocaust. Surviving ghettos, concentration camps and many months in hiding, Sam and Arie arrived in the United States in 1949, where together they built a series of successful businesses, developing homes, apartments and commercial property.

Together with Sam’s wife Gladys and Arie’s first wife Frieda and his second wife Eva, the Halperns became philanthropic leaders in the Jewish community, supporting both local Torah institutions in New Jersey and an array of organizations in support of the State of Israel. Arie served as an Honorary President of the Religious Zionists of America.

Rabbi Samuel E. Klibanoff, Rabbi of Congregation Etz Chaim in Livingston, New Jersey, and Chairperson of Israel Bonds’ Rabbinic Advisory Council, recently spoke with three of Sam and Arie’s children – Bella Savran, Shelly Paradis and David Halpern – to learn more about their life and legacy.

**Tell us a little about Arie and Sam’s extraordinary story of survival and rebirth. How did their experiences in the Holocaust shape their lives in America?**

After the Shoah, in which so many of their family members and friends were murdered, they were trying to figure out where to go. When they went back to their hometown, they realized it was *judenrein* (free of Jews); they couldn’t go back there anymore. They went to a Polish border town and ultimately to the American Zone in Germany, where they started a business and began to get their lives back on track. When the State of Israel was established, Frieda’s family moved to Israel, and Sam and Arie wanted to follow. But the relatives in Israel sent word that things were very difficult in Israel because of the War of Independence, and that they should go to America instead and come to Israel later on. Sam and Arie had an

uncle in America, Paul Wolfson, who sponsored their immigration.

With the money they had made in Germany, Arie and Sam were able to buy a little grocery store in Manhattan, near City College. They worked very hard and eventually bought a few more grocery stores. Eventually, through a friend in shul, they heard about another business called “building houses in New Jersey,” in which you didn’t have to work on Shabbat. They really hated having to work on Shabbat, and this was a great opportunity. They tried it for a year and saw that it was good, and so we all moved to Elizabeth, New Jersey, where Rabbi Pinchas Teitz had established a strong Jewish community with a *yeshivah* and a shul.

When they came to America and rebuilt their lives, they rebuilt the Jewish lives as well. They dedicated themselves to all the things they had learned in

Poland. Our grandfather was a *chassid*; when our fathers were young, they had *peyot*. As they got older they became more modern, but they carried Judaism with them their entire lives.

Growing up, they were Zionists as well. They had a brother, Avraham Chaim, who before the Holocaust was on *hachshara*, planning to immigrate to Palestine; he did all the paperwork to get a visa, raised the money for the ticket and had a permit to go. But then the Jewish Agency told him, “Sorry, you have to give up your permit because the Jews of Germany are in greater danger than the Jews of Poland.” And so Avraham Chaim’s permit went to a German Jew, and he was stuck in Poland. He was then drafted into the Polish army and was killed in the battle of Chelm when the Nazis attacked in September 1939. Our fathers never forgot that. It drove them to join and be involved in every Jewish organization they could for the rest of their lives.

**We don’t typically associate Chassidic thought with Zionism. How did brothers from a Chassidic background become essential leaders of the Religious Zionists of America and Israel Bonds?**

They were teenagers when they joined the *Noar Tzioni* (Youth Zionists) and hid their *peyot*. Part of it was a teenage rebellion, but it was also the spirit of the times; most of the young people in Chorostkov were going in that direction. Like today, the younger people didn’t accept the more conservative approach of their parents. They didn’t want to be passive victims anymore.



As they became more independent of their parents, the Zionist idea became part of their core identity. They would wait each week for Zionist pamphlets to arrive in their *shtetl*! And also, there were girls in the Zionist movement. That was definitely part of it too!

After the Shoah, Arie and Sam, like other survivors, understood the importance of the State of Israel, much more than people who grew up in America or in other places where Jews felt safe. They appreciated Israel the way a person who has been starving for years appreciates a piece of bread.

Sam said many times that they went to the first Israel Bond appeal in 1953, and together they bought a \$100 Israel Bond. They were so proud and excited that they had invested in the State of Israel, something their parents and grandparents couldn't even dream of doing. One of the most significant moments in our childhood was when we went to the 10th-anniversary celebration of the State of Israel at the Polo Grounds. There were 50,000 people there, most of them Holocaust survivors, and everybody was singing Hatikva and crying simultaneously. That generation understood the miracle of Israel in a way that we simply cannot. They witnessed the fulfillment of their dreams. We still have some of that passion, but it's often taken for granted with the next generation.

Arie was close with Dr. Yosef Burg, one of the founders of the National Religious Party and served in the Knesset. He was passionate about Yeshivot Hesder; he loved to talk with soldiers. He was also one of the founders of FIDE. The combination of "Religious" and "Zionist" spoke powerfully to them both.

**Over the many decades of their work on behalf of Israel, Sam and Arie met and worked together with many of the**

**greatest Jewish leaders of the era. Can you share some memories of those times?**

Our fathers idolized Ben-Gurion; there were pictures of him all over our houses. But the truth is, they loved every Prime Minister of Israel.

In the 1980s and 90s, Israel Bonds had an annual Elie Wiesel Holocaust Remembrance Award dinner. At the first dinner, they honored Elie Wiesel himself, and I remember when he came in from Boston and slept over at my parents' house because my father would not hear of him staying in a hotel. They developed a very close friendship.



We once went with our father (Arie) to Har Herzl, where many of the most important leaders in Israeli history are buried, people like Yitzchak Rabin and others. He stopped at each one of their graves and talked to them! It was very emotional for him, for a little boy from the *shtetl* to meet these important leaders of the state.

**How did Sam and Arie's dedication to the thriving of the State of Israel trickle down to your generation and your own children? On Tu B'Shvat, we plant seeds. Your parents planted so many seeds, and it's our responsibility to water and nurture those seeds.**

What's the key to inspiring the next generation with a love for and dedication to the Jewish people?

Preaching doesn't work very well with children; the best way to teach is to educate by example. Our parents were constantly involved in Jewish organizations like Israel Bonds and Mizrahi and their shuls and schools. They taught us by *doing*, and that's how our children and we became involved. That's the key to raising children. You show, you do, you role-model, and then you pray!

When our fathers spoke about their experience in the Holocaust, they never focused on victimhood. It was a story of survival – Arie would say that G-d saved them, pushing them to the left when everyone who went to the right was killed – and looking forward. Our mother (Frieda) died when we were pretty young, and he taught us then how to look forward.

Their communal activities, supporting Jewish institutions, remembrance and Israel Bonds, are important in their legacy. But there is also what they taught us about how to live personally. They spoke a lot about the dignity of hard work, which they learned from our grandparents, who were poor but worked incredibly hard to make a living. They taught us that you cannot only help yourself; you must also help others who have less than you. And they taught us to appreciate the people that support us. They really appreciated their rescuers who helped them during the Holocaust and sought to help them later on when they were able to.

They believed sincerely in the unity of the Jewish people. Many people today are on the far left or the far right. But they supported Israel, Chassidic causes, secular Jewish causes – they didn't think they had to take one side or the other. They believed that peace is the most important thing – peace among family and peace among our people. The Jewish people have to stay together. ■





Etz Chaim of Livingston pays tribute to  
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We stand on the shoulders of these giants who set an extraordinary example of what it means to be Jewish leaders, Baalei Tzedakah and true builders of our beloved state of Israel. We strive to continue their mission each and every day.

Rabbi Sam Klibanoff   Shira Stein and Kenny Weiss  
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Your devotion to Israel, and the Jewish community both here and abroad, is a shining example to us all.

We also want congratulate Rabbi Elie Mischel on his new position as Editor of HaMizrachi.

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# Redemption: When Israel Enters Center Stage

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

**I**n November, **Avi Borgen** asked Rabbi Hershel Schachter to discuss Rav Soloveitchik's perspective on redemption and whether rabbis should make *Aliyah*.

**Avi Borgen:** Why are there some communities of Jews who won't even go to Eretz Yisrael to learn Torah?

**Rabbi Hershel Schachter:** They don't see what's happening, that history is being made. *Geulah* – redemption! At the time of the Six-Day War, Rav Soloveitchik said that *geulah* means that Eretz Yisrael becomes the center of attention. After the war in 1967, the New York Times proclaimed Israel's success on its front page! Israel has become the center of the world's attention, and this is the beginning of the *geulah*. Rav Soloveitchik did not specifically call it the “*atchalta degeulah*” (the beginning of redemption), but he pointed to Israel's success as a sign of *geulah*.

**AB:** Did the Rav expect everyone to make *Aliyah*? Rav Soloveitchik himself did not go to Israel. Is there an obligation to live in Israel? How do practical considerations like jobs and family impact this question?

**RHS:** Rav Soloveitchik encouraged people to go on *Aliyah*, but not people in *chinuch* and *rabbanut*. He used to publicly say that whoever's in *chinuch* or *rabbanut* is not allowed to leave. These people are fighting intermarriage and assimilation, so they are not allowed to leave. The captain of the ship is not allowed to leave until all the passengers

are taken care of; the general of the army is not allowed to leave as long as there are soldiers to take care of. Rav Soloveitchik felt that the rabbis in America, the teachers and educators, were like the captain of the ship.

**AB:** Did you ever consider making *Aliyah*?

**RHS:** I remember the first time I met Rabbi Avraham Shapira zt”l. I was in Eretz Yisrael with my family and I joined an RCA tour for a day. One of our stops was visiting Rabbi Avraham Shapira, then Chief Rabbi of Israel. He had just been appointed to the position a few months earlier. These rabbis from America came and they were dressed like tourists! No jackets, no hats. Fun- nily, the next day, the group went to see the Prime Minister, so they were all dressed up for pictures. But the day they went to visit *rabbanim*, they were dressed very casually, like tourists.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Shapira was dressed like the Rosh Yeshivah he was. Rabbi Shapira sees a bunch of jokers there, and he says to them, “I’ve never been in the rabbinate before, I was always the Rosh Yeshivah. Can you give me some tips?” He wanted to learn from us how to act as a “rebbe”!

As we were leaving the room, somebody introduced each of the RCA members to Rabbi Shapira. When they came to me, they said “Here is Rabbi Hershel Schachter, he teaches at Yeshiva University.” Rabbi Shapira said he had heard of me. I said “you must have heard of the famous Rabbi Herschel Schachter

[the prominent pulpit rabbi and father of Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schachter].” He said “No, [I mean you,] I’ve read your *Divrei Torah* in the Mizrachi journal.”

Two, three days later, I got a phone call from Rabbi Shapira's American contact. Rabbi Shapira invited me to come to his apartment with my family. He even sent a car to pick us up. Rabbi Shapira was a very jolly fellow. He spoke very quickly in Hebrew, so I switched to Yid- dish to slow it down. Then he started speaking Yiddish quickly, so I switched back to Hebrew. Rabbi Shapira gave us *berachot* and then got to the reason he had invited me to his home. He gave me a 25 minute *derashah* on why I should move to Eretz Yisrael. “Eretz Yisrael has a lot of good *rabbanim* who know how to *paskin halachah*. But we need rabbis who know how to give a good *shiur*.” He told me he had money and access to people with money, he can help me get a position, he can help me make my own *yeshivah*, my own young *kollel*, whatever I want, he will be at my service – I should come to Eretz Yisrael!

After the whole *derashah*, he asked what else I do in New York aside from teaching at YU. Upon hearing that I gave *shiurim* in different places to many people every week, he said “I take it back. If you have influence on so many people, your place is in America. You have to stay there, they need you.”

**Rabbi Hershel Schachter** is Rosh Yeshivah and Rosh Kollel at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University.



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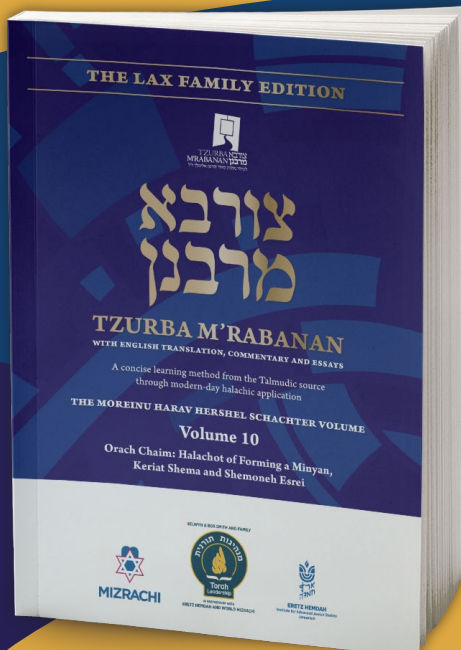
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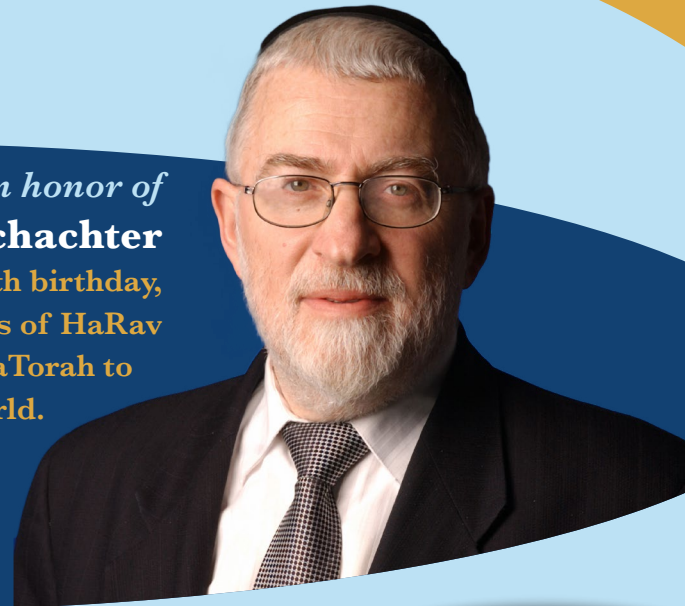
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## CHASSIDUT

# The Land that “Eats” its Inhabitants

Shoshana Judelman

**A**s a child, the Seer of Lublin, Rabbi Ya'akov Yitzchak Horowitz, used to go into the forests to *daven*. When his father asked him why this was necessary, he answered, “I go to find G-d.” “But my son,” said his father, “G-d is the same everywhere.” “He is,” responded the boy, “but I am not.”

And neither are we.

The very first thing Hashem ever said to Avraham Avinu was, “Go forth from your native land... to the land that I will show you.” From this point on, every promise Hashem makes to the forefathers includes the guarantee of Eretz Yisrael. In fact, throughout the Torah, the goal is clear – *Am Yisrael* is destined to be in Eretz Yisrael. As Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi writes in the *Kuzari*, the Jewish people in the Land of Israel are like a vineyard planted in the perfect mountain soil. Grapes can grow in many places, but only in certain environments can they reach their greatest potential. The same is true of *Am Yisrael*. Only through living in and connecting to Eretz Yisrael can we fully develop our promise.

When *Am Yisrael* reached the borders of the Land for the first time, they sent spies to gather information about the Holy Land. Tragically, the spies allowed their fears to overwhelm them and their negative report tainted the Jewish people's view of this Holy Land.

Where did the spies go wrong? They saw the people of Canaan attending

many funerals and mistakenly concluded the Land was an *אֶרֶץ אוֹכֵלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ* *היא*, “a land that consumes its inhabitants,” draining them of their life force (Bemidbar 13:32). Rashi explains that Hashem caused these deaths so that the Canaanites would be preoccupied with burying their loved ones and wouldn't pay attention to the spies. But instead of appreciating Hashem's kindness, the spies came to the opposite conclusion, that Hashem had brought His people to a land that would destroy them.

Although the spies were terribly wrong, their report contained some truth. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai teaches that Hashem gave the Jewish People three gifts: The Land of Israel, the Torah, and the World to Come – but that all three can only be acquired through suffering (Berachot 5a). Anyone who has made *Aliyah* can attest to the truth of this statement. To build a new life in Israel, new *olim* must not only navigate complicated paperwork and frustrating bureaucracy but also conquer their fears and anxieties. But this “suffering” benefits us in the long run, for it is human nature only to appreciate what we work hard to acquire. If something comes too easily, we don't value it.

Is the Land of Israel the ideal place to reach our potential or the “Land that eats its inhabitants”?

Rebbe Nachman interprets the spies' statement in a startlingly original way, empowering us to integrate these seemingly opposite perceptions.

He explains that when we eat food, it becomes a part of us. The food itself is transformed and elevated, remade as cells of our bodies.

The same is true of Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish people. When we describe Eretz Yisrael as “a land that consumes its inhabitants,” it means that when we enter Eretz Yisrael, we become one with the land. We are elevated and permeated by the essence of Eretz Yisrael until we are transformed into the same holy substance. Yes, living in Eretz Yisrael challenges us, but it doesn't drain us of life; it nourishes us and elevates us through the most profound connection.

This connection enables us to cultivate a level of faith that we cannot otherwise reach. *שֶׁכֶּן אֶרֶץ נִרְעָה אֶמְוֶנָה*, “dwelling in the land nourishes faith” (Tehillim 37:3). Faith gives us the energy and courage to keep going. Every minute we spend in Eretz Yisrael pushes us beyond our previous limits, growing our capacity for connection and empowering us to explore our potential.

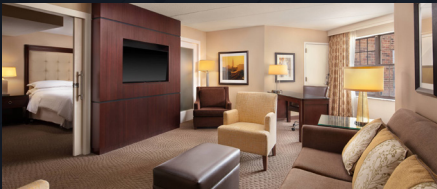
May we find the courage to embrace the challenge of Eretz Yisrael and be transformed by the Holy Land!

**Shoshana Judelman** teaches Chassidut for Shiviti Women's Institute in Jerusalem and in the Shirat David Community in Efrat, and guides at Yad Vashem. Shoshana holds a BA in History and an MA in Jewish History. She lived around the world, including in New Jersey, Western Australia and Pennsylvania before settling in Israel in 2013.



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# One on One

## with Hillel Halkin

Hillel Halkin is an American-born Israeli translator, biographer, literary critic, and novelist who has lived in Israel since 1970. The author of celebrated biographies of Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi and Vladimir Jabotinsky, Halkin has translated Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye the Dairyman*, and prominent Hebrew and Israeli novelists, among them Yosef Haim Brenner, S. Y. Agnon, Shulamith Hareven, A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, and Meir Shalev. Most recently, Halkin is the author of *The Lady of Hebrew and Her Lovers of Zion* (Toby Press, 2020), in which Halkin introduces English readers to many of the greatest Hebrew authors of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Last month, HaMizrachi Editor Rabbi Elie Mischel spoke with Halkin about his love of writing, why he is drawn to Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, and the uniqueness of Vladimir Jabotinsky.



**There's been nothing like it in human history. A small and ancient people loses its land and forgets how to speak its language; wanders defenselessly for hundreds, thousands of years throughout the world with its G-d and sacred books; meets with contumely, persecution, violence, dispossession, banishment, mass murder; refuses to give up; refuses to surrender its faith; continues to believe that it will one day be restored to the land it lost; manages in the end, by dint of its own efforts, against all odds, to gather itself from the four corners of the earth and return there; learns again to speak the language of its old books; learns again to bear arms and defend itself; wrests its new-old home from the people that had replaced it; entrenches itself there; builds; fructifies; fortifies; repulses the enemies surrounding it; grows and prospers in the face of all threats. Had it not happened, could it have been imagined? Would anyone have believed it possible?**

Hillel Halkin, *Letters to an American Jewish Friend: A Zionist's Polemic*

**It's an honor to speak with you today! Let's begin with your family history. You are a grandson of Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, one of the most critical figures in Mizrahi's history, and a great-grandson of the Netziv, Rosh Yeshivah of the famous Volozhin Yeshivah. How did your family background influence your own life path?**

It's something I hardly ever talk about to anyone, for a simple reason: If I tell an observant Jew I descend from Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, they think, "what happened to you?" So it's a *yichus* I generally keep "undeclared."

But the second thing, and this goes deeper, is that I have a different kind of *yichus* on my father's side. My father's brother was a well-known poet, Shimon Halkin, and my father's cousin, Shmuel Halkin, was a renowned Yiddish poet. The fact is, I identify more closely with my father's family than I do with my

mother's family. This is partly because it is a family of creative writers and partly because I knew them better; they all lived near us in New York. I unfortunately only met my mother's father, Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, one time in my life, when I was a small boy. Also, my father's family came from White Russia, which was Chabad territory, while my mother's family, the Netziv and Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, came from Lithuania, which was arch Mitnagdic territory. Although there is a bit of both the *Mitnagid* and the Chassid in me, I feel closer to the spirit of Chabad than to *Mitnagdic* Talmudism.

#### **What led you to make Aliyah in 1970?**

Both sides of my family were strongly Zionist. All the years we were living in New York, my father suffered great guilt for not living in Israel. It really weighed on him. My first book, *Letters*

*to an American Jewish Friend: A Zionist Polemic*, is dedicated to my father, for my Zionism comes from him. Ultimately, my parents made their long planned *Aliyah* when my father retired. Their *Aliyah* was well thought out in advance, unlike mine; my wife and I made a spontaneous decision, very quickly and impulsively, to move to Israel.

Although I grew up in a very Zionist home, as I grew older in my high school and college years, I developed a very strong American identity as well. I experienced great conflict between these two sides of myself. Like many American Jews who settle in Israel, but unlike most American Jews who haven't yet made *Aliyah*, I really felt I had to choose one or the other.

It was always clear to me that if I stayed in America, I would not partake at all in Jewish life. Jewish life in America made





Hillel Halkin's grandfather, Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, at the age of twenty. (PHOTO: COURTESY OF PROFESSOR MEIR BAR-ILAN, GRANDSON OF RABBI MEIR BAR-ILAN)

no sense to me, really, and it doesn't to this day. I was going to move to Israel to live as a Jew, or I would stay in America and live as an American – it was an existential choice. And when it dawned on me that I was too much of a Jew not to live a Jewish life, I really had no choice but to move to Israel.

**Most religious Jews living in America and elsewhere in the Diaspora, who spend so much of their lives studying Torah and doing mitzvot, would probably disagree with your assessment of Diaspora Jewish life. When you say that you couldn't live in America as a Jew, what do you mean?**

The existence of the State of Israel represents not only the greatest hope for the Jewish people, but also, short of the exodus in Egypt, the greatest adventure the Jewish people have ever been a part of. I don't question the feelings of American Jews; they may feel more Jewish than I do. But you have here in Israel, an airplane flight away, the greatest adventure in history happening – right now! It's the ultimate test of the Jewish people, of what we're capable of and what we're not. And so

to say, "Oh, that's wonderful, but I don't want to be part of it, I'm happy here, let the adventure take place without me" – to me, it's incomprehensible. If you really, really care with every fiber of your being about being Jewish, you would want to be in the place where Judaism and Jewishness are being developed in a way unlike anywhere else in the world.

**Your grandfather founded Religious Zionist newspapers in Germany, the United States and ultimately in Israel, where his paper, HaTzofeh, became the voice of Mizrahi for 70 years. In your own career, you have also used the power of the written word in support of Zionism. What draws you to writing? What have you sought to accomplish through your writing?**

Well, writing is something I do better than I do anything else. There are a lot of things I'm not good at, even though I wish I were. But I've always had a knack for writing. In high school we had a class called 'shop,' where they taught us mechanical things, like how to use saws and drills. I was terrible at that. But then I took a creative writing

class in high school where suddenly I had tools that I really knew how to use – commas, periods, semicolons, sentences and paragraphs. I knew what to do with them! So that's one thing that made me a writer. But I also read enormously as a young person; I was always reading as a boy. Much of my life has been lived in books – in books that I read and the books I've wanted to write, many of which I haven't written yet.

**In your biography of Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, you didn't have much to work with; a few letters, his poetry and the Kuzari. It's clear that you invested an extraordinary amount of time and effort to carefully read these materials and create a compelling picture of his life and personality. What is it that drew you to Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi? What can we learn from him today, a millennia after his death?**

Jonathan Rosen, the editor of Nextbook Press' Jewish Encounter Series, approached me about 10 years ago and asked me to write a book for the Jewish Biographies series they were publishing. He said I should pick my favorite Jew. I didn't have to think for too long before I chose Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi. Although I had read the *Kuzari*, I didn't know much about him at that point.

On the front cover of my first book, *Letters to an American Jewish Friend*, there is a motto, which is a quote from the *Kuzari* – a passage I'm sure you know. It's a passage where the Rabbi and the King of the Kuzars are talking, and the Rabbi is carrying on about the Jewish people's love for the Land of Israel and how important Israel is in Judaism. I wish I had been there to see the King's expression, as the King says to the Rabbi, "Who are you kidding? All of you Jews talk about 'Eretz Yisrael this, Eretz Yisrael that,' but none of you go to live there! Almost none of you have ever been there and you don't take the trouble to visit it. Who do you think you're fooling with all this talk of the Land of Israel?" The Rabbi is taken aback; for the first time in the book, the King has really thrown him. His answer is, in Ibn Tibbon's translation, וּבִשְׁתֵּי מִלִּיךָ, כִּזְזִיר, "you have shamed me, O' King of Kuzar!" The Rabbi knows that the King is right. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi understood that the Jewish people's love for



Israel was never strong enough to get them to actually go to Israel.

If you look at the pattern of Jewish migrations through history, after Israel ceases to be a sovereign Jewish nation, Jews go and settle everywhere in the world – *everywhere!* Everywhere, that is, except for one tiny country – Israel! Until the 19th century, the Jewish population of Israel was tiny. You can argue that Jews didn't move to Israel for economic reasons, as Palestine never had the developed economy that other countries had. But you can't help but come to the conclusion that for some deep, unconscious reason, Jews avoided living in this country. Perhaps it scared them, or was too much of a burden. Perhaps they were afraid that when they actually came to the Holy Land, they wouldn't be able to see its holiness; that it was better to imagine it from afar than to try to experience it when you were there.

One of the things that drew me to Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, besides being

a wonderful poet, is that he is the first Jew on record to come to Israel out of a deep existential need. And he does it most incredibly. He was a famous man, a great poet living when the Jewish community honored and adored its poets; he was the uncrowned king of Spanish Jewry! And then, at about the age of 70 or close to it, he gets up, all by himself – no one offers to come with him – and he goes to the port and sets sail for Palestine via Egypt. He is by himself, with no knowledge of where he is going, and no one he knows will greet him when he arrives. He knows that he is going to a tiny and impoverished Jewish community ravaged by the Crusades. What this man did is incredible, and he has deeply moved me.

I wanted to find out more about him, but our information is sparse. He wrote many poems, and a lot of them have an autobiographical basis; without these poems, I couldn't possibly have written his biography. Much of what we know about him was unearthed in the

Cairo Geniza, information that no one knew about previously. In that sense, we know more about Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi today than anyone did for the last thousand years.

I've had a lot of luck with biographies. I've written two biographies in my life, about Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi and Jabotinsky. Generally, from my experience, the more you know about a writer or any great figure, the less you like them. You begin to see their warts and faults and the unpleasant aspects of their personality. But with Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi and Jabotinsky, it was the exact opposite – the more I got to know them, the more I saw them up close and understood their surroundings, the more I came to love them! Both of those biographies turned out to be works of love about men I came to revere.

#### What is it that drew you to Jabotinsky?

I grew up in a Labor Zionist home; I went to Labor Zionist summer camp. And so Jabotinsky was both an

# S'DEI CHEMED

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5 weeks of touring in

# ISRAEL

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**inspiration**

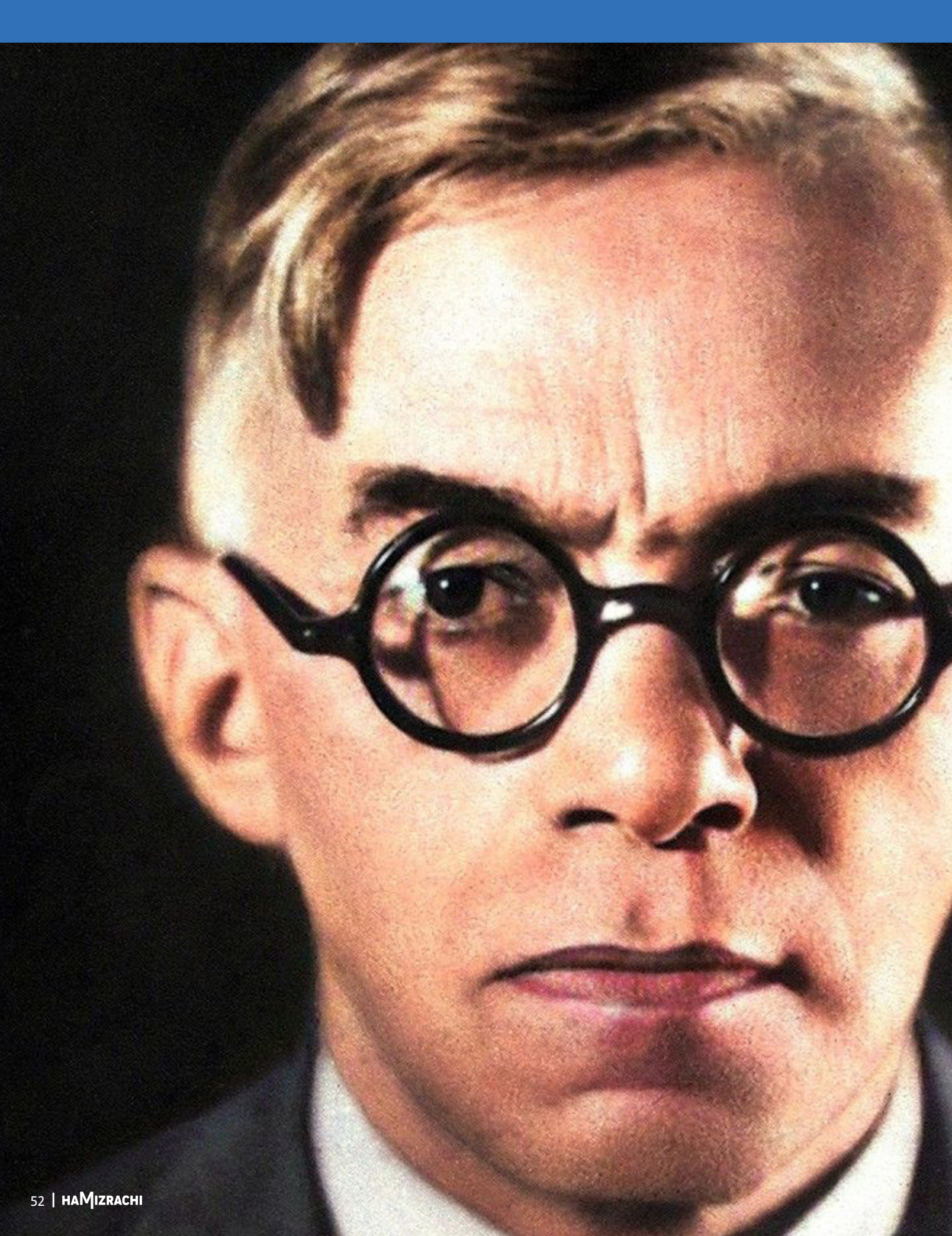


**adventure**



**excitement**









unknown and a suspect figure to me because he was anathema to Labor Zionism – and for good reason! But then, in the 1990s, I was asked by the New Republic to write a review of one of Jabotinsky's novels that was recently translated from the original Russian. I read the book and I was bowled over – it was an excellent, wonderful novel! I suddenly realized I was reading a great writer. This was a man who was also a leading Zionist politician, a pivotal figure in twentieth century history, and I realized I knew so little about him. When the editor of Yale University read my review of Jabotinsky's novel and asked me to write a biography of him, I agreed – and completely fell in love with him.

**Jabotinsky is a fascinating personality. He was a secular Jew but also held many opinions similar to those of Religious Zionism.**

Jabotinsky himself makes a journey towards religion, which he never entirely completed. He began his adult life as a staunch secularist and remained so for the rest of his life in certain ways. He was far too much of a free spirit to accept any discipline imposed on him by others, except when he chose to impose that discipline himself, by himself. I don't think he would ever have accepted the discipline of Orthodox Judaism.

But towards the end of his life, and this is something that is relatively little known, he began to draw closer to religion and the religious parties. This happened for two reasons. In the 1930s, Jabotinsky was involved in a life and death battle with the Zionist left. Jabotinsky, of course, was the leader of the Zionist right, and on the whole, he was losing this battle. In the beginning, this battle was fought within the Zionist Organization, and Jabotinsky's party was constantly losing all the Zionist Organization elections. Eventually, he pulled his party out of the Zionist Organization and started his own organization. At that point, he realized that his natural allies against the Zionist left were the religious parties – the Mizrachi and the Agudah – so he tried to develop an alliance with them and

draw them into his new Zionist organization. This was a purely pragmatic decision.

But at the same time, there's something beyond pragmatism involved here. When you read some of Jabotinsky's writings and letters from the 1930s, you see a growing appreciation of religion and the discipline of religious life that wasn't there before. The 1930s was a period when the world was in total turmoil. There were two great and monstrously evil powers, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, threatening to take over everywhere. Both were militant, godless, and anti-religious ideologies. Jabotinsky, of course, was horrified by both of them. He began to realize that, ultimately, religion is the only bulwark against this kind of madness; it is the only thing that can give a human being the spine to stand up to extremist ideologies. He began to see that a religious grounding is necessary to stand up for ultimate principles and transcendent truths. Only religion can give man the strength to act as he should in crucial moments. He began writing about man's need for religion, even if he did not possess that religious faith. Intellectually, emotionally and politically, he began to understand the importance of religion.

Occasionally, Jabotinsky would say things that sounded astonishing coming from the mouth and pen of a liberal and freethinking Jew. In 1938, he wrote an essay in a Yiddish language Warsaw Jewish newspaper in which he suggested that when an independent Jewish state was eventually founded, smoking should be forbidden on Shabbat in public spaces. He believed that religious truths are so much a part of Jewish history and who we are as a people that we simply cannot abandon them; he couldn't conceive of a Jewish state without them! Jabotinsky was a great believer in pageantry, ritual and public ceremony; Betar, the youth movement he founded, had a great deal of it. The Zionist left created all sorts of ersatz rituals, but Jabotinsky believed that only Judaism could provide the ritual that would bind the nation together in a Jewish state. He wanted the Jewish state to be Jewish, even if he struggled with those beliefs. ■

Jewish Revisionist Zionist leader, author, poet, orator and soldier, Ze'ev Jabotinsky  
(PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN)





RUACH YISRAEL

# A Sefer Torah from Plastic Bottles

Sivan Rahav Meir

**S**hlomi Cohen wrote to me the following with a photo attached: “For three years my son and his classmates have been working towards an incredible goal. Their *yeshivah* high school, Ort Ma’alot in the Upper Galilee, was lacking a Torah scroll, and the students decided they were going to do something about it. Under the guidance of their mentor, Rabbi Avi Cohen, they decided to finance the acquisition of a Torah scroll from pocket money and small donations, but mostly from plastic bottle recycling.<sup>1</sup>

“The students collected thousands upon thousands of bottles, to the point where all the supermarkets in Ma’alot couldn’t handle the quantity! A special truck from a recycling conglomerate stopped regularly at the home of Rabbi Avi in order to load up the vast quantities of plastic bottles that had been collected.

“Although many people offered financial assistance, the students refused to accept large contributions. They wanted to feel the effort of the project, the process of adding one shekel to another, in the most literal way. They felt that if a wealthy individual would



contribute tens of thousands of shekels, it would ruin the project. This was *their* project; they had to earn it.

“Just before the students graduated and embarked on different paths – some going to a *yeshivah*, others to *mechinah* (pre-military academy) or regular army service – the students, their parents and the residents of Ma’alot and the surrounding areas emotionally

welcomed a new Torah scroll to the Ort Ma’alot *yeshivah*.

“As a parent of one of the students who participated in the project, I feel that all of us learned a lesson about patience, looking far ahead, and also about the honor that a Torah scroll deserves. And in a certain sense, this Torah scroll serves as an additional diploma, even greater than the certificate the students received at their graduation.”

<sup>1</sup> In Israel, recyclable containers can be returned to a store and exchanged for the money that the container is worth.



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**Sivan Rahav Meir** is a media personality and lecturer. She lives in Jerusalem with her husband, Yedidya, and their five children, and serves as World Mizrachi’s Scholar-in-Residence. She is a primetime anchor on *Channel 2 News*, has a column in Israel’s largest newspaper, *Yediot Acharonot*, and has a weekly radio show on *Galei Tzahal* (Army Radio). Sivan was included by *Forbes* magazine in their list of the 50 most influential women in Israel, and listed by the *Jerusalem Post* as one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world.





# My Nephew Never Liked Goodbyes

A tribute to Eli Kay, hy”d, who was murdered by a Hamas terrorist in the Old City of Jerusalem on November 21, 2021

Rabbi Eli Levin

**M**y nephew Eli never liked long goodbyes. When we traveled to see each other, he preferred a quick farewell hug rather than dwelling on the departure. His final ‘goodbye’ when he was murdered in the Old City of Jerusalem took just a matter of seconds, but the legacy of his short life will last forever.

It is tragic that Eli was murdered in a senseless act of terror. He was a young man on a dynamic journey. Passionate about exploring different aspects of life, he was a keen musician, talented at water sports, a hugely intelligent student and a loyal friend to so many.

On graduating school in South Africa he made *Aliyah*, studied at *yeshivah*, served as a paratrooper in the IDF, took up his first job which was in agriculture,

became a guide at the Western Wall and had just been accepted to study at IDC with aspirations to become a diplomat.

Above all Eli was a person who valued life and all human beings. The depth of the tragedy is that given the chance, he would have befriended his attacker.

Through the tears and outrage that we have experienced from thousands, we hold tight to the belief that the Jewish

response to hatred is not hate but education and tolerance. We are asking people to do something in Eli’s honor and tolerance is a good place to start.

Eli enjoyed his daily coffee from the Jerusalem Arab café he frequented. When the vendor noticed that Eli had not visited his store for a few days, he went to find him at the Western Wall.

Alas, he won’t find him there now, but the values of Eli Kay’s life will always be etched into the history of the stones.

● Originally published in the Jewish Chronicle.

**Rabbi Eli Levin** is one of the rabbinic team and executive director of South Hampstead Synagogue in London, UK.







# Realpolitik Should Guide Israeli-Russian Relations

Professor Efraim Inbar

One of the first foreign leaders Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met was the Russian President Vladimir Putin, on October 22, 2021 in Sochi.

Today's Russia is no longer the superpower that was the Soviet Union. It is economically weak and dependent upon energy prices. But it still is a very important country. It has a large nuclear arsenal, and it does not hesitate to use force in foreign affairs (for example, in occupying Crimea). Its energy exports serve as levers of influence internationally. Moreover, it has a significant presence in the Middle East, a region that Russia views as its backyard.

Today, Russia sells arms to Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and several other Arab countries. Egypt has purchased two Russian nuclear power reactors, which will make Egypt dependent on Russian nuclear fuel for several decades. In Syria, the Russian air force is fighting to preserve Bashar Assad's regime, proving to everyone that Russia does not abandon its allies – in contrast to the US. Assad has rewarded Moscow by

providing Russian forces a naval base in Tartus and an air base in Hmeymim. In general, Russia seeks to maintain good relations with all parties in the Middle East, including Iran and Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, Turkey, and Iraq.

In October 2021, Israel and Russia marked the 30th anniversary of the resumption of relations between the two countries. It is important to recall several important historical facts in understanding the relationship. The Jewish people have a moral debt to Russia (formerly, the Soviet Union) which fought fiercely against the Nazis during World War II. The Red Army liberated many Jews from Nazi death camps. The Soviet Union voted in favor of the establishment of the State of Israel at the UN in 1947 (it did so primarily to push Britain out of the region). It enabled the transfer of weapons from Czechoslovakia to Israel during Israel's War of Independence.

This sympathetic stance towards Israel was replaced by a distinctly pro-Arab orientation in the 1950s. Israel and Russia were on opposing sides during

the Cold War. The Soviet Union became the arms supplier for most Arab countries and trained their armies, seeking influence in the Middle East at the expense of Western powers. In the wake of the 1967 Six Day War, the Soviet Union led most Eastern bloc countries into severing diplomatic ties with Israel and moved to consistently vote against Israel in all international institutions. After the end of the Cold War, Russia reestablished diplomatic relations with Israel and posted an ambassador in Tel Aviv.

Cordial relations followed. Russia opened its gates for the Jews to leave. Occasionally, Israel refrained from voting on anti-Russian resolutions at international fora. Israel even sold Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAVs) to Russia. In an unexpected, unprecedented and curious move, Moscow recognized West Jerusalem to be Israel's capital (April 2017), making Russia the first country in the world to extend such a recognition to any part of the city. In parallel, Russia declared that the eastern part of the city should be the capital of a Palestinian state.





President Putin sees Israel as a solid advanced country with impressive military capabilities, willing to use force to attain state interests. He also acknowledges that Israel is a key US ally in the region and even sees Israel as a potential tool for influence over the United States. A reflection of this attitude was a trilateral meeting of national security advisors from the three countries, held in Israel in June 2019. The three senior officials discussed regional and bilateral and trilateral matters, another sign of Russia's desire to be considered a significant power on par with the US.

Unlike some of his compatriots, Putin has a positive attitude towards Jews, reportedly due to childhood experiences. Moreover, he regards the 1.5 million native Russian-speaking Israelis as a Russian diaspora to be cultivated. Israel is considered the world's only part-Russophone country outside of the former Soviet states. The Russian language is the third-most widely spoken first language in Israel after Hebrew and Arabic; Israel has the third-largest number of Russian speakers outside of the post-Soviet states and the highest proportion of the total population.

Israel is the only country in the Middle East where the Russian language and culture are vibrant. In addition, over 100,000 Israeli citizens live in Russia, with 80,000 Israelis living in Moscow.

The first meeting between Putin and Naftali Bennett appears to have gone well. Putin missed the previous Israeli leader, Binyamin Netanyahu, who he had a good working relationship with. Yet relations between states transcend personal chemistry. Filling Netanyahu's big shoes is not easy, but Bennett has likely learned much from working closely with Netanyahu.

The dialogue with Russia and Putin should use a *realpolitik* language. This is the language that Putin understands well and is comfortable with. An attempt to speak in American liberal clichés is doomed to failure.

The central meeting of Israeli and Russian interests is in Syria. Moscow wants to maintain the Assad regime because it needs bases on the Mediterranean shore. Russia understands that Israel has the power to rock the boat and undermine Assad's rule. So Russia has good reason to be sensitive to Israel's

concerns about Iranian entrenchment in Syria. Like Israel, Moscow dislikes a strong Iranian influence in Damascus. This explains why, until now, Russia has allowed Israel to strike at Iranian targets in Syria. It is essential for Bennett that Israel preserves this quiet understanding.

At the same time, Israel-Russia understandings on the Iranian nuclear issue should not be expected. Russia sees a strong Iran as a useful factor that weakens the regional status of the US, which is Russia's main rival in the international arena. Although Russia does not desire a nuclear Iran, it prefers other nations take steps to prevent such a scenario.

The bilateral relationship between Russia and Israel is complex and fragile. Jerusalem should have good communication channels with Moscow in the Hobbesian world we live in.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett speaks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Russia, in October 2021.  
(PHOTO: EVGENY BİYATOV/THE KREMLIN)

**Professor Efraim Inbar** is President of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS).





## ALIYAH DIARIES

# A Scarf is Worth A Thousand Words

Learning Hebrew helps, but becoming Israeli is really all about how you tie your scarf

Kally Rubin Kislowicz

I've been listening to the music from *In the Heights*, the Broadway hit turned movie musical that kept Lin-Manuel Miranda busy before *Hamilton*. It's a show about Spanish-speaking immigrants trying to get by in New York. I love everything about the soundtrack. The rhythms, the lyrics, the story that describes the pride and the struggle that arise from being born somewhere else. And even though I have no rhythm and did not leave the Dominican Republic searching for a better life, when I listen to this music, I feel seen.

I moved to Israel when I was 36 years old knowing full well what challenges to expect, and with the clear understanding that I would never fully become Israeli. I accepted those terms, hoping that the rewards of raising my children in the Jewish homeland would far outweigh my temporary feelings of inadequacy and moments of embarrassment. To be fair, at the time I didn't realize that by "temporary" and "moments," I actually meant "constant" and "unending periods." But I regret nothing.

Until recently, I imagined I was adjusting to life in Israel rather well. I pepper

my conversation with Hebrew phrases. My wardrobe is slowly transitioning away from Old Navy and Target towards Fox and Chameleon. My four fingers automatically press against my thumb to signal a range of things from "Hold on just a second" to "You idiot, stop honking at me while my Waze recalculates!"

And then, without warning, my friends betrayed me and made me see myself in a new light. Little by little, they started tying their headscarves like Israelis. Now, I am a simple just-tie-a-knot-in-the-back-and-go-about-your-day kind of girl. It's a look that worked for me in the old country. But Israeli women have transformed the scarf into a multi-layered, three-dimensional work of fashion mastery. They tie it on the top, they twist, they add height, and they look incredible. For the past five years I was quite content to simply admire them while they stood in front of me in line at the cheese counter, wondering with awe about the physics and the mechanics of their artful displays. But at a wedding over the summer, I noticed that in a mixed American/Israeli crowd, my immigrant friends were blending and passing as natives. They had wrapped

and twisted themselves into looking like fabulous sabras. I suddenly felt like their greenhorn cousin, Balki Bartokomous.

A few weeks later I mustered up the courage to try this new look. I twisted and wrapped until I came up with something that I deemed passably Israeli. I skipped out the door to work (slowly, mind you, so as not to disrupt the temperamental structure on my head). I felt good and glamorous, like I had unlocked yet another achievement on this long path to acculturation.

When I got to work an Israeli coworker stopped me in the hall.

"Did you get a haircut?" she asked.

I told her I had not.

"New clothes?" she wondered.

"No," I said.

"Well, something is different about you. What is it?"

So I confided in her that I had tied my scarf differently. "I look more Israeli, right?"

She looked me up and down with sad eyes, touched me gently on the





shoulder, and her mouth said, “Sure you do,” while her pitying glance said, “poor, poor, Balki...”

In the opening song from *In the Heights*, there is a line that says, “In the Heights, I hang my flag up on display; it reminds me that I came from miles away.” I love that line, even though it is the opposite of my experience. I don’t need to fly the American flag to remember where I came from. I am reminded every time I open my mouth.

And while I am fiercely proud of my origins and journey, I still often find myself wishing I could pass for a local. I am aware that as soon as I start a conversation with an Israeli, they will immediately know that I am not from here, that I am simply another American who will say the wrong words and bruise their ears with my accent. My only chance to control the narrative is the five seconds before the conversation, which is why the scarf has taken on such importance. In those seconds, I need my scarf to say all the things that I cannot – that I am a proud Israeli woman, that I am whimsical and fascinating, and that I am not at all about to mess up my cheese order.

When you immigrate in your 30s, you are unlikely to ever thoroughly blend. You will forever be a hybrid, a half-blood. At best, you will be a (whimsical) centaur with qualities from both worlds. At worst, you will be a middle-aged, arhythmic American lady who is trying too hard to impress her coworkers and her traitorous friends. And sometimes, you will be just a girl, standing before the Israeli cheese counter boy, trying to buy shredded instead of sliced.

So wrap that scarf, hang your flag, and crank up the music. Speak your accented truth. Dance out of sync to your own drum. Remember – it was Balki Bartokomous who gave us the Dance of Joy! You are an immigrant. You are full of whimsy. And cheese. In every language and culture, that means you are winning.

● Headscarf illustrations are from Atur Mitzchech (*Sifriyat Beit El*), and are used here with permission of the publisher.

**Kally Rubin Kislowicz** made Aliyah from Cleveland, Ohio, to Efrat in 2016.





## FOOD FROM ISRAEL

# Shivat HaMinim Salad

Naomi Nachman

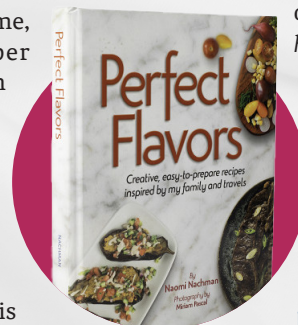


**H**appy birthday to the trees! The 15th of Shevat is the Rosh Hashanah (beginning of the year) for the trees. Growing up in Australia, where January is summertime, I fondly remember planting trees with my Tanach class on Tu BiShvat.

Several years ago, while on a visit to Israel during Tu BiShvat, I created this festive Tu BiShvat salad using all of the *Shivat HaMinim* (seven species of Israel). These ancient agricultural products – wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates – are all still grown in Israel. References to

each of them can be found throughout *Tanach*.

I love planting fruits and vegetables with my own children each spring, which highlights the interconnection of nature, *Tanach* and *halachah*.



**Naomi Nachman** started her own kosher personal chef business, *The Aussie Gourmet*. She is sought after to give cooking demonstrations and produce kosher *Chopped* competitions, where she shares her immense enthusiasm for food. [naominaachman.com](http://naominaachman.com)

the **aussie gourmet**  
Naomi Nachman

## Shivat HaMinim Salad

Pareve

**Ingredients (yields 8 servings)**

- 2/3 cup barley
- Oil, for deep frying
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 5 cups arugula or spinach
- 1 cup green grapes, halved
- 1/2 cup pomegranate seeds
- 8 dried figs, quartered

### Dressing

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons silan
- Juice of 2 limes
- 1/2 teaspoon whole grain mustard
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

### Preparation

- Cook barley according to package directions. Set aside to cool.
- Heat oil in a small pot over medium heat.

Toss 1/2 cup cooked barley with flour. Add to hot oil; fry for a few minutes, until golden and crispy. Set aside.

Prepare the dressing: Place all dressing ingredients into a small bowl. Whisk until combined.

Assemble salad: Place greens, grapes, pomegranate seeds, figs, remaining cooked barley into a large bowl. Pour dressing over; toss to combine. Garnish with fried barley.

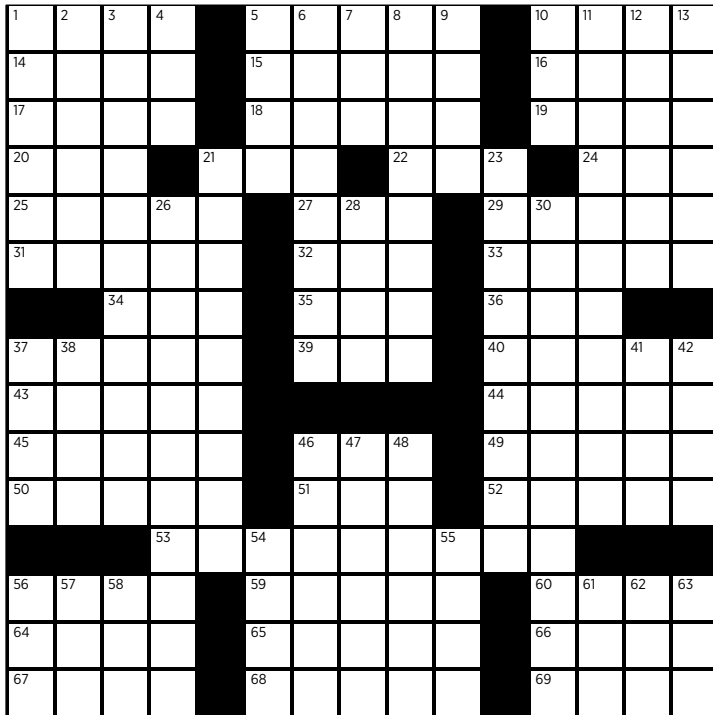
● Recipe by Naomi Nachman from *Perfect Flavors*, shared with permission by Artscroll/Mesorah Publications.



# HAMIZRACHI *Tu BiShvat*

## CROSSWORD

**BY YONI GLATT**  
AUTHOR OF KOSHER CROSSWORDS



### Across

1. America and Planet (Abbr.)
5. Where Elks gather.
10. American Jewish teen organization.
14. Side squared, for a square
15. Shapes of Australian football fields.
16. "Do not correct a fool \_\_\_ will hate you..." (King Solomon).
17. Pitcher Hideo.
18. Agricultural mitzvah.
19. Ford and Holland.
20. "Angry Birds," for one.
21. Impair.
22. They make technophobes nervous, for short.
24. Thor's wife in mythology.
25. United alternative.
27. What's needed to connect smartphones to networks, for short.
29. "...I know that a person's life is not \_\_\_ control..." (Jeremiah 10:23).
31. \_\_\_ HaShalom.
32. He did great work with Kirby.
33. Confine to jail.

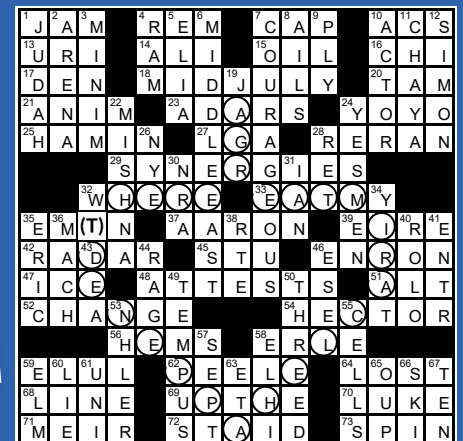
34. My in Marseilles.
35. Nickname for comic David.
36. Revival effort: Abbr.
37. Greek colonnades.
39. "Quiet down!" sounds.
40. Pays attention to.
43. T. Jefferson's first V.P.
44. Major Hurricane of 2011.
45. (Tony) Danza role on "Taxi".
46. Challah go-with, for some.
49. Fermented apple juice.
50. Car starter in Bond films?
51. Word between "Based" and "True Story".
52. Waste maker.
53. Objective for those observing the mitzvot in this puzzle... or something to kick through the center of the grid?
56. Display.
59. Aerodynamic.
60. "Galgat Mistovev" singer Raichel.
64. Dark drink.
65. One who might observe the mitzvot in this puzzle.
66. Genesis creator?
67. Bob who heads Disney.
68. Fitting description for one who uses Etsy.
69. Yom that, ironically, doesn't go by quickly (for many).
4. Paulo preceder.
5. Manilow maiden.
6. Stereotypical farming garb.
7. Black Hills terr.
8. Grain gatherers.
9. What Darius's mom might have been called for short.
10. Ending to many a lame joke.
11. Creates Kilayim (mixed species).
12. Agricultural mitzvah.
13. "It's a \_\_\_ me" (words contestants hope to hear from Simon Cowell).
21. Agricultural mitzvah.
23. Agricultural mitzvah.
26. Book that recommends putting the sun in your opponent's eyes.
28. Agricultural mitzvah.
30. Supporter of the British Empire.
37. Jewish grandfather, as some spell it.
38. Vague spots on a schedule, briefly.
41. Letter shaped mesh device for collecting plankton.
42. Bone-dry.
46. Budget alternative.
47. Like one receiving forgiveness during the Jubilee year.
48. Some doctors still wear them.
54. She, in Italy.
55. "Fine".
56. Geol., e.g.
57. Treif description of a selfish individual.
58. Matador's accolade.
61. Former NFL star Bryant.
62. Back, in a way.
63. Site of many '60s tours.

### Down

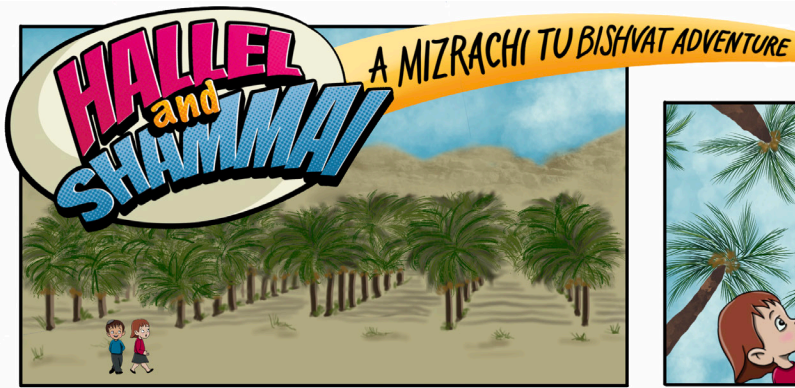
1. Its oldest synagogue is Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Westmount.
2. Impart motion to.
3. Locale where crops would be brought, long ago.



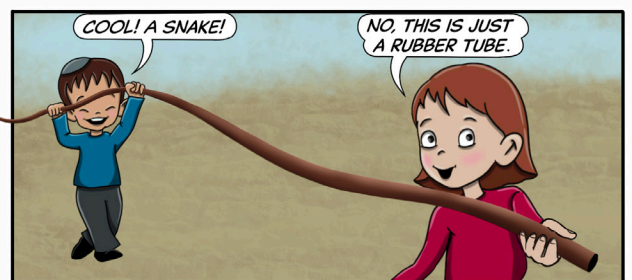
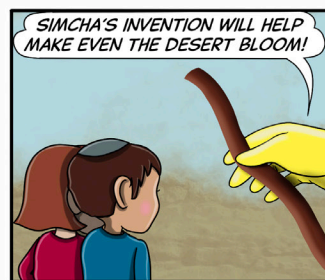
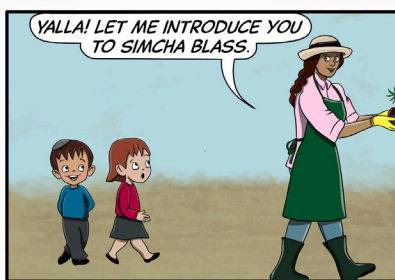
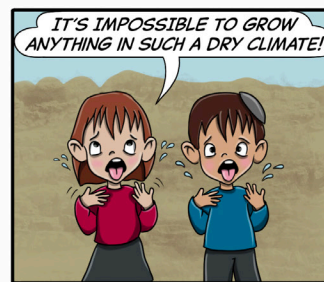
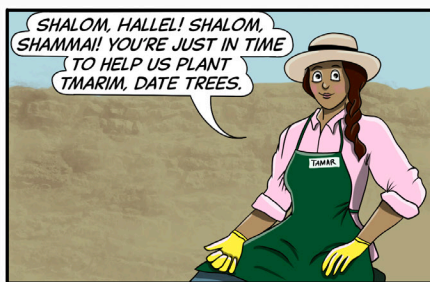
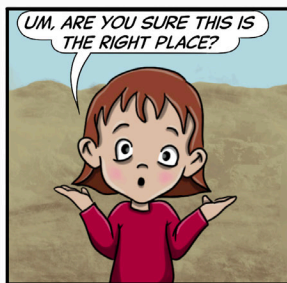
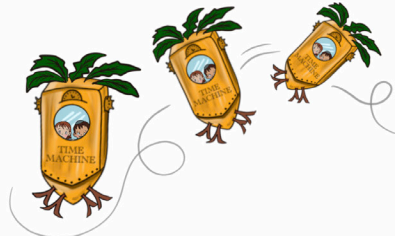
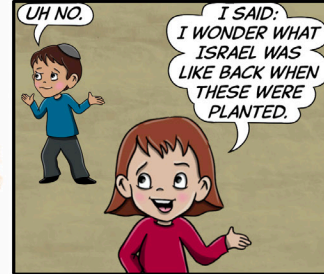
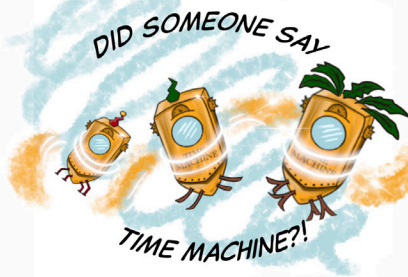
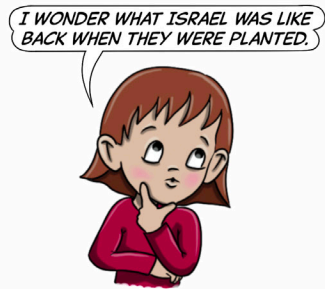
Solutions to the  
Chanukah edition puzzle



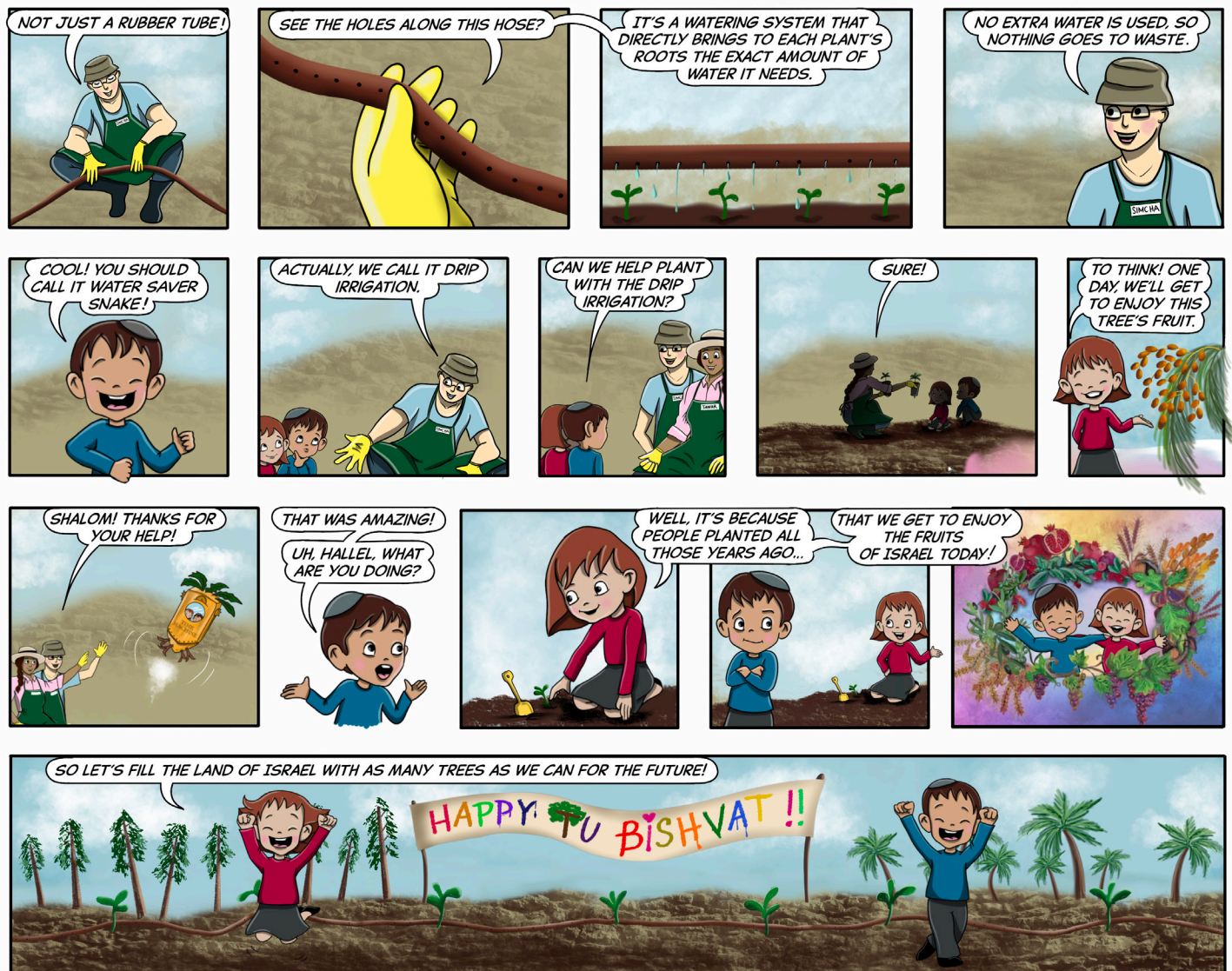




WRITTEN BY SHIRA GREENSPAN  
ILLUSTRATED BY Yael Harris Resnick  
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DISCLAIMER: No actual trees were planted in the making of this adventure due to the Shemitta year. Hallel and Shammai are just very talented actors.

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