



## Rosh Hashana September 25, 2014 / 1 Tishrei 5774

### Protect vs. Use

We constantly wrestle with large issues – likely none as large as the earth and the environment. Our actions affect our personal health and the health of our communities. FJMC is taking the lead in encouraging clubs and communities to run innovative programs which clearly impact the environment.

### Shmittah: Humans in Balance with Earth

The next Shmittah year will begin on Rosh Hashanah 5775, (September 24, 2014).

*“And six years you will sow your land, and gather in the land’s produce; but the seventh year you will release it from work and abandon it, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beast of the field shall eat. In like manner you will deal with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.” (Exodus 23:10-11)*

Shmittah, literally translated as the ‘year of release,’ and more widely known as the Sabbatical Year, is a biblical Jewish tradition, which, once every seven years, simultaneously re-adjusted agriculture and commerce to ensure an equitable, just and healthy society. The year of Shmittah was a time when agricultural lands were collectively left fallow. The Earth is not merely some resource to be used and abused. If we want to live on the land, it is our responsibility to let it rest.

The laws and rulings relating to the Shemithah year are numerous and complex, but there are four general commandments in the Torah from which they are derived.

1. The first commandment is that the land should rest, as it says “and the land shall rest a Shabbat to Hashem.” Leviticus 25: 1-7 Though this commandment is directed at the land, it is humanity’s responsibility to return all of creation to proper relationship with G-d. Through our refraining from planting, pruning, plowing, harvesting or any other form of working the land, the land is allowed to rest and move towards achieving the union of Shabbat. Vayikra 25:2
2. The second commandment is to declare all seventh-year produce hefker (ownerless) and free for all to take and enjoy.

3. The third general commandment is to sanctify all seventh-year produce. We are prohibited to do any business whatsoever with the produce and obligated to ensure that it is consumed properly and equitably and does not go to waste.
4. The fourth commandment requires us to absolve all loans from one Jew to another.

The conscious and meticulous observance of these laws and their rabbinic application expands the awareness of humankind as to the true nature of reality. The mandated abstinence from attempting to physically and commercially control the land and the positive commandment to give up all sense of ownership of its produce, free us from the enslavement of the constant pursuit of material goods and wealth and the idolatrous illusion that they serve as a testament to our existence. Additionally, the Sabbatical year provides ample time to contemplate and understand that it is not through the strength or the might of our hand that the Earth brings forth its fruits. This not only instills a deeper sense of faith and trust in G-d, but it allows a shift in how we relate to the Earth. The Earth must be viewed as a precious gift that has been entrusted to us and therefore we must treat it in a caring and sustainable manner.

The inner teachings of the commandment of Shemittah are vital today as humankind flirts dangerously with destroying the beautiful world we have been given.

1. **What should shmittah look like today? Think about how you would practice this tradition.**
2. **What would it mean to you to let the land rest every seventh year?**
3. **What would it mean to your family, to your synagogue, to your JCC, to your Jewish Federation?**
4. **What would it mean for all FJMC Clubs to recognize the power of shmittah and embark on a collaborative experiment with other Jews observing shmittah through a plethora of creative, dynamic and locally-based methods?**
5. **We urge you to respond to these questions at the Mentschen, FJMC's Online Forum for Jewish Men.**

*This commentary was edited by Michael Miller, chair of FJMC Shomrei Ha'aretz, from writings of Rabbi Naom Yehuda Sendor and Evonne Marzouk that appeared in Canfei Neshareim and Jewcology.com.*