

INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to Indoor World [chavrutot!](#) Throughout the Indoor World journey, we'll have the opportunity to explore different units that discuss instances where there were HUGE changes, and how these changes and challenges allow us to think about how Jewish communities respond to interruptions in what is normal.

For the next few days, this first unit will look at two big “interruptions” to daily life. One of them is a challenge that is created because the Torah says so, and the other is a natural disaster that we can't control. These topics are:

1. Shemittah and Yovel, and:
2. Famines.

You and your chavruta will look at sources that relate to these topics and discuss some of the ways the Jewish communities responded to these events. You'll have the opportunity to think about the fact that the Torah requires us to change our lives every seven years, and the ways in which that can be challenging and ways that it helps us recognize what is important.

You'll also look at ways communities respond to famine, and reflect the actions that we can take when things seem to be beyond our control. Throughout the process, questions will arise about how we respond to challenges as individuals, as well as how we respond as members of our immediate and more global communities.

Oh, and don't forget to enjoy the clips and memes along the way!

SHIUR 1:

One of the greatest gifts people can have, is the ability to be free. For example, [see](#) how exciting it was for Dobby to become a free elf (watch from 0:40):



That's one of the reasons why Yovel (which you'll learn more about below) was such an exciting event. Every 50 years, all Jewish slaves became free. At the same time, Shemittah and Yovel also have laws that limit working the land which has the potential to hurt the food supply.

Most of us can remember being hungry - often in the post-lunch pre-dinner part of the day when we need something to snack on (and we don't have shekem), or maybe if we fasted on one of the fast days. Recently, being hungry has hit closer to home than just the pre-shekem munchies. When schools closed a few months ago, all of a sudden students who relied on their schools to give them food [do not have lunch](#). In families where there isn't always enough money, the cost of food can mean people are forced to skip meals. All of a sudden, a crisis arose and the things that were a given became a question.

There's a fairly simple equation that exists:

No food = bad

Seems pretty obvious, right?

The thing is, the Torah asks us to keep the laws of Shemittah and Yovel, which can result in lowering the food supply. The Torah tells us to stop working the land, even though the result of that might be having much less than we are used to. What is there to learn from Shemittah and Yovel if they are so disruptive and diminish our access to food? How do we embrace something that challenges that way we are used to living our life?

First we need to figure out what exactly the rules of Shemittah and Yovel are, and how keeping them can result in limitations on food.

<p>Vayikra 25</p>	
<p>The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the LORD. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land...</p> <p>and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines..</p> <p>And should you ask, “What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?” I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in.</p>	<p>(א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְקֹוֹק אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר: (ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תֵבְאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשַׁבְתָּה הָאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיְקֹוֹק: (ג) שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כַּרְמְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ: (ד) וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבַּת שַׁבְתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיְקֹוֹק שְׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר: (ה) אֵת סְפִיחַ קִצְיֹרְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת־עֵנְבֵי נִזְיֹרְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שַׁבְתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאָרֶץ: (ו) וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרַאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאָרֶץ לְכָל־יֹשְׁבֵיהָ יִוָּבֵל הוּא תִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְשַׁבַּת־אִישׁ אֶל־אֲחֻזָּתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תָּשֻׁבוּ: (ז) יִוָּבֵל ה' וְזֹאת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה תִהְיֶה לָכֶם לֹא תִזְרְעוּ וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ אֶת־סְפִיחֶיהָ וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת־נִזְיֹרֶיהָ: (ח) וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מֵה־נֹּאכַל בַּשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית הֵן לֹא נִזְרַע וְלֹא נֹאסַף אֶת־תְּבוּאָתֵנוּ: (ט) וְצִוִּיתִי אֶת־בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֶם בַּשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁשִׁית וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַתְּבוּאָה לְשָׁלֹשׁ הַשָּׁנִים: (י) וְזָרַעְתָּ אֶת הַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁמִינִית וְאָכַלְתֶּם מִן־הַתְּבוּאָה יוֹשֵׁן עַד הַשְּׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִית עַד־בּוֹא תְּבוּאָתָהּ תֹאכְלוּ יוֹשֵׁן:</p>

The Torah describes two systems that both require stopping to work fields:

1. Shemittah: Every 7 years, the land rests
2. Yovel: Every 50th year, the land rests

If no one is allowed to plant, that means that the amount of food produced will be much less. How does the Torah address this concern? What promise does it make?

- Other than the resting of the land, what other parts are there to Shemittah and Yovel?
- What does the main goal of Shemittah and Yovel seem to be when we consider all these different parts?
- What are the costs of not working the land of the year? What benefits might there be?

- Why is it important to have a whole year of “shabbat?”

While Shemittah and Yovel can cause difficulty in food production, they also allow people who are sinking into poverty to get a leg up. How do Shemittah and Yovel serve as Tzedakah and as a tool to even the playing field?

Think about what the advantages of Shemittah and Yovel are - what do they teach us? Look specifically at the psukim 20-21 and think about the level of trust that it asks from us. Now, look at the following piece from the Sefer HaChinuch who describes some of the goals of Shemittah.

Sefer HaChinuch 89, Mitzvah of Shemittah	
<p>Therefore God commanded us to give up all that the land produces in this year - in addition to resting during it (i.e. during the year) - so that a person will remember that the land which produces fruits for him every year does not produce them by its [own] might and virtue. For there is a Master over it...</p> <p>And there is another benefit in this matter - to acquire the trait of letting go (i.e. of one's possessions), for there is no one more generous than he who gives without hope for being paid back.</p> <p>And there is another benefit - the outcome of this is that a person will add to his trust in God, may He be blessed, since anyone who finds it in his heart to give and abandon to the world all of the produce of his lands and his ancestral inheritance for an entire year - and educates himself and his family through this for all of his days - will never have the trait of stinginess overcome him too much, nor will he have a deficient amount of trust.</p>	<p>ולכן צוה ברוך הוא להפקיר כל מה שתוציא הארץ בשנה זו מלבד השביתה בה, כדי שיזכור האדם כי הארץ שמוציאה אליו הפירות בכל שנה ושנה, לא בכוחה וסגולתה תוציא אותם, כי יש אדון עליה ועל אדוניה, וכשהוא חפץ מצוה עליו להפקירם ועוד יש תועלת נמצא בדבר, לקנות בזה מידת הוותרות, כי אין נדיב כנותן מבלי תקוה אל הגמול.</p> <p>ועוד יש תועלת אחר נמצא בזה, שיוסיף האדם ביטחון בשם יתברך, כי כל המוצא עם לבבו לתת ולהפקיר לעולם כל גידולי קרקעותיו ונחלת אבותיו הגדלים בכל שנה אחת ומלמד בכך הוא וכל המשפחה כל ימיו, לא תחזק בו לעולם מידת הכילות הרבה ולא מיעוט הביטחון.</p>

- What are three lessons that Shemittah helps us learn? Are they all independent answers, or how do they connect? Do they all point to one bigger idea?
- What advantages are there to changing up our normal routines?
- Why is it so important to “let things go?” What are the risks of thinking we’re always in control?

In more modern times, when many people started farming the land of Israel, they realized how

difficult and disruptive Shemittah can be to the goal of settling the land. They faced real scary consequences of not being able to survive, and one solution, that Rav Kook endorses below, allows for people to avoid Shemittah by selling their fields to non-Jews. Even though the Torah asks us to change our lifestyle every seven years, other values come into play that respond to the difficulties of this request.

Mishpat Kohen 63, Rav Kook	
<p>By strengthening our Jewish brothers' settlement in the Holy Land, the Redemption will come closer... this [selling the land to avoid Shemittah] could be like violating one Shabbat [to save a person's life] so that someone could [live to] keep many more Shabbatot. And since the stringency of Shemittah would hurt settlement, and many would be less willing to buy land [in Israel], as I know many people in the Diaspora are saying that, since the berakhah of the Land, that it will produce three years' worth of food, has not yet happened, it is impossible to rest [for Shemittah]. And if they do work the Land, they will violate the words of the Torah. As a result, they stay away from the Holy Land. But, if we tell them that, given the circumstances, there are ways to allow [working the Land during Shemittah], and these leniencies are not as weak as some of the other leniencies that we commonly rely on (like issues of Glatt and Hādash, where we rely on individual's opinions against the majority), then they will want to come, and with this increase in people returning to Israel the Heavenly Berakhah will increase and bring Redemption, and then we will definitely be free from blame [for getting around Shemittah], in that we will be paid back for all of our troubles, and from the need to rely on weak leniencies.</p>	<p>על ידי חזוק הישוב והתרבות אחינו בית ישראל בארץ הקודש תהיה הגאולה בקרוב יותר, ... והוא כחלל שבת אחת כדי שישמור 'שבתות הרבה וכיון שעל ידי חומרא דשביעית יעוכב ענין הישוב, ויתרשלו ידי רבים מקנין קרקע, כאשר ידעתי שהרבה אומרים בחו"ל, שכיון שעדיין אינה ניכרת ברכת הארץ לעשות התבואה לשלש השנים אם כן אי אפשר להם לשבות, וכשיעבדו הלא יעברו על דברי תורה, על כן הם מתרחקים מארץ הקודש. אבל כשמודיעים שכפי המדה של הדחק יש צדדי היתר, והצדדים הללו אינם נופלים מכל דרכי היתר של הדברים הדחוקים הרבה, כסירכות וחדש וכיוצא בזה בהוראות רבות, שסומכים על דעת יחידים, אז יתרוצו רבים לבא, וכפי רבוי שיבתם של גאולים תתרבה הברכה העליונה להחיש גאולה, ואז נקיים הכל בבירור, באופן שיהיה לנו שילומים על כל צערנו ממה שאנו מוכרחים להשתמש בהיתירים דחוקים,</p>

Rav Kook allows people to use halakhic ways to avoid needing to keep Shemittah.

- If we practically find a way to “get out” of shemittah, do we miss out on all the lessons of Shemittah?
- What are the other values that we protect when we prioritize working the land over Shemittah?

Conclusion:

- Shemittah and Yovel provide many challenges and opportunities. What are the most important elements?
- What lessons do Shemittah and Yovel teach us?
- What values can emerge when we are forbidden from doing what we normally do and being

Unit 1, Day 1: Shemittah and Yovel

self-sufficient?