



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

32 B'Har—Limited Possession

Text

ויקרא כה

א ויִדְבַר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר. ב דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תָבוּ אוֹ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ שָׁבַת לַיהוָה. ג שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כְּרֶמֶךְ וְאִסְפַּת
אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ. ד וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת שָׁבַת שְׁבִתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שָׁבַת לַיהוָה שְׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכֶרֶם לֹא
תִזְמַר. ה אֵת סְפִיחַ קִצְיֹרֶךְ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת-עֵנְבֵי זִיּוֹרֶךְ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שְׁבִתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ. ו וְהִיְתָה
שְׁבַת הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם לֶאֱכֹלָה לָךְ וּלְעִבְדְּךָ וְלִאֲמָתְךָ וּלְשִׁכְיֹרְךָ וּלְתוֹשֶׁבְךָ הַגֵּרִים עִמָּךְ. ז וּלְבַהֲמֹתְךָ וּלְחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר
בָּאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה כָל-תְּבוּאָתָהּ לְאָכְלִי. {ס} ח וּסְפַרְתָּ לָךְ שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֻתִּים שְׁבַע שָׁנִים שְׁבַע שָׁנִים שְׁבַע שָׁנִים וְהָיוּ
לָךְ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֻתִּים תְּשַׁע וָאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה. ט וְהִעֲבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה בַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְעֶשְׂרֵי
לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּיוֹם הַכַּפָּרִים תַּעֲבִירוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּכָל-אַרְצְכֶם. י וְקִדַּשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרָאתֶם דְּרוֹר
בָּאָרֶץ לְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹבֵל הוּא תִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְשָׁבְתֶם אִישׁ אֶל-אֲחִזָּתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תִּשְׁבוּ. יא יוֹבֵל
הוּא שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה תִהְיֶה לָכֶם לֹא תִזְרְעוּ וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ אֶת-סְפִיחֶיהָ וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת-זִזְרֶיהָ. יב כִּי
יוֹבֵל הוּא קִדְשׁ תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם מִן-הַשָּׁדָה תֹּאכְלוּ אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ. יג בַּשְּׁנַת הַיּוֹבֵל הַזֶּה אֵת תִּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ אֶל-
אֲחִזָּתוֹ. יד וְכִי-תִמְכְּרוּ מִמֶּכֶר לַעֲמִיתְךָ אוֹ קִנְיָה מִיַּד עַמִּיתְךָ אֶל-תּוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת-אֲחִיו. טו בַּמִּסְפָּר שָׁנִים
אֲחֵר הַיּוֹבֵל תִּקְנֶה מֵאֵת עַמִּיתְךָ בַּמִּסְפָּר שָׁנֵי-תְבוּאָתְךָ יִמְכַר-לָךְ. טז לְפִי רֹב הַשָּׁנִים תִּרְבֶּה מִקְנֹתוֹ וּלְפִי
מְעַט הַשָּׁנִים תִּמְעִיט מִקְנֹתוֹ כִּי מִסְפַּר תְּבוּאָתְךָ הוּא מִכֹּר לָךְ. יז וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת-עַמִּיתוֹ וְיִירָאת
מֵאֵל הָיִךְ כִּי אָנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. יח וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת-חֻקֵּי וְאֶת-מִשְׁפָּטֵי תְּשִׁמְרוּ וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֵת וְיִשְׁבְּתֶם
עַל-הָאָרֶץ לְבָטָח. יט וְנִתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ פְּרִיָּה וְאֲכַלְתֶּם לִשְׁבַע וְיִשְׁבְּתֶם לְבָטָח עֲלֶיהָ. כ וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מֵה-
נֹאכַל בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת הֵן לֹא נִזְרַע וְלֹא נִקְצַף אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָנוּ. כא וְצִוִּיתִי אֶת-בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֶם בַּשָּׁנָה
הַשְּׁשִׁית וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת-הַתְּבוּאָה לְשֵׁשׁ הַשָּׁנִים. כב וְזָרַעְתֶּם אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁמִינִת וְאֲכַלְתֶּם מִן-הַתְּבוּאָה וְשָׂן
עַד הַשָּׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִת עַד-בּוֹא תְּבוּאָתָהּ תֹּאכְלוּ וְשָׂן. כג וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַר לְצַמְתָּת כִּי-לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי-גֵרִים
וְתוֹשְׁבִים אִתְּם עִמְדִי. כד וּבְכָל אָרֶץ אֲחִזְתְּכֶם גְּאֻלָּה תִתְּנוּ לָאָרֶץ. {ס} כה כִּי-יִמּוֹךְ אַחִיךָ וּמָכַר מֵאֲחִזָּתוֹ
וּבֹא גֹאֲלוֹ הַקָּרִיב אֵלָיו וְגָאֵל אֶת מִמְכָרוֹ אֲחִיו. כו וְאִישׁ כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה-לוֹ גֹּאֵל וְהִשְׁיִגָה יָדוֹ וּמָצָא כְּדִי
גְאֻלָּתוֹ. כז וְחָשַׁב אֶת-שָׁנֵי מִמְכָרוֹ וְהִשִּׁיב אֶת-הַעֲדָף לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר מָכַר-לוֹ וְשָׁב לְאֲחִזָּתוֹ. כח וְאִם לֹא-
/מָצָא יָדוֹ דֵּי הִשִּׁיב לוֹ וְהָיָה מִמְכָרוֹ בְּיַד הַקָּנָה אֵתוֹ עַד שְׁנַת הַיּוֹבֵל וַיֵּצֵא בִּיּוֹבֵל וְשָׁב לְאֲחִזָּתוֹ

לה וְכִי-יִמּוֹךְ אַחִיךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשַׁב וְחִי עִמָּךְ. לו אֶל-תִּקַּח מֵאִתּוֹ נֶשֶׁךְ וְתִרְבִּית
וְיִירָאת מֵאֵל הָיִךְ וְחִי אַחִיךָ עִמָּךְ. לז אֶת-כֶּסֶפְךָ לֹא-תִתֵּן לוֹ בְּנֶשֶׁךְ וּבְמִרְבִּית לֹא-תִתֵּן אֲכֹלְךָ. לח אָנֹכִי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם לְתֵת לָכֶם אֶת-אָרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לְאֵל הַיָּם. {ס} לט
וְכִי-יִמּוֹךְ אַחִיךָ עִמָּךְ וּנְמַכְרֶךְ לֹא-תַעֲבֹד בוֹ עַבְדָּת עַבְדִּי מִכְשִׁיר כְּתוֹשֵׁב יִהְיֶה עִמָּךְ עַד-שְׁנַת
הַיּוֹבֵל יַעֲבֹד עִמָּךְ. מא וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַמְךָ הוּא וּבְנָיו עִמּוֹ וְשָׁב אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וְאֶל-אֲחִזָּת אָבִיו תִּשְׁבוּ. מב כִּי-
עַבְדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר-הוֹצֵאתִי אֵתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם לֹא יִמְכְּרוּ מִמִּכְרַת עַבְדִּי. מג לֹא-תִרְדֶּה בוֹ בְּפָרֶךְ וְיִירָאת
מֵאֵל הָיִךְ



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

Vayiqra 25

1 The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: 2 Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the Lord. 3 Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. 4 But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. 5 You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. 6 But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce — you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, 7 and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

8 You shall count off seven weeks of years — seven times seven years — so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. 9 Then you shall sound the horn loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month — the Day of Atonement — you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land 10 and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim freedom 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. 11 That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, 12 for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field.

13 In this year of jubilee, each of you shall return to his holding. 14 When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. 15 In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the jubilee; and in selling to you, s/he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years: 16 the more such years, the higher the price you pay; the fewer such years, the lower the price; for what s/he is selling you is a number of harvests. 17 Do not wrong one another, but fear your God; for I the Lord am your God.

18 You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; 19 the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. 20 And should you ask, "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?"

21 I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. 22 When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in.

23 But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. 24 Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

25 If your kinsperson is in straits and has to sell part of his holding, his/her nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his/her kinsperson has sold. 26 If a person has no one to redeem for him/her, but prospers and acquires enough to redeem with, 27 s/he shall compute the years since its sale, refund the difference to the person to whom s/he sold it, and return to his/her holding. 28 If s/he lacks sufficient means to recover it, what s/he sold shall remain with the purchaser until the jubilee; in the jubilee year it shall be released, and s/he shall return to his/her holding.

35 If your kinsperson, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him/her as though a



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

resident alien, let him/her live by your side: 36 do not exact from him/her advance or accrued interest, but fear your God. Let him/her live by your side as your kinsperson. 37 Do not lend him/her your money at advance interest, or give him/her your food at accrued interest. 38 I the Lord am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

39 If your kinsperson under you continues in straits and must give him/herself over to you, do not subject him/her to the treatment of a slave. 40 S/he shall remain with you as a hired or bound laborer; s/he shall serve with you only until the jubilee year. 41 Then s/he and his/her children with him/her shall be free of your authority; s/he shall go back to his/her family and return to his/her ancestral holding. — 42 For they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt; they may not give themselves over into servitude. — 43 You shall not rule over him/her ruthlessly; you shall fear your God.

Context

Parashat B'har introduces some of the concepts of the *shmita*-sabbatical and *yovel*-jubilee years. On the seventh year, the land and all who work it—human and animal—are to rest from agricultural labor. On the sabbatical year, everyone is to live on the produce of the prior year, and to harvest the produce that grows spontaneously from the earth. When seven cycles of sabbaticals are complete, the fiftieth year is the *jubilee*—the Torah instructs the inhabitants to desist from working the land, and for all persons to return to their original holding, their ancestral plot. All land prices are therefore to be calculated according to the number of years of harvest remaining until the jubilee. God promises abundance in the sixth year in order to provide for the observance of the sabbatical and jubilee. The remainder of the parasha instructs to avoid exploiting people's poverty between jubilee years.

Explorations

The observance of the *shmita*-sabbatical cycle is part of the “holiness code” in VaYiqra. This parasha emphasizes how holiness integrates ritual observances and the *mishkan* service with everyday life. Along with the focus on the *kohanim*-priests and religious ritual functions, the holiness code engages the entire community in a web of commitments that connects people, the material world, and the divine. *Shmita* laws sanctify the every-day work-cycle and the human connections that arise from sustaining ourselves.

Shabbat, *shmita*, and *yovel* all define holiness in the dimension of time—in cycles of seven. On Shabbat, the seventh day, people and animals rest from productive labor; during *shmita*, the seventh year, the land and its inhabitants rest from productive labor and debts are absolved; on the fiftieth year, we sanctify by returning to the portion of land that each person inherits through the generations of her/his family. These commandments create a sacred rhythm of weeks and years that interrupts and releases our preoccupation with work and property, with daily needs. The Torah limits both the accumulation of wealth and destitution by regularly leveling economic gaps and redistributing resources. The seventh day, seventh year, and seventh cycle of seven years consecrate time through rest and renewal, thought and spirit—a pause, a breath for



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

refreshment.

Along with similarities, there are some very significant differences between shabbat and shmita. Whereas the Torah holds shabbat to be part of the structure of Creation—from *bereshit*—our parasha clarifies from the first verse, and Rashi emphasizes (on VaYiqra 25:1), that *shmita* is from Mount Sinai—revealed to the Israelites with the Torah. Whereas shabbat is potentially relevant to all people, in every place, shmita pertains to the Jewish People in the Land of Israel. Shabbat offers a taste of the world-to-come, accessible weekly anywhere on earth. Whereas Shabbat institutes the sanctification of time, *shmita* institutes sanctification of space *and* time. Shmita is among the commandments that can only be fulfilled while living in the land of Israel. Shabbat draws our attention *away* from where we are in space into a “Palace in Time”, to quote Avraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel characterizes the distinction between time and space in gender terms,

We usually think that the earth is our mother, that time is money and profit our mate. The seventh day is a reminder that God is our father, that time is life and the spirit our mate. (Shabbat, p 76)

For Heschel, space affiliates with the profane. His view developed during and in the aftermath of virulent anti-Semitism and Nazism in Europe which claimed the lives of much of his family. He envisions Shabbat holiness as escape from the material world and its persecutions. God, the father, time, is the spiritual homeland for which he longs. For Heschel, earth, the mother, is too vulnerable, defenseless, and ultimately corruptible.

Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel, affords Jews the possibility to re-connect with space, and to express holiness in relation to earth—as the Torah conceives. In mystical terms, the homecoming of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel aspires to reunify the male and female in the divine One. Israel makes it possible for sacred space and time to converge; Israel makes the definitions of time and space in terms of dyads—male-female and father-mother—unnecessary, obsolete. By contrast with Heschel's view of Shabbat, shmita draws us *into* the land and its nurturing potency. Shmita also embroils us in the complexities and contradictions between a biblical ideal and its fulfillment in a contemporary setting.

Before [Rav Kook](#), one of the great innovators of religious Zionism, arrived in Israel in 1904, he romanticized *shmita* as a link between Jewish re-settlement of the land and redemption. He fantasized the nation liberated during that year from daily labor, studying and pursuing all manner of meaningful activities. Once he was in the land, he became acquainted with farmers struggling in the young settlements, who could not afford to spend an entire year without tending the soil. Identifying with their desperate plight and the harrowing conditions in the land, he found a legal loophole whereby Jewish farmers symbolically sell their land to non-Jews, and thus may continue to work it during *shmita*. Rav Kook's ruling enabled the Israeli chief rabbinate to uphold the sale procedure so that Israeli farmers can earn their living, and the Israeli public can afford to buy food. In our day, Ultra-Orthodox halakhic authorities do not feel bound by this decision, nor by its values. This controversy affects the economy and society, and increases disaffection on all sides. Concerning the disputes of the last shmita year, 2007/8, one progressive Israeli religious figure comments,



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

"As in the past, and after investigating the situation of agriculture in this country, Israel's Chief Rabbinate is instructing Jewish farmers in Israel to sign deeds of sale for the lands they possess so that Jewish farming can continue in Israel. However, at the same time, the Rabbinate has informed the chief rabbis of Israeli cities that they are not bound by this instruction, thus enabling the ultra-Orthodox community to follow a line of conduct that zealously protects - and focuses exclusively on - the interests of ultra-Orthodox consumers. As a result, we find chief rabbis of cities issuing instructions forbidding restaurants and other establishments from using Israeli agricultural produce and requiring them to work only with suppliers importing foreign produce."

[Benjamin Lau, "[Observing Shmita Sensibly](#)," *Haaretz*, 10/09/2007]

In response to the hardship caused by these strictures, a group of Zionist rabbis mobilized dissent against the chief rabbinate. Their Tsohar organization issues its own *shmita* certificates to institutions and businesses where the local rabbis would not honor the land sale agreement. Rabbi Rafi Feuerstein, chairman of Tsohar, says, "We believe it is important to strengthen Jewish farmers and provide reasonably priced produce to the Jewish nation" [Steven Erlanger, "[As Farmers and Fields Rest, a Land Grows Restless](#)," *New York Times*, October 8, 2007].

After protracted deliberation and appeal, the Israeli Supreme Court ordered the chief rabbinate to replace any municipal rabbi refusing to accept the symbolic sale, the *heter mechira*. ["[Israel's Top Court Backs Loophole in Farming Law](#)," *New York Times*, November 27, 2007]. In the wake of the ruling, the Israeli justice minister commented that he would oppose the adoption of an Israeli constitution that prohibited the Supreme Court from ruling on conflicts between the state and religion. Lau concludes his essay about *shmita*,

We must apply the original idea of the *shmita*, a year when commercial competition is suspended and we refine our qualities, to other channels relevant to most Israelis. It is neither correct nor moral to subjugate our small community of Jewish farmers to a commandment whose observance is no longer possible.

Lau advocates for a humane religious solution—to circumvent the laws through the necessary manipulations. This has become a mainstream approach to *shmita* observance—finding halakhic solutions to enable people to carry on with their personal and business lives *as usual*. At the same time, he advocates to apply the values of *shmita* to non-agricultural realms of economic activity, in order to make *shmita* more meaningful to Israeli society.

Some view the *shmita* debate as a contest between the Ultra-Orthodox and mainstream religious authorities. Others view it as an exercise in modernizing halakha to respond to twenty-first century conditions. While both of these are true, the debate also reveals a challenge facing Zionism—how to apply Jewish ideals to contemporary reality. Organized today as a modern urbanized nation, there is no doubt that adhering to the utopian *shmita* principles jeopardizes the well-being of many. However, there is not enough acknowledgment within the Zionist camp of how circumventing the laws betrays the fulfillment of profound goals explicated in our sacred texts. The *shmita* laws themselves acknowledge their own difficulty,



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

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. [Vayiqra 25:20-21]

In a day when the heads of companies are earning an annual income of £18,426,105 (US\$28,967,399—according to British [Income Data Services](#), this was the sum earned by Mick Davies from Xstrata, a mining company that in the same year laid off employees and cut their pensions!), the parasha offers simple instructions throughout about how to promote a more ethical society:

Share together with all creatures:

But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce — you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield. [25:6-7]

Be fair:

When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. [25:14]

Be honest about our mortal limits:

But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. [25:23]

Treat people kindly and don't exploit weaknesses or be abusive:

If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side: do not exact from him advance or accrued interest, but fear your God. Let him live by your side as your kinsman. Do not lend him your money at advance interest, or give him your food at accrued interest. [25:35-37]
You shall not rule over him ruthlessly. [25:43]

The *shmita* observances curb incentive to earn excessively and prompt us to honor simplicity. According to the *yovel*-jubilee manifesto, the blessing of subsisting on the land pertains to every inhabitant. In our day, "women perform sixty-six percent of the world's work, produce fifty percent of the food, but earn ten percent of the income and own one percent of the property" ([UN Women, "Facts & Figures on Women, Poverty & Economics"](#)). Re-distributing material



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

resources among all strata of society proposes to redress gender inequity, release people from the suffering brought on by unfair distribution, and better honor human dignity.

You shall proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants [25:10]

Questions for Discussion

Evaluate your views about the relevance of shmita to both farmers and non-farmers today, and how it could be observed in both rural and urban settings. While the commandments apply to Israel, how might the concepts and values also be relevant outside Israel? (See *The Shmita Project* study link below.)

The Occupy movement, “We are the 99%”, is growing throughout the world. Compare the messages and aims of this movement with those of shmita and yovel.

According to Jonathan Chipman, “one may infer that it [human holiness in VaYiqra] means caring for one’s fellow man, behaving in an ethical manner, and creating an ethical society based, not only on decent behavior, but on loving and generous attitudes towards others. These goals, in Chipman's view, conflict with what he considers to be human nature,

The human being is the exact opposite: his natural, inborn inclination is to take, to grasp, to enjoy, to pursue pleasure and happiness. An infant’s first instinct upon birth is to grasp his mother’s breast, to suck, to take what he/she needs. As a human being matures, his needs and his way of attaining that which he wants and/or needs matures and becomes more sophisticated, but his essential nature and root impulses remain the same. The object of the Torah and its mitzvot is thus to gradually change this nature, to train or teach the human being to give rather than to take, to care about others, to forego certain ego-centered pleasures or at least to make them less central—and through this to become like God. “As I am merciful, so shall you be merciful; as I am compassionate, so shall you be compassionate.” [See [his full essay.](#)]

Chipman's focus on the infant's experience in his example ignores the breast-feeding mother he mentions who epitomizes the caring, loving, generous attitude and behavior to which his ethics aspire. To what extent do you think that parents and all people are *naturally* caring and giving compared with the egotistical, pleasure-seekers Chipman describes? What is gained by this common, even dominant narrative about peoples' egotistical nature, and how, if at all, does it contribute toward or detract from holiness?



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

Study Links

The purpose of this project is to consider the role of Shmita in our lives, both for farmers in the land of Israel and for Jews around the world. We encourage people to do that in two ways—through using the laws and values of Shmita as the conceptual framework for creating a more sustainable Jewish community and a more sustainable world. Second, to encourage practical application of Shmita laws among individuals and communities.

Learn more about how “[The Shmita Project](#)”, a joint venture of The Jewish Farm School and Hazon, conceives the relevance of shmita to the Jewish People and the world.

At the core of Heschel's Sabbath is the distinction between the sanctity of time and corruption and suffering in space. This [synopsis](#) of a review essay about Heschel's *Sabbath* explores its relevance to contemporary Diaspora Jews.

[Here](#) is a *New York Times* view of the recent shmita year controversies in Israel.

Concerning the *shmita* of loans and land—a commentary on Parashat Re'eh, see [this essay](#) by Shlomo Riskin in the *Jewish Week*.

See these sites for Occupy—a global movement for social and economic justice: [Occupy Together](#), [Occupy Wall Street](#), [Occupy London](#). [Here](#) is a *New York Times* essay about the branding of Occupy, and the site of one of its conceivers, [Adbusters](#).

[This Wikipedia entry](#) discusses the VaYiqra Holiness Code from a perspective of biblical criticism.

Summary of Issues

Shmita and yovel observance beckons us to attend to and sanctify our relationships—to one another, and to our world. The establishment of the State of Israel activates these observances and re-aligns the posture of the Jewish People in relation to space.

Methods & Observations

For thousands of years, Jews have been studying and interpreting the Torah in the Diaspora. Reading through the lens of the homecoming of the Jewish People, and the vital practices of Israeli society enables new perspectives on biblical texts that challenge previous core assumptions about our mortal lives—about space, time, gender, and holiness.

Contact

Please address queries and comments to Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman bonnadevora@gmail.com