

*A Resource for Your
Synagogue or Jewish
Faith Community*



I give you my smile. Photo by Daniela Hartmann

JUBILEE SHABBAT



Global Sabbath

*A Day of Prayer, Worship, and
Study Leading to Action to
End the Cycle of Poverty
Caused by International Debt*

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A Jewish Worship & Action Resource for your Faith Community

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your interest in participating in Jubilee Shabbat, a national day of worship, study, and reflection leading to advocacy.

Jubilee Shabbat has a special meaning for us in the Jewish world. As you know, the year of Jubilee proclaimed in the Torah took place every fifty years. It was a time when all debts were cancelled, land was returned, and people were freed. The Jubilee vision continues to serve as a powerful way for people of faith and conscience today to promote economic and social justice in our broken world. The spirit of Jubilee needs to be taken into the politics and economics of every nation on earth, including our own.



As a part of Jubilee Shabbat, communities nationwide will examine the roots of Jubilee in the Torah as we read *Parsha Behar Bechukotai* and explore how we as Jews can band together to break the chains of debt and poverty and transform our world. In this packet, you will find resources for your Jubilee Shabbat including text studies, sample sermons, worship materials, articles from renowned Jewish leaders, and opportunities to engage your leaders on this important issue.

This year, Jubilee Shabbat and the reading of *parsha Behar* coincides on a particularly significant weekend. On the same weekend communities will be reading from the *parsha* that calls for a restoring of economic and social relationships within our communities, the leaders of the largest eight economies, the G8, are meeting in Chicago making decisions that impact the world's poorest. Now, more than ever, as the global economic crisis deepens, our call for a Jubilee is even more pressing.

As Jewish communities around the country celebrate Jubilee Shabbat, others within the interfaith network of Jubilee USA will be attending these services or planning other events in conjunction. Together as a larger community we pray and act together towards *tikkun olam*.

We hope that you will do more than just declare this Shabbat a special day to focus on Jubilee. We urge you to create a community discussion in the months before this event to ask the members of your community to explore the ways that they believe as individuals and as a Jewish community we can begin to actualize the Jubilee in our own lifetime. Doing so may be *piku'ach nefesh* both for humanity and for the earth itself.

Join us! We hope this resource will help you plan your Jubilee Shabbat. If you need additional assistance in planning your event please contact Jeremy Weyl at jeremy@jubileeusa.org.

Sincerely,

Eric LeCompte, Executive Director, Jubilee USA Network

Rabbi David Saperstein, President, Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism

Ruth Messinger, President, American Jewish World Service

Rabbi Michael Lerner for Tikkun Magazine and Network of Spiritual Progressives

Rabbi Arthur Waskow for the Shalom Center

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Executive Director, Rabbis for Human Rights-North America

About Jubilee USA

We envision a world in which external debt no longer impoverishes nations and peoples by diverting resources from health, education, and the environment to pay rich countries and financial institutions, a world in which families and communities have a voice in economic policies and decisions that affect their lives, a world where right relationships are restored between nations. We respond to the call for Jubilee found in Judeo-Christian scripture, where those enslaved because of debts are freed, lands lost because of debt are returned, and communities torn by inequality are restored.

-Jubilee USA Network Vision Statement

Jubilee USA Network is part of the worldwide movement of people of faith and conscience seeking to cancel the debts of impoverished countries and work toward a responsible and just international economy. The Network includes a broad range of religious, social justice, environmental, and development organizations, as well as thousands of individuals who share a moral commitment to finding a definitive solution to the international debt crisis. The year of Jubilee proclaimed in the Hebrew Scriptures took place every years. It was a time when all debts were cancelled, land was returned to its original owners, and slaves were freed.

This vision of Jubilee calls for the building of right relationships between communities, peoples, and nations. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. captured the essence of Jubilee best when he said, "Injustice anywhere represents a threat to justice everywhere." In our world today international cooperation builds true security while the crisis of debt breeds instability, hopelessness, and unnecessary suffering.

We know debt cancellation works.

Now it is up to us to generate the political will needed to achieve this life-affirming goal. Movements turn the impossible into the inevitable. Ten years ago many economists, politicians, and development specialists argued that canceling the debts of impoverished nations was an impossible task given the entrenched nature of the debt and the lack of public awareness and engagement around the issue. The rising wave of people of faith contacting our elected leaders, educating the media, and reaching out to others in our communities has put this crisis on the national agenda.

In the late 1990s, a broad network of people of faith and conscience from across the globe came together under the banner of Jubilee 2000, engaging their communities and challenging policy makers to address the international debt crisis. This mobilization brought the issue of debt to the global stage, but it did not end the debt crisis.

In 2005, pressure from the Jubilee movement, together with the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, again pushed the issues of debt and global poverty onto the agenda of world leaders. But once again, while significant steps were taken, the debt crisis was not ended. The imperative to finish what was started remains: to lift the excruciating burden of debt that continues to siphon resources from impoverished countries that should be used for health care, education, and clean water.

*Injustice anywhere
represents a threat to
justice everywhere. "*
- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Expanded debt cancellation must come alongside the work of addressing the root causes of indebtedness - unjust economic policies and lending practices, a history of exploitation, and unequal relationships between the Global North and South. Inspired by the Jubilee vision of liberation and fullness of life for all, people of faith and conscience around the world continue to call for justice and liberation.

Minute for Mission

Use this guide for sharing about Jubilee in front of your congregation as part of Jubilee Shabbat.

Some of you may have only a few minutes to introduce the work of Jubilee USA to your congregation as a whole on Jubilee Shabbat, though of course there are many opportunities to have one-on-one conversations with others throughout the year. As you prepare to talk about the work of Jubilee USA, stop and think about why you are passionate about the work of debt cancellation and economic justice. Have you seen first-hand the effects of international debt? Was there a particular story or event that motivated you to participate? Have you felt empowered by participating in advocacy work? Consider sharing your reason for participating with Jubilee USA. Your passion will come through better than facts and figures can.

Share a personal story or share a story like Patricia's, a 17 year old woman from Malawi:

“I am from Kambenje Province. I have four brothers and sisters, and I am in grade two. I have a problem with my leg. I have been sick for a long time, in different ways, but now the sickness has taken hold of my leg. I have tuberculosis there. My knee is all swollen. It hurts. I like to play netball, but I can't anymore.

*It is a prescription
for living in right
relationship with
one another*

“They give me liquid antibiotics here, but I don't feel any better yet. I have been sick like this for five months, mostly at home. I came to the hospital a week ago. They say I'll stay another week then go home again. I hope I am better in a week. I don't think I'll get better at home. My mother died of the same thing that I have. She was scared before she died, just like I'm scared now. None of my friends can come to visit, because our village is too far away from here.”

Today is Jubilee Shabbat, a day where we focus on the needs of some of the world's poorest countries like Malawi, where Patricia lives. There are lots of ways to address issues of poverty in our world. One of those ways is the focus of an organization called Jubilee USA. Jubilee is a network of organizations and individuals that advocates debt cancellation and more just economic policies for the world's poorest countries. Debt cancellation has already proven effective in expanding health care for people like Patricia. Governments burdened by debt are often unable to help their people get access to basic health care, education, clean water, and sufficient food.

In the Torah, God commands the Israelites to hold a Sabbath year every seven years in which the land and the people were given rest. After seven cycles of the Sabbath year, the fiftieth year was to be a year of Jubilee. In this year, unpaid debts were released and slaves were freed from their servitude. It was a time to return to families, restore relationships, and rejoice together. We might be tempted to dismiss this as a system that could only work in the ancient world's economy. After all, the Rabbinic tradition modified biblical economic law to respond to changes in economic conditions in several cases, including allowing debts to be held through the Jubilee in some cases. But if we think about God's intention for the Jubilee year, we realize that it is a way for us to honor our relationships with one another. It is a way to keep some people from being permanently in debt to others. It is a prescription for living in right relationship with one another. One of the ways we can honor this Divine intention is by helping those in power to hear the voices of those in need, especially the voices from our partners in developing countries, and advocating on their behalf in the United States.

One of those voices is Phoebe Moono, the facilitator of a Jubilee group in Monze, Zambia, a town of 30,000 about three hours south of the capital, Lusaka. She organizes groups there to meet with their lawmakers and to

make sure that the voices of their region are heard. They struggle to get meetings with their leaders and have discovered the need for a debt audit, one of many things that new regulations on international lending could provide. The group in Monze is lively and energetic, organizing large groups to talk to legislators, encouraging civic participation, and educating the public about their role in keeping the government accountable, but their voice is even stronger when it is joined with voices all around the world. In the United States, Jubilee USA raises up the needs of these communities through strategic advocacy to elected officials, media outreach, and grassroots education and mobilization. Jubilee USA works with partners like Jubilee Zambia and 50 other Jubilee groups around the world. Collectively that voice can make a difference for those who still struggle for their daily bread. (Story of Patricia from Our Stories, Our Songs by Deborah Ellis)

Invite people to spend time later in the week getting more information from you from www.jubileeusa.org. Conclude with an invitation to participate in whatever action your synagogue is taking. Explain that your rabbi has signed the faith leaders letter to Obama (if he/she has done so), invite congregants to sign a Voices of Esther postcard, participate in an educational discussion, or some other event your community is planning.



Jubilee Shabbat Sermon Notes and Helpers

Below is a prayer that may be added to your Jubilee Shabbat services, as fits your community.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu, melech ha-olam, Asher kidshanu bmitzvotav vitzivanu lirdof tzedakah.
Blessed are you, Eternal our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who has hallowed us with mitzvot and commanded us to pursue justice.

We cannot merely pray to You, O G-d, to end war; for we know that You have made the world so that all of us must find our own path to peace within ourselves and with our neighbors.

We cannot merely pray to you, O G-d, to end starvation; for You have already given us the resources with which to feed the entire world, if we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to You, O G-d, to root our prejudice; for You have already given us eyes with which to see the good in all people, if we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O G-d, to end despair; for You have already given us the power to clear away slums and to give hope, if only we would use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O G-d, to end disease; for You have already given us great minds with which to search out cures and healings, if we would only use them constructively.

Therefore, we pray to You instead, O G-d, for strength, determination, and willpower – to do as well as to pray, to become as well as to wish.

For Your sake and for ours, speedily and soon, that our land may be safe, and our lives may be blessed,

Praised are You, O G-d; You bless Your people Israel, and all humankind, with peace.

- Rabbi Jack Riemer

Dvar Torah and Discussion Resources

By Jonathan Shefa

[Each of the following themes includes sources and a *drash* (commentary) that can be used in divrei Torah and questions that can form the basis of a group discussion.]

Connection between Shemita, Yovel and Har Sinai

Leviticus 25:1-2

ויקרא כה:א-ב
וידבר ה' אל משה בהר סיני לאמר

And the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying

דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כי תבאו אל הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם ושבתה הארץ שבת לה'

Speak to the children of Israel and you shall say to them: When you come into the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath for the Lord.

רש"י (ויקרא כה:א): מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר סיני?

Rashi (Leviticus 25:1): *What is the idea of Shemita with Mount Sinai?*

The opening of this week's *parasha* is the only time the Torah explicitly mentions Hashem speaking to Moshe on Har Sinai. Every other time the Torah tells us that God spoke to Moshe, either a location is not specified or it is somewhere other than Mount Sinai. This led Rashi to ask one of the most famous questions in the history of Torah commentary, "*ma inyan Shemita etzel Har Sinai*," what does the Shemita Year, the Sabbatical Year, have to with Mount Sinai?

If we were to fully keep Shemita and Yovel, we would once again meet the divine together as a nation

Drash:

Rashi answers his own question, stating that the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel prove that the entire Torah was given, in all of its details, on Mount Sinai. The whole *parasha* of Behar is dedicated to outlining the details for these two mitzvot alone (which really form just one integrated system). No other mitzvot receive such extensive coverage in the Torah. Rashi learns that linking the uniquely detailed treatment of these mitzvot with Har Sinai teaches us that all of the mitzvot were given in their details at Mount Sinai.

What's interesting is that no commentators challenge Rashi's assertion, they only discuss how these mitzvot prove the Torah was given in its entirety at Sinai. Many answers have been offered through the years, but there are still many open questions: Why above all other mitzvot, did the Torah find it necessary to be so fully descriptive of these two? What does it say about these particular commandments that they carry the weight of proof for the entire Torah?

Behar continues with Hashem saying, "you will come into the land..." The 16th Century commentator Kli Yakar writes that by linking Har Sinai with our entry into the land, the Torah is showing us that during Shemita and Yovel, the Land of Israel actually becomes Sinai. That is, if we were to fully keep Shemita and Yovel, we would once again meet the divine together as a nation.

Discussion Questions:

In the seventh year we are called upon to allow the earth to rest and to release all debts; everything the earth produces in the seventh year, all food, is considered holy and is meant to be free for all. Also in this *parasha*, we learn about the Yovel, the Jubilee Year, when all slaves are freed, and the land is redistributed equally between all citizens.

- Mount Sinai represents our collective encounter with the divine, our highest spiritual moment as a nation. Why do you think would it be here, with these particular mitzvot, that the Torah specifies that God spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai?
- Are there any other places in the Torah you think it would have made more sense to make such a strong linkage with Mount Sinai?

Equality and Freedom

Leviticus 25:6-7

ויקרא כה:ו-ז

וְהִיְתָה שְׁבַת הָאָרֶץ לְכֶם לְאֹכְלָהּ לְךָ וְלַעֲבָדְךָ וְלַאֲמִתְךָ וְלַשְׂכִּירְךָ וְלַתּוֹשֵׁבְךָ הַגֵּרִים עִמָּךְ

And [the produce of] the Sabbath of the land shall be yours to eat for you, for your male and female slaves, and for your hired worker and resident who live with you.

וְלִבְהֵמַתְךָ וְלַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּאַרְצְךָ תִּהְיֶה כָּל תְּבוּאָתָהּ לְאֹכֵל

And all of its produce may be eaten [also] by your domestic animals and by the beasts that are in your land.

Leviticus 25:10

ויקרא כה:י

וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרַאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאַרְץ לְכָל יֹשְׁבֵיהָ יוֹבֵל הוּא תִּהְיֶה לְכֶם וְשָׁבְתֶם אִישׁ אֶל אֲחֻזָּתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תָּשׁוּבוּ

And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live on it. It shall be a Jubilee for you and you shall return, each man to his portion, and you shall return, each man to his family.

Exodus 32:16

שמות לב:טז

וְהַלְחֹת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹקִים הִמָּה וְהַמְּכֻתָּב מִכְּתָב אֱלֹקִים הוּא חֲרוּת עַל הַלְחֹת

Now the tablets were God's work, and the inscription was God's inscription, engraved on the tablets.

We are expressly told that Shabbat Ha'aretz, the Sabbath of the Land, is a year for all to eat freely. The Torah specifies that this is meant equally for everyone, including every type of laborer and stranger, including even wild animals. Beyond this, all debt is to be released in the seventh year. During the Yovel, with the redistribution of land and universal emancipation from slavery, this radical equality and freedom is taken to its extreme.

*Proclaim freedom
throughout the land
for all who live on it*

-Leviticus 25:10

Drash:

This radical freedom may point to another connection between Shemita, Yovel and Sinai. The Talmud teaches us, “Where it says, ‘*charut*,’ don’t read ‘*charut*’ (carved), rather ‘*chairut*’ (freedom)” (Babylonian Talmud: Eruvin 54a). That is to say, when the Torah tells us that the *luchot*, the Tablets of the Law, had carvings in them, this should be read to say that they had freedom in them. Read in this way, tradition tells us that freedom is the essence of Torah.

In this week's *parasha*, we learn to “proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants.” By linking this freedom with entry into the land (above), the Torah is teaching us that “Observance of Jewish law and our return to our ancestral homeland must take place within a context of human freedom and equal opportunity” (Rabbi Shlomo Riskin).

The following helps us to see how freedom of food during Shemita can act as a psychological equalizer as well:

This year, both rich and poor go out to collect the grain together. Yesterday, the poor farmhand was a simple employee in this field, a laborer. Today he has full permission to enter and take the food for himself. Today the poor can enter the field with their heads high. As for the rich, maybe this year presents them with certain feelings of insecurity that they have never faced: “Will there be enough food to provide for the entire year's needs? Do we have to admit the commoners into our farms, our estates?” Shemita is indeed, a very powerful equalizer. (Rabbi Alex Israel)

At the Yovel, the 50th year, all land is redistributed equally. For an agricultural society, land is the primary productive resource. Put in context, this means that the means for generating wealth are redistributed equally. This radical equality is symbolized beautifully in traditional law, which states that, unlike Rosh Hashanah, when we need to hear the shofar blown, at the Yovel everyone, each individual member of the nation, has to blow his or her own shofar.

Discussion Questions:

- What would it take for us to achieve this kind of equality and freedom today?
- Do you think it would be easiest for us to release debt, make food free, or redistribute the land? Why?
- Is there anything you think the Torah is missing—beyond releasing debt, making food free and redistributing land—that would be necessary to truly achieve equality and freedom?

Beyond the Physical

Leviticus 25:8

ויקרא כה: ח

וְסַפַּרְתָּ לְךָ שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֻעוֹת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים וְהָיוּ לְךָ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֻעוֹת הַשָּׁנִים תִּשְׁעַת יָאָרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה

And you shall count for yourself seven sabbatical years, seven years seven times. And the days of these seven sabbatical years shall amount to forty nine years for you.

Leviticus 25:23

ויקרא כה: כג

וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַּר לְצִמְתָּת כִּי לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבֵי אֶתֶם עִמּוּדֵי

The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land belongs to Me, for you are strangers and residents with Me.

Deuteronomy 31:10-12

דברים לא: י-יב

וַיִּצַו מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מִקֶּץ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים בְּמֵעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בְּחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת

Then, Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of seven years, at an appointed time, in the Festival of Succoth, [after] the year of release.

בבוא כל ישראל לראות את פני ה' אלהיך במקום אשר יבחר תקרא את התורה הזאת נגד כל ישראל באזניהם

When all Israel comes to appear before the Lord, your God, in the place He will choose you shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears.

הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגרך אשר בשעריך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו ויראו את ה' אלקיכם ושמרו לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת

Assemble the people: the men, the women, and the children, and your stranger in your cities, in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear the Lord, your God, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah.

According to tradition, the years of Shabbat Ha'aretz and Yovel were designed to be extended Sabbaths. Since we were an agricultural people, and during those years we couldn't till, plant or harvest, our time was meant to be given over to Torah study, prayer and other spiritual pursuits.

The Torah tells us that immediately following Shemita, during Sukkot of the eighth year, the entire nation is to gather, including all children and even the strangers who live among us, to share the wisdom we cultivated during the seventh year.

Drash:

Many commentators emphasize that one of the central underlying objectives of Shemita and Yovel is to remind us not to get trapped into thinking we are only physical beings. These mitzvot are designed to help us remember that Hashem owns and runs the world. Seen from this perspective, the phrase *ki tavo'u el ha'aretz*, “for you will come into the land,” can be seen as building continuity between Eretz Yisrael and our time in the desert. In the desert, everything was miraculous. The very food we ate fell from heaven. Coming into the land, growing our own food, we were liable to get lost in thinking that we control the world, and to lose sight of the miraculousness of nature itself. Shemita and Yovel, by calling upon us to desist from farming and to trust that the earth will provide for us, were, in part, meant to help us remember that even with all of our work, the fact that food grows up from the ground is still a miracle.

Our entire frame of reference... shifts in the seventh year.

In fact, everything that grows from the ground during Shemita is considered to have *kedushat shvi'it*, holiness of the seventh year. If we sell such food, the money we get itself becomes holy, and can only be used to buy more food, which in turn becomes holy. Our entire frame of reference, the very lens through which we perceive the physical world, shifts in the seventh year.

The Ramban (Nachmanides) points out that during the entire fifty-year period, the Yovel helps us to remember that the world belongs to Hashem, because every time we calculate the sale of land, we have to think about the number of years remaining until the Yovel; we are selling the number of harvests, not the land itself.

The Kli Yakar (16th Century) wrote that *v'safarta lecha*, you shall count for yourself, written in the singular, is meant to teach that each and every one of us has to count the years leading to the Yovel, in order to remind ourselves that we are merely *gerim v'toshavim*, strangers and residents in the physical world. The fifty year cycle is a direct parallel to the fifty day period we count from Pesach to Shavuot, from slavery to our most exalted encounter with the divine at Sinai.

Discussion Questions:

- If you had a year off, with free food and no debt, how would you spend it?
- Imagine if our world were given a year off to study and focus on spiritual practice. How do you think the world would change? Why?

Security in the Land, Exile, Reward and Punishment

Leviticus 25:18-21

ויקרא כה: יח-כא

וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת מִשְׁפָּטַי תַּשְׁמְרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וּשְׁבַתֶם עַל הָאָרֶץ לְבִטָּח

You shall perform My statutes, keep My ordinances and perform them then you will live on the land securely.

וְנָתְנָה הָאָרֶץ פְּרִיָּהּ וְאָכַלְתֶּם לְשָׂבַע וּשְׁבַתֶם לְבִטָּח עָלֶיהָ

And the land will then yield its fruit and you will eat to satiety, and live upon it securely.

וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מָה נֹאכֵל בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת הֵן לֹא נִזְרַע וְלֹא נֶאֱסַף אֶת תְּבוּאָתֵנוּ

And if you should say, "What will we eat in the seventh year? We will not sow, and we will not gather in our produce!"

וְצִוִּיתִי אֶת בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֶם בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁשִׁית וַעֲשֵׂת אֶת תְּבוּאָהּ לְשָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים

I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield produce for three years.

Leviticus 26:34

ויקרא כו: לד

אִז תִּרְצָה הָאָרֶץ אֶת שְׁבַתֶיהָ כֹּל יְמֵי הַשְּׁמָה וְאַתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲבִיבֵיכֶם אִז תִּשְׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ וְהִרְצַת אֶת שְׁבַתֶיהָ

Then, the land will be appeased regarding its sabbaticals. During all the days that it remains desolate while you are in the land of your enemies, the Land will rest and thus appease its sabbaticals.

Chronicles II 36:21

דברי הימים ב לו: כא

לְמַלְאוֹת דְּבַר-ה' בְּפִי יִרְמְיָהוּ, עַד-רִצְתָהּ הָאָרֶץ אֶת-שְׁבַתֹתֶיהָ: כָּל-יְמֵי הַשְּׁמָה שְׁבַתָּהּ, לְמַלְאוֹת שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה

To fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had been paid her sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years

Ethics of the Fathers 5:11

פרקי אבות ה: יא

גְלוֹת בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם עַל עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה, וְעַל גְּלוֹי עֲרִיוֹת, וְעַל שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים, וְעַל הַשְּׁמַטַּת הָאָרֶץ

Exile comes upon the world because of idolatry and sexual transgressions and the shedding of blood; and because of neglect to give release to the soil during the sabbatical year.

Drash:

The Torah itself specifies the punishment of exile for only two sins—sexual immorality and breaking the Sabbaths of the land. The Mishna in Pirkei Avot expands this list (above). Next to idolatry, sexual immorality and bloodshed, Shemita, a largely agricultural practice, might seem out of place on the short list of mitzvot that cause us to be cast out of the land.

Following the sin of the Golden Calf at Sinai, after the first set of tablets was broken, tradition has it that a new covenant had to be established between God and the Jewish people. The Ramban (Nachmanides) taught that the first covenant had been, essentially, free. In creating a second covenant, a system of reward and punishment was established, with Shemita and Yovel at the core. We see this notion carrying throughout the entire Tanach. The third to last sentence of Second Chronicles, the very end of our most sacred literature,

makes it clear that the walls of Jerusalem were knocked down, its temple and palaces destroyed and we killed or taken into slavery, all because we had not kept the Sabbatical Years.

Many commentators point out that keeping Shemita and Yovel, releasing debt and allowing the earth to rest, requires incredible emuna—trust or faith. We have to trust that, without our toiling, God will provide. The Torah addresses this explicitly, “If you will say, what will we eat in the seventh year...I will command my blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield a crop for three years.” To not rely on this trust, to act from fear and doubt and not carry out these mitzvot that so clearly call on us to actualize justice, freedom and environmental sanity, is to go against the heart of the Torah.

Discussion Questions:

- Imagine you were told that tomorrow you will be required to leave your home and that, together with everyone on earth, you will receive an equal portion of land. How would you feel?
- Of all the commandments, why do you think the Torah decrees exile for not keeping the land’s Sabbaths?

Poverty and Debt

Leviticus 25:25

ויקרא כה:כה

כִּי יָמוּךְ אֶחִיךָ וַיִּמְכַר מֵאֲחֻזְתּוֹ וַיָּבֵא גֹאֲלוֹ הַקָּרֹב אֵלָיו וַיִּגְאֹל אֶת מִמְכָּר אֶחָיו

If your brother becomes destitute and sells some of his inherited property, his redeemer who is related to him shall come forth and redeem his brother's sale.

Leviticus 25:35-37

ויקרא כה:לה-לו

וְכִי יָמוּךְ אֶחִיךָ וַיִּמְטֶה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחֲזִיקְתָּ בּוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחִי עִמָּךְ

If your brother becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall support him [whether] a stranger or a resident, so that he can live with you.

אֶל תִּקַּח מֵאִתּוֹ נֶשֶׁךְ וְתַרְבִּית וְיִרְאתָ מֵאֱלֹקֶיךָ וְחִי אֶחִיךָ עִמָּךְ

You shall not take from him interest or increase, and you shall fear your God, and let your brother live with you.

אֶת כֶּסֶפְךָ לֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ בְּנֶשֶׁךְ וּבְתַרְבִּית לֹא תִתֵּן אֵכָלְךָ

You shall not give him your money with interest, nor shall you give your food with increase.

Leviticus 25:39

ויקרא כה:לט

וְכִי יָמוּךְ אֶחִיךָ עִמָּךְ וְנִמְכַר לָךְ לֹא תַעֲבֹד בּוֹ עַבְדֹת עֶבֶד

And if your brother becomes destitute with you, and is sold to you, do not work him with slave labor.

Deuteronomy 15:1-2

דברים טו:א-ב

מִקֶּץ שְׁבַע שָׁנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה שְׁמִטָּה

At the end of seven years you will make a release.

וְזֶה דְבַר הַשְּׁמִטָּה שְׁמוּט כָּל בַּעַל מִשָּׂה יָדוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִשֶּׂה בְרַעְהוֹ לֹא יִגֹּשׁ אֶת רַעְהוֹ וְאֶת אֶחָיו כִּי קָרָא שְׁמִטָּה לַיהוָה

And this is the manner of the release; to release the hand of every creditor from what he lent his friend; he shall not exact from his friend or his brother, because time of the release for the Lord has arrived.

השָׁמֹר לָךְ פֶּן יִהְיֶה דְבַר עִם לִבְבְּךָ בְּלִיעֵל לְאֹמֹר קִרְבָּה שְׁנַת הַשְּׁבַע שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה וְרָעָה עֵינֶיךָ בְּאַחִיךָ הָאֲבִיוֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקָרָא עָלֶיךָ אֵל ה' וְהָיָה בְּךָ חַטָּא

Beware, lest there be in your heart an unfaithful thought, saying, "The seventh year, the year of release is approaching, " and you will begrudge your needy brother and not give him, and he will cry out to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin to you.

נָתַן תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא יָרַע לִבְבְּךָ בְּתִתֶנּוּ לוֹ כִּי בְגִלְל הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה יִבְרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְכֹל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ

You shall surely give him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him; for because of this thing the Lord, your God, will bless you in all your work and in all your endeavors.

Many of the laws relating to the seventh and fiftieth years are explicitly focused on relieving poverty. In addition to allowing food to be free, we are also told to redeem the land for those among us who have been forced to sell because of poverty. We are also commanded to release all debt in the seventh year, and never to take interest from our fellows.

Drash:

Parasha Behar is, by and large, about periodic adjustments, most of which are designed to prevent ballooning disparities in wealth and power such as we see today: The release of debt ensures financial stability, the redistribution of land guarantees equal access to productive resources, and the freeing of slaves legislates against ongoing oppression.

*Your heart shall not
be grieved when you
give it to him.*

-Deuteronomy 15:10

Rashi, based on the Talmud, points out that *parasha Behar* follows a clear trajectory—from the agricultural laws of the Sabbatical year, to selling objects, land, then houses, through usury and interest, into laws relating to treatment and redemption of Hebrew slaves. Following this we find, seemingly out of place, laws relating to idolatry and Shabbat observance. Rashi teaches that this indicates a slippery slope that begins with failure to allow the earth to rest and to allow food to be free. These seemingly innocent failures, according to Rashi, eventually lead transgressors to have to sell their possessions, land, then houses, until they are forced to sell themselves into servitude. Finally, in service to other nations, they forget God entirely and become idolaters.

Rashi indicates that each of these stages are meant to awaken one to open his or her hand, to turn back and find it in one's heart to actualize the release of the seventh year—to relinquish debt and deem the produce of the land ownerless. Seen in this way, *parasha Behar* can be understood as both a bold call to relieve poverty, and a warning that failure to do so may lead to our own.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you imagine the world would be like if for a whole year we allowed food to be free and we released all debt?
- "If your fellow should become poor..." Who should be included in this? Why?
- Is it fair of Rashi to link failure to relieve poverty with becoming poor oneself?

A Call for a Sabbath Year to Repair a Broken World

By Jacob Feinspan, Executive Director of Jews United for Justice and Chairman of the Jubilee USA Network Board. Reprinted with permission from [Tikkun Magazine](#), May/June 2007.

Many of us, when we step back and consider our place in the world, feel tremendous dissonance. Especially for those of us lucky enough to be born into privilege in the United States, our standard of living has never been better. We live longer, are more highly educated, and have more economic opportunities than ever before.

At the same time, the gulf between rich and poor in our country continues to grow every year. This gap is dwarfed by the gaping chasm between our wealth and that of the people living in the global South. Every day, 13 percent of the world's population goes hungry. One person in seven has no access to clean water for drinking, cooking or washing. All this while the average American, earning \$36,500 a year, is richer than 95 percent of the world's population.

The brokenness of the world is staggering. With this degree of poverty and inequity, none of us can be spiritually whole. Many of us, particularly those I encounter in my work for American Jewish World Service, an international development organization, are asking ourselves the same questions: Are we doing enough? What more can we do to effect *tikkun olam*, to heal the world around us?

As individuals, there is much we can do—from volunteering with local organizations to making *tzedakah*, or charity, a significant part of our lives. These actions, however, will only get us so far. The global inequity we confront is staggering in scope—too big for any one of us to solve alone. In the face of this struggle, against what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called “the ancient enemy, poverty,” what better place to look for inspiration than our sacred texts?

In the Torah we find a vision of life in community that is liberating and just, governed by Sabbath cycles—the Sabbath Day, the Sabbath Year, and the

Jubilee Year. These cycles are a powerful reminder of God's intent that all creatures enjoy fullness of life and partake in the abundance of God's world. Just as Shabbat is a place and time for weekly individual spiritual renewal, so too was the Sabbath Year a time for communal renewal—to fortify the land and renew interpersonal relationships. In biblical times, the Israelites were forbidden from planting or harvesting every seventh year in order to allow the land to replenish itself. For the people living on the land, it was also a time of replenishment: every seventh year debts were cancelled.

The Marshall Plan of its time, this seven-year cycle of debt cancellation was a structural mechanism designed to address one of the biggest ethical challenges of all time—the cycle of intergenerational poverty. By canceling debts every seven years, and returning lands to their ancestral owners every fiftieth year—the Jubilee Year—the Torah instituted an economy where wealth was redistributed regularly. By living out the Torah's words, our ancestors prevented the rich from accumulating yet more wealth at the expense of the poor.

If ever there was a time to look back to this biblical structure for inspiration, it is now. Eleven years after the beginning of the new millennium, we live in a world that is seriously out of balance. Never before has the gap between the rich and poor been as immense as it is today. In the wake of the economic crisis, every day, 30,000 children die of easily preventable diseases due to malnutrition and lack of adequate medical care. Around the world, more than 70 million children do not go to elementary school because their parents cannot afford fees, books or uniforms.

In the face of this unimaginable inequity and poverty, the biblical vision of Sabbath and Jubilee provides reason for hope. In 2000, responding to a debt crisis that crippled impoverished countries' abilities to direct

funds towards health and education, and inspired by the concepts of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee Year, millions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims worked together in the Jubilee campaign to demand debt relief for impoverished countries around the world. By speaking truth to power, we forced our elected leaders

to relieve the debts of many impoverished countries, specifically those on the continent of Africa.

Debt relief has worked. Spending on health, education, and social services in countries that have received debt forgiveness has increased by 75 percent on average. Three billion dollars in debt relief enabled Tanzania to increase funding for poverty reduction by 130 percent over the last six years. New investments in education in that country enabled approximately 1.6 million children to return to school, almost overnight. Debt relief enabled Mozambique to make strides in combating HIV/AIDS. By 2002, 24 testing and counseling offices opened; 50 offices will be operating by the end of this year.

Though we won victories in the Jubilee 2000 campaign, we have not yet ended the global debt crisis. Twenty-one nations in Africa and Latin America have had their debts to the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and African Development Bank cancelled. But this is merely the beginning of what is needed. Only one in ten people in the developing world will benefit from the debt cancellation provided to date. For too many countries, demands of powerful creditors force a downward spiral of deepening poverty by forcing these nations to prioritize debt payments over clean water, adequate housing, AIDS prevention, basic health care, and

Today, we have the opportunity to bring justice to generations of our own descendants by doing our part to repair our broken world.

schooling for their citizens. Moreover, in many cases undemocratic and authoritarian regimes, such as the Duvaliers in Haiti, Charles Taylor in Liberia, Mobutu SeseSeko in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Suharto in Indonesia, incurred the debts and used them to repress the very people who are now struggling to pay them back. At least forty-five additional countries require debt cancellation to have any hope of reaching the Millennium Development Goals, which are internationally agreed upon anti-poverty targets for 2015.

Now after the victories of Jubilee 2000, communities of faith are calling on world leaders to cancel the unjust debts of impoverished nations in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Canceling these debts will allow countries to invest more in the lives of their citizens: more children will attend school, more people will receive life-saving AIDS medications, and more families will have access to clean drinking water.

When our ancestors lived in the land of Israel, with the memory of the slavery in Egypt still fresh in their collective conscience, could they have known the impact they would have on us, their descendants, by living their lives through the rhythms of Shabbat, the Sabbath Year, and the Jubilee Year? Perhaps. God's words to Moses were still fresh in their ears, "For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God... showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My Commandments." (Exodus 20:5-6)

Today, we have the opportunity to bring justice to generations of our own descendants by doing our part to repair our broken world. Our ancestors' actions inspired the worldwide Jubilee movement, and the imperative to complete what was started in 2000 remains: to lift the excruciating burden of debt that

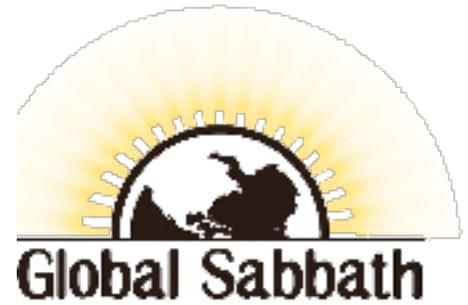
continues to siphon resources from impoverished countries that should be used for health care, education, and clean water.

As Americans we enjoy much good fortune, and

we understand that from those to whom much has been given, much is also required. As citizens of a rich country whose government played a role in the accumulation of these debts, we are uniquely placed to advocate for justice in solidarity with our brothers and sisters living in extreme poverty. If we care about the future of the world community, we must all do our part. We can start by educating our faith communities and legislators about providing debt cancellation to many more of the countries that need it. This is not something we do for them. This is something we do for us—for all of us.

About Global Sabbath

Global Sabbath is dedicated to raising humanity's awareness of the critical relationship between inner and outer change. The world we see around us—socially, economically, politically, environmentally—is an outward reflection of our inner state of being. To create a world of true freedom, justice and peace, an inner shift must be at the forefront of our efforts. Although technical solutions are essential, without the spiritual progress necessary to sustain them such measures will never realize their full power. To end hunger, violence and destruction of the natural world we must shift the very way we live. To do so, we have to truly want to change. That desire comes from within.



To deepening degrees, at each stage of the Sabbath system we are called upon to allow the earth to rest, to reduce consumption, release debt, free people from servitude and to share food and the productive resources of the earth.

Global Sabbath takes its approach from the wisdom of the biblical Sabbath system, including the daylong Sabbath, the yearlong “Earth’s Sabbath” and the Jubilee Year. At the heart of this system is the simultaneous emphasis on gradual development of collective spiritual capacity, along with the progressive realization of social, economic, political and environmental harmony. To deepening degrees, at each stage of the Sabbath system we are called upon to allow the earth to rest, to reduce consumption, release debt, free people from servitude and to share food and the productive resources of the earth.

To create a world of true freedom, justice and peace, an inner shift must be at the forefront of our efforts.

Global Sabbath creates opportunities for humanity to experience our higher potential. Through retreats, workshops, events, action campaigns, support groups and curricula, we awaken participant's to their capacity to live in new ways, and help them develop the tools necessary to do so. In all of what we do, we strive to lead humanity to slow down and cultivate inner peace, to step back and diminish our impact on the earth, and to let go and share what we have.

For more information, please visit www.globalsabbath.com

Signing Up to Become a Jubilee Congregation

Pray: Commit to praying regularly for debt cancellation and economic issues. Hold a yearly Jubilee Shabbat, and open or close with prayer when you hold meetings to plan Jubilee events.

Act: Participate in actions organized by Jubilee USA. Hold your own educational events such as showing a movie or bringing in a speaker from the Global South

Support: Jubilee congregations commit to supporting the work of Jubilee USA with one dollar per member per year or an annual offering dedicated to Jubilee USA.

Advocate: Jubilee Congregations commit to sending one letter per member per year to elected leaders or to engage in an advocacy action proposed by Jubilee USA's national office.

How to Become a Jubilee Congregation:

1. Be in touch with the Jubilee Office for support and advice as you familiarize yourself with the debt issue. They can provide local contacts and lots of ideas for getting started.
2. Approach leaders and appropriate committees and make a proposal to become a Jubilee Congregation.
3. Follow up by making a presentation to the appropriate group or committee
4. Pick a contact person for your church to be in touch with the Jubilee office. Begin planning for events in your congregation.
5. Once we receive your registration (back of this page), the Jubilee Office will send a Jubilee banner, a congregations handbook, and other materials.



Jubilee USA commits to being in regular contact with our Jubilee Congregations and to providing resources to support the ongoing work in your community.

When people of faith join together for a holy purpose, rooted in scripture, we can turn the tides of economic injustice, challenge harmful policies, and advance the prophetic vision of fairness, equality, and hope for the world's poor. The power to create change is in our hands.

Sign-up Sheet to Become a Jubilee Congregation

Yes, our faith community wants to become a Jubilee Congregation!

Name of Congregation: _____

Name of Rabbi/Leader: _____

Denomination: _____ Number of Members: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Website: _____

Contact person: _____

Role/Title in Congregation, if any: _____

Address (if different from above): _____

Phone: _____ Fax _____

Email (required): _____

Financial Commitment to Jubilee

- Enclosed is our Jubilee Congregation annual commitment of \$1 per member: \$ _____
- Enclosed is the offering received for Jubilee as our annual commitment: \$ _____
- We pledge to send in the proceeds of a special offering for Jubilee: _____
- Enclosed is an additional donation to Jubilee USA Network of \$ _____

Tell us about your plans to promote Jubilee in your congregation through prayer, worship, education and letter writing:

Send registration form and donation to:

Jubilee USA Network
212 E. Capitol Street, NE
Washington, DC 20003

Thank you for becoming a Jubilee Congregation and joining us to restore right relationships and economic justice by proclaiming Jubilee! If you have any questions or comments, please call Jeremy Weyl, Congregations and Outreach Fellow, at 202.783.3566 or email at jeremy@jubileeusa.org.

Your Jubilee banner, handbook and welcome letter will arrive within 2-4 weeks.

**questions? comments? ideas?
please contact us:**

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Jubilee USA Network is an alliance of 75 religious denominations and faith communities, human rights, environmental, labor, and community groups working for the definitive cancellation of crushing debts to fight poverty and injustice in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.



Ainsworth United Church of Christ, Portland OR celebrates stand up in 2008