

Rosh Hashanah *Shmita* Seder (courtesy of Hazon)

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What is Shmita? Think of it as the original "Sabbatical Year." According to the Torah, every seventh year the land is to be left fallow, debts are to be forgiven, and a host of other agricultural and economic adjustments are made to seek to maintain an equitable, just, and healthy society.

To mark the start of this Shmita cycle you might try adding a "Shmita plate" to your Rosh Hashanah table.

On the seder plate you might array slices of apples surrounded by six small cups or bowls on the base plate. Have honey, wine, seeds, pomegranate seeds, dates, and figs ready as fillers.

1. **Sova/Enoughness** is the feeling of not wanting; of maximum satisfaction with minimum consumption. Fill the first cup with honey, dip in apples and say:

"In this year of Shmita, may we know no hunger, either spiritual or physical."

2. **Hodayah/Gratefulness** is the feeling of deep appreciation and satisfaction. Hold up a cup with wine, and say:

"May we notice these unique days of Shmita, and may gratitude fill us as the wine fills this cup."

3. **Revaya/Abundance** is the awareness of a healthy world's capacity of self-renewal, and our call to sustainability. This cup is filled with seeds, signifying potential. Pass it around so that everyone may take, and say:

"In this year of Shmita, may we celebrate abundance and work toward sustainability so that our children also experience vast goodness."

4. **Hesed/Lovingkindness** is a response to give back in appreciation for all that we have been given. As you pass this cup around, each person should fill it with figs or dates, and say:

"In this Shmita year, may we know no greed, and give like the continuous fruiting of the fig tree."

5. **Puriyut/Fertility** is the creativity of nature that inspires the human gifts of imagination. This cup is filled with pomegranate seeds, symbols of fertility. Pass the cup around, eat, and say:

"In this Shmita year, may we know no emptiness. May this year bring forth acts of discovery."

6. **Otzar/Treasury** is the earth's shared resources, owned by none and gifted to all, that we leave behind for others. Fill the last cup with drops of wine from each person's cup, and say:

"In this Shmita year, may we be joined to one another through our common heritage, the Torah, our shared past and future, throughout the cycles of space and time."

Torah Texts

Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but in the seventh year, you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave, let the wild beasts eat of it. You shall do the same with your vineyards and olive groves.

- *Shemot, Parshat Mishpatim, 23:10-11*

And the Lord spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Shabbat of the Lord. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and you may gather in its crop. But on the seventh year, a complete rest shall there be for the land, a Shabbat for the Lord. Your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune. You shall not reap the wilds of your harvest or gather the grapes of the vines which you set aside; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. But you may eat whatever the land, during its Shabbat, will produce- you, your male and female servants, the hired workers and those who live with you. And for your animal and for the wild beast that is in your land, shall all its crop be to eat.

- *Vayikra, Parshat Behar, 25:1-7*

You shall observe my laws and faithfully keep my rules, that you may dwell securely upon the land. The land will give its fruit and you will eat to satisfaction; and you will dwell securely upon it. And should you ask: What will we eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops? I will ordain my blessings for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for three years.

- *Vayikra, Parshat Behar, 25:18-21*

Every seventh year you shall practice release of debts. This shall be the nature of the release: every creditor shall release his authority over what he claims from his neighbor. He shall not force it from his neighbor or his brother, for God's Shmita has been proclaimed... If there is a needy person among you, one of your brothers in any of your cities, in the land that the Lord gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your needy brother. Rather, you shall open your hand to him, you shall lend him sufficiently for whatever he needs. Beware, that you may harbor the thought, "the seventh year is approaching," so that you are mean to your needy brother and give him nothing. He will cry out to the Lord against you, and it will be your guilt. Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return, the Lord will bless you in all your efforts and all your undertakings.

- *Devarim, Parshat Re'eh, 15:1-2, 7-10*
