



# The Wisdom of Letting Go



## Shmita: A Sabbatical for the Land

The seven-year cycle has come round again, and with the arrival of Rosh Hashana 5782, September 2021, Israel will begin to observe a year of shmita; a year of letting go (from the Hebrew verb lishmot) and desisting from working the land.

Shmita is a biblical injunction pertinent to the Land of Israel that resonates with today's environmental awareness and a timely observance in response to the climate crisis.

The precept to leave the land fallow and let it rest derives from Leviticus: 25:4:

"But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land,  
a sabbath unto the LORD; thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard."

More references to shmita can be found in the Bible, and further Jewish sources are devoted to the ecological injunction, with extensive deliberation as to its applicability in the realm of the humanly possible. This noble idea includes components of social consciousness, one of which is the precept of debt cancellation and the other, allowing people as well as livestock free access to the land and all its produce, as prescribed in Exodus 23:10-11:

"And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and gather in the increase thereof;  
but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of thy people may eat; and what they leave the beast of the field shall eat.

In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard."

# KKL-JNF and the Shmita Year

What are the practical implications of shmita for KKL-JNF?

KKL-JNF foresters draw up their work plans in accordance with the limitations of the sabbatical year. As of Rosh Hashana 2021, no new tree plantings will take place, including those in celebration of Tu BiShvat. The preservation and maintenance of KKL-JNF forests will continue though, with the aim of preventing damage to and protecting trees from disease, pests, and fires. As well, seed collecting for the following year's germination is permitted. Maintenance work regarding forest infrastructure, including picnic and leisure sites, walking and bike trails, playground equipment, scenic lookouts, etc., will take place as usual. Seedlings and saplings will continue to be nurtured at KKL-JNF tree nurseries, activities in which schoolchildren will take part in celebration of Tu BiShvat 5782.

With that, however, there are exceptions. Life-saving security trees along the roads and around the border communities of the Gaza envelope will continue to be planted. As well, donations can be designated to specific planting areas in KKL-JNF's three regions (northern, central, and southern), according to regulations. In the southern region, for example, there are delimited areas for soil preservation where preparations for tree planting and transplanting can be carried out in accordance with defined rules approved and supervised by the rabbinate.

During this special year of shmita KKL-JNF forests will continue to be open to the public 24/7. Particularly at this time, while the coronavirus pandemic persists, our forests serve as inviting, safe and relaxing green leisure venues enhanced by thousands of picnic and recreation sites, cycling trails, and even cultural events, among others.

As worthy alternatives to planting during this sabbatical year, partnership opportunities that address the climate crisis are available as well as other projects that are integral to the core of KKL-JNF's activities for the benefit of Israel and its people.

קרן קיימת לישראל

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