

The Seventh Year of Rest

Topic

Shemittah, Israel

Grade Level(s)

3rd – 6th

Big Ideas

Helping the poor is a societal obligation.

The *Shemittah* year is a mechanism to alleviate the plight of the poor and to compel people to help.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Understand the basic Biblical concept of *Shemittah*
2. Empathize with the needs of poor people
3. Wrestle with the idea of compelling people to help
4. Develop ways to observe *Shemittah* in *Eretz Yisrael*

Materials / Technology Needed

- [Shemittah Video](#)
- Pictures that show instances of the number seven (available at the end of the activity)
- Envelopes (one for each picture)
- Google Slides (optional)
- Audio recording app like Vocaroo, SoundCloud, or Voice Memo (optional)

Background

The number seven is significant in Jewish tradition as it appears numerous times in different aspects of Jewish literature and ritual. The first occurrence of the number seven in the Torah is *Beresheet* 2:1 – 3. In this context, God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy. Hence, number seven is associated with the attributes of blessing and holiness. Following God's footsteps, the Jewish people are commanded to rest on the seventh day.

Relevant Vocabulary

שְׁמִטָּה (<i>Shemittah</i>)	The last year of the seven-year agricultural cycle in <i>Eretz Yisrael</i>
אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל (<i>Eretz Yisrael</i>)	The Land of Israel
אֶבְיוֹן (<i>Evyon</i>)	Needy (poor)
תִּשְׁמַטְנָה (<i>Tishm'tenah</i>)	Let it rest (verb form of <i>shemittah</i>)
וַיִּנְטַשְׁתָּהּ (<i>U'nitashta</i>)	Lie fallow (verb form of <i>shemittah</i>)
שְׁמַט (<i>Shamat</i>)	To leave, to release
בְּרֵאשִׁית (<i>Beresheet</i>)	The Book of Genesis
שְׁמוֹת (<i>Shemot</i>)	The Book of Exodus
וַיִּקְרָא (<i>Vayikra</i>)	The Book of Leviticus
הֶפְקֵר (<i>Hefker</i>)	Ownerless
חֲבֵרוּתָא/חֲבֵרוּתוֹת (<i>Havruta/havrutot</i>) From the root ח – ב – ר	Learning partner (From the Hebrew root for friend or companion). Can also refer to the traditional method of learning in pairs.

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Similarly, according to the Torah, Jewish landowners in *Eretz Yisrael* may work their land for six years; but every seventh year (*shevi'it*) is a *shemittah* year, when land must be left to rest*. Any crops that develop from that year are considered to be *hefker* and available to be collected by anyone who wishes to do so (*Shemot* 23:10 – 11, *Vayikra* 25:1 – 7, et al.).

Shemot 23: 10 – 11	שמות כג: י - יא
Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield	וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע אֶת־אֲרָצְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֹתָהּ
but the seventh 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. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.	וְהַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּשְׁמַטְנָהּ וּנְטַשְׁתָּהּ וְאָכְלוּ אֲבִינֵי עֹמֵד וְיִתְרָם תֹּאכַל חֵיט הַשָּׂדֶה כִּרְתֻעָשָׂה לְכַרְמְךָ לְזֵיתֶךָ

Note that the Torah explicitly states that one of the results of letting the land rest is that needy people must be permitted to come onto the land and partake of the food that develops from it.

Because the laws of *Shemittah* apply only in *Eretz Yisrael*, they became less important after the Jews were expelled from the land in the second century CE. As Jews began returning to *Eretz Yisrael* at the end of the 19th century the laws of *Shemittah* became relevant again. This caused certain difficulties that farmers had to face. As a result, many creative [ideas](#) have been developed to ameliorate the obstacles created by *Shemittah*.

* The seven-year cycle is a general one for all Jewish farmers in the Land of Israel, so everyone is on the same cycle regardless of when they took ownership of their land.

Prepare in Advance

- Print the pictures that represent the number seven (at the end of the activity) and place each one inside an envelope. See a glossary of the pictures towards the end of the activity, before the pictures for printing, for an explanation of each image.
- Watch the entire *Shemittah* video **twice** so you are prepared for the class discussion.
- Watch the [video](#) about how modern Israelis deal with the laws of *Shemittah*.

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Description of Activities

a) Divide students into *havrutot*. Give each *havruta* one picture inside an envelope. Ask learners to write down what they see in the picture. Ask learners to find one commonality among all the pictures. Lead learners to discuss the prevalence of number seven in the Jewish tradition. For more advanced learners, consider discussing what the number seven might represent.

Show students the video in the following manner:

1. 0:01 - 2:30 First part
2. 2:31 - 4:13 Second part
3. 4:14 - 6:20 Third part

Make sure to stop the video manually at the above-mentioned intervals to facilitate discussion. This technique will allow students to formulate their own ideas on what is happening in the video and to understand the law of *Shemittah*.

Movie's Cast

Yoni – boy

Avi – Yoni's dad

David – “thief, friend”

Possible questions for each section. (Feel free to add your own questions.)

Questions for the first part (01 – 2:30)

- 1) What does Yoni see while he is walking?
- 2) What does he try to do? Why?
- 3) Does he succeed?

Questions for the second part (2:31- 4:13)

- 1) What does Yoni tell his father?
- 2) What does Avi (Yoni's father) mean when he says: “You know that this year the vineyard is not ours.”
- 3) According to Avi, what happens during the *Shemittah* year?
- 4) What does Yoni worry about?

Questions for the third part (4:14 – 6:20)

- 1) Why is David calling Yoni a thief? Why does Yoni think David is the thief?
- 2) What seems to be the misunderstanding here?
- 3) Who has granted David permission to collect fruit in the vineyard?
- 4) Do you think Avi convinced his son that the family must allow Avi (and others like him) to take produce from their vineyard?
- 5) What would you respond to Avi when he says “but last year we did not have a *Shemittah* year?”

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- 6) What do you think needy people do to feed themselves and their families during non-*Shemittah* years? What is our obligation, if any, to help others during the non-*Shemittah* years?
- b) Divide students into small groups and pose the following scenario:
Your team is hired as consultants for an agricultural company in Israel. Your assignment is to advise Israeli farmers on how to make a living during a *Shemittah* year. Present at least three ideas. Ideas can be presented visually using Google Slides, or pen, and paper, or auditorily using Vocaroo, SoundCloud or Voice Memo.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

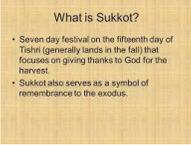
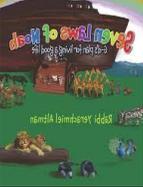
- Learners calculate the *Shemittah* years from this year until the year 6000. (For example: 5782, 5789, 5796, etc.)
- Learners illustrate the concept of *Shemittah* using graphics, computer images, or drawing pictures using colors of their choice.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Learners [research](#) how people outside *Eretz Yisrael* deal with *Shemittah*.

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Glossary of Pictures

	<p style="text-align: center;">מְנוֹרָה <i>Menorah</i></p>	<p>The seven-branched candelabra that was lit on a daily basis in the <i>Mishkan</i> and the <i>Beit Hamikdash</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">שְׁבַע בְּרָכוֹת <i>Sheva Berachot</i></p>	<p>The seven blessings recited under the wedding canopy and after post-wedding meals</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">שִׁבְעָה <i>Shiva</i></p>	<p>The seven-day mourning period after the loss of a close relative (literally: "seven")</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">בְּרֵאשִׁית <i>Beresheet</i></p>	<p>The first verse in the Torah contains seven words. It starts with the word בְּרֵאשִׁית <i>beresheet</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">סוכּוֹת <i>Sukkot</i></p>	<p><i>Sukkot</i>, a holiday celebrated for seven days from the 15th day of the month of <i>Tishrei</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">שְׁמִטָּה <i>Shemittah</i></p>	<p>The last year of the seven-year agricultural cycle in the Land of Israel</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי <i>Seventh Day</i></p>	<p>The seventh day of creation, <i>Shabbat</i>, G-d rested</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">שְׁבַע מִצְוֹת בְּנֵי נֹחַ The Seven Noahide Laws</p>	<p>Seven laws that the children of Noah were commanded</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה, יִצְחָק וְרִבְקָה, יַעֲקֹב וְרָחֵל וְלֵאָה</p>	<p>The seven patriarchs and matriarchs: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rivka, Jacob and Rachel and Leah</p>

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Pictures for Printing



בְּרֵאשִׁית כָּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ



What is Sukkot?

- Seven day festival on the fifteenth day of Tishri (generally lands in the fall) that focuses on giving thanks to God for the harvest.
- Sukkot also serves as a symbol of remembrance to the exodus.

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