



# Sermon Spark

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**Sermon Spark: Behar** The Jewish tradition has profound things to say about environmentalism and sustainability. Those ancient ideas and values are being given new life and expression in today's State of Israel.

## Framing

Consciousness about the environment and our responsibility to it seems to be a recent phenomenon. However, this kind of consciousness is very ancient, and very Jewish. One of the reasons for founding the State of Israel was to bring this ancient wisdom to fruition.

## Key Text: Leviticus 25:1-18

**כה,ב** דָּבַר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם, כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם-  
וְשָׁבַתָה הָאָרֶץ, שְׁבַת לַיהוָה.

**כה,ג** שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךְךָ, וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כְּרֶמְךָ; וְאִסְפָּתָה, אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ.

**כה,ד** וּבִשְׁנֵה הַשְּׁבִיעִת, שְׁבַת שְׁבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ--שְׁבַת, לַיהוָה: שְׂדֶךְךָ לֹא תִזְרַע,  
וְכְרֶמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר.

**כה,ה** אֵת סְפִיחַ קִצִּירְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר, וְאֶת-עֲנָבֵי נְזִירְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר: שְׁנַת שְׁבַתוֹן, יִהְיֶה  
לָאָרֶץ.

**כה,ו** וְהִיְתָה שְׁבַת הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם, לְאֹכְלָה--לְךָ, וּלְעַבְדְּךָ וּלְאִמְתְּךָ; וּלְשֹׁכֶיךָ, וּלְתוֹשְׁבֶיךָ,  
הַגֵּרִים, עִמָּךְ.

**כה,ז** וּלְבַהֲמֹתֶיךָ--וּלְחַיָּה, אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרְצְךָ: תִּהְיֶה כָל-תְּבוּאָתָהּ, לְאֹכֵל. { ס }

**כה,ח** וְסִפְרָתָ לְךָ, שְׁבַע שְׁבֹתֹת שָׁנִים--שְׁבַע שָׁנִים, שְׁבַע פְּעָמִים; וְהָיוּ לְךָ, יָמֵי שְׁבַע  
שְׁבֹתֹת הַשָּׁנִים, תִּשַׁע וָאַרְבָּעִים, שָׁנָה.

**כה,ט** וְהִעֲבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה, בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבַעִי, בְּעָשׂוֹר, לַחֹדֶשׁ; בַּיּוֹם, הַכִּפּוּרִים,  
תִּעֲבִירוּ שׁוֹפָר, בְּכָל-אֶרְצְכֶם.

**כה,י** וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם, אֵת שְׁנַת הַחֲמָשִׁים שָׁנָה, וּקְרַאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ, לְכָל-יֹשְׁבֵיהָ; יוֹבֵל  
הוּא, תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם, וְשְׁבֹתֶם אִישׁ אֶל-אֶחָזְתּוֹ, וְאִישׁ אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תִּשְׁבוּ.

**כה,יא** יוֹבֵל הוּא, שְׁנַת הַחֲמָשִׁים שָׁנָה--תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם; לֹא תִזְרְעוּ--וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ אֶת-  
סְפִיחֶיהָ, וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת-נְזִרֶיהָ.

כה, יב כי יובל הוא, קדש תהיה לכם ; מן-השדה--תאכלו, את-תבואתה.

כה, יג בשנת היובל, הזאת, תשבו, איש אל-אחוזתו.

כה, יד וכי-תמכרו ממכר לעמיתך, או קנה מיד עמיתך--אל-תונו, איש את-אחיו.

כה, טו במספר שנים אחר היובל, תקנה מאת עמיתך ; במספר שני-תבואת, ומכר-  
לך.

כה, טז לפי רב השנים, תרבה מקנתו, ולפי מעט השנים, תמעט מקנתו : כי מספר-  
תבואת, הוא מכר לך.

כה, יז ולא תונו איש את-עמיתו, ויראת מאלהיך : כי אני יהוה, אלהיכם.

כה, יח ועשיתם, את-חקתי, ואת-משפטי תשמרו, ועשיתם אתם--וישבתם על-  
הארץ, לבטח.

**1** And the LORD spoke unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying: **2** Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD. **3** Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the produce thereof. **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. **5** That which groweth of itself of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, and the grapes of thy undressed vine thou shalt not gather; it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. **6** And the sabbath-produce of the land shall be for food for you: for thee, and for thy servant and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant and for the settler by thy side that sojourn with thee; **7** and for thy cattle, and for the beasts that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be for food. **8** And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and there shall be unto thee the days of seven sabbaths of years, even forty and nine years. **9** Then shalt thou make proclamation with the blast of the horn on the tenth day of the seventh month; in the day of atonement shall ye make proclamation with the horn throughout all your land. **10** And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. **11** A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you; ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of the undressed vines. **12** For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy unto you; ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. **13** In this year of jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession. **14** And if thou sell aught unto thy neighbour, or buy of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not wrong one another. **15** According to the number of years after the jubilee thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the crops he shall sell unto thee. **16** According to the multitude of the years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of the years thou shalt diminish the price of it; for the number of crops doth he sell unto thee. **17** And ye shall not wrong one

another; but thou shalt fear thy God; for I am the LORD your God. **18** Wherefore ye shall do My statutes, and keep Mine ordinances and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety.

## Supporting Texts

- **Devarim 11:10:** “For the Land to which you come, to possess it – it is not like the land of Egypt that you left, where you would plant your seed and water it on foot like a vegetable garden. But the Land to which you cross over to possess it, is a Land of hills and valleys, from the rain of heaven will it drink water, a Land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year’s end.”
- **Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings, 6 Laws 8-10:** It is forbidden to cut down fruit bearing trees outside a besieged city, nor may a water channel be deflected from them so they wither.... The penalty is imposed not only during a siege but rather anyone who cuts down a fruit bearing tree in a destructive manner is flogged...And not only trees, but anyone who smashes household goods, tears clothing, demolishes a building, stops a spring, or wastes articles of food in a destructive manner, is in violation of the command “you shall not destroy.”
- **Sefer HaChinuch, Parshat Shoftim, Mitzvah 529:** “The root of the Mitzvah (Bal Tashchit) is well known – that it is to teach our souls to love the Good and the Greater Value and to cling to it. Therefore we should attach ourselves to the good and distance ourselves from anything that is bad and any type of destruction. This is the path for Hasidim (Righteous People) and People of Good Deeds – who love Peace and are happy with the goodness of the Creation and draw themselves close to Torah. They do not ever waste anything, even a kernel of mustard. They should fashion themselves in such a way that any wastefulness or destruction that they see – if they are able to (save) prevent it – they should save it from all forms of destructiveness with all their energy.”

## Modern Application to Israel

The relationship between the Jewish People and the earth is central to the Jewish tradition. The creation story in Genesis highlights our responsibility to take care of the earth, most of our holidays have strong agricultural connections, and there is a wealth of Jewish law and narrative about caring for the environment. Israel has always been praised by Jews for its natural beauty and resources. Here are two examples of Jewish organizations applying these ancient values in modern day Israel.

**Leket Israel** was founded in 2003 to rescue excess, nutritious food that would have otherwise been destroyed and redirected to people in need. They have become Israel's umbrella organization for donations of surplus food, with a committed lineup of volunteers and staff members providing more than 110 tons of food per week to over 230 soup kitchens, homeless shelters, senior citizen centers and other social service organizations around Israel.

<http://leket.org.il/english/>

In 1997, **Green Course** was founded by a group of students that looked around and thought that there wasn't a significant environmental movement in Israel. They started under the auspices of the SPNI (Society for Preservation of Nature in Israel) by opening Green Course chapters on 4 campuses, and within a few years there were chapters across the country. It went on to become the leading platform for volunteering for the environment in Israel.

<http://www.green.org.il/eng/>