

Genesis, Covenant, Jubilee and the Land Ethic, ver.8.3.3

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The Genesis texts in this study trace the devolution of humanity's two most important relationships, the relationship with the land and the relationship with God. Specifically, whenever one relationship degenerates so does the other one. Alongside these two relationships, one also sees the human relationship with the animals changing, from one of intimacy to one of "terror" on the part of the other animals as humans become predators.

The Exodus and Leviticus texts on the *Shmitah* (Sabbatical) year emphasize ideas and give textual clues that suggest *Shmitah* is a response to and a solution or *tikun* for the tragedy of Genesis. Here, when the right relationship with the land is restored, so too is the people's relationship with God ('I will become *Elohim* for you and you will become my people'). The relationship with the animals also transforms into a more Edenic one of sharing and living together, when all creatures, even the wild animals, have the right to eat the produce that grows without cultivation in *Shmitah* year.

The fundamental understanding that these texts drive at is that the goal and purpose of the Torah covenant, on a grand scale, is that the Israelites observe the *Shmitah* and *Yovel* (Jubilee) years, and that in doing so, they will repair the relationship with the Earth that was destroyed by the generations leading up to the flood. Essentially, the covenant with Abraham is meant to take one people and one land, and put them in right relationship with each other, in order to become a model for how humanity should live. That model society is created by the observance of *Shmitah*.

The importance of *Shmitah* is evidenced in the fact that according to Leviticus, if God has to choose between taking care of the people and taking care of the land, God will choose the land over the people. The land is not 'promised' to the Israelites except conditionally, based on whether they respect the land's rights and do justice with her and through her. This is why, according to the rabbis as well as the author of Chronicles, neglect of the *Shmitah* year leads to exile.

Every human right, as the Torah understands it—the right to feed oneself and one's family, the right to have equal access to resources, the right to be freed from debt and from slavery, and the protection of strangers—are all tied to the observance of *Shmitah* and the seven-year cycle. Social justice is fundamentally grounded in the idea of justice for the land, and for the Earth.

Rabbi David Mevorach Seidenberg

P.S. I started studying *Shmitah* and *Yovel* under a grant in 1982, after I became newly observant. I started teaching these texts on Genesis and *Shmitah* in 1993, when I prepared them for a *tikun leil Shavuot*. Since then, I have taught them many times at synagogues, at Teva Center and Kayam seminars, the Green Zionist Alliance, CAJE, Rabbis for Human Rights and other conferences, to educators, rabbis and lay people. Every time I teach them I learn new things. I hope the experience you have with these texts will also be rich.

Introduction for teachers

How to use these texts:

In order to emphasize the connections between the texts, the translation method used is 'concordant', that is, similar words in Hebrew are translated as much as possible by similar words in English. Strange phrases in Hebrew are also translated so as to sound strange in English. The goal is not just to trace the evolution of ideas about our relationship with the Earth, but also to provide a text that can be used for understanding and creating midrash, which often depends on specific phrasing and repeated words. For some phrases more than one translation is offered.

The texts themselves highlight which phrases and passages deal with our relationship to the land, and which deal with our relationship to the animals and to eating. (See key at the bottom of any page.) Commentary includes interpretations relating to questions of ecology and our relationship with the Earth or land, as well as interpretations that are simply elucidating or interesting. It also includes some discussion questions. Those comments that are most important for studying our ecological relationships are starred (*). Though there is a particular picture that I hope readers will arrive at, the commentaries include not only interpretations that support that goal, but also some interpretations that contradict it.

Students should attain an understanding of how the Torah covenant can be interpreted ecologically, as well as learning other interpretations. My intention is for there to be enough material here for students to arrive at their own conclusions, independently from the teacher.

A second, abridged version of these texts is available at neohasid.org/torah/genesis-shmitah/. It focuses on the verses that mention the wild animal or *chayah*. It is both shorter (a single sheet) and less dense. What can be seen most clearly there is that our relationship with the other animals is a prism which reflects our relationship with the land and with God. In fact, the most explicit link between Eden and *Shmitah* is that we share the same food as the wild animals in both settings. The abridged version does not have commentary and teachers may want to use it in conjunction with studying this longer version.

This text study can also work for *chevruta* or paired study, where each partner takes turns reading aloud and explaining the text. I would also recommend for anyone teaching these texts to first study them thoroughly and to become familiar with the translation.

Many more resources on *Shmitah* are also available at neohasid.org/torah/genesis-shmitah/.

a. *Elohim* said: Let us make a human *adam* in our figure like our image, and they will dominate/prevail *vayirdu* over the fish of the sea and over the bird of the skies and over the beast *b'heimah* and over all the land and over every crawler crawling on the land. And *Elohim* created the *adam* in god's* image, in *Elohim's* image god created him, male and female god created them. And *Elohim* blessed them and...said to them: Bear fruit and increase and fill the land and occupy her *umil'u et ha'aretz v'kinsuba* and prevail *ur'du* over the fish of the sea and over the bird of the skies and over every animal crawling on the land *kol hachayah haromeset 'al ha'aretz*. And *Elohim* said: Here, I have given to you-all every plant/grass *'esev* seeding seed which is on the face of all the land and every tree which has in it tree-fruit seeding seed, for you it will be for eating, and for every animal of the land *chayat ha'aretz* and for every bird of the skies and for every crawler on the land in which there is a living soul *nefesh chayah*, every green plant *yerek 'esev* for eating. Gen 1:26-30

b. And *Elohim* saw all that god made, and here: very good *v'hineh tov m'od*. And the skies and the land were completed and all their hosts, and *Elohim* completed in the seventh day god's work which god made. And in the seventh day *Elohim* stopped/rested *vayishbot* from all god's work which god made. And *Elohim* blessed the seventh day and made him holy, for in him god stopped from all god's work which *Elohim* created to do. Gen 1:31-2:3

c. Every growth of the field would yet be in the land and every plant of the field would yet grow, for *YHVH Elohim* had not caused rain on the land, and an *adam* to serve *la'avod* the ground was not... *YHVH Elohim* [ff]orm-ed *vayitzer* the human *ha'adam*, dirt from the ground/earth *'afar min ha'adamah* and blew in his nostrils a living breath *nishmat chayyim*, and the *adam* became a living soul *nefesh chayah*. *YHVH Elohim* planted a garden *gan* in *Eden* eastward and put there the *adam* that god formed, and caused to grow from the land every tree pleasurable *nechmad* for seeing and good for eating, and the life-tree in the middle of the *gan* and the tree of knowing good and bad/evil... *YHVH Elohim* took the *adam* and placed/rested him in *gan Eden* to work her/to serve her and to watch over her *L'ovdah ul'shomrah*. And *YHVH Elohim* commanded over the *adam*, saying: From every tree in the garden eating you will eat; and from the tree of knowing good and bad, you will not eat from him, for in the day of your eating from him dying you will die. Gen 2:5-17

d. *YHVH Elohim* said: No good is the *adam* being by himself – I will make for him a help opposite him. And *YHVH Elohim* formed every animal of the field *chayat basadeh* and every bird of the skies and brought unto the *adam* to see what he would call to him...and the *adam* called names to every beast *b'heimah* and every bird of the skies and every animal of the field *kol chayot basadeh*, and for Adam no help opposite/corresponding to him was found...And *YHVH Elohim* built the side *tzela* which god took from the *adam* into a woman and brought her unto the *adam*. Gen 2:18-22

The Kabbalah teaches that the sin was not eating the fruit but separating the fruit from the tree. Once the fruit was ripe, they would have been invited to eat it:

e. The two of them were naked *'arumim*, the *adam* and his woman, and they were not embarrassed. And the snake was clever (naked) *'arum* beyond any *chayat basadeh*...and he said to the woman: Did *Elohim* even say, you-all will not eat from any tree of the *gan*?...And the woman said: *Elohim* said...from the tree in the middle of the *gan* you-all will not eat and will not touch...And the woman saw, that the tree was good to eat and he was desire for the eyes, and the tree was pleasurable for enlightening *nechmad l'haskil*, and she took from his fruit and ate and gave to her man with her, and he ate. Gen 2:25-3:6

Key: underline = relation to the land; san serif = relation to animals/eating/food; bolded words have comments on them. The word 'god', uncapitalized, is used as a pronoun for God. Translation and commentary by Rabbi David Seidenberg; contact: rebduvid86@gmail.com, neohasid.org, ver.8.3

* **Prevail over.** Dominion over other animals does not include permission to eat them. If so, how did the first humans exercise dominion? Traditional answers include: They could use the animals for work (*b.Sanhedrin*). They gave names to the animals; when the animals were called, they would come (Rashi). For Maimonides, this is merely a description of human nature, not a *mitzvah*.

In god's image. Lit. 'his image'. Acc. to some this phrase refers to Adam's image. The end of the verse emphasizes that the divine image is both masculine and feminine. Note that throughout this translation, masculine pronouns referring to God are replaced by 'god'.

* **Occupy her.** Usu. translated 'conquer'. The humans were told to fill and occupy the land, i.e. the Earth—which this would imply that they were destined to leave Eden.

* **I have given to you-all.** The humans and the other animals all ate together from the same food supply, acc. to Rashi. Ramban disagrees, saying that the humans were to eat tree fruit and plant seeds (e.g. grain, beans), but not the plants themselves, which were for the animals. For Rashi *yerek 'esev* means all the plants, grass trees, fruit etc. that could be eaten. For Ramban *yerek 'esev* means what was specifically given to the other animals.

Very good. What makes the whole 'very good', more so than any of the parts? A midrashic answer: 'Very' means 'death'. Another answer: 'Very' means 'Adam' (*Bereishit Rabbah*). Maimonides says that the phrase teaches that human beings and all other species have no value 'in comparison with the whole that exists and endures'.

* **Seventh day.** Though the first Creation story prescribes hierarchy, it ends with the unity and peace of Shabbat. The paradigm of seven embedded in the days of Creation becomes the basis for Shabbat, *Shmitah* (the sabbatical year) and *Yovel* (the Jubilee). "7" may also be connected to Nature through the convention of seven planets, colors, seas, continents, and musical notes.

Rain. A mist, *eid*, comes up from the ground to moisten the soil so it can be formed into the human. *Adam* can be read as *eid* plus *dam*, blood.

* **From the ground.** *Min ha'adamah*. The second creation story explains that name *adam* is derived from *adamah*.

Living soul. In section a, the other animals are called *nefesh chayah*, while in c the human becomes a *nefesh chayah*. Many translations obscure this equality. *Chayah* can mean 'animal', but here it means 'living' and modifies *nefesh*, meaning 'soul', 'breath' or 'being'.

* **To serve.** *L'ovdah ul'shomrah* is often translated 'to till and to tend' or 'to work her and guard her', but *l'ovdah* means *la'avod otah*. Like *l'ovdo* in the 2nd paragraph of the *Shema*, which means 'to serve' or 'to worship' God—not 'to work God'—*l'ovdah* means 'to serve her'. Acc. to Torah, agriculture is meant to be a sacrament.

Animal of the field. *Chayat basadeh* means wild animal.

No help corresponding to him. Ramban explains that the *adam* named the other animals, but found none who could respond by giving him a name.

Built the side. Acc. to midrash and Kabbalah, the woman is made from one half of the *adam*, not just a rib.

Will not touch. Acc. to midrash, Adam told Eve that eating and touching the tree were forbidden. The snake, hearing this, pushed Eve, and she touched the tree.

As a consequence of the fall, three relationships deteriorate: the one between God and humans, the one between woman and man, and the one between humanity and the land. Genesis until Abraham is essentially a history of the ongoing degeneration of these relationships.

f. And the eyes of them both were opened and they knew, that they were naked *virumim* ...They heard the voice/sound of YHVH *Elohim* [god]self walking *mit'haleikh* in the *gan* and they hid, the *adam* and his woman, from the face of YHVH *Elohim*... YHVH *Elohim* called unto the *adam* and said to him: Where are you? *Ayekah!*...and god said: Who told you that you are naked? Is it from the tree which I commanded you against eating you ate?...Unto the woman god said: Increasing I will increase your labor-pain *itzvoneikh* and your pregnancy, in pain you will birth children, and toward your man your desire *t'shukateikh* and he will rule over/within you *bakb*. And to Adam god said: Because you listened to your woman's voice and ate from the tree which I commanded you saying you will not eat from him, **cursed is the ground/soil for your sake** *arurah ba'adamah ba'avurkha*, in pain *b'itzavon* you will eat of her all the days of your life; and thorn and thistle will grow for you and you will **eat the grass** *esev* **of the field**. By the sweat of your nostrils / your anger you will eat bread, **until you return to the ground, because from her were you taken, for you are dirt and will turn back to dirt**... YHVH *Elohim* made for Adam and his woman garments of skin and dressed them. And YHVH *Elohim* said: Here the human has become **like one from us** to know good and bad. And now, **lest he send out his hand** and take also from the life-tree and eat and live for all-time— YHVH *Elohim* sent him / threw him (them) out of *gan Eden* **to work / to serve** *la'avod* **the ground that he was taken from** *ba'adamah asher lukach misham*. And god **drove out** *vayigaresh* the *adam* and made the *k'ruvim* dwell from the east of *gan Eden* and the glowing-hot sword turning itself, to watch over the life-tree's path. Gen 3:7-24

g. Kayin said to Hevel his brother: it was while they were in the field, and Kayin rose up to Hevel his brother and killed him...And YHVH said unto Kayin: Where is Hevel your brother? And he said: I didn't know! Am I the one watching over my brother? And god said: What did you do? The voice of your brother's bloods, they **scream** unto me **from the ground**. Now you are **cursed from the ground** *arur atah min ba'adamah* which split open her mouth to take your brother's bloods from your hand. Because you will work / will serve *ta'avod* the ground, she will not add giving her strength. **Shaken off and thrust out** *na`v'nad* you will be in the land. And Kayin said to YHVH: Great is my sin, beyond carrying. **Here you have driven me** *hen geirashta oti* today **away from the face of the ground** *mip'nei ba'adamah* and from your face I will be hid, and **I will be** *na`v'nad* **in the land**, and it will be whoever finds me will kill me. Gen 4:8-14

h. YHVH said: My spirit will not strain in humanity *ba'adam* for all-time by reason that he is (they are) flesh...YHVH saw, that **the human's evil** *ra'at ba'adam* **in the land** was tremendous, and every leaning of his (their) heart's thought was only evil/bad all day. And YHVH drew-in *vayinachem*, for god made the *adam* within the land, and god was pained unto god's heart. And YHVH said: **I will blot out the human** *adam* **I created from off the face of the land**, from human to beast to crawler to bird of the skies, for I am withdrawn-against *nichanti* my having made them...**And the land was ruined** before the *Elohim* and the land was filled up with violence. **And Elohim saw** the land and here, her ruin, **for all flesh ruined his way on the land**. And *Elohim* said to Noah: The end of all flesh comes before me, **for the land is filled with violence from before them. Here am I going to ruin them with the land**. Gen 6:3-13

* **Cursed is the ground for your sake.** Usu. translated 'cursed...because of you', it can also mean, 'For your benefit'. The connection between *adam* and *adamah* remains intact because they are cursed together. Could cursing the ground alongside the humans help them to do *t'shuvah*, to return to God?

Eat the grass of the field. This could mean cultivated plants or specifically grains (which are grasses). Many see this story as a parable about hunter-gatherers being supplanted by agriculturalists. Ramban, uniquely, thinks the humans ate grain (i.e. grass seeds) before, but now ate the grass itself. (See above, on 'I have given to you-all'.)

Like one from us. A midrash interprets this to mean 'like one separated away from us'. The humans are separate from God, some say, because after eating from the tree of knowing (of knowledge), their knowledge of good and bad becomes mixed up, that is, they experience good and bad from the same things at the same time.

Lest he send out his hand. The human was supposed to eat first from the life-tree (tree of life). How is gaining awareness of good and bad an obstacle to eating from the tree of life?

* **To serve the ground from where he had been taken.** The soil from which the human being was first created. The humans are not thrown out of Eden willy-nilly but are brought to a place where they have a special connection to the ground: their birthplace.

Drove out. *Vayigaresh*. The human is exiled from the garden, but not from the ground. The root *GRSh* also means 'to divorce'.

Scream from the ground. This second sin is against the ground as well as against Hevel. 'Hevel' can also mean empty breath, as in the book of Eccl.

* **Cursed from the ground.** This can mean, 'cursed away from the ground' or 'cursed by the ground'. The language indicates something radically different from what happened before, when the ground was 'cursed for the sake of the humans.

Shaken off and thrust out. Kayin's punishment is to be completely disconnected from the land.

You have driven me away from the face of the ground. Kayin faces a double exile, from the ground and from God—this is what makes the punishment too great, 'beyond carrying'. Kayin is exiled specifically from 'the face' of each one. What does this teach about being in relationship to the Earth?

* **The human's evil in the land... blot out the human from off the face of the land...the land was ruined.** The sin is specifically against the land; God's response is to cleanse the land. The ruin/violence impacting the land is mentioned seven times. There is no ambiguity about this aspect of the flood.

And Elohim saw. Like in Sodom (Sodom), and in Egypt when God saw the Israelites' slavery, 'seeing' means understanding with empathy and compassion.

Noach. When Noah is named, his father says: 'This one will comfort us *yinachemenu* from the works and the pain of our hands from the ground which YHVH cursed.' (Midrash understands this to mean that Noah invented the plow. Similarly, it says after the flood, 'Noach, man of the soil *ish ba'adamah*, began, and he planted a vineyard.') Instead, YHVH is the one described as '*vayinachem*'.

The relationship between humanity and the land and animals is replaced by covenant. The animals are equal partners in this covenant, as is the land itself.

i. Elohim remembered Noah and all the animals *kol bachayab* and beasts which were with him in the ark...And *Elohim* spoke to Noah saying: Go out from the ark, you and your woman and your sons and your sons' women with you; every animal *chayah* that is with you, from all flesh of bird and beast and every crawler crawling on the land that is with you, going out with you, and they will **swarm in the land** and bear fruit and increase in the land...And Noah built an altar for *YHVH* and took from every cult-pure beast and from every cult-pure bird and made burnt-up-offerings go up...And *YHVH* smelled the pleasing smell and *YHVH* said unto god's heart: I will not add to cursing anymore the ground for the sake of humanity *ba'avur ha'adam* – for the human heart's leaning is evil/bad from his youth, and I will not add anymore to striking down all life as I did. Throughout all the land's days, sowing and reaping and cold and hot and summer and winter and day and night will not stop/rest *lo yishbotu*. And *Elohim* blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: Bear fruit and increase and fill the land. And fearing you and **terror of you** will be over every animal of the land *chayat ha'aretz* and over every bird of the skies, in all that crawls the ground and in all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. **All that crawls which living, for you it will be for eating, like green plants** I have given to you-all. Just the flesh with **his soul** *nafsho*, **his blood**, you will not eat. And just your blood for your souls will I require, **by the hand of every animal** *chayah* and by the hand of every human...for in **the image of Elohim** god made the human. And you, bear fruit and increase, swarm in/through the land... Gen 8:1, 8:15-9:7

j. And *Elohim* said unto Noah and unto his sons saying: And I, here I am **erecting my covenant** *briti* with you and with your seed after you and with the soul of **every animal/soul living with you** *kol nefesh bachayah itchem*, among the bird and among the beast and among every animal of the land *kol chayat ha'aretz* with you...And I will erect my covenant...all flesh will not be cut-off anymore from the flood waters, and there will be no more flood to destroy the land. And *Elohim* said: This is the covenant-sign which I am placing between me and between you-all and between every living/animal's soul *kol nefesh chayah* which is with you, for generations, for all-time: my bow I put in the cloud, and she will be a covenant sign between me and the land...I will remember My covenant...and I will look at her to remember the covenant for all-time between Elohim and between all living/animal soul in all flesh on the land. This is the covenant...between Me and between all flesh on the land. Gen 9:8-17

At the Tower of Babel, God scatters the people to force them to fulfill the mandate in the original blessing and the rainbow covenant: fill the Earth. Why, and why are the people resisting doing so?

k. And all the land was one speech and single words *d'varim achadim*...and they said: Let us build a city and a tower...lest we be scattered *pen nafutz* over the face of the land...And *YHVH* said: Let us go down and **babble** their speech there...and from there YHVH scattered them over the face of the land, and they stopped building the city. Gen 11:1-9

After the flood, God gives up on a relationship between *adam* and *adamah*. Instead, God tries creating relationship between one people and one land.

l. And *YHVH* said to Avram: Go for yourself / to yourself...to a land that I will show you... and you will be a blessing...and **through you** will be blessed all the families of the earth *kol mish'p'chot ha'adamah*. Gen 12:1-3

Key: underline = relation to the land; **san serif** = relation to animals/eating/food; **bolded words** have comments on them. The word 'god', uncapitalized, is used as a pronoun for God. Translation and commentary by Rabbi David Seidenberg; contact: rebduvid86@gmail.com, neohasid.org, ver.8.3

*** Elohim remembered Noah and all the animals.**

The midrash uses this verse to show that God's mercy and covenantal love extend to all the animals and not just humans. "Why were they rewarded? Because they kept their *mitzvab*—to preserve their species." (Tanchuma)

Swarm in the land. A kind of super-fertility, where the animals would reproduce as quickly as bugs. See below.

*** Cursing the ground for the sake of humanity.** God forswears destroying the land for humanity's sake—severing the connection between people and the land that has driven the story thus far.

*** Sowing and reaping...will not stop.** Not stopping is the mark of a world that has abandoned the significance of Eden, where creation is completed through resting or stopping. The Sabbatical and Jubilee years restore exactly this: resting from sowing and reaping.

*** Terror of you.** This sounds like a kind of dominion, but according to *Gen. Rabbah*, after the flood *r'diyab*, dominion, did not return. Rashi explains that when Adam called the animals they would come to him—so terror is dominion's exact opposite. Dominion and God's image are connected in midrash—hence some say humanity was no longer in God's image after the flood.

*** All that crawls which lives, for you it will be for eating, like green plants.** This is the end of the last vestige of Eden: not only will humans and the other animals not share the same food, but the other animals will become food.

His soul, his blood. The blood is the medium through which all our cells breathe, hence like the breath, it is the animating principle of the entire body, which is also called *nefesh*. In *kasbrut*, blood must be completely removed. In the case of a wild animal, the blood must be covered with earth, in a way which honors the *mitzvab*, in a kind of burial of the animal's soul.

By the hand of every animal. The verse sounds like it means, 'I will avenge any animal that kills a human', but Rashi, Ramban and the Talmud all say it means, 'I will let the animals kill any person who kills another human'.

The image of Elohim. This is the only time God's image is given ethical significance in Torah.

Swarm through the land. There are only two places where 'swarm' is used to describe human beings, here and in describing the fertility of the Israelites in Egypt. The Egyptian response was to be horrified.

I am erecting my covenant with you and with every soul living with you. The animals are equal partners in the covenant. A covenant binds those not present, i.e., future generations, and is for the sake of a greater whole, i.e., the land. 'Covenant' appears 7 times in the Hebrew.

*** A covenant sign between me and the land.** The land is fully a partner in the first covenant. It may even be the primary partner.

Scattered them...over the land. Practically speaking, humans are the only species that can adapt to virtually any environment on Earth. Is that related?

Babble. *V'navlab* is a pun on Bavel, Babylon.

Through you. The covenant with Abraham is the first covenant in which a human is the primary subject. The blessings of this covenant include all humanity.

m. Six years you will sow your land and gather your produce. And the seventh you will release *tish'm'tenah* and forswear, and the poor of your people will eat and their remainder the animal of the field *chayat basadeh* will eat. So you will do to your vineyard and olive orchard. Six days you will do your works and in the seventh day you will stop, for the sake of your ox and your donkey resting *l'ma'an yanua'ch* and your female servant's child and the stranger re-souling *vayinajfeish*. Ex. 23:10-11

n. YHWH spoke to Moshe in Mount Sinai saying: Speak to Yisrael's children and say unto them: For you will come to the land which I give you and the land will rest/stop *shavtah*, YHWH's *shabbat*/Sabbath-rest...In the seventh year the Sabbath's sabbath *shabbat shabbaton* will it be for the land, a Sabbath for YHWH. Don't sow your field and don't prune your vineyard...And the *shabbat* of the land will be for you for eating; for you and for your male servant and for your female servant and for your hired-worker and for your settler living-as-a-stranger with you *toshav'kha hagarim imakh;* and for your beast *b'hemte'kha* and for the animal which is in your land *chayah asher b'artzek'kha*, all of her produce *t'vu'atab* will be to eat. You will count for yourself seven Sabbaths of years, seven years seven times...on *Yom Hakipurim* you will make the shofar pass through all your land. And you will make holy the fifty-year year, and call out liberty/release *d'ror* in the land, to all those inhabiting her. It will be a Jubilee *Yovel* for you – you will return each man/person to his (their) tribe-possession, and each person will return to his (their) family...You will do my statutes, and you will watch over my judgments...and settle on the land securely *lavetach*. And the land will give her fruit and you will eat to be satisfied and you will settle securely on her...And the land you may not sell permanently *latz'mitut*, for the land is mine *ki li ha'aretz*, for you are strangers and settlers by/with me *ki gerim v'toshavim atem imadi*. So in all the land of your tribe-possession, redemption *g'ulah* you-all will give to the land. Lev 25:1-24

o. If you will walk in my statutes and watch over my commandments and do them, then I will give your rains in their season and the land will give her produce *y'vulah* and the tree of the field his fruit...and you will dwell securely *lavetach* in your land...And I will put/give peace in the land and I will uphold my covenant with you...and I myself will walk *bit'halakhti* in the midst of you and I will become *Elohim* for you and you will become for me (my) people...And if you will not listen...and if you will despise my statutes...to undo my covenant, even so will I do this to you... you will sow your seed for emptiness, for your enemies will eat it... I will set my face at you... And you will completely use your strength for emptiness, and your land will not give her produce and the tree of the land will not give his fruit...and I will send out against you the animal of the field *chayat basadeh* and she will make you childless...And if with this you will not listen to me and will walk with me in opposition *b'keri*, I will walk with you in a fury of opposition...and you will eat the flesh of your sons and your daughter's flesh you will eat...and I will desolate the land and your enemies will be desolate over her, those living in her. And you-all will I scatter in the nations...then the land will enjoy/ desire *tirtzeb* her Sabbaths...All the days of her desolation she will rest what she didn't rest in your Sabbaths when you were dwelling on her...You will be lost in the nations and the land of your enemies will eat you...And those of you who are left...their uncircumcised hearts will be bent-to-shape...and I will remember my covenant with Yaakov, and even my covenant with Yitzchak and my covenant with Avraham...and I will remember the land...These are the statutes and judgments and *Torot* which YHWH set between god and between Yisrael's children in Mount Sinai by Moshe's hand. Lev 26:3-42

Key: underline = relation to the land; san serif = relation to animals/eating/food; bolded words have comments on them. The word 'god', uncapitalized, is used as a pronoun for God. Translation and commentary by Rabbi David Seidenberg; contact: rebduvid86@gmail.com, neohasid.org, ver.8.3

Tish'm'tenah. The word '*Shmitah*' is only used in Deut. 15, describing loan cancellation.

The poor of your people. Here only the poor are mentioned with respect to *Shmitah*, while section n includes servants, employees, and the *ger toshav*, non-citizen or non-Jew. Here they appear under Shabbat.

*** The animal of the field will eat.** The wild animals will eat the Sabbath produce alongside the people. Similarly in n: 'the animal which is in your land'. The other time when animals and people share the same food supply is in Eden (and perhaps in the ark). This is a strong clue that *Shmitah* restores our Edenic relationship to the earth. In order to allow animals to share *Shmitah* crops, *balak'bab* requires fences to be breached and gates left open.

*** In Mount Sinai.** The midrash asks, 'What does *Shmitah* have to do with Sinai?' From an ecological perspective, the answer is clear: The purpose of the Sinai covenant is to create a society that can observe *Shmitah* and live in right relationship with the land. (Rashi's answer is that this phrase teaches us that all the laws, even those dependent on the land, were taught at Sinai.)

*** the Sabbath's sabbath.** The ultimate Shabbat—the purpose of Shabbat. One might say that Shabbat is practice for *Shmitah* and Jubilee.

Yom Hakipurim. Unlike other demarcations of a year, the Jubilee year begins on Yom Kippur. Why?

*** Seven years seven times.** The Torah emphasizes seven again and again. It can mean renewing the cycle of Creation. How do you interpret it?

Call out liberty. The verse on the Liberty Bell. Slaves who refused freedom in their seventh year were also required to be freed at the Jubilee.

My statutes. The rest of the laws, important in themselves, support a society that can observe *Shmitah*.

*** The land is mine, for you are strangers...with me.** The inverse of property rights: even land we can always return to is not ours.

Redemption. This can mean freedom, spiritual redemption, or messianic redemption. It can also mean redemption from debt. This redemption is founded on distributing the land equally at the very beginning.

The land will give her produce and the tree...his fruit. The symbol of security is the fruit tree, which gives to us freely, without any loss to itself.

Your enemies will eat... your land will not give her produce... will make you childless... you will eat the flesh...the land of your enemies will eat you. In this progression, eating is turned inside out, culminating in the land eating you.

I will become *Elohim* for you. Is God not God until then? Rather, only after our relationship with the land is restored, can we encounter God in fullness.

*** Your land will not give her produce.** If you don't release the land, she will not give to you. If you do, knowing she is not yours, you may live with her in peace.

*** The land will enjoy her Sabbaths.** Acc. to 2Chr 36:21, the people were exiled "to fulfill YHWH's word... until the land enjoyed her sabbaths". The land has a right to rest. Rights for the poor, for animals, for freedom from debt and slavery, stem from this right.