

Betach: Sense of Security

Imagine the time leading up to the sh'mita year in the ancient world. In an agricultural society, people no doubt would have been anxious: what would they eat while the land rested? Would the previous season's crop suffice for an extra year? And before the yovel year, the anxiety must have been doubled, as the produce of the forty-eighth year would have to last for two extra years!

This passage in Leviticus acknowledges this fear, and also frames the yovel year as a time to cultivate a sense of security not based on material possessions:

Leviticus 25:11-12 and 18-22

(יא) יובל הוא שנת החמשים
שנה תהיה לכם לא תזרעו
ולא תקצרו את ספיחיה ולא
תבצרו את נזריה: (יב) כי
יובל הוא קדש תהיה לכם מן
השדה תאכלו את תבואתה:

(יח) ועשיתם את חקתי ואת
משפטי תשמרו ועשיתם
אתם וישבתם על הארץ
לבטח: (יט) ונתנה הארץ
פריה ואכלתם לשבע וישבתם
לבטח עליה: (כ) וכי תאמרו
מה נאכל בשנה השביעת
הן לא נזרע ולא נאסף את
תבואתנו: (כא) וצויתי את
ברכתי לכם בשנה הששית
ועשית את התבואה לשלש
השנים: (כב) וזרעתם את
השנה השמינית ואכלתם
מן התבואה ישן עד השנה
התשיעת עד בוא תבואתה
תאכלו ישן:

¹¹That fiftieth year shall be a *yovel* for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the after-growth or harvest the untrimmed vines, ¹²for it is a *yovel*. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field.

¹⁸You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; ¹⁹the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. ²⁰And should you ask, "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?" ²¹I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. ²²When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in.

There is a hint here of returning to The Garden of Eden, an idyllic time when we were able to eat without working the land.

We will explore below how the practice of letting the land lay fallow might, paradoxically, evoke feelings of security. As you study these sources, consider when you feel most secure. What impact does your sense of security have

on your interactions with others? On your decisions? When does your own community (however you define it) feel secure? What impact does this sense of security have?

I. Let the Land Lie Fallow

A. Eat with the poor: Ramban on Leviticus 25:12

ולדעתי יאמר, לא תקצרו ולא תבצרו בשנה הזאת כי יובל היא וקדש תהיה לכם, מן השדה תביאו התבואה ותאכלו,

שתצאו השדה ללקוט ולאכול עם העניים והאביונים החיה והבהמה, לא שיהיה לכם עת קציר ובציר ותאספו לכם אל הבית ואל האוצרות כתבואת שאר השנים :

When it is written “you (plural) shall not reap and you shall not harvest, for it is a *yovel*. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field,” it means:

You will go out to the fields to gather and to eat with the poor and the paupers, with the wild beasts and domesticated animals, rather than taking the reaping and the harvest and gathering them into your house and into your storehouses, as you would with the harvest in other years.

- » *Why is this text directed at you (plural)? Who is the you?*
- » *How might it feel for someone accustomed to growing or buying food to eat at home instead to go out and gather food with the poor, and even with animals? How would this experience affect one’s sense of security?*
- » *Could there be a contemporary parallel to this experience? How might you come to a better understanding of the experiences of those accustomed to experiencing food insecurity?*
- » *The text invites us to eat with people whose life experience differs from ours, and whom we might therefore avoid—or who might even scare us. When have you taken the risk to get close to people who are much different from you—or even who scare you? What did you learn in the process?*

Rabbi Moses ben Nahman Girondi (Spain, 1194–1270), known as Nahmanides or Ramban, was a prominent philosopher, mystic, and biblical commentator. His commentary on the Torah includes mystical elements, along with explanations of the basic meaning of the text and references to *midrash* (rabbinic interpretation).

B. Not like owners: Sforno on Leviticus 25:11

(יא) יובל הוא שנת החמשים שנה תהיה לכם. כמו שיצאה הקרקע לחירות מיד הקונים כן תהיה בלתי משועבדת ביד הבעלים השבים אליה שלא ישתמשו בה כדרך בעלים באותה השנה :

“That fiftieth year shall be a *yovel* for you:” Just as the land goes free from those who bought it, so too it may not be worked by the owners who are returning to it—they may not use it like owners that year.

- » *What does it mean to “use [land] like owners”? What do you imagine would then be forbidden to the people returning to their land for yovel? How do you think behaving as non-owners for a year would shape their subsequent relationship with that land?*
- » *In what ways do Israelis and Palestinians both feel like owners of the land of Israel? How do these claims of ownership conflict? How does each exercise these claims of ownership (or not)?*

Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (Italy, c.1475-1550) was a biblical commentator, physician, and philosopher. His commentary on the Bible is known for its humanism and compassion.

B. Fields as commons build trust: *Kli Yakar* on Leviticus 25:12

לפי פשוטו השמיטה והיובל טעם אחד לשניהם והוא כדי שגשמים בטחוננו בה ולידע כי לה' הארץ לכך נאמר בשנת היובל הזאת מן השדה תאכלו את תבואתה לא תחזיק השדה כשדך אלא כסתם שדה שאינו שלך :

On the surface, *sh'mitah* and *yovel* have the same purpose, which is so that we will put our trust in God and know that the land belongs to God. Therefore it [also] says in the *yovel* year “you may eat only the growth from the field”—you shall not hold the field as your own, but rather as a generic field that is not yours.

- » *What connection do you see between relating to the land (even, or especially, land you own) as ownerless, and building trust in God?*
- » *The Kli Yakar points that while in the sh'mitah year, the owner must let the land lie fallow, in the yovel year the owner may not even collect the aftergrowth or what is left on the vines. What is the psychological difference that this prohibition adds?*
- » *In Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, land ownership is often a matter of intense dispute. Israel often does not recognize Ottoman-era land deeds, or declares certain property to be state land or a secure military zone. In East Jerusalem, many disputes arise from the application of the Absentee Property Law, which declared as absentee homes whose owners were not present in 1967, and therefore allows for the takeover of these homes by Jewish groups such as Elad. What examples have you heard of such disputes? How do ideas about ownership play out? How might a belief that “the land belongs to God” affect such disputes?*

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (Prague, 1550-1619), often referred to by the title of his most famous work, the *Kli Yakar*, served as Chief Rabbi of Prague. The *Kli Yakar* is a homiletical commentary on the Torah.

II. Security of the People

What makes for the security of a people? Who gets to decide? Whose actions will have an impact on this sense of security?

A1. Safe only in Israel: *Sifra*, Parashat Behukotai, 1

<p>וישבתם לבטח בארצכם, בארצכם אתם יושבים לבטח ואי אתם יושבים לבטח חוצה לה</p>	<p>“You may live on the land in security:” On your land you will live in security; and you will not live in security outside it.</p>
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Sifra is a collection of *midrash* on the book of Leviticus, probably compiled around the third century. It is considered a work of legal (rather than narrative) *midrash* because it expands on and explains the laws of the book of Leviticus.

A2. Safe everywhere: *Pesikta DeRav Kahanah*, Buber edition, Leviticus 26

<p>וישבתם לבטח בארצכם : שתהיו יושבים לבטח בארץ ובחוצה לארץ :</p>	<p>“You may live on the land in security:” that you will live in security in the land and outside the land.</p>
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- » *How do these two midrashim differ on the question of what grants the Jewish people security? To which of these comments do you gravitate?*
- » *When have you felt most safe as a Jew? Least safe? What contributed to these feelings?*
- » *Do you see aspects of our contemporary conversations about Jewish safety aligning with either of these midrashim? How do the various experiences of Jews within and outside the land of Israel shape understandings of what is needed for Israel's security?*
- » *What are the various ways that Jews and/or Israelis understand “security” and feeling safe? What are the ways that Palestinians do? How do the various aspects of the people's histories affect definitions of safety and security?*

Pesikta DeRav Kahanah is a collection of *midrash* on the book of Leviticus, probably compiled around the fifth century. It consists of homilies on Torah portions and *haftarah* (prophetic) readings for major holidays and special Shabbatot.

C2. Exile from ignoring *sh'mitah*: Rashi on Leviticus 25:18

וישבתם על הארץ לבטח—שבעון שמטה
 ישראל גולים, שנאמר (ויקרא כו לד) אז
 תרצה הארץ את שבתותיה והרצת את
 שבתותיה, ושבעים שנה של גלות בבל,
 כנגד שבעים שמתות שבטלו היו :

“You shall live on the land in security”—
 Israel is exiled because of transgressing
sh'mitah, as is written [Leviticus 26:34]
 “Then shall the land make up for its
 sabbath years throughout the time that
 it is desolate and you are in the land of
 your enemies; then shall the land rest and
 make up for its sabbath years.” The seventy
 years of Babylonian exile correspond to the
 seventy *sh'mitah* years that were ignored.

- » *Why do you think these commentators draw a relationship between the particular laws mentioned here and the right to live on the land?*
- » *How do you understand the theology of Rashi's claim that transgressing *sh'mitah* leads to exile? Is this punishment? Cause-and-effect? Something else? If you were to take this position yourself, how would you phrase it?*
- » *How do you relate to the claim of the two sources above that our actions affect our right to dwell in the land of Israel? Do you think some version of this biblical viewpoint relates in some way to contemporary circumstances? If yes, how? If not, why not?*

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, France 1040-1105) is perhaps the best known commentator on the Bible. His commentary includes *midrash*, as well as explanations of *p'shat*—the surface meaning of the text.

D. Freedom from hatred: *Meshech Hochmah* on Leviticus 25:18-19

ועשיתם את חקתי וכו' (וישבתם על הארץ לבטח ונתנה הארץ פריה ואכלתם לשבע) וישבתם לבטח עליה.

כי יש שני שנאות ללאום: האחת מצד שנאת הדת המפרדת בין העמים, והשנית מצד שנאת הקנאה מהעושר והמעלה.

לכן אמר "ועשיתם את חוקותי וכו'", כי כשתשמרו התורה בכלל, תסוכך ההשגחה עליהם, שלא יהיה עליהם שנאת הדת.

"ואכלתם לשבע וכו'", שאז לא יהיה עליכם שנאה מצד הקנאה, כי תהיו מלאים כל טוב, "ולא יחמוד איש את ארצו".

וזה גם כן אמר יחזקאל סוף פרק כח (פסוקים כה—ו) "ונקדשתי במ לעיני הגויים, וישבו על אדמתם (אשר נתתי לעבדי יעקב).

וישבו עליה לבטח—זהו שלא יפחדו מפני שנאת הדת. "ובנו בתים ונטעו כרמים"—ויהיו עשירים מלאים כל טוב, "וישבו לבטח"—שלא יפחדו משנאה מפני הקנאה והעושר.

"You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security."

There are two kinds of hatred for a nation. The first is hatred of religion, which causes separation between peoples, and the second is hatred that comes from jealousy over wealth and advancement.

This is why the text says "You shall observe my laws," etc., because when you keep the Torah as a whole, you will be sheltered by Divine regard, in that religious hatred will not affect you.

"And you shall eat your fill:" then you will not experience hatred that comes from jealousy—for you will be filled up with all good things, "and no one will covet your land" [Exodus 34:24].

This is also what Ezekiel said [28:25-6]: "Thus said the Lord God: When I have gathered the House of Israel from the peoples among which they have been dispersed, and have shown Myself holy through them in the sight of the nations, they shall settle on their own soil, which I gave to My servant Jacob, and they shall dwell on it in security. They shall build houses and plant vineyards, and shall dwell on it in security."

"They shall dwell upon it in security"—they will not be afraid of religious hatred. "They shall build houses and plant vineyards"—and be wealthy and full of all good things. "And they shall dwell in security"—they will not be afraid of hatred from jealousy because of wealth.

- » *What do you make of the two categories of hatred that Rabbi Meir Simcha defines? These are two kinds of national hatred with which Jews are quite familiar. To what extent do you feel they are operational today? How does that experience shape the way that individual Jews, "the Jewish community", and the State of Israel operate?*
- » *What kinds of insecurity arise from experiencing national hatred?*
- » *What other kinds of hatred and prejudice would you identify?*
- » *How do you see these two kinds of hatred (and others you have identified) at play in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories? How does it affect the sense of collective and individual security and safety? Which*

factors foster it, and what kind of work needs to take place to reduce national hatred? What actions and choices would contribute to building a sense of security in relation to them?

- » *In this 50th year, what kind of reflection is necessary to expand our thinking about safety and security?*

The *Meshech Hochmah* is a commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Meir Simcha Kalonymus of Dvinsk (Lithuania and Poland, 1843–1926), a prominent rabbinic leader in his time. It combines Jewish thought and law with commentary on the text.

E. Leon Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*

With the loss of their country [2,000 years ago], the Jewish people lost their independence, and fell into a decay which is not compatible with existence as a whole vital organism. The state was crushed before the eyes of the nations. But after the Jewish people had ceased to exist as an actual state, as a political entity, they could nevertheless not submit to total annihilation — they lived on spiritually as a nation. The world saw in this people the uncanny form of one of the dead walking among the living. The Ghostlike apparition of a living corpse, of a people without unity or organization, without land or other bonds of unity, no longer alive, and yet walking among the living — this spectral form without precedence in history, unlike anything that preceded or followed it, could but strangely affect the imagination of the nations. And if the fear of ghosts is something inborn, and has a certain justification in the psychic life of mankind, why be surprised at the effect produced by this dead but still living nation. . .

To sum up then, to the living the Jew is a corpse, to the native a foreigner, to the homesteader a vagrant, to the proprietary a beggar, to the poor an exploiter and a millionaire, to the patriot a man without a country, for all a hated rival. . .

If other national movements which have risen before our eyes were their own justification, can it still be questioned whether the Jews have a similar right? They play a larger part in the life of the civilized nations, and they have rendered greater service to humanity; they have a greater past and history, a common, unmixed descent, an indestructible vigor, an unshakable faith, and an unexampled martyrology; the peoples have sinned against them more grievously than against any other nation. Is not that enough to make them capable and worthy of possessing a

fatherland? The struggle of the Jews for national unity and independence as an established nation not only possesses the inherent justification that belongs to the struggle of every oppressed people, but it is also calculated to win the support of the people by whom we are now unwanted. This struggle must become an irresistible factor of contemporary international politics and destined for future greatness.

Leon (Yehudah Leib) Pinsker (Poland, Russia, Ukraine, 1821-1891) was a physician and early Zionist. Pinsker was initially pro-assimilation, but after violent anti-Jewish attacks in Odessa and other cities in the late 19th century, Pinsker stopped believing that humanism and enlightenment could defeat antisemitism. He founded the *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) movement, and published a pamphlet titled *Auto-Emancipation* in 1882, urging Jews to work for independence and national consciousness.

F. Max Nordau

Zionism is a new word for a very old thing, so far as it merely expresses the longing of the Jewish people for Zion. Since the destruction of the Second Temple by Titus, since the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world, this ancient people has not ceased to long fervently for a return to the lost land of their fathers nor to entertain for it a determined hope. This longing of the Jews for Zion, this hope for Zion, was the concrete, I may say the geographical, aspect of their Messianic faith, which formed itself into an essential part of their religion. Messianism and Zionism were actually identical concepts for almost two thousand years, and it would be difficult, without subtlety and sophistry, to separate the prayers in the Jewish liturgy for the appearance of the promised Messiah from those for the not less promised return to the historic home. These prayers were meant literally by all Jews until a few generations ago, just as they are meant to-day by plain believing Jews. Jews had no other thought but that they were a people which had lost its hereditary land as a punishment for its own sin, condemned to live as strangers in foreign countries, and whose grievous sufferings, will cease only when the Nation will again be gathered together on the sanctified soil of the Holy Land.

THE JEWISH NATIONALITY—CONDITION SINE QUA NON

The one point that excludes the possibility of an understanding between Zionists and non-Zionistic Jews, probably for ever, is the question of Jewish nationality. Whoever maintains and believes that the Jews are not a nation, cannot in truth be a Zionist: he cannot attach himself to a movement which is only justified by its wish to create a normal condition

of existence for a people living and suffering under normal conditions. But, on the contrary, he who is convinced that the Jews are a nation, must necessarily be a Zionist, as only the return to our own land can preserve the Jewish people, universally hated, persecuted, and oppressed, from physical and spiritual decay.

- » *Both Pinsker and Nordau were writing before there was any real expectation that a modern state of Israel would be created. What are their explanations for needing a Jewish state? Do these align with your beliefs about the reasons for the creation of Israel?*
- » *How much does safety or security play a role in each author's retelling of Jewish history?*
- » *From these texts, what do you think the authors hoped to see happen for the Jewish people in their time?*

Max Simon Nordau (Budapest, Paris, 1849-1923), co-founded the World Zionist Organization with Theodor Herzl. He was born in Pest (now Budapest) to a religious Jewish family, and graduated from the University of Budapest with a medical degree. He was highly assimilated until he met Theodor Herzl and experienced the Dreyfus Affair, after which he returned to Jewish life and developed a passion for Zionism.

III. Cultivating a Sense of Security

Our human sense of security is linked to our place in the world—what we are accustomed to having and what we might fear losing. As you read these sources, consider your own circumstances as an individual, as part of a family, and as a member of larger social groups that shape how you relate to these questions. Consider how feelings of lack and abundance influence our perceptions of the unfolding reality in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

A. Eat your fill: *Sifra* on Leviticus 25:19

ונתנה הארץ פריה ואכלתם לשובע שיהא
אדם אוכל הרבה ושבע דברי ר' יהודה.

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר אף אינה
סימן ברכה אם כן למה נאמר ואכלתם
לשובע, אוכל ולא גוסי.

דבר אחר ואכלתם לשובע שלא יהא דבר
חסר משולחנו שלא יהיה עולה לו.

“The land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill”—A person will eat much and be satisfied, according to Rabbi Yehudah.

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says: This is not a sign of blessing! If so, why is it stated? It means that a person will eat much and not feel bloated.

Another reading: “And you shall eat your fill”—There will be nothing that you desire lacking from your table.

- » *Can you summarize in your own words the three different readings of this verse? How do they differ on the question of what it means to “eat your fill”?*
- » *How would you describe the difference between experiencing a sense of blessing in abundance and in enjoying more meager offerings? Why are each important?*
- » *What kind of sense of security emerges from each of these three interpretations? How would you render each of them in national and political rather than individual terms? How do you think these differing visions of having enough play out in the context of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories?*

B. Adjust yourself to modest consumption: K'tav Sofer

- ונתנה הארץ את פריה – אבל – ואכלתם
 לשובע – תתרגלו לאכול קמעא, בצנע
 ובצמצום – וישבתם לבטח – ממילא
 לא תדאגו משנות בצורת, הדאגה למחר
 לא תדריך את מנוחתכם. בזה אפשר
 גם לפרש את הפסוק במשלי (י: כב)
 ברכת ה' היא תעשיר ולא יוסיף עצב
 עמה. כי לעשיר יש הרבה דאגות ועצב,
 הדאגה למחר, אבל לברכת ה' אין
 אותו החסרון.
- “The land shall yield its fruit *but* you shall eat your fill”—you will adjust to eating little, modestly, and withholding yourself—“and you shall live in security”—you won’t worry about years of drought, and worry about tomorrow will not trample your rest. With this we can also explain the verse in Proverbs (10:22), “It is the blessing of the Lord that enriches, and no toil can increase it.” The wealthy have many worries and much sorrow, [and] worry about tomorrow, but regarding God’s blessing there is no such lack.

- » *The K'tav Sofer expands on Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel's reading of the verse (the second one in the previous source). What is your reaction to his portrayal of developing a sense of security through modest consumption? In what ways do you think that adjusting one's needs downwards can make one feel more safe? Be more safe?*
- » *Does this reading romanticize being poor or living with less? To what extent does it depend on whether one is starting with a lot or a little?*
- » *How is the idea of being willing to live with less relevant to your vision of how a solution might be reached to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*

Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer (Hungary, 1815–1871), was the head of the Pressburg yeshiva, and one of the main orthodox voices against an emerging reform movement in Hungarian Judaism.

C. Bread in your basket: *Kli Yakar* on Leviticus 25:20

ולוי נראה שכך פירושו, שכל תלונה זו סובבת על מה שנאמר בפסוק שלפני זה ואכלתם לחמכם לשובע.

ואמרו חז"ל (עיין יומא עד א) כתיב (דברים ח טז) המאכילך מן במדבר, וכתיב (שם פסוק ג) ויענך וירעיבך, אלא אינו דומה מי שיש לו פת בסלו למי שאין לו, הנך רואה שאף על פי שירד המן דבר יום ביומו מכל מקום היו אוכלים ורעבים לפי שלא היה פת בסלם ליום המחרת,

על כן כאן ודאי יאמרו מה נאכל בשנה השביעית קודם שיראו בששית ריבוי תבואה ויאמרו אילו היינו זורעים בשביעית לצורך שמינית היה לנו פת בסל והיינו אוכלים ושבעים אבל מאחר שלא נזרע לצורך שמינית אם כן לא יהיה לנו פת בסל ואם כן גם בשביעית לא נשבע וכל שכן בשמינית ואיה הבטחת האומר ואכלתם לחמכם לשובע, ומה נאכל שיהיה לשבעה מאחר שלא נזרע ולא נאסף תבואתינו לצורך שמינית.

על זה אמר וצויתי את ברכתי וגו', כדי שיהיה לכם פת בסל גם לצורך שמינית ואז יאכלו לחמם לשובע בשביעית כי יהיה להם פת בסלם לשלש שנים.

It seems to me that the complaint ["What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?"] relates to what is written in the previous verse, "you shall eat your fill of bread."

The Sages wrote [*Yoma* 74a]: it is written [Deuteronomy 8:16] "the one who fed you from the wilderness" and it is written [ibid, 8:3], "who oppressed you and made you hungry." What does this mean? A person who has bread in their basket is not similar to one who does not. Even though the manna fell each day for that day, they would eat and be hungry, because they did not have bread in their basket for the next day.

So too here of course they would say, "What are we to eat in the seventh year?" before they saw the abundant harvest in the sixth year, and they would say, "If only we would sow in the seventh year for what we need in the eighth, then we would have bread in our baskets, and we would eat and be satisfied, but because we will not sow for what we need in the eighth year, if so, we will not have bread in our baskets. And in that case, even in the seventh year we will not be satisfied—how much the more so in the eighth. And you have promised us saying "you will eat your fill of bread," so what will we eat so we might be satisfied, since we will not sow and will not harvest for the eighth year?"

And this is why God said, "I will ordain My blessing for you"—so they would have bread in their baskets even for the eighth year, and then they could eat and be satisfied in the seventh year, because they would have bread in their baskets for three years.

- » *How does the Kli Yakar elaborate on the fear expressed in our text from the Torah? How does he understand the phrase "bread in their baskets"? When have you felt like you have enough? When have you not?*
- » *How would you describe the experience of having or lacking bread in your basket in contemporary terms, for both individuals and nations?*

- » *In this reading, where does insecurity come from? How do feelings of security come about?*
- » *Is God's promise at the end of the text satisfying? Why or why not?*
- » *How do you see feelings of scarcity playing out in the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in its future? How could we move toward a sense of abundance, of having a basket full of bread?*

D. Awaken compassion: Avraham Saba, *Tzror HaMor*

וכי תאמרו מה נאכל ... וצויתי את ברכתי...
 בנוהג שבעולם, עשיר שיש לו שדות, כרמים, נחלות ואחוזות, ואינו יודע מחסור, בטוח בעצמו, לבו קשוח ואינו מרגיש במצוקת העני. לכן ציוה הקב"ה על שנה של שמיטה, שאסור בה לחרוש ולזרוע, כדי שגם העשיר ידע מחסור, ירגיש בטעמו של העני וישא עיניו לשמים בחרדה: מה נאכל! וזה יעורר בלבו רגשי רחמנות על העני כל הימים, ישתתף בצערו וביגונו ויבין לרוחו הנכאה. ובזכות זה – וצויתי את ברכתי.

“And should you ask, ‘What are we to eat?’ ... I will ordain My blessing ...” (Leviticus 25:20-21)—The way the world works, a wealthy person—who has fields and vineyards, inheritance and landholdings, and does not know lack—is secure, has a stubborn heart, and does not feel the distress of the poor. Therefore the Holy Blessed One commanded the *sh'mitah* year, when it is forbidden to plow and to plant, so that the wealthy, too, would know lack, would feel empathy for the poor, and would lift up their eyes to the heavens with trembling: “What are we to eat?” This will awaken in the wealthy person's heart feelings of compassion for the poor every single day—joining in their sorrow and their struggle and understanding their despair. And because of this—“I will ordain My blessing.”

- » *Avraham Saba suggests a human-to-human purpose for experiencing lack. How does this resonate with you? Are there parallel contemporary experiences?*
- » *How useful is it to have a temporary experience of deprivation in order to understand those who have less, or who have a very different experience than you? Where such a direct experience is not possible, what are other meaningful ways of generating real and meaningful empathy for those in a less privileged position?*
- » *How do you relate this human-to-human compassion with the texts above that suggest that yovel strengthens human trust in the Divine? How does trust in God make it more possible for us to have meaningful empathy?*
- » *What kind of security is represented in this text? How does it affect the one who experiences it?*
- » *Have you ever engaged in a “dual narrative” approach to understanding the Israel-Palestinian conflict? Have you encountered Israelis or Palestinians with very different experiences than you? How have*

these experiences affected you? What are the benefits and limitations of such approaches?

Abraham Saba (1440-1508) was born in Castile, then fled to Portugal when Jews were expelled from Spain. Almost immediately, Portugal expelled its Jews, and Saba fled to Fez, Morocco, where he spent the next ten years. He died on a boat from Fez to Italy. His work incorporates kabbalistic teaching, along with reflections on the lived experience of his embattled community.

E. Feeling secure: *Chazon Ish*, Chapter 2

ואכן מדת הבטחון קנין הלב, ומטבע
הבוטח באמת בהצנע לכת ולא ישמע
מפיו כי הוא מן הבוטחים, וגם בלבו הוא
נאנח על חסרון בטתונו ומיעוט שלימותו
בזה, ורק למעשה תלוה עמו בטחון
ועצמה בו ית', לא יחס אם רעהו פותח
חנות, ישתדל עוד לעזור לרעהו, לתקנו
בעצה טובה, לעשות עבורו, ולשקוד על
תקנתו, וכמה מן הקדושה מוסיף בעולם
לראות איש עושה חסד עם המתעתד
להתחרות עמו, ומוסיף תהלה ליראיו
ית', אשריו ואשרי דורו.

The quality of security is an acquisition of the heart, and the truly secure person by nature acts modestly. You would not hear such a person touting their own security, but rather even in their own heart they would be sighing about their lack of security and their imperfection in that quality. Only through their actions do you know their security and courage in the Blessed One. A shop owner would not be upset if another person opened a store, but would try hard to help them, to give them good advice, to do for them, and to watch over their work. It adds so much holiness to the world to see a person acting kindly towards a person who might compete with them, and adds praise to those who have awe for the Blessed One—that person and their generation are happy.

- » *According to the Chazon Ish, how is true security measured?*
- » *Do you see the ideal envisioned by the Chazon Ish play out in the real world? How or how not?*
- » *How might the Chazon Ish's ideal, if implemented, affect the feelings of Israelis and Palestinians toward one another?*

The *Chazon Ish* is the major work of **Rabbi Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz (Belarus and Israel, 1878-1953)**, who became a leader of the Haredi community in Israel around the time of the founding of the state. The *Hazon Ish* is a commentary on parts of the *Shulchan Arukh*, a primary code of Jewish law.

F. Peace is equivalent to all: Leviticus 26:5-6

(ה) וְהַשִּׁיג לָכֶם דִּישׁ אֶת-בְּצִיר, וּבְצִיר
יִשִּׁיג אֶת-זֶרַע; וְאַכַּלְתֶּם לַחֲמֻכָּם לְשִׁבְעָה,
וְיִשְׁבַּתֶּם לְבֶטַח בְּאֶרְצְכֶם: (ו) וְנָתַתִּי
שָׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ, וְשָׁכַבְתֶּם וַאֲיִן מִחְרִיד;
וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי חַיָּה רָעָה, מִן-הָאֶרֶץ, וְחָרֵב, לֹא-
תַעֲבֹר בְּאֶרְצְכֶם:

⁵Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and your vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land. ⁶I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down untroubled by anyone; I will give the land respite from vicious beasts, and no sword shall cross your land.

Sifra, Parashat Behukotai 1:8 on Leviticus 26:5-6

שמא תאמרו הרי מאכל והרי משתה אם אין שלום אין כלום ת"ל ונתתי שלום בארץ, מגיד שהשלום שקול כנגד הכל, וכן הוא אומר עושה שלום ובורא רע, מגיד שהשלום שקול כנגד הכל.

Lest you say, Here is food and here is drink, but without peace there is nothing, the text says "I will grant peace in the land"—this indicates that peace is equivalent in value to everything, and so it says "Who makes peace and creates evil," indicating that peace is equivalent in value to everything.

- » *In this interpretation, why is it necessary for the biblical text to include a promise of peace? What does it mean here to say that that "peace is equivalent in value to everything"?*
- » *How does peace make us feel safe and secure? How does feeling safe and secure make peace possible?*

Final questions

- » *When have you felt most secure as a Jew? Least secure?*
- » *When have you felt most secure about the future of Israel? Least secure?*
- » *What elements contribute to a sense of security (or lack thereof)?*
- » *How do both Israelis and Palestinians feel insecure? Secure? How does the relative sense of security (or lack thereof) contribute to the ongoing mistrust and fear that each has toward the other?*
- » *How do you understand the role that a sense of security (achieved, elusive, or hoped-for) plays now in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories? What are the different aspects of security for each entity?*
- » *Are there texts in this section that you wish would be read and applied? By whom? If you were called upon to advise the state of Israel on a neglected aspect of its security based on the texts in this section, what case would you make?*