

Dear Darchei Noam Friends,

It has not been the easiest year for the Jewish People, certainly not the easiest summer we have had. We are all eager for the promise and hope of a New Jewish Year.

We may not be able to change the global situation. But we can affect our inner spiritual life. This Rosh Hashana also begins the Year of Shmita, the Sabbatical year of rest for the Land of Israel. We may want to consider ways to use the Shmita to uplift ourselves and our community. While we are not in Israel, there are a number of ways Shmita can affect us.

1. If we visit Israel, even foods grown from the ground are subject to restrictions not found the other years. Many, including yours truly, rely on the "Heter Mechira" of selling land to non-Jews and allowing growing and harvesting. My Israeli children tell me that this year it is not just a sale of the entire country as in past years, but farmers, or collectives of farmers had to sign up for this procedure. They tell me that about 90% of the country's farmers and lands followed this, but it is still not 100%. This means that if you visit Israel, even relying on the "Heter Mechira" means that one should check for a hechsher on ground-grown products.
2. Shmita has a social justice component – the land lies fallow and the economy is equalized, since all have to live at a slightly lower prosperity level and share the produce. We may want to consider ways to study this, if not actually practice it.
3. Shmita also has a spiritual component – even the simple farmer gets a Sabbatical. According to most commentaries, this was so the farmer could study and grow spiritually while not plowing and harvesting. We may want to consider ways to implement this in our own lives.

Ashira, my children, and grandchildren join me in wishing you a wonderful new year, filled with health and joy for all for of you, along with peace and tranquility for our people and the world. May you all be inscribed in Hashem's Book of Life, and, as the Sfardim say, "Tizku L'shanim Rabot!"

Rabbi Dr. Joseph S. Ozarowski