

# Following *Shemita* laws a way to strengthen connection to Israel

**Richard Rabkin**



With everything that has happened in Israel over the summer it's hard not to constantly be thinking about the wellbeing of the Israeli people and the land of Israel itself. Fittingly, this year, Jews in Israel and, by extension, around the world, will be celebrating an intricate set of laws that highlight the reverence that we have for the land of Israel. It is called *Shemita*, or Sabbatical year.

The Torah states, "You may plant your land for six years and gather its crops. But during the seventh year, you must leave it alone and withdraw from it. The needy among you will then be able to eat just as you do and whatever is left over can be eaten by wild animals. This also applies to your vineyard and your olive grove." (Exodus 23:10-11)

The laws of *Shemita* are extremely complicated, but I will try to outline a few important points. The types of agricultural activities that are prohibited during the *Shemita* year include plowing, planting, pruning, watering and cultivating produce. The land must be left ownerless and any crop that the land will produce will not only be free and ownerless but imbued with a special holiness called *Kedushat Shevi'it*. *Kedushat Shevi'it* does not imply that *Shemita* produce cannot be consumed but rather that:

- it cannot be owned;
- there are various restrictions in the way it may be bought and sold, and
- it must be treated with special care and not wasted at all.

So how do Israelis who want to observe the *Shemita* laws consume fruits and vegetables grown in Israel? They have one of three options.

The first is called *Otzar Beit Din*. This is a procedure in which the landowner, instead of simply declaring his property ownerless, hands it over to the *Beit Din* (ecclesiastical court) for the public need. The land is declared ownerless, but it is reserved for the needs of the town's residents. The *Beit Din* appoints agents to work the field and is even allowed to pay them a salary.

This can be the landowner himself, which gives him an opportunity to earn a livelihood during the *Shemita* year. The workers bring the produce to the town, charging the purchasers a fee for harvesting and transporting it. In addition, they are allowed to charge a fee to compensate them for their efforts. Such payment is permitted since it is not payment for the produce but rather for their efforts.

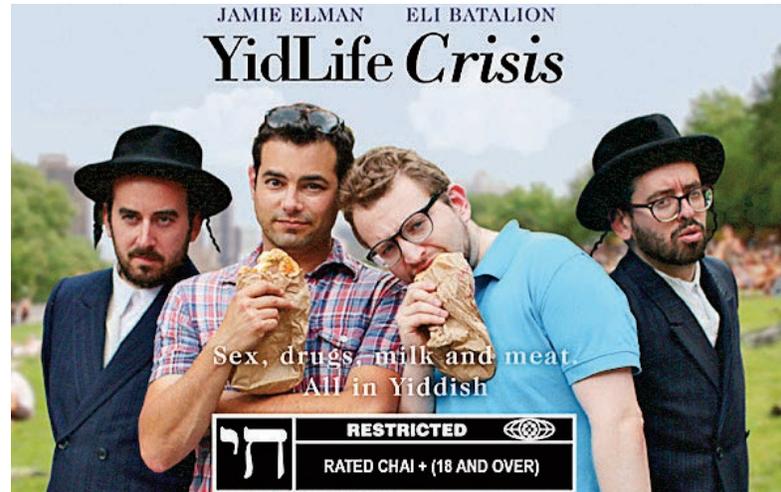
The next option is called *Yevul Nochri*, purchasing produce from land owned by a gentile. The status of such produce is the subject of rabbinic debate. Some say that the land of Israel does not lose its holiness regardless of whether it is in the hands of a gentile. Others maintain the laws of *Shemita* do not apply to the land of a gentile, and therefore, its produce is not subject to the laws of *Shemita*.

Finally, *Heter Mechira* refers to the sale of Jewish owned land to a gentile for the duration of *Shemita* so that the land can be cultivated. Produce from land that is sold to a gentile would have the status of *Yevul Nochri*. The concept of *Heter Mechira*, which involves several halachic complexities including the permissibility of selling the land of Israel to a gentile, is disputed amongst contemporary halachic authorities and the practice of major North American kashrut organizations, including COR and OU, is to be stringent.

If you are not fortunate enough to be visiting Israel this year are the laws of *Shemita* still relevant for you? The answer is yes. Because of the *Shemita* restrictions many Israeli farms actually sell their products abroad because there is less demand for them in Israel. Supermarkets, restaurants and caterers that are under COR supervision are *Shemita* free and COR sends out emails via our 'Kosher Insiders' email group to notify consumers when *Shemita* produce is being sold.

During the past summer we have noticed how important it is to support Israel physically, but we must do so spiritually as well. Following the *Shemita* laws is a practical way of strengthening our connection with our beloved homeland. In the merit of the observance of these special set of laws may we soon see peace in *Eretz Yisrael* and around the world. *Shana Tova*.

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The poster for the new online series, *YidLife Crisis* created by and starring two Montrealers.

MONTREAL

## Launch of web series a thrill for two Bialik grads

**Mike Cohen**  
QUEBEC BUREAU CHIEF

What would an episode of *Seinfeld* or *Curb Your Enthusiasm* be like if two central characters conversed in Yiddish? This is one of the first observations made after screening episodes of the absolutely hilarious new web series *YidLife Crisis*, starring Jamie Elman and Eli Batalion.

The four-part series went live at [www.YidLifeCrisis.com](http://www.YidLifeCrisis.com) via YouTube on Tuesday and it is rated Chai-plus (18-plus) due to its edgy nature. It features Elman and Batalion engaging in rip-roaring funny dialogue in Yiddish, with English subtitles. There is also some great music.

The duo graduated four years apart from Bialik High School in Montreal, where Yiddish was part of the curriculum.

After their successful appli-

cation for a Jewish Community Foundation Arts Grant, as well as some additional funding from the Bronfman Youth Fellowships Venture Fund, Elman and Batalion began building the concept for the web series.

"At one point we were looking at shows like *Seinfeld* and *Curb* and agreed that they both have a real Yiddish spirit," said Elman. "First we considered taking classic episodes of *Seinfeld*, with me being Jerry and Jerome as George speaking in Yiddish. Then we came up with our own original idea to talk Yiddish with the subtitles."

One five-minute episode will be rolled out monthly over the next four months. The premiere, arriving the week before Rosh Hashanah, is appropriately called *Breaking the Fast*. It was filmed at La Banquise, best known for its

Quebec delicacy of poutine. The latter is how the duo decide to break their fast on Yom Kippur.

They'll wrap things up in December, with a finale in the spirit of Chanukah, after which they will decide what direction to take. Everything from more episodes to a stage version are being considered. Filming also occurred at Lester's Deli and the St. Viateur and Fairmount bagel factories.

A French version of the site is planned, as well as a French subtitled version of the episodes, for early October.

Elman and Batalion wrote, produced and directed the series. Elman confesses that he does not actually speak Yiddish. Batalion does, so he proceeded to record the dialogue for all four episodes, doing both voices, and left it for Elman to practise. That effort and a Yiddish coach enabled Elman, a seasoned actor who has actually appeared on an episode of *Curb*, to nail the script.

Elman said, "We're speaking to issues we believe are universal, even if through a Jewish lens. And while the dialogue is in Yiddish – not your zeide's Yiddish, mind you – we believe the comedic essence will allow us to export this around the world."

There's also a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/YidLifeCrisis> and Twitter feed @YidLifeCrisis.

## All Ashkenazi Jews descend from 350 people, study shows

(JNS.org) – A new study conducted at Columbia University, based on the genetic sequencing of 128 Ashkenazi Jews, shows that modern Ashkenazi Jews descend from a small group of about 350 individuals who lived between 600 and 800 years ago.

Those ancestors of current Ashkenazi Jews were both Eu-

ropean and Middle Eastern, said the study, which was published last Tuesday in the *Nature Communications* journal.

Today's approximate population of 10 million Ashkenazi Jews descends from such a small group of ancestors due to the 'bottleneck' effect, a drastic reduction in population size that occurred for un-

known reasons about 25-30 generations ago, according to the study.

"[Among Ashkenazi Jews] everyone is a 30th cousin... They have a stretch of the genome that is identical," Itsik Pe'er, an associate professor of computer science and systems biology at Columbia University, told Live Science.



Jews from Worms, Germany, during the Middle Ages. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.