



Preparing The Garden For Shemita, #2: *Melachot Derabanan* During Shemita

Last week, we learned about four or five *melachot* pertaining to shemita, which are forbidden by the Torah.

However, there are many more *melachot* that do not appear in the Torah. The Mishna (Shevi'it chap. 2) enumerates 17 *melachot* and the Rambam (Shevi'it 1,5) includes them too. Rav Kook lists more than 20 *melachot* in his book *Shabbat Ha'aretz* (1,5), as does the Chazon Ish (Shevi'it 17, 19).

The well-known *melachot* are the following: watering and irrigation, weeding, fertilization, mowing (grass), spraying and crop-dusting. Are they forbidden *derabanan*, or permitted?

Ukmei ilana and avruyei ilana

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 3) writes that

any *melachah* directed toward keeping the tree alive (in Aramaic, “*ukmei ilana*”) is permissible, but a *melachah* to improve or strengthen the tree (*avruyei ilana*) is forbidden.

For example; there are many plants that will die if they don't receive water during the summer. Therefore, watering these plants fall into the category of *okmey ilana* and is permissible during Shemita. On the other hand, it is forbidden to cut old branches of a tree so that the tree will grow better. Why? Because the goal is to “improve” the tree, to make it grow better. Fertilization is usually *avruyei ilana*, thus forbidden, because generally the tree or plant will survive without fertilization. **Chazal didn't want that our plants would die during shemita, but only that we do the minimum needed to ensure their survival.**

Ukmei ilana or ukmei peira (fruits)

Rav Kook believed that only actions taken to preserve the **tree** are permitted, while activities to preserve the **fruits** are forbidden. By contrast, the Chazon Ish was lenient with regards to the fruit as well. For example, spraying trees against pests that attack the tree's fruit, would be forbidden to Rav Kook but acceptable to the Chazon Ish. *Lema'aseh*, the general custom is to be lenient like the Chazon Ish.

Given the above, any *melacha* whose goal is to avoid loss of a plant or its yield – is permitted during shemittah.

There are activities that are sometimes permissible and sometimes forbidden. It depends on whether the activity is directed to strengthen the tree, or merely to keep it tree alive.

In light of these principles, there are many *melachot* that we must perform **before** shemittah, during the end of the sixth year. We will discuss this next week. ■



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