ABOUT GEEZ

Geez magazine is a quarterly, nonprofit, ad-free, print magazine about social justice, art, and activism for people at the fringes of faith in Canada and the U.S. Geez is committed to naming and raging against oppression while also offering the hope, beauty, and power alive in local communities doing their work.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

This biblical tradition occurred every 49 years, declaring all debts be forgiven, slaves and prisoners freed, and land laid to rest. First laid out in the book of Leviticus (and later referenced in the New Testament), Jubilee was the “Year of Release” that signaled the end of seven cycles of Sabbath years. Quaker minister Kristina Keefe-Perry called it a “cosmic reset button” – and we sure feel like we’re a couple thousand years overdue. In this moment of massive debt overload, mass incarceration, and rampant land destruction, we ask: What would this practice look like today? We dream together of reparations, debt forgiveness, prison abolition, land restoration, and a whole lot of radical rest.

RECOMMENDED READING

Page 51 – Sweet Blossoming of Justice: A Rewrite of Isaiah 61 by Kateri Boucher
Page 22 – Shmita: Radical Jews Practice Release by Jake Ehrlich
Page 47 – Thinking Abolition Theologically An Interview with Hannah Bowman

DEFINITIONS

Shmita: Meaning “release” in Hebrew, shmita refers to the Biblical institution of the sabbatical year, when the land is to lay fallow and unharvested for the duration of the year.

Prison abolition: A political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment (as defined by Critical Resistance).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Both Hannah Bowman and Jake Ehrlich name the Biblical traditions and passages that inform their radical political work. Are there certain texts (Biblical or otherwise) that you regularly turn to in your work for peace and justice?

2. When asked if she considers the Bible an abolitionist text, Hannah tells us it’s complicated. “If we tried to reduce it to only saying one thing, then we’re not doing justice to the fact that it’s a 3,000 year-old document written over the course of more than a thousand years. And I think it’s important for us to realize that it’s not always going to say what we want it to.” Do you agree with Hannah? What are the challenges of searching for specific messages in a complex elder text like the Bible?

3. There are multiple ways of understanding the call to set the captives free. Thinking both materially and spiritually, what people, places, objects, or ideas are being held captive in our society? What parts of yourself or your life might be held captive right now? What would collective liberation from these chains look like? Feel like? Sound like?

ACTIVITY

1. Find a way to sit with Isaiah 61. Read it alone and aloud. Read it over a dinner meal. Study it in a group. Let it seep into the corners of your body.
2. Hannah Bowman said in the interview “If there won’t be any prisons in the reign of God, why are we committed to visions of reform that say we’re going to have to have prisons in the meantime?” Find a way to take an act toward prison abolition. Read a book. Become a pen pal with a person who is incarcerated. Join a local Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee or Critical Resistance group.

DEFINITIONS

Eviction moratorium: A period of time when landlords are prohibited from removing a tenant who is not paying rent.

Papal bull: An official public decree by the Pope. (Not to be confused – although sometimes overlapping – with Papal bulls.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Dean Dettloff reminds us, “Global debt is not an accident, but is intentionally mediated through financial institutions and the way that capitalism distributes wealth.” In what ways do those in power attempt to mask the fact that this debt is intentionally created? Did his article teach you anything new about the workings of global capital?

2. Reflecting on the story of his church’s experiment in wealth redistribution, Andrew Yang writes, “To the extent that it was only happening among our church community members, it was symbolic justice and not true justice.” Does this distinction resonate with you? What could be helpful about referring to these experiments as “symbolic justice”? What could be misleading? Do you see your work as falling into that category, and why?

Hannah Bowman said in the interview “If there won’t be any prisons in the reign of God, why are we committed to visions of reform that say we’re going to have to have prisons in the meantime?” Find a way to take an act toward prison abolition. Read a book. Become a pen pal with a person who is incarcerated. Join a local Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee or Critical Resistance group.
PART 4 ALLOW OUR BODIES TO REST

RECOMMENDED READING
Page 40 – If an Undocumented Chinese Restaurant Worker Took a Sabbatical by Luan Huska
Page 42 – Blessing for a Rest by Kate Suffling
Page 43 – Rest as a Sacred Ceremony by Owolabi

ACTIVITY
1. If you are able, put some money (perhaps $5, perhaps $1,000) towards debt relief or redistribution. You likely know a great place in your own local community. Otherwise, here are some suggestions: Resource Generation (for young people with class privilege), National Bail Out, and Debt Collective.
2. Journal: What is your personal and ancestral relationship with debt?

PRAYER
For the Snails by Hannah Renglich, page 46

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. Read through Katie Kulla’s correspondence with Wendell Berry. What emotions were brought up for you while reading? Do you also have a beloved author who you’ve wanted to challenge or invite into further decolonization and anti-racism work? Who would you write to and what might you say?
2. What did you learn from your family about food growing up? If you have access to information about your ancestors’ lives, what do you know about their relationships to land and food? What lessons do you want to carry with you from your family’s history with food, and what traditions need to be changed?

ACTIVITY
3. Research and write a detailed acknowledgement for the land that you are on or that your family is from. Learn about #LandBack campaigns and make a plan to bring your acknowledgement one step closer to reparation.