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Rabbi Mark Hillel Kunis

*Parashat HaShavuah Series*

**Parashat Behar**

Times are hard, our economy is not doing so great, and some people are in trouble. Where do you turn when your source of income has evaporated? How do you cope? My advice to people who have lost their jobs is to try to find a new job and, at the same time, try to draw closer to God and trust that He will be there for you. After tracking this piece of advice over many years, I have seen that most people find themselves, after a while, better off. It's crucial to keep your faith in such circumstances and remember that you are an image of God, that God loves you and that He already has a solution in mind for your situation.

Where does such faith come from? It is part of Jewish life and it is never demonstrated more powerfully than in this week's Torah portion, which opens with the laws of *Shmita*. Work your fields for six years and the seventh year is a Shabbat for the fields— no plowing, no planting and no harvesting!

Rabbi Shraga Simmons, in a beautiful D'var Torah, points to this law as proof that the Torah was by God, and not by a committee. Imagine, he says, a committee of rabbis assigned to write the Torah. Of course, they would not tell anyone that they're writing it or it won't be accepted. Instead, they would say that God gave this book. Remember, there's nothing yet written – no Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, no Ten Commandments. So what would be a good law to include in our Torah? How about, "Thou shalt not steal"? That's very practical – let's include it. "Thou shalt not murder"? Okay, we'll put that in, too.

What if they proposed the following law: Every seventh year the entire Jewish people must cease working the fields. They may not plow, plant or harvest for an entire year, once every seven years. Do you think this is a good law to put into our Torah? Sure! We've all heard of "crop rotation." Letting the land lie fallow helps replenish the soil's nutrients, yielding better crops than if they'd use the soil year after year.

One problem: If we're an agrarian society – as the early Israelites were – then we live off of what we plant. So if we don't plant for an entire year, we'll have nothing to eat! But there's a solution: let's store up 1/6 of the harvest in each of the first six years, and then eat from that in the Sabbatical year. Or we could divide the country into seven regions. Each year a different region will let their fields rest and borrow or buy food from the others.

Now imagine that the committee proposes a far more radical idea: no dividing the land, no storing up grain. Rather, simply a promise to deliver a triple crop in the sixth year – enough to

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*Rabbi Mark Kunis serves as rabbi of Congregation Shaarei Shamayim In Atlanta, Georgia.*

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eat in the sixth year, the seventh year that the land will lie fallow, and enough for the eighth year because there was no planting in the seventh year. Absurd! A committee can't guarantee that the sixth year will yield a triple crop. They will be exposed as frauds! How long will this religion last with such a promise? About six years! Until the triple crop doesn't happen! You can bet that the imaginary Torah-writing committee would shoot down the triple-crop idea as an impossible option.

Let's review the Sabbatical year as described in the Torah (Leviticus 25:3-21):

*(25:3-6) For six years you may plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and harvest your crops. But the seventh year is a Sabbath for the land. During that year, you may not plant your fields nor prune your vineyards. Do not harvest crops that grow on their own. Do not gather the grapes on your unpruned vines since it is a year of rest for the land...*

*(25:20-21) And if you ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year? We have not planted nor have we harvested crops." I will direct my blessing to you in the sixth year and the land will produce enough crops for three years!*

What is the Torah's proposal? Divide up the land? Store the grain as Joseph did in Egypt? No! The Torah promises that, "the sixth year will produce enough crops for three years"! The Torah could have written, "Keep the Sabbath law in the seventh year. It's going to be a terrible year; everybody's going to be starving. But as a great reward, you'll get a triple crop in the eighth year." That would have been smart, because then, if it didn't happen, the excuse could always be, "Well, some people were cheating in the seventh year. So God punished us and didn't give us the triple crop."

But no, the Torah promises a triple crop in the sixth year, before we even observe the law of *Shmita*, the seventh year. There is no possible excuse should there fail to be a bumper crop.

Who would make such a promise? Let's read the opening verses of the parasha (Lev. 25:1-3):

*God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbatical year of rest. For six years you may plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and harvest your crops. But the seventh year is a Sabbath for the land.*

Question: Why does the Torah, in relating the mitzvah of *Shmita*, of the Sabbatical year, specify that God is speaking, *b'har Sinai*, "on Mt. Sinai"? We don't see Sinai mentioned with other mitzvot in the Torah? It is because the *Shmita*, the Sabbatical year, is a mitzvah that proves that no human being could ever write this law. Only God could be the Author Who gave the Torah on Mt. Sinai. Only God could promise a triple crop in the sixth year. And in fact, according to the prophets, this is what happened throughout Biblical times.

What can we learn from this mitzvah that is totally irrelevant to **our** lives – we who don't plant crops or live in Israel where *Shmita* is observed? What we learn is that God loves us and will take care of us. He already has a solution in mind to help us out of our problems if we only keep our faith in Him strong. There is a triple crop waiting for each and every one of us just around the corner.

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And so my counsel, as I said, to those who have lost a job, is to do what they can to find a new job and to do what they can to draw closer to God and trust that He will be there for them. It's crucial to keep your faith strong in such circumstances and always remember that you are an image of God, that God loves you and that He already has a solution to your situation in mind. There is a triple crop waiting for you.

*Shabbat Shalom!*

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