

# EVERY 7TH YEAR

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

HASHEM spoke to Moshe 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 Shabbos rest for HASHEM. (Vayikra 25:1-2)

What is the subject of Shmitta doing in relation to Mount Sinai? Were not all the Mitzvos stated at Mount Sinai? Rather it is written here to teach that just as with Shmitta, its general rules and its details were stated at Mount Sinai, so too with all the Mitzvos that their general rules and their details were stated at Mount Sinai. (Rashi)

Rashi asks a great question. What is the connection between Mt. Sinai and the subject of Shmitta? He offers the answers that he offers but perhaps there are other approaches too.

Talk about taking a career risk. Moshe, who never stepped foot Eretz Yisrael, is promulgating laws that have to do with agriculture. That's not the risky part, yet.

Shmitta is a great idea and for many reason it makes plenty of good sense. It's good for the long term production of the land to rest it from work every 7th year. The notion of a sabbatical has been adopted by the collegiate community. Professors too take a vacation for a year every 7th year. This certainly renews their vigor for academic rigor. I would welcome such an opportunity as would most of us.

Let's say, the government demands we all take a one year leave of absence every seventh year but it is not a paid leave of absence. Super, but what would be the first question our spouses would ask? You got it! The Torah anticipated the same problem and it offers a definitive answer. "And if you should say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? We will not sow, and we will not gather in our produce!' (Vayikra 25:20)

What would be a logical response? How can we carry this plan through successfully? There are a number of reasonable approaches. 1) How about saving up as Yosef managed in Egypt during the years of plenty. Let's create a savings plan so that we will have what to eat in the 7th year. That's not the answer the Torah gives though.

2) Let's try staggering the fallow years as universities do, and giving 1/7th of the staff off every 7th years. That way at least there is a strong and productive support system to carry those who are in the non-working mode. Sounds like a plan but that is not what the Torah says.

How does the Torah address this serious concern about Shmitta? "[Know then, that] I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield produce for three years." (Vayikra 25:21) Why 3 years? By not planting or harvesting the 7th year, the 8th year crop is also a forfeit. The problem is actually worse than we thought, but at least now we have a solution. It solves all the problems but one.

Who can make such a promise? Who can deliver on such a pledge? The other two were at least logical but this is absurdly risky. Moshe wants the Torah to be kept in perpetuity. If this is the plan then he is taking a major career risk by advising everyone to be idle the same year and in the 6th year there will be a bumper crop, enough for 3 years, the 6th, 7th and 8th. How long would it take for Moshe and the entire Torah to lose credibility? Yes, 6 years!

If I was Moshe writing these laws by myself, I would be nervous. Only HASHEM can make such a guarantee and deliver. The laws of Shmitta give loads of credence to the Torah that was given at Mt. Sinai, that it was mandated by HASHEM and that would continually be affirmed over and over again **every 7th year**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).