

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



Produced by THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
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The Rabbinical Assembly

3080 Broadway

New York, NY 10027

Blessings for the Torah and haftiarot have been adapted from

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Illustrations of the tabernacle and its furnishings by Joe Sikora.

Composition by VARDA Graphics, Skokie, Illinois

Design by Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden

Manufactured in the United States of America

09 10 10 9 8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. Hebrew. 2001.

Etz Hayim: Torah and commentary / senior editor, David L. Lieber; literary editor, Jules Harlow; sponsored by the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

p. cm.

Text of the Pentateuch in Hebrew and English; commentary in English.

Includes the haftiarot and commentary on them, p'shat and d'rash commentaries, comments on Conservative halakhic practice, topical essays, and other material.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-10: 0-8276-0712-1 ISBN-13: 978-0-8276-0712-5

1. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Commentaries. 2. Haftiarot—Commentaries. 3. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Theology. 4. Conservative Judaism—Customs and practices. I. Lieber, David L. II. Harlow, Jules. III. United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. IV. Rabbinical Assembly. V. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. English. Jewish Publication Society, 2001. VI. Title.

BS1222 .L54 2001

222'.1077—dc21

2001029757

¹²And if you do obey these rules and observe them carefully, the LORD your God will maintain faithfully for you the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers: ¹³He will favor you and bless you and multiply you; He will bless the issue of your womb and the produce of your soil, your new grain and wine and oil, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock, in the land that He swore to your fathers to assign to you. ¹⁴You shall be blessed above all other peoples: there shall be no sterile male or female among you or among your livestock. ¹⁵The LORD will ward off from you all sickness; He will not bring upon you any of the dreadful

וְהָיָה | עֲקֵב תִּשְׁמְעוּן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים
הָאֵלֶּה וְשִׁמְרַתֶּם וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְשָׁמַר
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְךָ אֶת-הַבְּרִית וְאֶת-הַחֹסֶד
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתָּיִךָ: ¹³ וְאִהְבֶּךָ וּבִרְכֶּךָ
וְהִרְבֶּךָ וּבִרְךָ פְּרִי-בִטְנֶךָ וּפְרִי-אֲדָמָתְךָ
דִּגְגָנְךָ וְתִירְשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהָרְךָ שְׂגֵר-אֶלְפֵיךָ
וְעִשְׂתֵּרֶת צֹאנֶךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּע
לְאַבְתָּיִךָ לָתֵת לְךָ: ¹⁴ בְּרוּךְ תִּהְיֶה מִכָּל-
הָעַמִּים לֹא-יִהְיֶה בְּךָ עֵקֶר וְעֵקְרָה
וּבְבִהֶמְתֶּךָ: ¹⁵ וְהִסִּיר יְהוָה מִמֶּךָ כָּל-חֲלֵי

Moses' Second Discourse, Part 2: Preamble to the Laws Given in Moab (continued)

AVOIDING DANGERS TO FAITH AND OBEDIENCE AFTER THE CONQUEST *(continued)*

EXHORTATIONS CONCERNING CONQUEST *(continued)*

OBSERVE THE COMMANDMENTS! (7:12–16)

12. if Hebrew: *eikev*; literally, “on the heels of,” i.e., “as a consequence of.” Verses 12–16 seem to be a continuation of verse 11. A new section (and a new weekly portion), however, begins here according to the Masoretic text, probably because it sees this word as framing a literary unit from here through 8:20, a unit whose first and final clauses begin with the same Hebrew word, *eikev* (rendered “because” in 8:20).

for you God has fulfilled His promises to the patriarchs by redeeming the Exodus generation. If the present generation obeys His commandments, He will fulfill those promises on its behalf as well.

13. These are the main elements of God’s

promises to the patriarchs, in addition to the land of Canaan. The terms used here for grain (*dagan*), wine (*tiros*), calving (*sheger*), and lambing (*ashtarot*) are also names of Semitic deities. The same word often was used to refer both to a deity and a phenomenon which that deity was thought to control or personify. Most Israelites were probably unaware of the etymology of these terms, as English speakers are in talking about cereal, which is related to the Greek goddess Ceres.

new grain and wine and oil The prime products of Israelite agriculture.

14. Sterility was regarded as one of the greatest human tragedies. Hundreds of fertility charms have been found by archaeologists, testifying to the longing for children in the ancient Near East.

15. dreadful diseases of Egypt Certain diseases, such as elephantiasis, ophthalmia, and dysentery, were endemic to Egypt.

This *parashah* prepares the reader for the transition in subsequent sections from exhortation to law. Moses now stresses that the relationship between God and Israel is based on love.

13. favor you and bless you Literally, “love you and bless you.” Whether it is a case of God blessing the people or of the people blessing God, “only a blessing that flows from love

deserves to be called a blessing” (A. J. Heschel of Apt).

14. blessed above all other peoples The Hebrew can also be read as “blessed by all other peoples.” As a reward for Israel’s distinctive way of living, other nations will admire and praise them (Deut. R. 3:6).

diseases of Egypt, about which you know, but will inflict them upon all your enemies.

¹⁶You shall destroy all the peoples that the LORD your God delivers to you, showing them no pity. And you shall not worship their gods, for that would be a snare to you. ¹⁷Should you say to yourselves, “These nations are more numerous than we; how can we dispossess them?” ¹⁸You need have no fear of them. You have but to bear in mind what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians: ¹⁹the wondrous acts that you saw with your own eyes, the signs and the portents, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God liberated you. Thus will the LORD your God do to all the peoples you now fear. ²⁰The LORD your God will also send a plague against them, until those who are left in hiding perish before you. ²¹Do not stand in dread of them, for the LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God.

²²The LORD your God will dislodge those peoples before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them at once, else the wild beasts would multiply to your hurt. ²³The LORD your God will deliver them up to you, throwing them into utter panic until they are wiped out. ²⁴He will deliver their kings into your hand, and you shall obliterate their name from under the

וְכָל־מְדוּיֵי מִצְרַיִם הָרְעִים אֲשֶׁר יָדַעְתָּ לֹא יִשְׁיִמָם בָּךְ וּנְתַנָּם בְּכָל־שְׁנֵאֵיךָ:

¹⁶וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ לֹא־תַחַס עֵינֶיךָ עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹד אֶת־אֱלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי־מוֹקֵשׁ הוּא לְךָ: ¹⁷ס כִּי תֹאמֵר בְּלִבְבְּךָ רַבִּים הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִמֶּנִּי אֵיכָה אוּכַל לְהוֹרִישָׁם: ¹⁸לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם זָכֹר תִּזְכֹּר אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָרְעֹה וּלְכָל־מִצְרַיִם: ¹⁹הַמַּסֹּת הַגְּדֹלֹת אֲשֶׁר־רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ וְהָאֲתֹת וְהַמִּפְתִּים וְהַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וְהַזְרַע הַנְּטוּיָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּן־יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְכָל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר־אֲתָה יָרָא מִפְּנֵיהֶם: ²⁰וְגַם אֶת־הַצְרָעָה יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּם עַד־אֲבֹד הַנְּשֹׂאִים וְהַנְּסֻתָּיִם מִפְּנֵיךָ: ²¹לֹא תַעֲרֹץ מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּקִרְבְּךָ אֵל גָּדוֹל וְנוֹרָא:

²²וְנָשַׁל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵל מִפְּנֵיךָ מֵעַט מֵעַט לֹא תוּכַל כְּלַתֶּם מֵהֶם פֶּן־תִּרְבֶּה עֲלֶיךָ חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה: ²³וּנְתַנָּם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ וְהֵמָּם מֵהוֹמָה גְדֹלָה עַד הַשָּׁמַדִּים: ²⁴וְנָתַן מְלִכֵיהֶם בְּיָדְךָ

16. that would be a snare to you Worshiping the gods of the Canaanites would lead to Israel’s ruin.

DO NOT FEAR THE CANAANITES! (vv. 17–26)

20. plague Hebrew: *tzir-ab*, literally, “hornets” or “wasps.” Ferocious swarms of wasps will hunt down the remaining Canaanites and sting them to death.

22. There were too few Israelites to fill the entire land. If all the Canaanites were dislodged at once, some of the land would remain unoccu-

piated and would be overrun by wild animals. Therefore, God will give the Israelites only as much territory as they can occupy, and—if they obey His commandments (19:8–9)—will give them the rest when there are enough of them to fill the entire land. This is one of several explanations for the gradual and partial conquest.

24. their kings Canaan was not a unified country but a collection of city-states ruled by individual kings. The Book of Joshua lists 31 kings conquered by the Israelites (12:7–24).

obliterate their name A frequent curse, re-

22. else the wild beasts would multiply to your hurt If you become too adept at waging war, some of your men may come to enjoy it

too much—and become like wild beasts (Israel of Modzhitz).

heavens; no man shall stand up to you, until you have wiped them out.

²⁵You shall consign the images of their gods to the fire; you shall not covet the silver and gold on them and keep it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared thereby; for that is abhorrent to the LORD your God. ²⁶You must not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be proscribed like it; you must reject it as abominable and abhorrent, for it is proscribed.

8 You shall faithfully observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today, that you may thrive and increase and be able to possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your fathers.

²Remember the long way that the LORD your God has made you travel in the wilderness these past forty years, that He might test you by hardships to learn what was in your hearts: whether you would keep His commandments or not.

ffering to total extinction. People's names are all that is left of them on earth after death, and the preservation of their names was considered vitally important for the well-being of their spirits in the afterlife. To obliterate one's name was to leave no oral or written trace of that name on earth, i.e., to leave that person no survivors or monuments.

from under the heavens From the surface of the earth.

25. abhorrent to the LORD Regularly refers to morally and religiously detestable practices and objects, such as cheating, perverse sexual relations, impure foods, defective sacrifices, and especially idolatry and its rites (e.g., child sacrifice, magic, and divination) (see Lev. 18, 20).

26. proscribed Hebrew: *heirem* (a proscribed

וְהֶאֱבַדְתָּ אֶת־שִׁמְם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא־ יִתְיַצֵּב אִישׁ בְּפָנֶיךָ עַד הַשְּׂמֹדֶה אִתָּם :
²⁵ פְּסִילֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ לֹא־ תַחֲמוּד כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב עֲלֵיהֶם וְלִקְחַתָּ לָךְ פֶּן תִּקְשֶׁ בּוֹ כִּי תוֹעֵבֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא :
²⁶ וְלֹא־תָבִיא תוֹעֵבָה אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ וְהֵייתָ חָרָם כְּמָהוּ שִׁקָץ | תִּשְׂקַצְנוּ וְתֵעֵב | תִּתְעַבְבוּ כִּי־חָרָם הוּא : פ

ח כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תַּחֲיוּן וּרְבִיתֶם וּבֵאתֶם וִירִשְׁתֶּם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם :

² וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הֲלִיכָךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ זֶה אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה בַּמִּדְבָּר לְמַעַן עֲנֹתְךָ לְנִסְתֹתְךָ לְדַעַת אֶת־אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְךָ הִתְשֹׁמֵר מִצּוֹתוֹ מִצְוֹתָיו אִם־לֹא : ³ וַיַּעֲנֶךָ

thing), related to the verb *baharem* (doom to destruction). Objects used in idolatry were regarded as quasi-contagious and, therefore, prohibited; anyone who appropriated them became proscribed like them. Both the objects and their users were to be destroyed.

REMEMBER GOD AND OBSERVE THE
 COMMANDMENTS! (8:1–20)

1. that you may . . . increase Then you will be able to take control of the entire Land.

2. test you by hardships The hardships in the wilderness were not only a proper punishment of the rebellious Exodus generation. God also used them to teach the Israelites that they were dependent on Him and to test whether they would obey His commandments.

CHAPTER 8

To the theme of love, the Torah now adds the dimension of gratitude. Gratitude is perhaps the cornerstone of a religious outlook, an emotion to which even a person who is not spiritually inclined can be open.

2. test you by hardships Was this to test their faith, because they could never be sure that the manna would appear the next day (Rashbam)? Or was it to see if they would remain grateful to God even if they knew their food supply was assured?

³He subjected you to the hardship of hunger and then gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your fathers had ever known, in order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that the LORD decrees. ⁴The clothes upon you did not wear out, nor did your feet swell these forty years. ⁵Bear in mind that the LORD your God disciplines you just as a man disciplines his son. ⁶Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God: walk in His ways and revere Him.

⁷For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; ⁹a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks

וַיִּרְעַבְכֶם וַיֹּאכַלְכֶם אֶת־הַמָּן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתֶּם וְלֹא יָדְעוּן אֲבֹתֵיכֶם לְמַעַן הוֹדַעְכֶם כִּי לֹא עַל־הַלֶּחֶם לִבְדוּ יַחֲיֶה הָאָדָם כִּי עַל־כָּל־מוֹצֵא פִי־יִהְיֶה יַחֲיֶה הָאָדָם: ⁴ שְׂמַלְתְּךָ לֹא בִלְתָהּ מֵעֲלִיךָ וּרְגְלֶךָ לֹא בִצְקָה זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה: ⁵ וַיִּדְעַתְּ עִם־לִבְבְּךָ כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יִיטֵר אִישׁ אֶת־בְּנוֹ יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִיִּסְרֶךָ: ⁶ וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכֵי וּלְיִרְאָה אֹתוֹ:

⁷ כִּי יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִבְּיַאֲךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נַחְלֵי מַיִם עֵינַת וּתְהִמֵּת יִצְאִים בַּבִּקְעָה וּבַהָר: ⁸ אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וּשְׂעֵרָה וְגִפְנֵן וּתְאֵנָה וּרְמוֹן אֶרֶץ־זֵית שֶׁמֶן וּדְבַשׁ: ⁹ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְּמִסְפַּנֵּת תֹּאכַל־בָּהּ לֶחֶם לֹא־תִחְסַר כָּל בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבִנְיָהּ בְּרוּל

3. manna See Exod 16:15,31; Num. 11:7.

4. Another indication of Israel's dependence on God and His control over nature. The Israelites' clothing and feet were immune to the effects of nature during the years in the wilderness.

5. The hardships in the wilderness are a paradigm for all of God's disciplinary actions with Israel. Their aim is educational. As in the case of a father and child, the discipline is administered with love.

7. The goodness of the Promised Land is a major theme of Deuteronomy, graphically illustrated here. The phrase "a good land" occurs no fewer than 10 times in the book.

8. wheat and barley The Land's principal

grains, from which bread, the staple of the Israelite diet, was made.

vines Important as the source of grapes and wine, the predominant human-made drink.

figs A favorite fruit, eaten fresh or dried or baked into cakes.

pomegranates Another popular fruit. Their juice could be drunk or made into wine. Also valued as objects of beauty and symbols of fertility, they were used as decorations in Israelite religious and secular art.

honey Because this verse is a list of agricultural products, "honey" must refer to the nectar of dates.

3. man does not live on bread alone This familiar verse is usually taken to mean that people need "more than bread"—including culture, art, and food for the spirit. ("Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread but give us roses.") But in context, it is better understood to mean that people can survive on "less than bread"—namely, the manna from heaven

with which God sustains them.

4. The clothes upon you did not wear out The faith you practiced every day never wore out nor did you outgrow it, while the faith you took out only on special occasions shrank and became too small for you. Similarly your children's religious outlook grew with them as they grew and matured (Deut. R. 7:11).

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

8:8. a land of wheat . . . and honey The Sages decreed that one should recite a special short grace after eating any of these seven species that are mentioned as the products of the land of Israel—the *sheva minin*: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates (the source of the honey). When they are eaten as part of a fixed meal, the full Grace after Meals (*Birkat ha-Mazon*) is recited.

are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. ¹⁰When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

¹¹Take care lest you forget the LORD your God and fail to keep His commandments, His rules, and His laws, which I enjoin upon you today. ¹²When you have eaten your fill, and have built fine houses to live in, ¹³and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, ¹⁴beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the LORD your God—who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage; ¹⁵who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its *seraph* serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it, who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock; ¹⁶who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers had never known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end—¹⁷and you say to yourselves, “My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.” ¹⁸Remember that

וּמֵהַרְרֵיהָ תַחֲצֹב נְחֹשֶׁת: ¹⁰ וְאֶבְלֹתַי
וּשְׁבַעְתָּ וּבִרְכַתְּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־
הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ:

שְׁנֵי ¹¹ הַשְׁמֵר לְךָ פֶּן־תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לְבַלְתִּי שְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו
אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם: ¹² פֶּן־תֵּאֱכַל
וּשְׁבַעְתָּ וּבָתִּים טֹבִים תִּבְנֶה וּיְשֻׁבֹת:
¹³ וּבִקְרָה וְצֹאנְךָ יִרְבֶּן וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב יִרְבֶּה־
לְךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ יִרְבֶּה: ¹⁴ וְרָם לְבַבְךָ
וּשְׁכַחְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַמוֹצִיאֲךָ
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: ¹⁵ הַמוֹלִיכְךָ
בַּמִּדְבָּר | הַגָּדֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא נָחֵשׁ | שָׂרָף
וְעִקְרָב וְצִמְאוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֵין־מַיִם הַמוֹצִיא
לְךָ מַיִם מִצּוֹר הַחֲלָמִישׁ: ¹⁶ הַמֵּאֲכִלְךָ מִן
בַּמִּדְבָּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעוֹן אֲבֹתֶיךָ לְמַעַן
עֲנֹתְךָ וּלְמַעַן נִסֹּתְךָ לְהִיטִבְךָ בְּאַחֲרִיתְךָ:
¹⁷ וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ כַחֲלִי וְעֵצִים יָדֵי עֲשָׂה
לִי אֶת־הַחֲלִיל הַזֶּה: ¹⁸ וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה

9. iron . . . copper The wording reflects the fact that iron is mined from the surface, while copper is mined underground.

11. forget the LORD . . . and fail to keep His commandments Literally, “forget the LORD by failing to keep His commandments.”

15. seraph serpents Literally, “fiery serpents.” Creatures whose deadly bite causes a burning sensation.

brought forth water On two occasions when water was unavailable, God had Moses obtain water for the people from the inside of a rock (see

Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:7–11). In the Sinai there are limestone rocks from which small amounts of water drip; a blow to their soft surface can expose a porous inner layer containing water. On the occasions in question, the rocks miraculously produced enough for the entire people.

16. test you by hardships Refers to the entire wilderness period, which also prepared the Israelites for the future.

to benefit you in the end The lesson of its dependence on God would lead Israel to obey Him and earn His continued benefactions.

10. Birkat ha-Mazon, the prayer of thanksgiving after a meal, is the fundamental *mitzvah*, because all people should be capable of feeling grateful that the earth has produced food for them to eat (Menahem Mendel of Kotzk).

When you have eaten your fill When one eats in a spirit of gratitude, whether there is much food or little, the meal is satisfying (Shlomo of Karlin).

it is the LORD your God who gives you the power to get wealth, in fulfillment of the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers, as is still the case.

¹⁹If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve them or bow down to them, I warn you this day that you shall certainly perish; ²⁰like the nations that the LORD will cause to perish before you, so shall you perish—because you did not heed the LORD your God.

9 Hear, O Israel! You are about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and more populous than you: great cities with walls sky-high; ^{2a}a people great and tall, the Anakites, of whom you have knowledge; for you have heard it said, “Who can stand up to the children of Anak?” ³Know then this day that none other than the LORD your God is crossing at your head, a devouring fire; it is He who will wipe them out. He will subdue them before you, that you may quickly dispossess and destroy them, as the LORD promised you. ⁴And when the LORD your God has thrust them from your path, say not to yourselves, “The LORD has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues”; it is rather because of the wickedness of those nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. ⁵It is not because of your virtues and your rectitude that you will be able to

אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הִנְתֵּן לְךָ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׂוֹת חַיִּל לְמַעַן הִקִּים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם בְּיוֹם הַהוּא: פ

וְהָיָה אִם־שָׁכַח תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְעַבַּדְתָּם וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לָהֶם הֵעֵרְתִּי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אָבִד תֹּאבְדוּן: ²⁰ בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה מֵאַבִּיד מִפְּנֵיכֶם כִּן תֹּאבְדוּן עַקֵּב לֹא תִשְׁמַעוּן בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: פ

ט שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתָּה עֹבֵר הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבֹא לָרֶשֶׁת גּוֹיִם גְּדֹלִים וְעַצְמִים מִמֶּךָ עָרִים גְּדֹלֹת וּבְצֻרֹת בְּשָׂמַיִם: ² עַם־גְּדוֹל וְרַם בְּנֵי עֲנָקִים אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה יֹדְעַת וְאַתָּה שׁוֹמְעַת מִי יִתְיַצֵּב לְפָנַי בְּנֵי עֲנָק: ³ וַיִּדְעַת הַיּוֹם כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא־הָעֹבֵר לְפָנֶיךָ אֵשׁ אֹכֵלָה הוּא יִשְׁמִידֵם וְהוּא יִכְנִיעֵם לְפָנֶיךָ וְהוֹרֵשׁתָּם וְהֵאבַדְתָּם מֵהָר כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה לְךָ: ⁴ אַל־תֹּאמַר בְּלִבְבְּךָ בְּהִדְחֵךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אַתָּם | מִלְּפָנֶיךָ לֵאמֹר בְּצַדִּיקְתִּי הִבִּיאֲנִי יְהוָה לָרֶשֶׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבְרִשְׁעַת הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה יְהוָה מוֹרִישָׁם מִפְּנֵיךָ: ⁵ לֹא בְצַדִּיקְתְּךָ וּבְיִשְׁרָל לְבַבְּךָ אַתָּה בָּא לָרֶשֶׁת

18. as is still the case God is now fulfilling His promise to the patriarchs to give you the land.

20. If the Israelites act like the Canaanites, they will suffer the same fate (see Lev. 18:28).

AN ARGUMENT AGAINST
SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS (9:1–10:22)

THEME: VICTORY IS NO PROOF
OF VIRTUE (vv. 1–5)

2. you have heard it said Either by the scouts (1:28, Num. 13:31) or by others describing the Anakites' reputation.

3. as the LORD promised you See Exod. 23:23–31, 34:11.

4. virtues The word *tz'dakah* is usually translated “righteousness,” but here it probably refers specifically to loyalty or devotion.

5. God did not deprive the Canaanites of their land arbitrarily but because of their morally outrageous practices. Israel, however, has not yet earned the right to succeed them. God brings the Israelites into the land only to fulfill the oath He made to their ancestors, the oath that sustains them even when they are devoid of merits. It is “the merit of the ancestors” (*z'khat avot*) that prevents God from forsaking them.

possess their country; but it is because of their wickedness that the LORD your God is dispossessing those nations before you, and in order to fulfill the oath that the LORD made to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

⁶Know, then, that it is not for any virtue of yours that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess; for you are a stiffnecked people. ⁷Remember, never forget, how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the wilderness: from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you reached this place, you have continued defiant toward the LORD.

⁸At Horeb you so provoked the LORD that the LORD was angry enough with you to have destroyed you. ⁹I had ascended the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the Tablets of the Covenant that the LORD had made with you, and I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty

אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּפִי בְרָשָׁעַת | הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מוֹרִישָׁם מִפְּנֵיךָ וּלְמַעַן
הִקִּים אֶת־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה
לְאַבְתָּיִךְ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב:

⁶וַיִּדְעַתְּ כִּי לֹא בַצְדִּיקְתָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
נָתַן לְךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ כִּי עִם־קִשָׁה־עָרַף אֶתָּה: ⁷זְכֹר
אֶל־תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הִקְצַפְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמִּדְבָּר לְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יָצָאתָ |
מִמִּצְרַיִם עַד־בְּאֵתְכֶם עַד־הַמָּקוֹם
הַזֶּה מִמֵּרִים הָיִיתֶם עִם־יְהוָה:

⁸וּבַחֲרֹב הִקְצַפְתֶּם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּתְאַנֶּף
יְהוָה בְּכֶם לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶתְכֶם: ⁹בַּעֲלֹתִי
הַהָרָה לְקַחַת לְוַחֹת הָאֲבָנִים לְוַחֹת
הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־כָּרַת יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם וְאִשְׁב
בְּהָר אַרְבַּעַיִם יוֹם וְאַרְבַּעַיִם לַיְלָה לְחַם

A HISTORY OF PROVOCATIONS

(vv. 6–24)

6. Know, then From the following.
stiffnecked Obstinate, headstrong.

7. this place The valley near Beth-peor (3:29), the site of their most recent rebellion.

8–21. This passage recapitulates the more detailed account of the Golden Calf in Exod. 32.

8. At Horeb That is, even at Horeb (Mount Sinai). Although the Golden Calf incident was not the first of Israel's provocations, it is mentioned first because it was the most outrageous. If there was one place above all others where the

people should have been faithful, it was Horeb, where they had encountered God personally, had seen that He alone is God, and were commanded to worship no other gods.

9. Tablets of the Covenant They contain the Decalogue (see 4:13, 5:19).

forty days and forty nights During this time Moses was learning the remainder of the laws (see 5:28). Such 40-day periods are frequently encountered in the Bible and seem to convey the proper time for completion of a lengthy process. This period was required for the Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai to achieve repentance (Rashi).

CHAPTER 9

6. not for any virtue of yours Israel's election as God's special people is not based on their superiority to other nations, either in size or in merit. God chose to give Israel the Torah in order that Israel might thereby become a moral exemplar among the nations—not because it already was one. Characterizing Israel as a people chosen by God is not an assertion of superiority, but a historical fact. It was through God's using Israel as an instrument of divine revelation that the notion of ethical monotheism, the Decalogue, the prophets, and the psalms all came into the

world. (Maimonides differs, suggesting that God must have seen Israel's unique spiritual potential despite their flaws and their numerical insignificance when measured by human standards.)

for you are a stiffnecked people Most commentators see this as a negative trait. "A stiffnecked person will not accept criticism and change" (Sforno). "A stiffnecked person cannot look behind him and see how his actions have led him to where he finds himself" (Abravanel). A few see this characteristic as positive: The stubbornness of Jews in the face of persecution has enabled us to remain Jewish through the centuries (Exod. R. 42:9).

nights, eating no bread and drinking no water. ¹⁰And the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God, with the exact words that the LORD had addressed to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the Assembly.

¹¹At the end of those forty days and forty nights, the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the Tablets of the Covenant. ¹²And the LORD said to me, "Hurry, go down from here at once, for the people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted wickedly; they have been quick to stray from the path that I enjoined upon them; they have made themselves a molten image." ¹³The LORD further said to me, "I see that this is a stiffnecked people. ¹⁴Let Me alone and I will destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven, and I will make you a nation far more numerous than they."

¹⁵I started down the mountain, a mountain ablaze with fire, the two Tablets of the Covenant in my two hands. ¹⁶I saw how you had sinned against the LORD your God: you had made yourselves a molten calf; you had been quick to stray from the path that the LORD had enjoined upon

eating no bread and drinking no water During his intimate encounter with God, inside the cloud, Moses was beyond human needs and concerns.

10. inscribed with the finger of God According to Exod. 32:16, the tablets were also made by God.

day of the Assembly At Mount Sinai (Horeb).

12. God's preemptory tone implies that He is annoyed with Moses because of the people's behavior. So, too, does this reference to the Israelites as "the people whom you [Moses] brought out of Egypt"—literally, "your people whom you brought out of Egypt." Normally, God referred to them as "My people . . . whom I brought out of Egypt."

molten image According to Exod. 32:2 and 24, the calf was made from melted gold ornaments.

14. Let Me alone The phrase implies that Moses, if he so wishes, can restrain God from destroying Israel by interceding with Him and arguing the case for mercy.

לֹא אֶכְלָתִי וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתִיתִי: ¹⁰ וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אֵלַי אֶת־שְׁנֵי לוחֹת הָאֲבָנִים כְּתוּבִים בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים וְעֲלֵיהֶם כָּכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם בְּהַר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ בְּיוֹם הַקָּהָל:

¹¹ וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה נָתַן יְהוָה אֵלַי אֶת־שְׁנֵי לוחֹת הָאֲבָנִים לְלוחֹת הַבְּרִית: ¹² וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי קוּם רַד מֵהַר מִזֶּה כִּי שָׁחַת עַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם סָרוּ מִהַר מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָם עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מִסֵּכָה: ¹³ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר רְאִיתִי אֶת־הָעַם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עִם־קִשָׁה־עָרֹף הוּא: ¹⁴ הֲרַף מִמֶּנִּי וְאֲשַׁמִּיחֵם וְאֶמְחָה אֶת־שְׁמֵם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי־עַצוֹם וְרַב מִמֶּנּוּ:

¹⁵ וְאֶפֶן וְאִירָד מִן־הַהָר וְהָהָר בַּעַר בְּאֵשׁ וּשְׁנֵי לוחֹת הַבְּרִית עַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי: ¹⁶ וְאָרָא וְהִנֵּה חֲטֵאתֶם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם עֲשִׂיתֶם לָכֶם עֵגֶל מִסֵּכָה סָרְתֶם מִהַר מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ

blot out their name This is what Israel was to do to the Canaanites and the Amalekites (7:24, 25:19).

far more numerous They already are as numerous as the stars (1:10, 10:22). The promise to the patriarchs would be continued through Moses and his descendants.

15. The idol was made in full view of the mountain that was still blazing with God's Presence (see 4:11–12, 36, 5:20). And it violated the very commands written on the tablets that Moses carried.

16. molten calf It is likely that the calf did not represent another deity, but a pedestal or mount on which *YHWH* was thought to be invisibly present, much as the cherubs in the Holy of Holies were conceived as *YHWH*'s throne. Nevertheless, even if the original motive for making the calf was not idolatrous, the people immediately fell to worshipping it and violated the Decalogue's prohibition against worshipping idols.

you. ¹⁷Thereupon I gripped the two tablets and flung them away with both my hands, smashing them before your eyes. ¹⁸I threw myself down before the LORD—eating no bread and drinking no water forty days and forty nights, as before—because of the great wrong you had committed, doing what displeased the LORD and vexing Him. ¹⁹For I was in dread of the LORD's fierce anger against you, which moved Him to wipe you out. And that time, too, the LORD gave heed to me.—²⁰Moreover, the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to have destroyed him; so I also interceded for Aaron at that time.—²¹As for that sinful thing you had made, the calf, I took it and put it to the fire; I broke it to bits and ground it thoroughly until it was fine as dust, and I threw its dust into the brook that comes down from the mountain.

²²Again you provoked the LORD at Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah.

²³And when the LORD sent you on from Kadesh-barnea, saying, "Go up and take possession of the land that I am giving you," you

17. smashing them The act not only depicts Moses' rage but also has legal significance. In Mesopotamian law, one canceled a contract by breaking the clay tablets on which it was written, the equivalent of ripping up written legal documents. By smashing the tablets, Moses indicated that the covenant was annulled.

18. Moses' second 40-day fast matches the first (v. 9) but has a different purpose. Here it is an expression of grief over the people's sin and the danger to their survival.

19. that time, too Because Moses is now speaking at the end of the Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness, the word "too" implies any of the other occasions when he interceded with God during the preceding decades.

20. angry enough Literally, "very angry." God was angrier with Aaron than with the people, because it was he who made the Golden Calf. The guilt for making the idol was greater than the guilt of those who requested it.

I also interceded for Aaron This detail was not mentioned at the time (Exod. 32). Moses may well have interceded on his brother's behalf, as he

אֲשֶׁר-צָוָה יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם: ¹⁷ וְאֶת־פָּשׁ בְּשֵׁנַי הִלַּחַת וְאֲשַׁלְּכֶם מֵעַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי וְאֲשַׁבְּרֶם לְעֵינֵיכֶם: ¹⁸ וְאֶת־נַפְלִל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כָּרַאשְׁנָה אַרְבַּעַיִם יוֹם וְאַרְבַּעַיִם לַיְלָה לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַלְתִּי וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתִיתִי עַל כָּל-חַטָּאתְכֶם אֲשֶׁר חָטַאתֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינַי יְהוָה לְהַכְעִיסוֹ: ¹⁹ כִּי יִגְרַתִּי מִפְּנֵי הָאֵף וְהַחֲמָה אֲשֶׁר קָצַף יְהוָה עָלֵיכֶם לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶתְכֶם וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֵלַי גַּם בַּפֶּעַם הַהוּא: ²⁰ וּבְאֶהְרֹן הַתְּאֵנָה יְהוָה מְאֹד לְהַשְׁמִידוֹ וְאֶת־פָּלִל גַּם-בְּעַד אֶהְרֹן בָּעַת הַהוּא: ²¹ וְאֶת-חַטָּאתְכֶם אֲשֶׁר-עֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת-הָעֵגֶל לְקַחְתִּי וְאֲשַׁרְף אֹתוֹ בְּאֵשׁ וְאֶפֶת אֹתוֹ טַחֲוֹן הֵיטֵב עַד אֲשַׁר-יִדָּק לְעָפָר וְאֲשַׁלְּף אֶת-עַפְרוֹ אֶל-הַנָּחַל הַיַּרְדֵּן מִן-הָהָר:

²² וּבַתְּבַעֲרָה וּבַמִּסָּה וּבַקְבָּרֹת הַתְּאֵוָה מִקְצָפִים הָיִיתֶם אֶת-יְהוָה:

²³ וּבִשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם מִקְדֵּשׁ בְּרִנְעָ לֵאמֹר עֲלוּ וְרִשׁוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי

did for Miriam (Num. 12:13). Or he may be recalling past events as he wished they had happened.

21. This is a practical way of getting rid of an impure object (see Exod. 32:20).

22. The Golden Calf incident was not an isolated one; rebelliousness has been the consistent pattern of the Israelites' behavior.

Taberah Literally, "conflagration." The people complained there to the Lord for an unspecified reason, and He caused a fire to ravage the outskirts of the Israelite camp (see Num. 11:1–3).

Massah Literally, "ordeal, test." The people, lacking water, complained there that Moses had taken them out of Egypt to kill them with thirst (see Exod. 17:1–7).

Kibroth-hattaavah Literally, "the graves of those who had a lustful appetite." The people angered the Lord by complaining there that they were bored with the manna and wanted meat, and that they had eaten better in Egypt. God fed them quail but also sent a plague against them (see Num. 11:4–34).

23. See 1:26–43.

flouted the command of the LORD your God; you did not put your trust in Him and did not obey Him.

²⁴As long as I have known you, you have been defiant toward the LORD.

²⁵When I lay prostrate before the LORD those forty days and forty nights, because the LORD was determined to destroy you, ²⁶I prayed to the LORD and said, “O Lord God, do not annihilate Your very own people, whom You redeemed in Your majesty and whom You freed from Egypt with a mighty hand. ²⁷Give thought to Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and pay no heed to the stubbornness of this people, its wickedness, and its sinfulness. ²⁸Else the country from which You freed us will say, ‘It was because the LORD was powerless to bring them into the land that He had promised them, and because He rejected them, that He brought them out to have them die in the wilderness.’ ²⁹Yet they are Your very own people, whom You freed with Your great might and Your out-

10 stretched arm.” Thereupon the LORD said to me, “Carve

לְכֶם וּתְמֹרוּ אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלֹא
הָאֲמַנְתֶּם לוֹ וְלֹא שְׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹלוֹ:
מִמְּרִים * הֵייתֶם עִם־יְהוָה מִיּוֹם דַּעַתִּי
אֶתְכֶם:

²⁵ וְאֶתְנַפֵּל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶת אַרְבָּעִים הַיּוֹם
וְאֶת־אַרְבָּעִים הַלַּיְלָה אֲשֶׁר הִתְנַפַּלְתִּי
בִּי־אָמַר יְהוָה לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶתְכֶם:
²⁶ וְאֶתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה וְאָמַר אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה
אֶל־תִּשְׁחַת עַמֶּךָ וְנִחַלְתָּךְ אֲשֶׁר פָּדִיתָ
בְּגֹדְלֶךָ אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד
חֲזָקָה: ²⁷ זָכֹר לַעֲבֹדֶיךָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק
וְלְיַעֲקֹב אֶל־תִּפֹּן אֶל־קְשֵׁי הָעַם הַזֶּה
וְאֶל־רִשְׁעוֹ וְאֶל־חַטָּאתוֹ: ²⁸ פֶּן־יֹאמְרוּ
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבְּלִי
יְכָלֶת יְהוָה לְהַבִּיאֵם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־
דִּבַּר לָהֶם וּמִשְׁנֵאתוֹ אוֹתָם הוֹצִיאֵם
לְהַמָּתָם בַּמִּדְבָּר: ²⁹ וְהֵם עַמֶּךָ וְנִחַלְתָּךְ
אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ בְּכַחֲךָ הַגָּדֹל וּבְזוֹרְעֶךָ
הַנְּטוּיָה: פ

רביעי

v. 24. מ' זעירא

THE AFTERMATH OF THE GOLDEN CALF
INCIDENT (9:25–10:11)

25. those forty days and forty nights Referred to in verses 18–19.

26. Your very own people Literally, “do not destroy the people that is Your inheritance,” Your cherished hereditary property. In verse 12, God calls Israel “your [Moses’] people whom you brought out of Egypt,” thereby dissociating Himself from them. Here Moses’ plea appeals to God’s self-interest.

whom You redeemed All the effort that God

has invested in the people of Israel would be utterly worthless if He were now to destroy them.

28. Here Moses invokes the most daring argument against annihilating the people Israel: It would give a damaging impression of God, who is not indifferent to human opinion (see Exod. 7:5, 17, 32:12). If God should destroy Israel, He would appear powerless or diabolical and damage the stature that He had gained from the Exodus.

29. The Egyptians might accuse You of weakness and of rejecting Israel, when in fact Israel is Your own beloved people whose redemption clearly revealed Your power.

27. The concept of “the merit of ancestors” (*z'khut avot*) appears once again. If the people today are unworthy, remember the merit of their ancestors.

pay no heed to the stubbornness of this

people The patriarchs were also stubborn; that is how they maintained their faith in the face of all odds. The stubbornness of the people may serve this purpose as well (Mordecai ha-Kohen).

out two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain; and make an ark of wood. ²I will inscribe on the tablets the commandments that were on the first tablets that you smashed, and you shall deposit them in the ark.”

³I made an ark of acacia wood and carved out two tablets of stone like the first; I took the two tablets with me and went up the mountain. ⁴The LORD inscribed on the tablets the same text as on the first, the Ten Commandments that He addressed to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the Assembly; and the LORD gave them to me. ⁵Then I left and went down from the mountain, and I deposited the tablets in the ark that I had made, where they still are, as the LORD had commanded me.

⁶From Beeroth-bene-jaakan the Israelites marched to Moserah. Aaron died there and was buried there; and his son Eleazar became priest in his stead. ⁷From there they marched to Gudgod, and from Gudgod to Jotbath, a region of running brooks.

New Tablets: Reaffirmation of the Sinai Covenant (10:1–5)

1. Carve out Although God would inscribe the new tablets, they would be made by a mortal, unlike the first ones, which were made by God (Exod. 32:16).

ark A chest. Contractual documents in the ancient world were often stored in chests and other types of containers, to protect them against damage or loss and to preserve evidence of the agreement.

wood According to Exod. 25:11, the wood of the Ark was overlaid with gold.

3. I made an ark In Exodus the Ark is built later, by Bezalel, along with the rest of the Tabernacle. Some commentators infer that there were

שְׁנֵי־לִוְחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֹׁנִים וְעִלָּה אֵלַי הִהְרָה וְעָשִׂיתָ לָּךְ אֲרוֹן עֵץ: ²וְאָכַתְבָּ עַל־הַלְּחֹת אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל־הַלְּחֹת הָרֵאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ וְשָׂמְתָם בְּאֲרוֹן:

³וְאָעַשׂ אֲרוֹן עֵצֵי שִׁטִּים וְאָפְסַל שְׁנֵי־לִוְחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֹׁנִים וְאָעַל הִהְרָה וְשָׁנִי הַלְּחֹת בְּיָדִי: ⁴וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלְּחֹת כַּמְּכֻתָב הָרֵאשֹׁן אֶת עֲשֶׂר־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֵלֵיכֶם בְּהָר מְתוֹף הָאֵשׁ בְּיוֹם הַקֶּהֶל וַיִּתַּנֵּם יְהוָה אֵלַי: ⁵וְאָפֹן וְאָרַר מִן־הָהָר וְאָשַׁם אֶת־הַלְּחֹת בְּאֲרוֹן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי וַיְהִיו שָׁם כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוֵּנִי יְהוָה:

⁶וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָסְעוּ מִבְּאֵרֶת בְּנֵי־יַעֲקֹן מוֹסֵרָה שָׁם מֵת אַהֲרֹן וַיִּקְבֹּר שָׁם וַיִּכְהֶן אֶלְעָזָר בְּנוֹ תַחְתָּיו: ⁷מִשָּׁם נָסְעוּ הַגְּדָדָה וּמִן־הַגְּדָדָה יִטְבְּתָה אֶרֶץ נַחֲלֵי מַיִם:

two Arks, one of them built by Moses to house the tablets temporarily until Bezalel built the permanent Ark. Others hold that there was only the one Ark built by Bezalel, and that this passage in which Moses “makes” the Ark means that he had it made after he came down from the mountain. Modern scholarship assumes that the passage reflects a different tradition about the building of the Ark from that recounted in Exodus.

The Death of Aaron (vv. 6–7)

Aaron died 40 years after the Golden Calf incident (Num. 33:38–39). His death is mentioned here to indicate that although he was spared at the time, he did not escape punishment for his role in Israel’s idolatry. Like Moses, he died in the wilderness and never reached the Promised Land.

CHAPTER 10

6. Aaron’s death is recounted here after the story of Moses breaking the tablets, to teach us

that the death of a righteous person is as grievous as the shattering of the original Tablets of the Covenant. Both represent a diminution of God’s presence in the world (*Divrei David*).

⁸At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark of the LORD's Covenant, to stand in attendance upon the LORD, and to bless in His name, as is still the case. ⁹That is why the Levites have received no hereditary portion along with their kinsmen: the LORD is their portion, as the LORD your God spoke concerning them.

¹⁰I had stayed on the mountain, as I did the first time, forty days and forty nights; and the LORD heeded me once again: the LORD agreed not to destroy you. ¹¹And the LORD said to me, "Up, resume the march at the head of the people, that they may go in and possess the land that I swore to their fathers to give them."

¹²And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the LORD your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with

Election of the Levites (vv. 8–9)

8. At that time The time of the Golden Calf incident. The Levites were chosen for their priestly role because they rallied to Moses and punished the worshipers of the calf (Exod. 32:26–29). As a reward for their devotion, they were made the guardians of the shrine from infringement.

to carry the Ark This applied whenever the Israelites traveled or if there was any other need to move it.

to stand in attendance To offer sacrifices.

to bless in His name To pronounce the priestly benediction (21:5; Num. 6:22–27; cf. Lev. 9:22).

9. No tribal territory was accorded the Levites, who lived dispersed among the other tribes and were supported by the income of the sanctuaries so that they might devote their entire time to clerical duties (18:1–2).

12. demand Hebrew: *sho-el*; literally, "ask." Moses knows that reverence and love cannot be produced on command. "Everything is in the power of Heaven except whether a person will choose to revere God" (BT Ber. 33b). Reverence and obedience are perhaps the only virtues we cannot learn by imitating God, because

8 בַּעַת הַהוּא הָיָה הַבְּדִיל יְהוָה אֶת־שֵׁבֶט הַלְוִי לְשָׂאת אֶת־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה לְעֹמֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְשָׂרְתוֹ וּלְבַרְךָ בְּשֵׁמוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: 9 עַל־כֵּן לֹא־הָיָה לְלוֹוֵי חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה עִם־אֲחָיו יְהוָה הוּא נַחֲלָתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־הֵיךָ לֵאמֹר:

10 וְאֲנֹכִי עֹמְדָתִי בְּהָר פִּימִים הָרְאשֹׁנִים אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֵלַי גַּם בַּפֶּעַם הַהוּא לֹא־אַבָּה יְהוָה הַשְׁחִיתָךְ: 11 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי קוּם לֶךְ לְמַסַּע לִפְנֵי הָעָם וַיְבֹאוּ וַיִּרְשׁוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְתָּם לְתַתּ לָהֶם: פ

חמישי 12 וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה יְהוָה אֶל־הֵיךָ שָׂאֵל מֵעַמָּךְ כִּי אִם־לִירְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֶל־הֵיךָ לְלַכַּת בְּכָל־דְּרָכָיו וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ וּלְעַבְדוֹ

Permission to Continue On to the Promised Land (vv. 10–11)

10. Moses returns to the main subject of 9:25–10:11, his successful prayer to spare the Israelites (9:26–29).

11. In Exodus 33, this was not God's final word. After telling Moses that His angel would lead the people to the Promised Land, God responded to Moses' further entreaties and agreed to lead the people personally.

GOD'S REQUIREMENTS (vv. 12–22)

Moses summarizes the principles that must guide the people if they are to avoid acts of rebellion in the future.

12. revere Reverence (literally, "fear of God") comes first. Israel's narrow escape from destruction should be sufficient to deter it from disobedience.

God has no one to revere or obey. One of the fundamental teachings of Judaism is that people are free to choose between good and evil, between following God's ways and rejecting them. We cannot be compelled to be good. The decision whether to love God and to follow the Torah's teachings is totally under our control.

all your heart and soul, ¹³keeping the LORD's commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good. ¹⁴Mark, the heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to the LORD your God, the earth and all that is on it! ¹⁵Yet it was to your fathers that the LORD was drawn in His love for them, so that He chose you, their lineal descendants, from among all peoples—as is now the case. ¹⁶Cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts and stiffen your necks no more. ¹⁷For the LORD your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, ¹⁸but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing.—¹⁹You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

²⁰You must revere the LORD your God: only Him shall you worship, to Him shall you hold

אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל־לִבְּךָ וּבְכֹל־
נַפְשְׁךָ: ¹³ לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וְאֶת־
חֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מִצְוֶה הַיּוֹם לְטוֹב
לָךְ: ¹⁴ הֵן לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַשָּׁמַיִם וּשְׂמֵי
הַשָּׁמַיִם הָאָרֶץ וְכֹל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ: ¹⁵ רַק
בְּאַבְתָּיִךְ חֶשֶׁק יְהוָה לְאַהֲבָה אוֹתָם
וַיִּבְחָר בְּזַרְעָם אַחֲרֵיהֶם בְּכֶם מִכָּל־
הָעַמִּים כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה: ¹⁶ וּמִלְתָּם אֶת עַרְלַת
לִבְבְּכֶם וְעִרְפָּכֶם לֹא תִקְשׁוּ עוֹד: ¹⁷ כִּי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֲדֹנֵי
הָאֲדֹנִים הָאֵל הַגָּדֹל הַגָּבֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־יִשָּׂא פָנִים וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד: ¹⁸ עֲשֵׂה
מִשְׁפָּט יְתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה וְאַהֲבֵה גֵר לְתַת לוֹ
לֶחֶם וּשְׂמִלָּה: ¹⁹ וְאַהֲבַתְּם אֶת־הַגֵּר כִּי־
גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:
²⁰ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא אֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹד

14. the heavens to their uttermost reaches Literally, “the heavens and the heaven of heavens.” In this conception, there are skies above the sky, and God is master of them all. Thus Israel’s election by God is an extraordinary privilege; all the more reason to obey Him.

16. Cut away . . . the thickening about your hearts Literally, “circumcise the foreskin of your heart.” The “foreskin” is what blocks your heart and renders it inaccessible to God’s teachings. It is a metaphor for the mental obstruction that has made Israel stubborn.

stiffen your necks no more As you did during the years in the wilderness (9:6,13,27).

17. God supreme and Lord supreme Literally, “the God of gods and Lord of lords.” The greatest of heavenly beings and the most powerful of rulers—another argument for obedience to

God. “Lord of lords” and similar titles were used as epithets of kings in the ancient Near East.

shows no favor and takes no bribe God exemplifies the qualities of the ideal judge.

18. the fatherless and the widow God is the protector of those who have no one to protect and provide for them.

befriends Literally, “loves.” As the final clause of the verse indicates, the verb refers to affection expressed in action.

the stranger The resident alien.

19. for you were strangers No sooner are strangers mentioned than Israel’s duty toward them prompts this digression. Israel’s experience as aliens in a foreign land is regularly cited to encourage fair and kind treatment of strangers in its own land. Exodus 23:9 adds: “for you know the feelings of the stranger” (see Lev. 19:34).

17. takes no bribe We cannot buy God’s favor with charity, synagogue attendance, or good deeds. We do those things to elevate our

own souls, not to create a reciprocal obligation on God’s part.

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

10:19. befriend the stranger This verse requires us to make converts welcome and to treat them as equal members of the Jewish community. The Hebrew word *ger*, commonly translated “stranger” as used in the Bible, is now used (as a shortened version of *ger tzedek*) to designate a convert.

fast, and by His name shall you swear. ²¹He is your glory and He is your God, who wrought for you those marvelous, awesome deeds that you saw with your own eyes. ²²Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons in all; and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

וְבוֹ תִדְבֹק וּבשְׁמוֹ תִשָּׁבַע: ²¹ הוּא תְהִלָּתְךָ וְהוּא אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה אֵתְךָ אֶת-הַגְּדֹלֹת וְאֶת-הַנּוֹרָאִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ: ²² בְּשִׁבְעִים נַפְשׁ יָרְדוּ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ מִצְרָיִם וְעַתָּה שְׁמֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לְרֹב:

11 Love, therefore, the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His laws, His rules, and His commandments.

²Take thought this day that it was not your children, who neither experienced nor witnessed the lesson of the LORD your God—

His majesty, His mighty hand, His outstretched arm; ³the signs and the deeds that He performed in Egypt against Pharaoh king of Egypt and all his land; ⁴what He did to Egypt's army, its horses and chariots; how the LORD rolled back upon them the waters of the Sea of Reeds when they were pursuing you, thus destroying them once and for all;

יא וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַרְתָּ מִשְׁמֵרָתוֹ וְחֻקֹּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו כָּל-הַיָּמִים:

² וַיִּדְעֶתֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֵלֵינוּ אֲנִי וְלֹא אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדְעוּ וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא-רָאוּ אֶת-מוֹסַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

אֶת-גְּדֻלּוֹ אֶת-יָדוֹ הַחֲזָקָה וְזִרְעוֹ הַנְּטוּיָה: ³ וְאֶת-אֲתוֹתָיו וְאֶת-מַעֲשָׂיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם לְפָרֹעַ מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם וּלְכָל-אֶרֶץ: ⁴ וְאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְחַיֵּי מִצְרַיִם לְסוּסֵי וּלְרֶכֶבָּו אֲשֶׁר הֵצִיף אֶת-יָם-סוּף עַל-פְּנֵיהֶם בְּרֹדֶפָם אַחֲרֵיכֶם וַיֹּאבְדֵם יְהוָה עַד

21. He is your glory He and none other, continuing the thought of verse 20.

marvelous, awesome deeds Namely, the Ten Plagues, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds,

and the revelation at Mount Sinai.

22. seventy persons Jacob, his children, and his grandchildren, as indicated in Gen. 46:8–27 and Exod. 1:1–5.

THE PRECONDITION FOR CONQUERING AND KEEPING THE PROMISED LAND (11:1–25)

1. This verse introduces verses 2–25 by stating their theme and calling for love of and loyalty to God, as do verses 13 and 22.

2. that it was not your children Moses

stresses that he is not appealing to the people on the basis of another generation's experience, but their own.

4. once and for all Literally, "to this day."

CHAPTER 11

1. The fundamental relationship between God and the individual is one of love, not fear of punishment or hope of reward. We do what God asks of us because we are so

pleased to be able to do something for one whom we love. Petuchowski said that a Jew reads the Torah not as one reads a novel or a newspaper, but as one reads a love letter, eager to extract every bit of meaning from it.

⁵what He did for you in the wilderness before you arrived in this place; ⁶and what He did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab son of Reuben, when the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them, along with their households, their tents, and every living thing in their train, from amidst all Israel—

⁷but that it was you who saw with your own eyes all the marvelous deeds that the LORD performed.

⁸Keep, therefore, all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today, so that you may have the strength to enter and take possession of the land that you are about to cross into and possess, ⁹and that you may long endure upon the soil that the LORD swore to your fathers to assign to them and to their heirs, a land flowing with milk and honey.

¹⁰For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There the grain you sowed had

הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: ⁵ וַאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לָכֶם בַּמִּדְבָּר עַד-בְּאֲכֹם עַד-הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה: ⁶ וַאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְדַתָּן וּלְאַבִּירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב בֶּן-רְאוּבֵן אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה הָאָרֶץ אֶת-פִּיהָ וַתִּבְלַעֵם וְאֶת-בְּתֵיהֶם וְאֶת-אֹהֲלֵיהֶם וְאֶת כָּל-הַיְקוּם אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלֵיהֶם בְּקֶרֶב כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל:

⁷ כִּי עֵינֵיכֶם הִרְאִיתָ אֶת-כָּל-מַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה הַגְּדֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

⁸ וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה הַיּוֹם לְמַעַן תִּחְזְקוּ וּבִאתֶם וִירִשְׁתֶּם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲתֶם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ⁹ וּלְמַעַן תִּאָּרְכוּ יָמִים עַל-הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם וּלְזֶרְעָם אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ: ^ס

¹⁰ כִּי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בָא-שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ לֹא כְאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הִוא אֲשֶׁר

That is, now, 40 years later, Egypt still has not replaced the army, horses, and chariots that it lost at the Sea of Reeds.

5. did for you Alternatively, “did to you” (*asah lakhem*). The rest of the verse deals with punitive acts. Moses is referring to the punishments that God inflicted for Israel’s insubordination on hearing the scouts’ report (1:22–45), for the Golden Calf (Exod. 32), and for other acts of faithlessness (Deut. 2:15, 9:22).

6. Dathan and Abiram Accomplices of Korah in the notorious rebellion described in Num. 16. Korah’s name is conspicuously absent here. Traditional commentators explain that Moses, wishing to spare the feelings of Korah’s sons, omitted his name. Modern scholarship holds that Num. 16 combines the stories of two separate rebellions, one led by Korah and the other by Dathan and Abiram. According to this view, Deuteronomy knows only the Dathan and Abiram story because the two stories were not yet

combined in their present form when Deuteronomy was composed.

from amidst all Israel It happened in full sight of all the people, who thus know of the event firsthand (v. 7). The sinners alone fell into the earth although they were surrounded by the rest of the people.

8. Instruction Literally, “commandment,” and so also in verse 22 below.

9. Obedience to God’s commands is the precondition for conquering the Promised Land and remaining in it.

flowing with milk and honey Indicates that “enduring upon the soil” is to be viewed in the context of agriculture and the supply of food.

10. In Egypt, you had to bring water to the fields (Exod. 1:14) on your own, by a method normally used only in vegetable gardens, for which rainfall is insufficient; in the Promised Land the fields will be watered by God, by means of rain.

10. not like the land of Egypt The majority of commentators understand this verse as speaking in praise of the Land (one need not

haul water in buckets; God waters your fields for you). Its more probable sense, though, is that Egypt is like a child whose mother gives

to be watered by your own labors, like a vegetable garden; ¹¹but the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, soaks up its water from the rains of heaven. ¹²It is a land which the LORD your God looks after, on which the LORD your God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end.

¹³If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, ¹⁴I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil—

יִצְאֲתֶם מִשֶׁם אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע אֶת-זֵרְעֵךָ
וְהִשְׁקִיתָ בְּרִגְלֶךָ כְּגֵן הַיָּרֵק: ¹¹ וְהָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ אֶרֶץ
הָרִים וּבִקְעוֹת לְמִטֵּר הַשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁתָּה-
מֵיָם: ¹² אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ
אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד עֵינָיו יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ
מִרְשִׁית* הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה: ¹³
וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי
אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה
אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם
וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם: ¹⁴ וְנָתַתִּי מִטֵּר-אֶרְצְכֶם
בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפַּת דְּגָנְךָ

חֲסֵר א' v. 12.

Very little rain falls in Egypt; irrigation depends entirely on the annual flooding of the Nile, which is caused by melting snow and spring rains at its Ethiopian source.

by your own labors Literally, “by your foot.” Probably refers to the use of the foot for opening and closing sluice gates or to the more primitive method of making and breaking down ridges of dirt to control the flow of water into the irrigation channels in gardens and fields.

11. The land could be irrigated only by rain, not by human effort.

12. God’s attention is constantly focused on the land of Israel. The metaphor is used as an ex-

pression of benevolent concern and judgmental scrutiny.

from year’s beginning to year’s end God is attentive to the land in every season, “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter” (Gen. 8:22).

13. Because the land of Israel is watered by God, rainfall and other benefits are conditional on obedience to Him.

14. I will grant Here, and in verse 15, Moses is speaking in God’s name.

rain . . . in season Promises of rainfall often carry the assurance that it will come in the proper season, because for agricultural purposes rain in

it what it needs whether it deserves it or not. The Promised Land represents a more mature stage. “It is a land . . . on which the LORD your God always keeps His eye” (v. 12). The Land will be blessed by rain only if the people, by their good behavior, deserve it.

13–20. These words constitute the second passage recited after *Sh’ma Yisra-el* in services of prayer. How shall we understand them, given that we find no connection between morality and rainfall, or, for that matter, between morality and good fortune? Many admirable people are not blessed with abundance. The answer may lie in the fact that this passage is phrased in the plural, unlike the first passage (Deut. 6:5–9), which is phrased in the singular. Righteous individuals may not always prosper, and wicked individuals may not always suffer the consequences of their wickedness. (Would

we expect God to send life-giving rain to a good person’s farm but make sure none of it fell on the fields of a wicked neighbor?) Righteous communities, however, will tend to thrive and bestow blessings on all their members, the good and the less good alike. And wicked communities will bring misfortune on all their inhabitants.

Yeshayahu Leibowitz finds two distinct theological approaches in the first two passages that are recited after *Sh’ma Yisra-el*. There are some people (addressed in the first passage) who instinctively love God so much that they are eager to do God’s will with no thought of a reward. Then there are others, at a less developed theological level (addressed in this second passage) who can be persuaded to do what is right only with the hope of reward and the threat of punishment.

¹⁵I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle—and thus you shall eat your fill. ¹⁶Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. ¹⁷For the LORD's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the LORD is assigning to you.

¹⁸Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, ¹⁹and teach them to your children—reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up; ²⁰and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates—²¹to the end that you and your children may endure, in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to assign to them, as long as there is a heaven over the earth.

²²If, then, you faithfully keep all this Instruction that I command you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all His ways, and holding fast to Him, ²³the LORD will dislodge before you all these nations: you will dispossess nations

וְחִירְשֶׁן וְיִצְהָרָה: ¹⁵ וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדֶךָ לְבַהֲמֹתֶךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ: ¹⁶ הַשְׁמִרוּ לְכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסִרְתֶּם וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם: ¹⁷ וְחָרָה אַף־יְהוָה בְּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וְאֲבַדְתֶּם מִהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה נָתַן לְכֶם:

¹⁸ וְשָׂמַתֶּם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהֵי עַל־לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל־נֶפְשְׁכֶם וְקִשְׂרֹתֶם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל־יְדֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם: ¹⁹ וְלִמְדֹתֶם אֹתָם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בְּדֹרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ: ²⁰ וְכָתַבְתֶּם עַל־מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ: ²¹ לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיָמֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם לֵאמֹר לְתַת לָהֶם פְּרִי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ: ס

²² כִּי אִם־שָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֹתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹתָהּ לְאַהֲבָהּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְלַכֵּת בְּכָל־דְּרָכָיו וּלְדַבְּקָה־בּוֹ: ²³ וְהוֹרִישׁ יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִלְּפָנֵיכֶם וּיְרִשְׁתֶּם

שביעי
ומפטיר

the wrong season is useless, and at times harmful. Rain is the special sign of divine providence in biblical religion. It is especially apt because it can also serve as a monitor of the Israelites' obedience to the Covenant.

gather Bringing crops in from the field for processing, and gathering the processed products for storage.

15. Well-fed cattle will plow better, thus in-

creasing the harvest. They also will be fatter and provide more meat.

18. In view of verses 16–17, the Israelites should remind themselves of God's teachings so as to obey them and avoid a disastrous fate. The reminders are prescribed in 6:6–9.

21. as long as there is a heaven That is, forever. The sky and heavenly bodies symbolize permanence.

15. Based on the order in this verse, with concern for cattle preceding that for human beings, the Talmud rules that one may not eat before feeding one's animals (BT Ber. 40a).

22. walking in all His ways Imitating God, so to speak, through acts of compassion and kindness (*Sifrei*).

greater and more numerous than you. ²⁴Every spot on which your foot treads shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River—the Euphrates—to the Western Sea. ²⁵No man shall stand up to you: the LORD your God will put the dread and the fear of you over the whole land in which you set foot, as He promised you.

24. Every spot on which your foot treads

This wording may reflect the ancient practice of formally acquiring title to land by walking through it.

your territory God is giving the Israelites the entire Promised Land, from one end to the other. Because this is the point of the verse, only the land's borders are named: the deserts in the south, the Lebanon and the Euphrates in the north, and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. The eastern boundary, the Jordan River, goes unmentioned

גוֹלִים גְּדוֹלִים וְעֲצָמִים מִכֶּם: ²⁴ כָּל-הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרֹךְ כַּף-רַגְלְכֶם בּוֹ לָכֶם יִהְיֶה
מִן-הַמִּדְבָּר וְהַלְבָּנוֹן מִן-הַנָּהָר נְהַר-פְּרַת
וְעַד הַיָּם הָאֲחֵרוֹן יִהְיֶה גְבֻלְכֶם: ²⁵ לֹא-
יִתְיַצֵּב אִישׁ בְּפָנֶיכֶם פְּחָדְכֶם וּמֹרָאֲכֶם
יִתֵּן | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרֹכוּ-בָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָכֶם: ס

here because it is self-evident. The Israelites are about to cross it to enter the land.

Western Sea Literally, the “hind” or “rear” sea. The geographic orientation of the ancient western Semites was not toward the north, as in modern cartography, but the east. Hence one set of terms for the four points of the compass expresses “east” by “forward” (*kedem*), “west” by “behind” (*ahor*) “north” by “left” (*s'mol*) and “south” by “right” (*yamin, teiman*).

25. See Exod. 23:27–31; Deut. 7:19–24.

הַפְּטָרָה שְׁנִייה דְנַחֲמָתָא

SECOND HAFTARAH OF CONSOLATION HAFTARAH FOR EIKEV

ISAIAH 49:14–51:3

(Recite on the 2nd Shabbat after the 9th of Av, coinciding with the reading of Eikev. On the Seven Haftarot of Consolation, see p. 1032.)

This *haftarah* enunciates the despair of Zion, which feels forgotten and abandoned by God in the years since the destruction of the Temple in 587–586 B.C.E. and the exile of Judeans to Babylon. God seeks to stem this attitude by proclaiming divine care and promising that the nation will be returned to its homeland. Yet the city's lament reflects the constant, deep sense of loss felt by the nation during the years of exile and dispersion. Personifying the people of Zion, the city's voice complements the elegy recited over it in the Book of Lamentations. The brevity of the cry "The LORD has forsaken me" in the opening verse reveals the depth of despair—beyond words and theological artifice.

This *haftarah* has been drawn from several prophecies to produce a rich rhetorical tapestry of consolation and exhortation. Dominant contrasts are stressed at the beginning and at the end. The opening report of Zion's words of despair is matched by a concluding notice that "Truly the LORD has comforted Zion" (51:3). In between lie assurances, remonstrations, and words of expectation.

Rhetorical questions mark the stages of the argument. Responding to Zion's despair, God asks the first question: "Can a woman forget her baby, / Or disown the child of her womb?" The point is made with no room for ambiguity: "Though she might forget, / I never could forget you" (49:15). Because divine concern transcends even the most fundamental natural human instincts, despair is altogether baseless.

The second question and response (49:24–25) stresses that the Lord Himself will deliver the nation. The third question (50:2) mocks Israel's

baseless lack of faith in the power of divine salvation.

These expressions of God's concern concretize around the figure of the divine hand or arm. God asserts that He could never forget Zion, in a remarkable mythic image in which the pattern of Zion and its ramparts are etched on God's own hands as an eternal remembrance of it (49:16). God, so to speak, meditates constantly on Zion the way the faithful are bidden to bind God's teachings on their arms and write them on the doorposts of their homes so as to be ever-mindful of their religious duties and obligations (Deut. 6:8–9).

Further bold imagery likens God and Zion to a married couple whose children are the nation (49:15–18). Then God counters the people's sense of abandonment with the rhetorical question, "Where is the bill of divorce / Of your mother whom I dismissed?" (50:1). This suggests a deep bond between God and His city (a bond also dramatized elsewhere through bold figures of marriage, divorce, and erotic delight; Isa. 62:1–5).

The *haftarah* ends with a series of speeches in which the prophet stresses his faithfulness to his task (50:4ff.). He exhorts those who would revere the Lord to trust in the "voice of His servant" and "in the name of the LORD." Only God's supernatural word will give true light and direction, not the firebrands kindled by human hands. Those who rely on their own prowess, to "Walk by the blaze of [their own] fire," shall be doomed (50:10–11). The way of faith is a path of heavenly trust; it leads to redemption because it looks beyond self-reliance.

In a further word, those who "seek the LORD" are given an example of faith on which to model themselves. They are told to look to "Abraham your father" and to "Sarah who brought you forth" (51:1–2). To underscore the new moment,

and to bolster the nation’s resolve, the prophet concludes with a proclamation of assurance and utopian vision (51:3).

their future; acting on the future, the nation may overcome its past. The renewal of Zion is imagined as nothing less than utopia—a renewal of Eden, beyond the travail of history and exile.

Looking to the past, the people may restore

49 ¹⁴Zion says,

“The LORD has forsaken me,
My Lord has forgotten me.”

¹⁵Can a woman forget her baby,
Or disown the child of her womb?
Though she might forget,
I never could forget you.

¹⁶See, I have engraved you
On the palms of My hands,
Your walls are ever before Me.

¹⁷Swiftly your children are coming;
Those who ravaged and ruined you shall leave
you.

¹⁸Look up all around you and see:
They are all assembled, are come to you!
As I live

—declares the LORD—

You shall don them all like jewels,
Deck yourself with them like a bride.

¹⁹As for your ruins and desolate places
And your land laid waste—

You shall soon be crowded with settlers,
While destroyers stay far from you.

²⁰The children you thought you had lost
Shall yet say in your hearing,

“The place is too crowded for me;

Isaiah 49:14. Zion says Hebrew: *va-tomer tziyon*; literally, “But Zion said.” These words, in context as part of the Book of Isaiah, rejected the teaching that preceded them (49:1–13). That teaching concluded with the assertion that “the LORD has comforted His people, / And has taken back His afflicted ones in love.” The Sages, however, by beginning this *haftarah* here, gave verse 14 an independent status and new meaning. The

phrase lost its polemical tone and acquired one of pathos and despair.

15. her baby Hebrew: *ulah*. In a remarkable play on words, the Midrash relates it to Israel’s having accepted at Sinai the “yoke” (*ol*) of the Kingdom of Heaven, a fact always to be remembered in its favor (*Tanna d’Bei Eliyahu* 17).

17. your children Hebrew: *banayikh*. The large Isaiah scroll at Qumran (the “Dead Sea

מט ¹⁴וַתֹּאמֶר צִיּוֹן

עֲזַבְנִי יְהוָה

וְאֲדֹנָי שָׁכַחְנִי:

¹⁵הֲתִשְׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עוֹלָהּ

מִרְחֶם בֶּן-בֶּטְנָהּ

גַּם-אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחְנָהּ

וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ:

¹⁶הֵן עַל-כַּפַּיִם

חֲקַתֶּיךָ

חֹמֹתֶיךָ נִגְדִי תָמִיד:

¹⁷מְהֵרָה בָּנֶיךָ

מְהֵרָסֶיךָ וּמְחַרְבֶיךָ מִמֶּנָּה יֵצְאוּ:

¹⁸שְׂאִי-סָבִיב עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאִי

כֹּלֶם נִקְבְּצוּ בְּאוֹ-לֶךָ

חַי-אֲנִי

נְאֻם-יְהוָה

כִּי כֹלֶם כְּעָרֵי תִלְבָּשִׁי

וְתִקְשְׂרִים כְּכֹלָה:

¹⁹כִּי חֲרַבְתֶּיךָ וְשִׁמְמַתֶּיךָ

וְאַרְץ הִרְסַתֶּיךָ

כִּי עֲתָה תִצְרִי מִיּוֹשֵׁב

וְרַחֲקוּ מִבְּלַעֲיֶךָ:

²⁰עוֹד יֹאמְרוּ בְּאָזְנֶיךָ

בָּנֵי שִׁבְלֶיךָ

צֶר-לִי הַמָּקוֹם

Make room for me to settle.”

²¹And you will say to yourself,

“Who bore these for me

When I was bereaved and barren,

Exiled and disdained—

By whom, then, were these reared?

I was left all alone—

And where have these been?”

²²Thus said the Lord God:

I will raise My hand to nations

And lift up My ensign to peoples;

And they shall bring your sons in their
bosoms,

And carry your daughters on their backs.

²³Kings shall tend your children,

Their queens shall serve you as nurses.

They shall bow to you, face to the ground,

And lick the dust of your feet.

And you shall know that I am the LORD—

Those who trust in Me shall not be shamed.

²⁴Can spoil be taken from a warrior,

Or captives retrieved from a victor?

²⁵Yet thus said the LORD:

Captives shall be taken from a warrior

And spoil shall be retrieved from a tyrant;

For *I* will contend with your adversaries,

And *I* will deliver your children.

²⁶I will make your oppressors eat their own
flesh,

They shall be drunk with their own blood as
with wine.

And all mankind shall know

That I the LORD am your Savior,

The Mighty One of Jacob, your Redeemer.

גָּשָׁה-לִּי וְאָשְׁבָה:

²¹וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְּךָ

מִי יִלְדֶ-לִּי אֶת-אֵלֶּה

וְאֲנִי שְׂכוּלָה וְגִלְמוּדָה

גְּלָה | וְסוּרָה

וְאֵלֶּה מִי גִדֵּל

הֵן אֲנִי נִשְׁאַרְתִּי לְבַדִּי

אֵלֶּה אֵיפֹה הֵם: פ

²²כֹּה-אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

הִנֵּה אֲשָׂא אֶל-גּוֹיִם יָדַי

וְאֶל-עַמִּים אָרִים נְסִי

וְהֵבִיאוּ בְנֵיךָ בְּחֻצָן

וּבִנְתֶיךָ עַל-כַּתְּפֶךָ תִּנְשָׂאנָה:

²³וְהָיוּ מְלָכִים אֲמֹנֶיךָ

וְשָׂרוּתֵיהֶם מִיְנִיקֶתֶיךָ

אֶפְסִים אָרְץ יִשְׁתַּחֲווּ לָךְ

וְעַפְרֵ רַגְלֶיךָ יִלְחֲכוּ

וְיָדַעְתָּ כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוִה

אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִבְשׁוּ קוֹי: ס

²⁴הֲיִקַּח מִגְבוּר מִלְּקוּחַ

וְאִם-שָׁבִי צְדִיק יִמְלֹט:

²⁵כִּי-כֹה | אָמַר יְהוִה

גַּם-שָׁבִי גְבוּר יִקַּח

וּמִלְּקוּחַ עֲרִיץ יִמְלֹט

וְאֶת-יְרִיבֶךָ אֲנֹכִי אָרִיב

וְאֶת-בְּנֵיךָ אֲנֹכִי אוֹשִׁיעַ:

²⁶וְהֵאֲכִלְתִּי אֶת-מוֹנֵיךָ אֶת-בְּשָׂרָם

וְכַעֲסִים דָּמָם יִשְׁפְּרוּן

וְיָדְעוּ כָּל-בָּשָׂר

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוִה מוֹשִׁיעַךָ

וְגֵאלֶךָ אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב: ס

Scrolls”) reads *bonayikh* (your builders), which fits in juxtaposition with “those who ravaged and ruined you.” A similar reading is found in Saadia.

23. Kings shall tend your children A vision of social reversal: the powerful shall serve the (now) powerless people Israel.

50

Thus said the LORD:

Where is the bill of divorce
 Of your mother whom I dismissed?
 And which of My creditors was it
 To whom I sold you off?
 You were only sold off for your sins,
 And your mother dismissed for your crimes.
²Why, when I came, was no one there,
 Why, when I called, would none respond?
 Is my arm, then, too short to rescue,
 Have I not the power to save?
 With a mere rebuke I dry up the sea,
 And turn rivers into desert.
 Their fish stink from lack of water;
 They lie dead of thirst.
³I clothe the skies in blackness
 And make their raiment sackcloth.
⁴The Lord GOD gave me a skilled tongue,
 To know how to speak timely words to the
 weary.
 Morning by morning, He rouses,
 He rouses my ear
 To give heed like disciples.
⁵The Lord GOD opened my ears,
 And I did not disobey,
 I did not run away.
⁶I offered my back to the floggers,
 And my cheeks to those who tore out my hair.

נ כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה
 אֵי זֶה סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת
 אִמְכֶם אֲשֶׁר שַׁלַּחְתִּיהָ
 אוּ מִי מְנוּשֵׁי
 אֲשֶׁר־מָכַרְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לוֹ
 הֵן בְּעוֹנֹתֵיכֶם נִמְכַרְתֶּם
 וּבִפְשָׁעֵיכֶם שַׁלַּחַה אִמְכֶם:
² מִדּוּעַ בָּאתִי וְאִין אִישׁ
 קָרָאתִי וְאִין עוֹנֶה
 הֲקָצוֹר קַצְרָה יָדִי מִפְדּוֹת
 וְאִם־אֵין־בִּי כֹחַ לְהַצִּיל
 הֵן בְּגַעַרְתִּי אֲחָרִיב יָם
 אֲשִׁים נְהָרוֹת מִדְּבַר
 תִּבְאֵשׁ דְּגַתָם מֵאִין מַיִם
 וְתָמַת בְּצִמָּא:
³ אֶלְבִּישׁ שָׁמַיִם קַדְרוֹת
 וְשֹׁק אֲשִׁים כְּסוּתָם: ס
⁴ אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה נָתַן לִי לְשׁוֹן לְמוֹדִים
 לְדַעַת לְעוֹת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב דְּבַר
 יַעֲרִיר | בְּבִקֵּר בְּבִקֵּר
 יַעֲרִיר לִי אָזֶן
 לְשִׁמֵּעַ כֹּל־מוֹדִים:
⁵ אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה פָּתַח־לִי אָזֶן
 וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא מָרִיתִי
 אֲחֹזֵר לֹא נְסוּגְתִי:
⁶ גּוֹי נָתַתִּי לְמַכִּים
 וְלַחֲיִי לְמַרְטִים

Isaiah 50:1. Where is the bill of divorce
 The question is rhetorical. No divorce took place; there was only a temporary dismissal for sins. (By contrast, the theme of God’s divorce of Israel recurs in Hos. 2; Jer. 3:1,6–10; and in Ezek. 16.)
bill of divorce Hebrew: *seifer k’ritut*. This terminology follows Deuteronomic law (Deut. 24:1,3). Both texts use the same verb for dismissal (*shillah*).

4. skilled tongue The prophet affirms that his tongue has been shaped by God “To know how to speak,” that his ear is aroused to hear divine instruction, and that he has obeyed God’s word to him (v. 5). This is a theme of prophecy first found with Moses (Exod. 4:11–12), though stated differently. Later tradition understood this “skilled tongue” to be the ability to speak favorably in defense of Israel (Yalkut Sh. 2:406).

I did not hide my face
From insult and spittle.
7But the Lord GOD will help me—
Therefore I feel no disgrace;
Therefore I have set my face like flint,
And I know I shall not be shamed.
8My Vindicator is at hand—
Who dares contend with me?
Let us stand up together!
Who would be my opponent?
Let him approach me!
9Lo, the Lord GOD will help me—
Who can get a verdict against me?
They shall all wear out like a garment,
The moth shall consume them.

10Who among you reveres the LORD
And heeds the voice of His servant?—
Though he walk in darkness
And have no light,
Let him trust in the name of the LORD
And rely upon his God.
11But you are all kindlers of fire,
Girding on firebrands.
Walk by the blaze of your fire,
By the brands that you have lit!
This has come to you from My hand:
You shall lie down in pain.

פָּנִי לֹא הִסְתַּרְתִּי
מִבְּלִמּוֹת וְרֹק:
7 וְאֲדֹנָי יְהוָה יִעֲזָרֵנִי
עַל-כֵּן לֹא נִבְלַמְתִּי
עַל-כֵּן שְׁמֹתִי פָּנִי בַחֲלָמִישׁ
וְאָדַע כִּי-לֹא אֲבוֹשׁ:
8 קָרוֹב מְצַדִּיקִי
מִי-יִרִיב אֶתִּי
נִעְמְדָה יַחַד
מִי-בְעַל מִשְׁפָּטִי
יִגֹּשׁ אֵלַי:
9 הֲיֵן אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה יִעֲזָרֵנִי
מִי-הוּא יִרְשִׁיעֵנִי
הֲיֵן כָּלֶם כְּבִגְד וּבָלוּ
עֵשׂ יֹאכְלֵם:

10 מִי בְכֶם יִרְאֵה יְהוָה
שָׁמַע בְּקוֹל עַבְדּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר אֵל הַלֵּךְ חֲשֻׁכִים
וְאֵין נֹגֵה לוֹ
יִבְטַח בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה
וְיִשְׁעֵן בְּאֵלֵהוּ:
11 הֲיֵן כָּלְכֶם קִדְחִי אֵשׁ
מֵאֲזֵרֵי זִיקוֹת
לָכוּ אֲשַׁכֶּם
וּבְזִיקוֹת בְּעֵרְתֶם
מִיָּדִי הִיִּתְהַנְּאֵת לָכֶם
לְמַעַצְבָּה תִּשְׁכַּבּוּן: פ

51 Listen to Me, you who pursue justice,

You who seek the LORD:
Look to the rock you were hewn from,
To the quarry you were dug from.
2Look back to Abraham your father
And to Sarah who brought you forth.
For he was only one when I called him,

נֵא שְׁמַעוּ אֵלַי רְדִפֵי צֶדֶק
מִבְּקֵשֵׁי יְהוָה
הַבְּיִטּוּ אֶל-צֹר חֲצֵבְתֶם
וְאֶל-מִקְבַּת בּוֹר נִקְרַתֶם:
2 הַבְּיִטּוּ אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אָבִיכֶם
וְאֶל-שָׂרָה תַחֲוֹלְלֵכֶם
כִּי-אֶחָד קָרָאתִיו

But I blessed him and made him many.

וְאַבְרָכְהוּ וְאַרְבֶּהוּ: ט

³Truly the LORD has comforted Zion,
 Comforted all her ruins;
 He has made her wilderness like Eden,
 Her desert like the Garden of the LORD.
 Gladness and joy shall abide there,
 Thanksgiving and the sound of music.

³כִּי־נָחַם יְהוָה צִיּוֹן
 נָחַם כָּל־חֲרֻבֹתֶיהָ
 וַיִּשֶׂם מִדְבָּרָהּ כְּעֵדֶן
 וְעֵרְבָתָהּ כְּגֵן־יְהוָה
 שִׂשׁוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה יִמְצָא בָּהּ
 תּוֹדָה וְקוֹל זְמִרָה: ט