

עץ חיים

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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*

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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 haftarat 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. Haftarat—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

The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people and say to them:

When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. <sup>4</sup>But in the seventh year the land shall have

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup>דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם

כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשַׁבְתָּהּ הָאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה: <sup>3</sup>שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כַּרְמְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ: <sup>4</sup>וּבַשָּׁנָה

*The Pursuit of Holiness (continued)*

PRINCIPLES OF LAND TENURE (25:1–26:2)

Chapter 25 is the only law code on the subject of land tenure in ancient Israel that is preserved in the Torah. It governs the permanent rights of landowners and the legalities of the sale and mortgaging of land. There are also laws regarding indebtedness and indenture, a system of repaying debts through one's labors, and the commandment regarding the jubilee year.

SABBATICAL YEAR AND JUBILEE (vv. 1–23)

**2. the land shall observe a sabbath** The land

is personified. It, too, tires and requires rest (see Exod. 23:10–11).

**3. six years you may prune your vineyard** Pruning was essential for ensuring the growth of the grapes. There were two prunings each year: one in the winter, or rainy season, when the shoots that had not produced grapes the previous year were snipped off, and the second in June or July, when the new blossoms had already appeared.

**4.** Allowing the land to lie fallow every seventh year reduced the amount of sodium in the

At the heart of this *parashah* is the visionary concept of returning land to its original owner at the end of a 50-year cycle. This prevents the polarization of society into two classes: wealthy, powerful landowners on the one hand and permanently impoverished people on the other. In an agrarian society, a farmer who sold all the land to pay debts had no prospect of ever being anything other than a servant. Nor would a servant's sons ever rise above that level. Anticipating the human misery and social instability this would lead to, the Torah provides a plan. In the 50th year, families would reclaim the land they had held originally and later sold. Behind this plan are two religious assumptions. Because all the earth and all of its inhabitants belong to God, human beings cannot possess either the land or the people in perpetuity. And no human being should be condemned to permanent servitude. Some critics have seen this as a utopian plan that never was put into practice, but archaeologists have found records of deeds from the late biblical period containing references to the number of years remaining till the jubilee year.

Kook taught that the purpose of the jubilee

was primarily spiritual, not economic. It came to restore the sense of unity that once prevailed in Israel and to restore self-respect to the person who had sunk into poverty and a sense of failure. Even as the weekly *Shabbat* enables people to define themselves in noneconomic terms, the sabbatical year and the jubilee enable an entire society to put aside economic competition and the practice of defining a person's value in economic terms alone.

CHAPTER 25

**1.** Why does the Torah emphasize that these agricultural laws were promulgated at Mount Sinai? Perhaps because at Sinai no one owned any land yet, and no one could object that the law deprived people of what they had worked to acquire. It is easier to propose a visionary system of equality when all start out equal. Another interpretation: Just as Sinai was the smallest of the mountains but the words spoken there changed the world, so the people Israel, among the smallest of the nations, presents a vision of social justice that has the power to change the world.

**4.** The Holy Land, like the holy people who

a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. <sup>5</sup>You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. <sup>6</sup>But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce—you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, <sup>7</sup>and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

<sup>8</sup>You shall count off seven weeks of years—seven times seven years—so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup>Then you shall sound the horn loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month—the Day of Atonement—you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land <sup>10</sup>and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You

הַשְּׁבִיעֵת שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאֶרֶץ שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה שָׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר: <sup>5</sup> אֶת סְפִיחַ קִצְיֹרְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת-עֲנָבֵי נִזְיֹרְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שַׁבָּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאֶרֶץ: <sup>6</sup> וְהִיתָה שַׁבָּת הָאֶרֶץ לָכֶם לְאֲכֹלָה לָךְ וּלְעַבְדְּךָ וּלְאִמְתְּךָ וּלְשִׁכְיֹרְךָ וּלְתוֹשְׁבֵיךָ הַגֵּרִים עִמָּךְ: <sup>7</sup> וּלְבְהֵמָתְךָ וּלְחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרְצְךָ תִהְיֶה כָּל-תְּבוּאָתָהּ לְאֲכֹל: <sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> וְסַפַּרְתָּ לָךְ שִׁבְעַת שַׁבָּתוֹת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת פְּעֻמִּים וְהָיוּ לָךְ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שַׁבָּתוֹת הַשָּׁנִים תִּשְׁעַת יָרְבָעִים שָׁנָה: <sup>9</sup> וְהִעֲבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה בַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבַעִי בַעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּיוֹם הַכַּפָּרִים תִּעְבְּרוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּכָל-אֶרְצְכֶם: <sup>10</sup> וְקִדַּשְׁתֶּם אֶת

soil, especially in areas where the land was irrigated.

**5. aftergrowth of your harvest** That which grows naturally the following season from seeds that fell to the ground during reaping.

**untrimmed vines** Hebrew: *nazir*; or “forbidden vines” (cf. Num. 6:1–21).

**6. hired . . . laborers** Hebrew: *sakbir*, which usually refers to a laborer who works for wages.

**bound laborers** Hebrew: *toshav*, which often designates a foreign “resident,” a merchant or laborer.

7. The reference to beasts symbolizes the freedom characteristic of the sabbatical year: Humans and beast are free to roam about and gather their sustenance.

9. The sounding of the *shofar* five days before the autumn harvest festival of *Sukkot* (even on *Shabbat*) served to proclaim the advent of the jubilee.

10. **hallow** Hebrew: *kiddesh* (sanctify, hallow), customarily used to convey the sanctification of *Shabbat*. The use of this verb in connection with the jubilee creates a parallelism between the

will inhabit it, needs a *Shabbat* to replenish itself and bear witness to God’s ownership of it. Chapter 26 threatens that if the people Israel do not live by God’s ways, the Land will be devastated by enemies and “make up for its sabbath years” (Lev. 26:34). The prophet Jeremiah predicted 70 years of exile in Babylonia to make up for the 70 sabbatical years the people neglected during their approximately 500 years of living in Israel (see 2 Chron. 36:21).

**6. you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath may produce** Sometimes the wealthy don’t believe that poor people are actually suffering, suspecting that they are just too lazy to provide for themselves. Let the wealthy undergo the experience of not knowing whether there will be enough to eat, and their attitudes will change.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

**25:5. You shall not reap** Restrictions on working the land and purchasing agricultural produce during sabbatical years refer solely to the Land of Israel. Some still observe these restrictions in Israel today. The *Va-ad Halakhah* (Law Committee) of the Masorti/Conservative Movement in Israel has ruled that in modern times the laws of the seventh-year produce (*sh'mittah*) are neither biblically nor rabbinically required but are considered a *middat hassidut* (an act of piety). The *Va-ad* recommends that *kibbutzim* observe some of the *sh'mittah* laws by letting one field lie fallow as the *sh'mittah* field, and that they give a percentage of their income to the poor, because that was the original purpose of the law.

shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family. <sup>11</sup>That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, <sup>12</sup>for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field.

<sup>13</sup>In this year of jubilee, each of you shall return to his holding. <sup>14</sup>When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. <sup>15</sup>In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only

שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרִאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ לְכָל־יִשְׂבֵּיהָ יוֹבֵל הוּא תְהִיָּה לְכֶם וְשַׁבְּתֶם אִישׁ אֶל־אֶחָזְתּוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תִּשְׁבוּ: <sup>11</sup> יוֹבֵל הוּא שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה תְהִיָּה לְכֶם לֹא תִזְרְעוּ וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ אֶת־סִפְיָחֶיהָ וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת־נִזְרֶיהָ: <sup>12</sup> כִּי יוֹבֵל הוּא קֹדֶשׁ תְהִיָּה לְכֶם מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה תֹאכְלוּ אֶת־תְּבוֹאֲתָהּ: <sup>13</sup> בְּשַׁנַּת הַיּוֹבֵל הַזֹּאת תִּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֶחָזְתּוֹ: <sup>14</sup> וְכִי־תִמְכְּרוּ מִמְּכָר לְעַמִּיתְךָ אוֹ קָנָה מִיַּד עַמִּיתְךָ אֶל־תּוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אֶחָיו: <sup>15</sup> בְּמִסְפַּר שָׁנִים אַחַר הַיּוֹבֵל תִּקְנֶה

two occasions. The jubilee year is to be hallowed just as *Shabbat* is hallowed.

**release** Hebrew: *d'ror*, usually translated “freedom, liberty.” It is related to the ancient Akkadian word *anduraru*, which refers to an edict issued by Mesopotamian kings when they ascended the throne. As a gesture of royal benevolence and power, they would proclaim a moratorium on debts and indenture, thereby releasing those bound by servitude.

**jubilee** Hebrew: *yovel*, which means both “ram” and “ram’s horn.” The 50th year is called “jubilee” because its arrival is announced by sounding the ram’s horn.

**each of you shall return to his holding** This refers primarily to families who had been unable to repay their loans and were evicted from their homes and farms due to foreclosure. This situation is projected in verses 13–17 and 25–28.

**family** Hebrew: *mishpahah* (clan). It is the basic socioeconomic unit in ancient Israel, more inclusive than the immediate family.

**12.** The owners of fields and groves are forbidden to harvest their yields in the usual way, but must leave it for all to eat. They may, of course, join others in gathering food but not in the status of owners.

**13.** This general introductory statement is followed by a delineation of the specific conditions under which a person was likely to lose possession of his or her land in the first place.

**14.** This law applies only to transfers of property among Israelites.

**you shall not wrong one another** The following verses explain how to avoid fraud in land transfers.

**15.** The value of leases on the land was to be computed in terms of crop years, because all land

**10. proclaim release** This clause is inscribed on the Liberty Bell. Some commentators derive the word *d'ror*, “release,” from the Hebrew root *dar*, “to dwell,” and understand it to mean the freedom to live wherever one wants.

**for all its inhabitants** The jubilee year brings freedom not only to the slaves but also to the slave owners, freeing them from the dehumanizing situation of having such power over other human beings (*P'nei Y'hoshu-a*). We find a similar insight in Eccles. 4:1: “I further observed . . . the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors—with none to comfort them.” Hirsch understands the word the word for “ju-

bilee” (*yovel*) to mean “a summoning home” of the rightful owners of the land.

**14. you shall not wrong one another** This rule, specifically applied to real estate sales, is expanded by the Talmud to include all commercial transactions. Egregious overcharging is grounds for canceling an agreement (BT BM 47b). The Midrash extends the concept still further to include wronging a person with harmful words (Lev. R. 33:1). This includes reminding a repentant sinner of his or her former misdeeds and asking a merchant the price of something when you have no intention of buying. Pious persons do not deceive even themselves.

for the number of years since the jubilee; and in selling to you, he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years: <sup>16</sup>the more such years, the higher the price you pay; the fewer such years, the lower the price; for what he is selling you is a number of harvests. <sup>17</sup>Do not wrong one another, but fear your God; for I the LORD am your God.

<sup>18</sup>You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; <sup>19</sup>the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. <sup>20</sup>And should you ask, "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?" <sup>21</sup>I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. <sup>22</sup>When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in.

<sup>23</sup>But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. <sup>24</sup>Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

that was "sold" would revert to its original owners at the next jubilee.

**17.** The Israelites are urged to act out of fear of God, especially in matters whose norms are not easily enforced.

#### SECURITY AND ABUNDANCE (vv. 18–22)

This section interrupts the continuity of legislation governing the sabbatical and jubilee years. It is an exhortation to obey God's laws and commandments, with the promise of security and abundance as a reward for such obedience.

**18. live upon the land in security** That is, the people will not fear invasions.

**19.** Along with security will come fertility and abundance.

**23. you are but strangers resident with Me** Even the Israelites are but God's tenants, resident aliens in the Land. Only if they live

מֵאֵת עֲמִיתְךָ בְּמִסְפַּר שָׁנֵי־תְבוּאָת יִמְכְּרֶה לָּךְ: <sup>16</sup> לְפִי א רב השנים תרבה מקנתו ולפלי מעט השנים תמעט מקנתו פי מספר תבואת הוא מכר לך: <sup>17</sup> ולא תונו איש את עמיתו ויראת מאלהיך כי אני יהוה אלהיכם:

<sup>18</sup> ועשיתם את־חקתי ואת־משפטי תשמרו ועשיתם אתם וישבתם על־הארץ לבטח: <sup>19</sup> ונתנה הארץ פריה ואכלתם לשבע וישבתם לבטח עליה: <sup>20</sup> וכי תאמרו מה־נאכל בשנה השביעת הן לא נזרע ולא נאסף את־תבואתנו: <sup>21</sup> וצויתי את־ברכתי לכם בשנה הששית ועשת את־התבואה לשלש השנים: <sup>22</sup> וזרעתם את השנה השמינית ואכלתם מן־התבואה ישן עד השנה התשיעת עד־בוא תבואתה תאכלו ישן: <sup>23</sup> והארץ לא תמכר לצמתת בי־לי הארץ כי־גרים ותושבים אתם עמדי: <sup>24</sup> ובכל ארץ אחזתכם גאלה תתנו רביעי לארץ: ט

שלישי  
[שני]

**20.** This verse projects the anxiety of the people.

**21–22.** The response to the people. Until the crop of the eighth year is harvested, you will have sufficient food from the "old" crop, namely, that of the sixth year.

**23.** The text returns to its original subject: the inalienable status of the land.

#### ADDITIONAL LAND TENURE AND INDENTURE LAWS (vv. 24–55)

**24.** This general statement is followed by a series of situations in which the rule applies. The effect of this law is to obligate the purchaser to accept the redemption payment of the original owner.

up to the terms of the Covenant will they endure there.

25If your kinsman is in straits and has to sell part of his holding, his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his kinsman has sold. 26If a man has no one to redeem for him, but prospers and acquires enough to redeem with, 27he shall compute the years since its sale, refund the difference to the man to whom he sold it, and return to his holding. 28If he lacks sufficient means to recover it, what he sold shall remain with the purchaser until the jubilee; in the jubilee year it shall be released, and he shall return to his holding.

29If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale; the redemption period shall be a year. 30If it is not redeemed before a full year has elapsed, the house in the walled city shall pass to the purchaser beyond reclaim throughout the ages; it shall not be released in the jubilee. 31But houses in villages that have no encircling walls shall be classed as open country: they may be redeemed, and they shall be released through the jubilee. 32As for the cities of the Levites, the houses in the cities they hold—the Levites shall forever have the right of redemption. 33 Such property as may be redeemed from the Levites—houses sold in a city they hold—shall be released through the jubi-

רביעי 25 כִּי־יִמּוֹךְ אָחִיךָ וּמָכַר מֵאֲחֻזּוֹתָיו וּבָא גָאֵלוֹ הַקָּרֹב אֵלָיו וּגְאָל אֶת מִמְכָּר אָחִיו: 26 וְאִישׁ כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה־לּוֹ גָּאֵל וְהִשְׁיגָה יָדוֹ וּמָצָא כְּדֵי גְאֻלָּתוֹ: 27 וְחָשַׁב אֶת־שָׁנָיו מִמְכָּרוֹ וְהָשִׁיב אֶת־הָעֶדְף לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר מָכַר־לוֹ וְשָׁב לְאֲחֻזּוֹתָיו: 28 וְאִם לֹא־מָצָאָה יָדוֹ דֵּי־הָשִׁיב לוֹ וְהָיָה מִמְכָּרוֹ בְּיַד הַקֹּנֶה אֹתוֹ עַד שְׁנַת הַיּוֹבֵל וַיִּצָּא בַּיּוֹבֵל וְשָׁב לְאֲחֻזּוֹתָיו:

חמישי [שלישי] 29 וְאִישׁ כִּי־יִמְכֹר בַּיִת־מוֹשָׁב עִיר חוֹמָה וְהָיְתָה גְאֻלָּתוֹ עַד־תֵּם שְׁנַת מִמְכָּרוֹ יָמִים תִּהְיֶה גְאֻלָּתוֹ: 30 וְאִם לֹא־יִגְאָל עַד־מְלֵאת לוֹ שָׁנָה תְּמִימָה וְקָם הַבַּיִת אֲשֶׁר־בְּעִיר אֲשֶׁר־לֹא לוֹ חֹמָה לְצִמְיַתָּת לְקִנְיָה אֹתוֹ לְדוֹרֹתָיו לֹא יֵצֵא בַּיּוֹבֵל: 31 וּבְתֵי הַחֲצֵרִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לָהֶם חֹמָה סְבִיב עַל־שְׂדֵה הָאָרֶץ יִחָשֵׁב גְאֻלָּה תִּהְיֶה־לּוֹ וּבַיּוֹבֵל יֵצֵא: 32 וְעָרֵי הַלְוִיִּם בְּתֵי עָרֵי אֲחֻזָּתָם גְּאֻלַּת עוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה לְלוִוִּים: 33 וְאֲשֶׁר יִגְאָל מִן־הַלְוִיִּם וַיִּצָּא מִמְכָּר־בַּיִת וְעִיר אֲחֻזּוֹתוֹ בַּיּוֹבֵל כִּי בְתֵי עָרֵי

25. The object of redemption is to restore the property to one's relative, who would retain possession of the land within the clan. The redeemer himself or herself would not possess the land.

27. One who wished to redeem land he or she had sold was required to pay the purchaser the value of the rest of the lease.

29. In the ancient Near East, towns and cities had a special status in regard to tax exemptions and legal prerogatives. Arable land and pastureland were the economic mainstays of an agrarian society and accounted for most of the employment, in addition to their value as the source of

food. The artisans and those we would today call members of the service professions, which often included members of priestly families, lived in the towns.

31. *villages* Hebrew: *hatzerim*, which refers to agricultural villages with houses and fields, not tents and pastureland.

32. The urban dwellings of the Levites within their cities are to be released on the jubilee. They are redeemable, unlike other urban dwellings, which are subject to a different law, according to verse 31.

33. This verse concerns urban dwellings that

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

25:25. *If your kinsman is in straits* Jewish law requires extending help to people in financial straits so that their economic condition does not worsen. According to Maimonides, helping people help themselves become financially independent is the highest form of *tz'dakah* (charity, or literally, righteousness) (MT Gifts to the Poor 10:7–14).

lee; for the houses in the cities of the Levites are their holding among the Israelites. <sup>34</sup>But the unenclosed land about their cities cannot be sold, for that is their holding for all time.

<sup>35</sup>If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side: <sup>36</sup>do not exact from him advance or accrued interest, but fear your God. Let him live by your side as your kinsman. <sup>37</sup>Do not lend him your money at advance interest, or give him your food at accrued interest. <sup>38</sup>I the LORD am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

had been sold or mortgaged by Levites who found themselves in difficult financial straits.

**34. the unenclosed land about their cities cannot be sold** Perhaps the reason for this restriction was related to the sustenance that the Levites derived from such plots of land, the only ones they possessed.

**their holding for all time** The rights to the land conferred by God to the Israelites are permanent. The plots of the Levites remain always in the possession of the Levites.

INDEBTEDNESS AND INDENTURE (vv. 35–46)

A person with debts who possesses property that can be sold or mortgaged is still free, but a person

הַלְוִיִּם הוּא אַחֲזֵתֶם בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>34</sup>וְשָׂדֵה מְגֵרֶשׁ עָרֵיהֶם לֹא יִמָּכַר בֵּי-אַחֲזֵת עוֹלָם הוּא לָהֶם: ס

<sup>35</sup>וְכִי-יִמּוֹךְ אָחִיךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחִי עִמָּךְ: <sup>36</sup>אַל-תִּקַּח מֵאִתּוֹ נֶשֶׁךְ וְתִרְבִּית וְיִרְאֵת מֵאֲלֹהֶיךָ וְחִי אָחִיךָ עִמָּךְ: <sup>37</sup>אֶת-כֶּסֶףךָ לֹא-תִתֵּן לוֹ בְּנֶשֶׁךְ וּבְמִרְבִּית לֹא-תִתֵּן אִכְלָךְ: <sup>38</sup>אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָתֵת לָכֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים: ס

ששי  
[רביעי]

who has no assets must work off the debts as an indentured servant.

**35. you hold him as though a resident alien** Those who mortgaged their land or sold it to another became, in a real sense, tenants on their own land.

**let him live by your side** The person involved may not be evicted from the land but must be allowed to continue to reside at your side as a member of the community.

**38.** The God who gave the Israelites a land of their own and freed them from the servitude of Egypt now commands them, in turn, to prevent conditions of servitude among their own people.

**35. If your kinsman, being in straits** Literally, "if your kinsman stumbles." This prompted the Sages to comment that it is easier to support a person and hold him or her up when the person first begins to stumble than it is to pick the person up after he or she has fallen (*Sifra*). It is easier to prevent poverty than to cure it.

**36. Let him live by your side as your kinsman** This verse is the source of the famous ruling by Akiva: If two men in a desert have enough water to keep only one of them alive,

the possessor of the water may drink it all rather than share it and condemn both to die of thirst. Our neighbors are entitled to live alongside us, not instead of us (BT BM 62a).

**38.** Why the reference to God's bringing Israel out of Egypt? To remind us that we owe all we have to God and dare not keep it all for ourselves? Or perhaps to imply that God, having given us the land of the Canaanites, holds Israel to a higher moral standard than that practiced by the Canaanites (Hoffman).

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**25:35. you hold him** The Joint Social Action Commission of the Rabbinical Assembly and of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism has published a Rabbinic Letter to articulate the theological convictions underlying the Torah's concern for the poor and to apply them to modern measures for alleviating the plight of the poor (Dorff, "You Shall Strengthen Them").

**25:36. interest** See Comments to Exod. 22:24; Deut. 23:20.



<sup>39</sup>If your kinsman under you continues in straits and must give himself over to you, do not subject him to the treatment of a slave. <sup>40</sup>He shall remain with you as a hired or bound laborer; he shall serve with you only until the jubilee year. <sup>41</sup>Then he and his children with him shall be free of your authority; he shall go back to his family and return to his ancestral holding.—<sup>42</sup>For they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt; they may not give themselves over into servitude.—<sup>43</sup>You shall not rule over him ruthlessly; you shall fear your God. <sup>44</sup>Such male and female slaves as you may have—it is from the nations round about you that you may acquire male and female slaves. <sup>45</sup>You may also buy them from among the children of aliens resident among you, or from their families that are among you, whom they begot in your land. These shall become your property: <sup>46</sup>you may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property for all time. Such you may treat as slaves. But as for your Israelite kinsmen, no one shall rule ruthlessly over the other.

<sup>47</sup>If a resident alien among you has prospered, and your kinsman being in straits, comes under his authority and gives himself over to the res-

ששי [רביעי] <sup>39</sup> וְכִי־יִמּוֹךְ אָחִיךָ עִמָּךְ וְנִמְכַרְתָּ לָּךְ לֹא־ תַעֲבֹד בּוֹ עַבְדֹת עָבֵד: <sup>40</sup> בְּשָׂכִיר כְּתוּשָׁב יִהְיֶה עִמָּךְ עַד־שְׁנַת הַיָּבֵל יַעֲבֹד עִמָּךְ: <sup>41</sup> וַיֵּצֵא מֵעִמָּךְ הוּא וּבָנָיו עִמּוֹ וְשָׁב אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וְאֶל־אֲחֻזַּת אֲבֹתָיו יָשׁוּב: <sup>42</sup> כִּי־עַבְדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יִמְכְרוּ מִמִּכְרַת עָבֵד: <sup>43</sup> לֹא־תִרְדֶּה בּוֹ בְּפָרְךָ וּיְרֵאתָ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ: <sup>44</sup> וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיוּ־לָךְ מֵאֶת הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֶיכֶם מֵהֶם תִּקְנֶנּוּ עָבֵד וְאִמָּה: <sup>45</sup> וְגַם מִבְּנֵי הַתּוֹשָׁבִים הַגֵּרִים עִמָּכֶם מֵהֶם תִּקְנֶנּוּ וּמִמִּשְׁפַּחְתָּם אֲשֶׁר עִמָּכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹלִידוּ בְּאֶרְצְכֶם וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְאֻחָזָה: <sup>46</sup> וְהִתְנַחַלְתֶּם אֹתָם לְבָנֵיכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם לְרֵשֶׁת אֻחָזָה לְעֹלָם בְּהֵם תַּעֲבֹדוּ וּבְאֲחֵיכֶם בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ בְּאֻחָיו לֹא־תִרְדֶּה בּוֹ בְּפָרְךָ: <sup>47</sup> וְכִי תִשְׁגֶּיךָ יָד גֵּר וְתוֹשָׁב עִמָּךְ וּמָךְ אָחִיךָ עִמּוֹ וְנִמְכַר לְגֵר תוֹשָׁב עִמָּךְ אִו לְעֵקֶר

**39.** An Israelite indentured to another Israelite must not be treated as a slave.

**40. as a hired or bound laborer** The indentured Israelite has the legal status of an employee. **only until the jubilee year** The laws of Exod. 21:1–6 and Deut. 15:12–18, which deal with slavery, set 6 years as the limit of service. Indenture, however, may last as long as 50 years.

**41.** Indentured servants often lived on the estates of their masters. With the jubilee, land was restored to its original owners and indentured servants were released. Thus indentured Israelites

had a home, once again, to which they could return.

**42. For they are My servants** By redeeming the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, God acquired them as “slaves.” God’s claim has priority.

**45. your property** In ancient law, slaves often were regarded as having a legal status parallel to that of land. Just as the land was a “holding” to be handed down within families, so were slaves.

**46.** The rights granted to Israelites over their non-Israelite slaves, like those they had over the Land, were permanent.

**43. ruthlessly** Hebrew: *b'farekh*. The word recurs in verses 46 and 53. Except in Ezek. 34:4, it appears nowhere else in the Bible outside of the account of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt. It apparently means a particularly rigorous

kind of work. Maimonides suggests that it refers to work done not to benefit the master but to exhaust and humiliate the slave, work done only to emphasize the master’s power over the slave (MT Slaves 1:6).

ident alien among you, or to an offshoot of an alien's family, <sup>48</sup>he shall have the right of redemption even after he has given himself over. One of his kinsmen shall redeem him, <sup>49</sup>or his uncle or his uncle's son shall redeem him, or anyone of his family who is of his own flesh shall redeem him; or, if he prospers, he may redeem himself. <sup>50</sup>He shall compute with his purchaser the total from the year he gave himself over to him until the jubilee year; the price of his sale shall be applied to the number of years, as though it were for a term as a hired laborer under the other's authority. <sup>51</sup>If many years remain, he shall pay back for his redemption in proportion to his purchase price; <sup>52</sup>and if few years remain until the jubilee year, he shall so compute: he shall make payment for his redemption according to the years involved. <sup>53</sup>He shall be under his authority as a laborer hired by the year; he shall not rule ruthlessly over him in your sight. <sup>54</sup>If he has not been redeemed in any of those ways, he and his children with him shall go free in the jubilee year. <sup>55</sup>For it is to Me that the Israelites are servants: they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I the LORD your God.

#### INDENTURE TO A NON-ISRAELITE

(vv. 47–54)

**48. right of redemption** The clan of the Israelite indentured to a non-Israelite bears the responsibility for redeeming its kinsman.

**One of his kinsmen shall redeem him** This is the order of obligation to redeem kinsmen within the clan: brothers, then uncles and cousins, then other blood relatives. These could even include grandchildren, also considered blood relatives in the laws of Lev. 18:10.

**49. of his own flesh** A clan is usually a fairly

מִשְׁפַּחַת גֵּר: <sup>48</sup> אַחֲרֵי נִמְכַּר גְּאֻלָּה תִּהְיֶה־לוֹ אֶחָד מֵאֲחֵיו יִגְאֲלֵנּוּ: <sup>49</sup> אִם־דָּדוֹ אוֹ בֶן־דָּדוֹ יִגְאֲלֵנּוּ אוֹ־מִשְׁאֵר בְּשָׂרוֹ מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ יִגְאֲלֵנּוּ אוֹ־הַשִּׁיגָה יָדוֹ וְנִגְאֵל: <sup>50</sup> וְחָשַׁב עִם־קֹנָהוּ מִשְׁנַת הַמְכָרוֹ לֹא עַד שְׁנַת הַיָּבֵל וְהָיָה כְּסֶף מִמְכָרוֹ בְּמִסְפַּר שָׁנִים כִּי־יָמִי שָׂכִיר יִהְיֶה עִמּוֹ: <sup>51</sup> אִם־עוֹד רַבּוֹת בְּשָׁנִים לְפִי־הֶן יִשְׁיב גְּאֻלָּתוֹ מִכְּסֶף מְקַנְתּוֹ: <sup>52</sup> וְאִם־מְעַט נִשְׂאָר בְּשָׁנִים עַד־שְׁנַת הַיָּבֵל וְחָשַׁב־לוֹ כְּפִי שָׁנָיו יִשְׁיב אֶת־גְּאֻלָּתוֹ: <sup>53</sup> כְּשָׂכִיר שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה יִהְיֶה עִמּוֹ לֹא־יִרְדְּנוּ בְּפִרְףֵי לְעֵינָיִךָ: <sup>54</sup> וְאִם־לֹא יִגְאֵל בְּאֻלָּה וְיִצֵּא בְּשְׁנַת הַיָּבֵל הוּא וּבָנָיו עִמּוֹ: <sup>55</sup> כִּי־לִי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים עֲבָדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

מפטיר

large unit, and not all relatives within it are of the same blood.

**50. compute** The computation is in terms of wages over a period of years.

**53.** To allow a fellow Israelite to remain indentured to a gentile would be a cruel humiliation. One was not permitted to remain indifferent in such a situation, which could lead to the forfeiture of land that had been mortgaged to debts and its seizure by non-Israelites.

**54.** The last recourse is the jubilee, when all other efforts have failed.

**48.** The obligation of a kinsman to redeem a relative from bondage to a non-Israelite would become the source in postbiblical times of the obligation to ransom Jews taken captive (*pidyon sh'vuyyim*). Communities would go to great lengths to save their fellow Jews in that situation, even selling Torah scrolls to redeem

hostages. In the last three decades of the 20th century, successful efforts were undertaken by the Jewish community to bring Jews out of Ethiopia, Syria, and the former Soviet Union. The guiding principle is "all Jews are responsible one for another" (*kol Yisra-el arevim zeh ba-zeh*).

**26** You shall not make idols for yourselves, or set up for yourselves carved images or pillars, or place figured stones in your land to worship upon, for I the LORD am your God. <sup>2</sup>You shall keep My sabbaths and venerate My sanctuary, Mine, the LORD's.

**כו** לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם אֱלִילִים וּפְסֵל  
וּמִצְבֵּה לֹא־תִקְיְמוּ לָכֶם וְאֶבֶן מִשְׁפָּיִת  
לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּאַרְצְכֶם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת עָלֶיהָ  
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: <sup>2</sup> אֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתַי  
תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקְדָּשִׁי תִירָאוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה: \* ס

POSTSCRIPT (26:1–2)

2. Instead of worshipping improperly, Israelites should attend God's legitimate sanctuary.

CHAPTER 26

1–2. Why this denunciation of idolatry at this point? And why are *Shabbat* and the sanctuary mentioned as contrasts to idol worship? It is suggested that these verses raise the question: Is the visible world all there is? Or is

that which is real but invisible ultimately the greatest reality? Hoffman considers these two verses, which seem to be an arbitrary postscript, as a deliberate echoing of the Decalogue, serving to introduce the theme of loyalty to the Covenant, which will be the subject of the book's concluding chapters.

\* For the haftarah for this portion, see p. 758.

<sup>3</sup>If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments, <sup>4</sup>I will grant your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit. <sup>5</sup>Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and your vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land.

אִם-בַּחֲקָתִי תֵלְכוּ וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ <sup>3</sup>  
 וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם: <sup>4</sup> וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעִתָּם  
 וְנָתַנָּה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ וְעֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִתֵּן  
 פְּרִיֹ: <sup>5</sup> וְהִשִּׁיג לָכֶם דִּישׁ אֶת-בְּצִיר וּבְצִיר  
 יִשִּׁיג אֶת-זֶרַע וְאָכַלְתֶּם לַחֲמֻכָּם לְשֹׁבַע  
 שְׁנֵי וַיִּשְׁבַּתֶּם לְבֶטַח בְּאֶרְצְכֶם:

*The Pursuit of Holiness (continued)*

EPILOGUE TO THE HOLINESS CODE (26:3–46)

Two major principles of biblical religion find expression in this epilogue: the concept of free will and the doctrine of reward and punishment. Obedience to God’s will brings great reward; disobedience brings dire punishment. The choice is left to the people Israel and its leaders.

THE BLESSING (vv. 3–13)

**5. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage**

There will be so much grain to thresh that the threshing will continue into late summer when the vines are picked.

This *parashah* centers on a brief but eloquent promise of blessings for those who follow God’s ways and a lengthy and chilling series of curses for those who reject God’s ways. The curses are known as the *Tokheḥah* (Reproach). Several commentators, notably Ibn Ezra, insist that although more verses are dedicated to the *Tokheḥah*, the blessings promised in the opening section outweigh it in quality. The curses are spelled out at length in the hope that they will put fear into the hearts of those who cannot be persuaded to do what is right by any other means. In many synagogues, it is customary to read the *Tokheḥah* in an undertone, perhaps because its vision of disaster is so frightening—or perhaps in keeping with Leviticus’s commitment to the reality of words; to say something aloud is halfway to making it happen.

**3. If you follow My laws** Some commentators have understood this as “the Laws that I Myself follow” (Lev. R. 35:3). The verb translated “follow” literally means “walk, go,” prompting the comment that humans “walk” in God’s ways but angels “stand” in the presence of God. Human beings, unlike angels, have the ability to grow and change after doing something wrong. Jewish law is known as *halakhah* and is sometimes understood as “the way to go.” For Hoffman, these blessings emphasize the idea that God is not only a God of

liberation and hope but also a God of peace and prosperity. Once settled in the Land, Israel will have no need to turn to pagan fertility gods to ensure an abundant harvest.

**4. rains in their season** The plain meaning here refers to the rainy season in Israel. Rashi, however, following the Midrash (Lev. R. 35:10), takes it to mean that God will make it rain only at times convenient for the people, e.g., on Friday nights when most people are at home and no one is traveling.

What is the modern reader to make of these threats and promises, aware of the fact that righteous people are not always rewarded and that wicked people are not invariably punished? We can see them as a vision of what the world will be like when it truly becomes God’s kingdom. Or we can see them as a collective assurance: When most members of a community follow God’s ways, the community as a whole will prosper even if some innocent individuals suffer illness or injustice. Alternatively, we can understand these verses as addressed to a still immature Israelite nation, not mature enough to do good for its own sake, capable of responding only to promises of reward and threats of punishment. Although these passages may be the word of God, they need not be God’s last word on the subject.

**5.** When will the people be able to live securely? When there is enough food for every-

6I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down untroubled by anyone; I will give the land respite from vicious beasts, and no sword shall cross your land. 7You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. 8Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.

9I will look with favor upon you, and make you fertile and multiply you; and I will maintain My covenant with you. 10You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make room for the new.

11I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you. 12I will be ever present in your midst: I will be your God, and you shall be My people. 13I the LORD am your God who brought you out from the land of the Egyptians to be their slaves no more, who broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

14But if you do not obey Me and do not ob-

9. When God turns toward His people, they are blessed with victory and prosperity; but when God turns away from them or turns against them, the result is disaster.

11. *abode* Hebrew: *mishkan*, which often refers to the tabernacle, here has the more general sense of “residence.”

12. *I will be your God, and you shall be My people* This statement, which here presents the

שני 6 וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאַרְצְךָ וּשְׁכַבְתֶּם וְאִין מִחֲרִיד וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי חַיָּה רָעָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ וְחָרֵב לֹא־תַעֲבֹר בְּאַרְצְכֶם: 7 וְיִרְדְּפֶתֶם אֶת־אֹיְבֵיכֶם וְנָפְלוּ לִפְנֵיכֶם לְחָרֵב: 8 וְיִרְדְּפוּ מִכֶּם חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאָה וּמֵאָה מִכֶּם רַבְבָּה יִרְדְּפוּ וְנָפְלוּ אֹיְבֵיכֶם לִפְנֵיכֶם לְחָרֵב:

9 וּפְנִיתִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְהִפְרִיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְהִקִּימְתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם: 10 וְאָכַלְתֶּם יֶשֶׁן נוֹשֵׂן וְיֶשֶׁן מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶשׁ תּוֹצִיאוּ:

שלישי [חמישי]

11 וְנָתַתִּי מִשְׁכְּנִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְלֹא־תִגְעַל נַפְשִׁי אֶתְכֶם: 12 וְהָיִתִּי לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי לְעָם: 13 אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִיַּת לָהֶם עֲבָדִים וְאֲשַׁבַּר מִטַּת עַלְכֶם וְאֹלֶךְ אֶתְכֶם קוֹמְמִיּוֹת: פ

14 וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ לִי וְלֹא תַעֲשׂוּ אֶת

terms of adoption, defines the covenantal relationship between God and Israel.

13. *who broke the bars of your yoke* The bars of the yoke were tied to the neck of a work animal by means of thongs. Persons who are subjugated, upon whom a yoke is placed, are bent over. After the bars of the yoke are broken, they can stand straight.

one, so that no one is driven to crime or violence for lack of food. Ultimately, then, the question of whether our society will be blessed with peace or cursed with violence depends on how we share our resources.

6. *vicious beasts* According to one homiletic interpretation, the reference is to humans acting viciously. Thus “peace in the land” would mean internal peace, between neighbors, and between factions.

9. Maimonides, recognizing that people who follow God’s ways are not always rewarded with peace and prosperity, compares

this passage to a teacher who bribes children to do their lessons with gifts of nuts and candy. He adds, “This is deplorable but unavoidable because of people’s limited insight. A good person should not ask ‘If I perform these commandments, what reward will I get?’” (*Mishnah Commentary*, Intro. to Sanh. 10).

11. *My abode in your midst* Israel’s greatest blessing will be the sense that they are living in the presence of God.

14–45. The Sages called this section the *Tokheḥah* (Reproach). Based on the phrase “sevenfold for your sins” (v. 18), the *Sifra* sees

serve all these commandments, <sup>15</sup>if you reject My laws and spurn My rules, so that you do not observe all My commandments and you break My covenant, <sup>16</sup>I in turn will do this to you: I will wreak misery upon you—consumption and fever, which cause the eyes to pine and the body to languish; you shall sow your seed to no purpose, for your enemies shall eat it. <sup>17</sup>I will set My face against you: you shall be routed by your enemies, and your foes shall dominate you. You shall flee though none pursues.

<sup>18</sup>And if, for all that, you do not obey Me, I will go on to discipline you sevenfold for your sins, <sup>19</sup>and I will break your proud glory. I will make your skies like iron and your earth like copper, <sup>20</sup>so that your strength shall be spent to no purpose. Your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

<sup>21</sup>And if you remain hostile toward Me and refuse to obey Me, I will go on smiting you sev-

כָּל־הַמִּצְוֹת הָאֵלֶּה: <sup>15</sup>וְאִם־בְּחֻקֹּתַי תִּמְאַסּוּ וְאִם אֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי תִּגְעַל נִפְשְׁכֶם לְבַלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתַי לְהַפְרֹכֶם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי: <sup>16</sup>אֶף־אֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־זֹאת לָכֶם וְהִפְקַדְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם בְּהִלָּה אֶת־הַשְּׁחָפֹת וְאֶת־הַקְּדֻחַת מַכְלוֹת עֵינַיִם וּמְדִיבַת נֶפֶשׁ וְזִרְעֹתֶם לְרִיק וְזִרְעֹכֶם וְאֶכְלָהוּ אִיְבֵיכֶם: <sup>17</sup>וְנָתַתִּי פָנַי בְּכֶם וְנִגְפֹתֶם לִפְנֵי אִיְבֵיכֶם וְרָדוּ בְכֶם שְׂנְאֵיכֶם וְנִסְתָּם וְאִין־רָדָף אֶתְכֶם: <sup>ס</sup>

<sup>18</sup>וְאִם־עַד־אֵלֶּה לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ לִי וְיִסְפַּתִּי לְיִסְרָה אֶתְכֶם שִׁבַע עַל־חַטָּאתֵיכֶם: <sup>19</sup>וְשִׁבַּרְתִּי אֶת־גְּאוֹן עֲזֹכֶם וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־שָׁמַיְכֶם כְּבַרְזֶל וְאֶת־אֲרָצְכֶם כְּנֹחֶשֶׁת: <sup>20</sup>וְתִם לְרִיק כִּחְכֶם וְלֹא־תִתֵּן אֲרָצְכֶם אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וְעֵץ הָאָרֶץ לֹא יִתֵּן פְּרִיו: <sup>21</sup>וְאִם־תִּלְכּוּ עִמִּי קָרִי וְלֹא תֵאבְדוּ לְשִׁמְעֵ לִי וְיִסְפַּתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִפֶּה שִׁבַע

#### THE EXECRATION (vv. 14–45)

The execration, the curse brought on by disobedience, often employs the terms and idioms of the blessing to state the reverse, a literary technique that heightens the opposition of obedience and disobedience.

**15.** It is the people Israel who create the unfavorable situation, not God, who promised not to reject His people as long as they remain obedient.

**16. which cause the eyes to pine** Literally, “exhaust the eyes,” so that the eyes can no longer

see. They will have been worn out by anxiety and despair.

**your enemies shall eat it** In a situation of blessing, one enjoys the fruits of one’s labors. It is tragic for a people to see its harvests ravaged by conquering hordes.

**17. I will set My face against you** This is the reverse of verse 9 of the blessing.

**18. discipline you sevenfold** The notion of sevenfold is proverbial in biblical literature.

**19. I will break your proud glory** The land, which was the pride of the people, will be destroyed.

the process of falling away from God’s ordained path occurring in seven steps, hinted at by proof texts in the Torah’s warnings: (a) People will stop studying Torah. (b) Without the foundation of study, they will come to see the commandments as matters of personal choice rather than moral obligation. (c) They will resent people who do study and practice and who make them feel guilty for not doing so. (d) They will try to stoop others from fulfilling the commandments, so they will feel less guilty themselves. (e) They will deny that the command-

ments come from God. (f) They will deny the existence of a covenant between God and Israel. (g) They will deny the existence of God.

**21–41. hostile** Hebrew: *keri*, a word found nowhere else in the Bible, characterizing the Israelites’ attitude of disobedience. It has prompted several interpretations. Hoffman takes it to mean “at cross purposes,” doing the opposite of what God commands, in the way that adolescents will often do the opposite of what they are told, to proclaim their autonomy. Rashi and Ibn Ezra relate it to the word

enfold for your sins. <sup>22</sup>I will loose wild beasts against you, and they shall bereave you of your children and wipe out your cattle. They shall decimate you, and your roads shall be deserted.

<sup>23</sup>And if these things fail to discipline you for Me, and you remain hostile to Me, <sup>24</sup>I too will remain hostile to you: I in turn will smite you sevenfold for your sins. <sup>25</sup>I will bring a sword against you to wreak vengeance for the covenant; and if you withdraw into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into enemy hands. <sup>26</sup>When I break your staff of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven; they shall dole out your bread by weight, and though you eat, you shall not be satisfied.

<sup>27</sup>But if, despite this, you disobey Me and remain hostile to Me, <sup>28</sup>I will act against you in wrathful hostility; I, for My part, will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. <sup>29</sup>You shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. <sup>30</sup>I will destroy your cult places and cut down your incense stands, and I will heap your carcasses upon your lifeless fetishes.

I will spurn you. <sup>31</sup>I will lay your cities in ruin and make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not savor your pleasing odors. <sup>32</sup>I will make the

בַּחֲטֹאתֵיכֶם: <sup>22</sup>וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי בְכֶם אֶת־חַיֵּי הַשָּׂדֶה וְשִׁבְּלָה אֶתְכֶם וְהִכְרִיתָה אֶת־בְּהֵמַתְּכֶם וְהִמְעִיטָה אֶתְכֶם וְנָשְׂמוּ דְרֵיכֵיכֶם:

<sup>23</sup>וְאִם־בְּאַלֶּה לֹא תוֹסְרוּ לִי וְהִלַּכְתֶּם עִמִּי קָרִי: <sup>24</sup>וְהִלַּכְתִּי אֶף־אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם בְּקָרִי וְהִפִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם גַּם־אֲנִי שִׁבַע עַל־חֲטֹאתֵיכֶם: <sup>25</sup>וְהִבַּאתִי עֲלֵיכֶם חֶרֶב נִלְקַמַת נִקְם־בְּרִית וְנִאֲסַפְתֶּם אֶל־עָרֵיכֶם וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי דָבָר בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְנִתְתֶם בְּיַד־אוֹיֵב: <sup>26</sup>בְּשִׁבְרֵי לֶכֶם מִטֶּה־לֶחֶם וְאָפוּ עֶשֶׂר נָשִׁים לַחֲמֶכֶם בְּתַנּוּר אֶחָד וְהִשִּׁיבוּ לַחֲמֶכֶם בְּמִשְׁקָל וְאָכַלְתֶּם וְלֹא תִשְׂבְּעוּ: ח

<sup>27</sup>וְאִם־בְּזֹאת לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ לִי וְהִלַּכְתֶּם עִמִּי בְּקָרִי: <sup>28</sup>וְהִלַּכְתִּי עִמָּכֶם בְּחִמַת־קָרִי וְיִסַּרְתִּי אֶתְכֶם אֶף־אֲנִי שִׁבַע עַל־חֲטֹאתֵיכֶם: <sup>29</sup>וְאָכַלְתֶּם בְּשָׂר בְּנֵיכֶם וּבְשָׂר בְּנֹתֵיכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ: <sup>30</sup>וְהִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֶת־בְּמִלְתֵיכֶם וְהִכְרַתִּי אֶת־חַמְנֵיכֶם וְנִתְתִּי אֶת־פְּגָרֵיכֶם עַל־פְּגָרֵי גְלוּלֵיכֶם וְנִעַלְה נַפְשֵׁי אֶתְכֶם: <sup>31</sup>וְנִתְתִּי אֶת־עָרֵיכֶם חֶרְבָה וְהִשְׁמוּתִי אֶת־מִקְדְּשֵׁיכֶם וְלֹא אֲרִיחַ בְּרִיחַ נִיחַחְכֶם: <sup>32</sup>וְהִשְׁמוּתִי

**I will make your skies like iron** The rains will cease and the artesian springs of the earth will become dry.

**22. I will loose wild beasts against you** This is the reverse of verse 6 of the blessing.

**25.** It will not help you to seek refuge in cities, because pestilence will spread quickly through the crowded towns under siege.

**30.** The Israelite warriors and citizenry will be slain at the very altars where they worshiped foreign gods.

**31. I will not savor your pleasing odors** God will refuse to accept the sacrificial offerings of those who have angered Him by violating His commandments.

**32. I will make the land desolate** The He-

for "chance" (*mikreh*), following God's ways only when convenient, only if things happen to work out favorably, rather than out of a sense of obligation or love. Salanter relates it to *kor* (cold), so that it would mean "calculated, without passion." These curses will occur not only if the people Israel violate God's laws but

even if they obey them in a spirit that drains them of religious value. If the people Israel follow the commands without love, in a calculating manner, God says, "I will act toward you coldly (*b'keri*, v. 24), without the love that makes forgiveness for misbehavior possible."

**32-33.** As the Promised Land was the re-

land desolate, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled by it.<sup>33</sup> And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheath the sword against you. Your land shall become a desolation and your cities a ruin.

<sup>34</sup>Then shall the land make up for its sabbath years throughout the time that it is desolate and you are in the land of your enemies; then shall the land rest and make up for its sabbath years.  
<sup>35</sup>Throughout the time that it is desolate, it shall observe the rest that it did not observe in your sabbath years while you were dwelling upon it.  
<sup>36</sup>As for those of you who survive, I will cast a faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies. The sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight. Fleeing as though from the sword, they shall fall though none pursues.  
<sup>37</sup>With no one pursuing, they shall stumble over one another as before the sword. You shall not be able to stand your ground before your enemies,<sup>38</sup> but shall perish among the nations; and the land of your enemies shall consume you.

<sup>39</sup>Those of you who survive shall be heartsick over their iniquity in the land of your enemies;

אֲנִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְשָׁמְמוּ עָלֶיהָ אִיבֵיכֶם  
הַיֹּשְׁבִים בָּהּ: <sup>33</sup> וְאַתְּכֶם אֲזַרָה בְּגוֹלִים  
וְהִרִיקְתִּי אַחֲרֵיכֶם חֶרֶב וְהִיְתָה אֶרְצְכֶם  
שְׁמָמָה וְעָרֵיכֶם יִהְיוּ חֲרָבָה:

<sup>34</sup> אִזְּ תִרְצָה הָאָרֶץ אֶת־שְׁבַת־תֵּיהָ כֹּל  
יְמֵי הַשְּׁמָה וְאַתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ אִיבֵיכֶם אִזְּ  
תִשְׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ וְהִרְצַת אֶת־שְׁבַת־תֵּיהָ:  
<sup>35</sup> כֹּל־יְמֵי הַשְּׁמָה תִשְׁבַּת אֶת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־  
שְׁבַתָּה בְּשְׁבַת־תֵּיכֶם בְּשְׁבַתְכֶם עָלֶיהָ:  
<sup>36</sup> וְהִנְשָׂאֲרִים בְּכֶם וְהִבֵּאתִי מֶרֶךְ בְּלִבְכֶם  
בְּאֶרֶצְתִּי אִיבֵיהֶם וְרָדַף אֹתְכֶם קוֹל עֲלֵה  
נִדְף וְנָסוּ מִנְּסַת־חֶרֶב וְנָפְלוּ וְאִין רָדַף:  
<sup>37</sup> וְכִשְׁלוּ אִישׁ־בְּאֹחִיו כְּמִפְנֵי־חֶרֶב וְרָדַף  
אִין וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה לְכֶם תְּקוּמָה לִפְנֵי  
אִיבֵיכֶם: <sup>38</sup> וְאַבְדַּתֶּם בְּגוֹיִם וְאָכְלָה  
אֶתְכֶם אֶרֶץ אִיבֵיכֶם:

<sup>39</sup> וְהִנְשָׂאֲרִים בְּכֶם יִמְקוּ בְּעוֹנֵם בְּאֶרֶצְתִּי

brew is emphatic: “I, Myself, will make the land desolate.”

**your enemies . . . shall be appalled** They will interpret the desolation as punishment for a horrid offense the Israelites committed against their God.

**36. The sound of a driven leaf** A leaf “blown

away” (*niddaf*) by the wind. The slightest sound will alarm the people, so great is their fear.

**38.** The exiled community, swallowed up by the land of exile, will become extinct.

**39. heartsick** The people will experience deep remorse.

ward for upholding the Covenant, the loss of the Land will be the ultimate punishment for neglecting the Covenant. As living in the presence of God as a distinctive people was the reward for following in God’s ways, so exile and living far from God’s sanctuary, becoming a number of unconnected individuals instead of a special people, will be the worst punishment imaginable.

Some medieval commentators, fastening on the principle that “even God’s curses contain within them the possibility of being turned into a blessing,” would interpret Israel’s being scattered among the nations as a good thing. When enemies attacked and destroyed one Jewish community, others would still flourish.

Some universally minded 19th-century thinkers saw the Diaspora as part of God’s plan to have the people Israel bring its message to all humanity by being scattered to so many different countries.

Rashi took this verse as an implicit promise that, once the Land has been laid waste, it would not return to life for any of its gentile occupiers. It would wait for the Jewish people to return and reclaim it. Only then would it yield its blessings.

**36. faintness into their hearts** Not only will the Israelites be defeated in battle; they will not care enough about their people’s fate even to put up a fight on its behalf. They will have given up even before the battle is joined.



more, they shall be heartsick over the iniquities of their fathers; <sup>40</sup>and they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, in that they trespassed against Me, yea, were hostile to Me. <sup>41</sup>When I, in turn, have been hostile to them and have removed them into the land of their enemies, then at last shall their obdurate heart humble itself, and they shall atone for their iniquity. <sup>42</sup>Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob; I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land.

<sup>43</sup>For the land shall be forsaken of them, making up for its sabbath years by being desolate of them, while they atone for their iniquity; for the abundant reason that they rejected My rules and spurned My laws. <sup>44</sup>Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them: for I the LORD am their God. <sup>45</sup>I will remember in their favor the covenant with the ancients, whom I freed from the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God: I, the LORD.

<sup>46</sup>These are the laws, rules, and instructions

*the iniquities of their fathers* The realization that they are suffering for the sins of past generations is even more distressing to the exiles.

**41. their obdurate heart** Literally, “their un-circumcised heart.” In exile, the people will submit to God’s will, and their contrition will prompt God to remember the covenant with Israel.

**42. I will remember the land** This statement is unique in Scripture. The personification of the land is a frequent theme, but nowhere else is it said that God remembers the land.

**43. the land shall be forsaken of them** Both the land and the people must atone: the land, through its desolation and the loss of its inhabitants; the people, through exile.

אִי־בִיכֶם וְאִף בַּעֲוֹנֹת אֲבֹתֶם אֶתֶם יִמְקֹוּ: 40 וְהִתְוֹדוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנֵם וְאֶת־עֲוֹן אֲבֹתֶם בְּמַעַלְמֵם אֲשֶׁר מָעְלוּ־בִי וְאִף אֲשֶׁר־הִלְכוּ עִמִּי בְקָרִי: 41 אִף־אֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ עִמָּם בְּקָרִי וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ אִי־בִיהֶם אוֹ־אֲזוּ יִכְנַע לְבַבְכֶם הָעֶלְל וְאֲזוּ יִרְצוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנֵם: 42 וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹוב וְאִף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאִף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֲזָכֹר וְהָאָרֶץ אֲזָכֹר:

43 וְהָאָרֶץ תִּעֲזֹב מֵהֶם וְתִרְץ אֶת־שְׁבֹתֶיהָ בְּהַשְׁמָה מֵהֶם וְהֵם יִרְצוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנֵם יַעַן וּבִיַעַן בְּמִשְׁפָּטֵי מֵאֶסוּ וְאֶת־חֻקֹּתַי גָּעְלָה נַפְשָׁם: 44 וְאִף־גַּם־זֹאת בְּהִיוֹתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ אִי־בִיהֶם לֹא־מֵאֲסָתִים וְלֹא־גְעַלְתִּים לְכַלְתֶּם לְהַפֵּר בְּרִיתִי אֶתֶם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: 45 וְזָכַרְתִּי לְהֶם בְּרִית רֵאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי־אֶתֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם לְהִית לְהֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי יְהוָה:

46 אֵלֶּה הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וְהַתּוֹרוֹת

*for the abundant reason that* The Hebrew is emphatic: “For the very reason that.”

**45. the ancients** Hebrew: *rishonim*; literally, “the former ones,” referring here to the Israelites who left Egypt.

*in the sight of the nations* To allow Israel to be destroyed, even though the punishment is deserved, would diminish God’s renown. Hence, if Israel shows remorse and mends its ways, God will not cause the entire people to perish.

POSTSCRIPT (v. 46)

All that is commanded in chapters 17–26, the Holiness Code, comes from the Lord and was transmitted through Moses on Mount Sinai.

**40.** Although God proclaims the divine readiness to accept penitents and meet them more than halfway, the first turning must

come from the errant people. God does not impose repentance (*t’shuvah*) on an unwilling people.

that the LORD established, through Moses on Mount Sinai, between Himself and the Israelite people.

**27** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

<sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When anyone explicitly vows to the LORD the equivalent for a human being, <sup>3</sup>the following scale shall apply: If it is a male from twenty to sixty years of age, the equivalent is fifty shekels of silver by the sanctuary weight; <sup>4</sup>if it is a female, the equivalent is thirty shekels. <sup>5</sup>If the age is from five years to twenty years, the equivalent is twenty shekels for a male and ten shekels for a female. <sup>6</sup>If the age is from one month to five years, the equivalent for a male is five shekels of silver, and the equivalent for a female is three

אֶשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה בֵּינוֹ וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
בְּהַר סִינַי בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה: פ

**כז** וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:  
<sup>2</sup>דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ  
כִּי יִפְלֵא נָדַר בְּעֶרְפּוֹ נִפְשֹׁת לַיהוָה:  
<sup>3</sup>וְהָיָה עֶרְפּוֹ הַזֶּכֶר מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה  
וְעַד בֶּן־שְׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וְהָיָה עֶרְפּוֹ חֲמִשִּׁים  
שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ: <sup>4</sup>וְאִם־נָקְבָה  
הוּא וְהָיָה עֶרְפּוֹ שְׁלֹשִׁים שֶׁקֶל: <sup>5</sup>וְאִם  
מִבֶּן־חֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים וְעַד בֶּן־עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה  
וְהָיָה עֶרְפּוֹ הַזֶּכֶר עֶשְׂרִים שֶׁקֶלִים  
וְלִנְקָבָה עֶשְׂרֵת שֶׁקֶלִים: <sup>6</sup>וְאִם מִבֶּן־חֹדֶשׁ  
וְעַד בֶּן־חֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים וְהָיָה עֶרְפּוֹ הַזֶּכֶר  
חֲמִשָּׁה שֶׁקֶלִים כֶּסֶף וְלִנְקָבָה עֶרְפּוֹ

רביעי  
[ששי]

#### FUNDING THE SANCTUARY (27:1–34)

Maintaining the sanctuary was costly. It was necessary to provide the materials used in public sacrifice and to support the clergy. The goal of the system of funding prescribed in this chapter was to secure silver for the sanctuary and its related needs. What was donated could be redeemed; it was the redemption payment, the silver, that was sought for the sanctuary in most cases.

##### VOTARY PLEDGES OF SILVER (vv. 1–8)

The custom of promising one's value in silver to the sanctuary goes back to the actual dedication of oneself, or one's child, to Temple service. Pledging the equivalent of one's life, according to

a scale established by the priesthood, served two ends: the spirit of the ancient tradition was satisfied and, in practical terms, the sanctuary received necessary funds.

**3.** On the shekel, see Comment to Gen. 23:9; its silver content is specified in verse 25. The age factor reflects productive ability. At the age of one month, a child was considered viable and likely to survive the perils of infant mortality.

**4.** Gender differentiation may be linked to productivity, it being presumed that a male could earn more than a female. Note that women could participate freely in the votive system.

#### CHAPTER 27

Why is this chapter on pledging to the sanctuary appended to the end of Leviticus? Hoffman sees it as continuing the theme of raising ordinary objects to the status of holiness, a major theme of the entire book. One commentator sees this connection: Even after all the calamities predicted in Lev. 26 have befallen the Jewish people, they will still be dedicated to God and to God's sanctuary. Jews will strive for a life of holiness, not because it brings them re-

wards and comfort but because it brings them into the presence of God.

**3.** How do we measure the value of a person? The world at large values rich people more than poor people, economically productive people more than less productive, fertile women more than childless women, clever and attractive people more than others. In God's temple, however, people are evaluated "by the sanctuary weight" (*b'shekel ha-kodesh*). God views our worth differently than the world does.

shekels of silver. <sup>7</sup>If the age is sixty years or over, the equivalent is fifteen shekels in the case of a male and ten shekels for a female. <sup>8</sup>But if one cannot afford the equivalent, he shall be presented before the priest, and the priest shall assess him; the priest shall assess him according to what the vower can afford.

<sup>9</sup>If [the vow concerns] any animal that may be brought as an offering to the LORD, any such that may be given to the LORD shall be holy. <sup>10</sup>One may not exchange or substitute another for it, either good for bad, or bad for good; if one does substitute one animal for another, the thing vowed and its substitute shall both be holy. <sup>11</sup>If [the vow concerns] any impure animal that may not be brought as an offering to the LORD, the animal shall be presented before the priest, <sup>12</sup>and the priest shall assess it. Whether high or low, whatever assessment is set by the priest shall stand; <sup>13</sup>and if he wishes to redeem it, he must add one-fifth to its assessment.

<sup>14</sup>If anyone consecrates his house to the LORD,

**8.** Allowance was made for reductions when the inability to afford the standard cost of an offering or donation would either deprive an Israelite of expiation or, as in this case, preclude a pious act.

**VOTARY PLEDGES OF ANIMALS** (vv. 9–13)

One who gave of his or her own property to the sanctuary received public thanks. Then, too, what was devoted had already become sacred. Accordingly, a surcharge of 20 percent was imposed on the donor who sought to undo the act, allowing the sanctuary to profit from the transaction.

**9.** If the donor pledged a ritually pure animal, it was presumed that he or she intended it as a sacrifice. The donation constituted a valid assignment to the altar, and no redemption was possible.

שְׁלֹשֶׁת שְׁקָלִים בְּסֹף: <sup>7</sup>וְאִם מִבֶּן-שֵׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה אִם-זָכָר וְהָיָה עֶרְכָּךָ חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר שְׁקָל וְלִנְקֵבָה עֶשְׂרֵה שְׁקָלִים: <sup>8</sup>וְאִם-מָנֹךְ הוּא מֵעֶרְכָּךָ וְהֶעֱמִידוּ לְפָנַי הַכֹּהֵן וְהֶעֱרִיף אֹתוֹ הַכֹּהֵן עַל-פִּי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁיֹג יָד הַנִּדָּר יַעֲרִיכֶנּוּ הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>9</sup>וְאִם-בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר יִקְרִיבוּ מִמִּנְהָ קָרְבָן לַיהוָה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן מִמֶּנּוּ לַיהוָה יִהְיֶה-קֹדֶשׁ: <sup>10</sup>לֹא יִחַלִּיפֶנּוּ וְלֹא-יִמִּיר אֹתוֹ טוֹב בְּרָע אִוֶּרֶע בְּטוֹב וְאִם-הֵמֶר יִמִּיר בְּהֵמָה בְּבֵהמָה וְהָיָה-הוּא וְתַמּוּרְתוֹ יִהְיֶה-קֹדֶשׁ: <sup>11</sup>וְאִם כָּל-בְּהֵמָה טְמֵאָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִקְרִיבוּ מִמֶּנּה קָרְבָן לַיהוָה וְהֶעֱמִיד אֶת-הַבְּהֵמָה לְפָנַי הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>12</sup>וְהֶעֱרִיף הַכֹּהֵן אֹתָהּ בֵּין טוֹב וּבֵין רָע בְּעֶרְכָּךָ הַכֹּהֵן בֵּן יִהְיֶה: <sup>13</sup>וְאִם-גָּאֵל יִגְאֻלָּנָה וְיִסֹּף חֲמִישְׁתּוֹ עַל-עֶרְכָּךָ: <sup>14</sup>וְאִישׁ כִּי-יִקְדֵּשׁ אֶת-בֵּיתוֹ קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה

v. 9. סבירין ומטעין "ממנה"

**11.** An impure animal is unfit for sacrifice. Therefore, it is presumed that the donor really intended to pledge the assessed value of the animal. By paying the 20 percent surcharge, one could retrieve it.

**12.** The assessment of the priest stands, even if it exceeds the market price of the animal.

**13.** The law is stated conditionally, although in actual practice it was usually expected that the donor would redeem what had been pledged.

**CONSECRATIONS** (vv. 14–25)

**14.** According to Lev. 25:29ff., urban dwellings are not subject to the jubilee; if sold but not redeemed within a year, they become the permanent property of the purchaser. Here, nothing is said about a time limit, because consecration differs from an ordinary sale.

**14. If anyone consecrates his house to the LORD** "True holiness sanctifies the seemingly mundane activities of running a household. One who behaves in an elevated manner

in one's own house is truly a holy person" (Menaḥem Mendel of Kotzk). The home is a small sanctuary (*mikdash m'at*).

the priest shall assess it. Whether high or low, as the priest assesses it, so it shall stand; <sup>15</sup>and if he who has consecrated his house wishes to redeem it, he must add one-fifth to the sum at which it was assessed, and it shall be his.

<sup>16</sup>If anyone consecrates to the LORD any land that he holds, its assessment shall be in accordance with its seed requirement: fifty shekels of silver to a *homer* of barley seed. <sup>17</sup>If he consecrates his land as of the jubilee year, its assessment stands. <sup>18</sup>But if he consecrates his land after the jubilee, the priest shall compute the price according to the years that are left until the jubilee year, and its assessment shall be so reduced; <sup>19</sup>and if he who consecrated the land wishes to redeem it, he must add one-fifth to the sum at which it was assessed, and it shall pass to him. <sup>20</sup>But if he does not redeem the land, and the land is sold to another, it shall no longer be redeemable: <sup>21</sup>when it is released in the jubilee, the land shall be holy to the LORD, as land proscribed; it becomes the priest's holding.

<sup>22</sup>If he consecrates to the LORD land that he purchased, which is not land of his holding, <sup>23</sup>the priest shall compute for him the proportionate assessment up to the jubilee year, and he shall pay the assessment as of that day, a sa-

וְהִעֲרִיכוּ הַכֹּהֵן בֵּין טוֹב וּבֵין רָע כַּאֲשֶׁר יַעֲרִיף אֹתוֹ הַכֹּהֵן כִּן יִקּוּם: <sup>15</sup> וְאִם-הַמְקַדֵּשׁ יִגְאֹל אֶת-בֵּיתוֹ וְיִסֵּף חֲמִישִׁית כֶּסֶף-עֲרֻכָּהּ עָלָיו וְהָיָה לוֹ:

<sup>16</sup> וְאִם אִישׁ מִשְׁדֵּה אֶחָזְתוֹ יִקְדֵּשׁ אִישׁ לַיהוָה וְהָיָה עֲרֻכָּהּ לְפִי זֶרְעוֹ זֶרַע חֶמֶר שְׁעָרִים בַּחֲמִשִּׁים שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף: <sup>17</sup> אִם-מִשְׁנַת הַיָּבֵל יִקְדֵּשׁ שְׂדֵהוּ כְּעֲרֻכָּהּ יִקּוּם: <sup>18</sup> וְאִם-אַחַר הַיָּבֵל יִקְדֵּשׁ שְׂדֵהוּ וְחֹשֶׁב-לוֹ הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַכֶּסֶף עַל-פִּי הַשָּׁנִים הַנּוֹתָרֹת עַד שְׁנַת הַיָּבֵל וְנִגְרַע מֵעֲרֻכָּהּ: <sup>19</sup> וְאִם-גְּאֹל יִגְאֹל אֶת-הַשְּׂדֵה הַמְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ וְיִסֵּף חֲמִישִׁית כֶּסֶף-עֲרֻכָּהּ עָלָיו וְקָם לוֹ: <sup>20</sup> וְאִם-לֹא יִגְאֹל אֶת-הַשְּׂדֵה וְאִם-מִכַּר אֶת-הַשְּׂדֵה לְאִישׁ אַחֵר לֹא יִגְאֹל עוֹד: <sup>21</sup> וְהָיָה הַשְּׂדֵה בְּצֵאתוֹ בַּיָּבֵל קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה כְּשְׂדֵה הַחֲרָם לַכֹּהֵן תִּהְיֶה אֶחָזְתוֹ:

<sup>22</sup> וְאִם אֶת-שְׂדֵה מִקְנָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִשְׂדֵה אֶחָזְתוֹ יִקְדֵּשׁ לַיהוָה: <sup>23</sup> וְחֹשֶׁב-לוֹ הַכֹּהֵן אֶת מִכְסַּת הָעֲרֻכָּהּ עַד שְׁנַת הַיָּבֵל וְנָתַן אֶת-הָעֲרֻכָּהּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה:

**16. any land that he holds** This chapter differentiates between land belonging to an original owner and acquired land that had been transferred to someone other than the original owner.

**seed requirement** The method of delineating plots of arable land by reference to the quantity of seed required in their planting was common to many ancient Near Eastern societies.

**homer** A dry measure of Egyptian origin, approximately 6 bushels (220 L).

**17.** At the jubilee, tenured land reverted to its original owners, as mandated in 25:10, 13ff. All transfers of such property were, in fact, not final sales, but long-term leases that expired at the next jubilee.

**20.** The priesthood sold the land when it became apparent that its donor had no intention of

redeeming it. Once this occurred, the donor forever lost the right of redemption.

**21.** If the donor fails to redeem the land before the next jubilee, the initial consecration is considered permanently binding, and the land remains the property of the sanctuary forever.

**22.** This reflects the provisions of 25:25ff. If a man is compelled to sell any part of his tenured land, it reverts to him at the next jubilee, even if he has been unable to redeem it in the interim. Anyone who purchased such land from him, therefore, was not a full owner. If he subsequently consecrated such acquired land, he had to be prepared to remit its value in silver to the sanctuary at the time of its consecration, plus the surcharge of 20 percent. Otherwise, his consecration could not be accepted because the field could not be collateral for his donation.

cred donation to the LORD. <sup>24</sup>In the jubilee year the land shall revert to him from whom it was bought, whose holding the land is. <sup>25</sup>All assessments shall be by the sanctuary weight, the shekel being twenty *gerahs*.

<sup>26</sup>A firstling of animals, however, which—as a firstling—is the LORD’s, cannot be consecrated by anybody; whether ox or sheep, it is the LORD’s. <sup>27</sup>But if it is of impure animals, it may be ransomed as its assessment, with one-fifth added; if it is not redeemed, it shall be sold at its assessment.

<sup>28</sup>But of all that anyone owns, be it man or beast or land of his holding, nothing that he has proscribed for the LORD may be sold or redeemed; every proscribed thing is totally consecrated to the LORD. <sup>29</sup>No human being who has been proscribed can be ransomed: he shall be put to death.

<sup>30</sup>All tithes from the land, whether seed from the ground or fruit from the tree, are the LORD’s; they are holy to the LORD. <sup>31</sup>If anyone wishes to redeem any of his tithes, he must add one-fifth to them. <sup>32</sup>All tithes of the herd or

בשנת היובל ישוב השדה לאשר קנהו מאתו לאשר-לו אחזת הארץ: <sup>25</sup> וכל-ערבף יהיה השקל הקדש עשרים גרה יהיה השקל: <sup>ס</sup>

אך-בבכור אשר-יבכר ליהוה בבהמה לא-יקדיש איש אתו אם-שור אם-שה ליהוה הוא: <sup>27</sup> ואם בבהמה הטמאה ופדה בערבף ויסף חמשתו עליו ואם-לא יגאל ונמכר בערבף:

אך-כל-חרם אשר יחרם איש ליהוה מכל-אשר-לו מאדם ובהמה ומשדה אחזתו לא ימכר ולא יגאל כל-חרם קדש-קדשים הוא ליהוה: <sup>29</sup> כל-חרם אשר יחרם מן-האדם לא יפדה מות יומת:

וכל-מעשר הארץ מזרע הארץ מפרי העץ ליהוה הוא קדש ליהוה: <sup>31</sup> ואם-גאל יגאל איש ממעשרו חמשיתו יסף עליו: <sup>32</sup> וכל-מעשר בקר וצאן כל אשר-

שביעי

מפטיח

**24.** The consecration of the land by one who had purchased it from its original owner does not affect the primary rights of the original owner.

**FIRSTLINGS** (vv. 26–27)

The firstborn males of humans and beasts are consecrated to God at the moment of birth. One may not consecrate them to the sanctuary, for one may consecrate only what one owns.

**26.** This refers to pure animals, suitable for sacrifice.

**27.** The firstlings of impure animals, unsuitable for sacrifice, may be redeemed on the usual basis. If they are not redeemed, the sanctuary may sell them for silver. No time limit is stipulated.

**PROSCRIBED PROPERTY** (vv. 28–29)

**28. owns . . . man** A non-Israelite slave, considered to be the owner’s property.

**proscribed thing** Hebrew: *heirem*; the related verb means “to set apart, denote, restrict.” In the Bible, it seems always to have a negative or prohibitive connotation; it describes what is to be

avoided, destroyed, or forbidden. To designate something as *heirem* may mean either that it is to be destroyed completely or that it is reserved for purposes associated with the sanctuary.

**29.** This law reflects, in part, the provisions of Exod. 22:19, which ordain that anyone who worships another god shall be condemned to death, proscribed (see Exod. 20:3).

**TITHES** (vv. 30–33)

This section speaks of two kinds of tithes: 1/10 of the yield of the land and 1/10 of the flocks and herds.

**30.** Israelites are required to set aside a tithe from the produce of the fields and to bring it each year to the central Temple. There, they are to consume it “in the presence of the LORD” as a sacred meal. Those distant from the Temple were to convert the ritual produce into silver and to use that silver to purchase offerings when they arrived at the Temple, with which they would then celebrate in God’s presence. This was in addition to the tithe given locally to the Levites.

flock—of all that passes under the shepherd's staff, every tenth one—shall be holy to the LORD. <sup>33</sup>He must not look out for good as against bad, or make substitution for it. If he does make substitution for it, then it and its substitute shall both be holy: it cannot be redeemed.

<sup>34</sup>These are the commandments that the LORD gave Moses for the Israelite people on Mount Sinai.

יֵעֲבֹר תַּחַת הַשֶּׁבֶט הָעֹשִׂי לִי יִהְיֶה-קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה: <sup>33</sup> לֹא יִבְקֹר בֵּין-טוֹב לְרַע וְלֹא יִמְיָנֶנּוּ וְאִם-הִמְרִי יִמְיָנֶנּוּ וְהִיא-הִוא וְתַמּוּרְתוֹ יִהְיֶה-קֹדֶשׁ לֹא יִגָּאֵל:

<sup>34</sup> אָלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת-מֹשֶׁה אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַר סִינַי: \*

15:7 סכום הפסוקים של הספר 859 וחציו 15:7 v. 34.

## חֹזֶק חֹזֶק וְנִתְחַזַּק

**33.** The actual 10th animal is to be counted as the tithe, whatever its condition. It can be neither substituted nor redeemed.

### POSTSCRIPT (v. 34)

Likewise, the opening verse of chapter 25 reads:

“The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai.” Both at the beginning and at the end of major sections, or books, of the Torah, it was customary to state where and when the revelation from God had occurred.

**34. on Mount Sinai** Not all the laws, however, were literally given to Moses at Sinai! The opening verse of Leviticus describes the laws that follow as having been given at the Tent of Meeting. Sinai is not a geographic location. It is a symbol of Israel's awareness of having stood in the presence of God and having come to understand what God requires of them. Whenever a person hears the commanding voice of God and commits himself or herself

to live by that voice, that person can be considered to be standing at Sinai. “The greatest single event in the history of God's revelation took place at Sinai, but was not limited to it. God's communication continued in the teaching of the Prophets and the biblical Sages, and in the activity of the Rabbis of the Talmud. It remains alive in the Codes and Responsa to the present day” (*Emet Ve-Emunah*).

# הַפְּטָרָה בְּהָר

## HAFTARAH FOR B'HAR

JEREMIAH 32:6–27 (*Ashk'nazim*)

JEREMIAH 32:6–22 (*S'fardim*)

(When B'har and B'hukkotai are combined, recite the haftarah for B'hukkotai.)

This *haftarah* focuses on a symbolic action performed by the prophet Jeremiah. He was bidden by God to purchase the field of his cousin Hanamel “in the tenth year of King Zedekiah” (588–587 B.C.E.), when “the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem” (32:1–2). At that time, Jeremiah was confined to a prison compound, charged with having uttered a seditious oracle about the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of its king, Zedekiah (vv. 3–5, cf. 34:2–5). The purpose of the divinely initiated performance was to dramatize the future restoration of the nation to its homeland on the very eve of its forthcoming destruction (in 586 B.C.E.).

Accordingly, the purchase and sale agreement negotiated by Jeremiah (32:9–12) was explicitly written down and stored against a future time when “houses, fields, and vineyards shall again be purchased in this land” (v. 15). Jeremiah’s public action is followed by a private prayer in which the prophet struggles to comprehend the drama of hope, which is symbolized in what he has just done. God’s response (“Is anything too wondrous for Me?”) addresses his concern.

Under normal conditions, lands taken due to their owners’ economic duress could be reclaimed before the jubilee year through the intervention of relatives who would pay the outstanding premium (Lev. 25:25–27). There is thus a strong resemblance between this reappropriation of ancestral lands by uncles and cousins (Lev. 25:49) and Jeremiah’s action with his cousin Hanamel, as Ramban observed.

Jeremiah’s prayer, which follows his act of obedience, expresses amazement glorifying divine justice and power (vv. 17–19) and recalls God’s

great wonders on behalf of the people Israel (vv. 20–23). The people’s rejection of God’s law, however, inevitably results in their punishment (vv. 23–24). Given this reality of doom, the prophet is astonished at God’s word of redemptive hope (v. 25). The divine answer declares that there is nothing too wondrous for God, using language that echoes the opening words of praise in Jeremiah’s prayer (Kara).

Threefold repetition of the Hebrew word *hinnei* (usually translated “behold”) establishes the rhythm of this passage as it moves from human amazement to divine assertion. The word appears near the beginning of the prophet’s prayer (“[Behold!] You made heaven and earth,” v. 17), as he shifts from uttering declarations as a spokesman for God to uttering God’s praise. Subsequently, *hinnei* (“Here,” v. 24) provides a dramatic shift to the people’s punishment and Jeremiah’s wonder at what God told him to do. Finally, through the use of language recalling Jeremiah’s words in verse 17, God seemingly cites the prophet, responding in a counterpoint to Jeremiah’s words of concern with a rhetorical question: “Behold (*hinnei*) I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too wondrous for Me?” (v. 27). The question hangs in suspension. With ironic concision, the divine promise of redemption is posed as an unexpected challenge to religious faith.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The legal theme of land redemption by near kin is the common element in the *parashah* (Lev. 25:25–55) and in the *haftarah* (Jer. 32:6–12). The purpose of such a transaction was to safeguard the preservation of property within family

groups (see Ramban on Lev. 25:33). Redemption (*g'ullah*) is a legal term that takes on spiritually and nationally redemptive overtones in the process. Implied in the figure of Jeremiah's use of this

term is the promise of God's own restorative *g'ullah* of His people to their homeland. One must marvel at the bold act of hope, much as Jeremiah himself did (32:24–25).

**32** <sup>6</sup>Jeremiah said: The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>7</sup>Hanamel, the son of your uncle Shallum, will come to you and say, "Buy my land in Anathoth, for you are next in succession to redeem it by purchase." <sup>8</sup>And just as the LORD had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me in the prison compound and said to me, "Please buy my land in Anathoth, in the territory of Benjamin; for the right of succession is yours, and you have the duty of redemption. Buy it." Then I knew that it was indeed the word of the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>So I bought the land in Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel. I weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. <sup>10</sup>I wrote a deed, sealed it, and had it witnessed; and I weighed out the silver on a balance. <sup>11</sup>I took the deed of purchase, the sealed text and the open one according to rule and law, <sup>12</sup>and gave the deed to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah in the presence of my kinsman Hanamel, of the witnesses who were named in the deed, and all the Judeans who were sitting in the prison compound. <sup>13</sup>In their presence I charged Baruch as follows: <sup>14</sup>Thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: "Take these documents, this deed of purchase, the sealed text and the open one, and

**לב** <sup>6</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר יִרְמְיָהוּ הִנֵּה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: <sup>7</sup>הִנֵּה חֲנַמְאֵל בֶּן־שָׁלֹם דִּדְךָ בָּא אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר קְנֵה לְךָ אֶת־שְׂדֵי אֲשֶׁר בְּעֲנֹתוֹת פִּי לְךָ מִשְׁפֵּט הַגְּאֻלָּה לְקָנוֹת: <sup>8</sup>וַיָּבֵא אֵלַי חֲנַמְאֵל בֶּן־דָּדַי בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה אֶל־חֲצֵר הַמְּטָרָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי קְנֵה נָא אֶת־שְׂדֵי אֲשֶׁר־בְּעֲנֹתוֹת אֲשֶׁר | בְּאַרְץ בְּנֵי־מִינִן כִּי־לְךָ מִשְׁפֵּט הִירְשָׁה וְלְךָ הַגְּאֻלָּה קְנֵה־לְךָ וְאָדַע כִּי דְבַר־יְהוָה הוּא: <sup>9</sup>וַאֲקַנְהָ אֶת־הַשְּׂדֵה מֵאֵת חֲנַמְאֵל בֶּן־דָּדַי אֲשֶׁר בְּעֲנֹתוֹת וְאֲשַׁקְלֶה־לוֹ אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף שִׁבְעָה שְׁקָלִים וְעֶשְׂרֵה הַכֶּסֶף: <sup>10</sup>וְאֶכְתֹּב בְּסֵפֶר וְאֶחְתֹּם וְאֶעַד עֵדִים וְאֲשַׁקֵּל הַכֶּסֶף בְּמֵאזְנַיִם: <sup>11</sup>וְאֶקַּח אֶת־סֵפֶר הַמְּקִנָּה אֶת־הַחֲתוּם הַמְצוּה וְהַחֲקִים וְאֶת־הַגְּלוּי: <sup>12</sup>וְאֶתָּן אֶת־הַסֵּפֶר הַמְּקִנָּה אֶל־בְּרוּךְ בֶּן־נְרִיָּה בֶן־מַחְסֵיָה לְעֵינַי חֲנַמְאֵל דָּדַי וְלְעֵינַי הָעֵדִים הַכְּתוּבִים \* בְּסֵפֶר הַמְּקִנָּה לְעֵינַי כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּחֲצֵר הַמְּטָרָה: <sup>13</sup>וְאָצְוָה אֶת־בְּרוּךְ לְעֵינֵיהֶם לֵאמֹר: <sup>14</sup>כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה עֲבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְקוֹחַ אֶת־הַסְּפָרִים

v. 12. בנוסח אחר "הכתובים"

**Jeremiah 32:8. you have the duty of redemption** Hanamel is saying: "If I die without sons, you [Jeremiah] could be my heir; and if I were to sell [the property] to another, you would have the legal right to redeem [it] from the purchaser even if you were not to inherit it . . . as it is written, '[redemption may be performed by a kinsman] or his uncle or his uncle's son' (Lev. 25:49)" (Kara).

**12. gave the deed to Baruch** Baruch (ben Neriah) functions as Jeremiah's aide, disciple,

agent, and personal scribe. This is especially the case in Jer. 36.

**who were named** Rendered according to the text of many mss. and ancient versions; so ancient Near Eastern practice. The Hebrew text above, like other mss. and the editions, reads "who wrote" (i.e., signed their names) [Transl.].

**14. the sealed text and the open one** The Mishnah refers to two types of documents: a "plain document whose witnesses signed within



put them into an earthen jar, so that they may last a long time.”<sup>15</sup>For thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: “Houses, fields, and vineyards shall again be purchased in this land.”

<sup>16</sup>But after I had given the deed to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD: <sup>17</sup>“Ah, Lord God! You made heaven and earth with Your great might and outstretched arm. Nothing is too wondrous for You! <sup>18</sup>You show kindness to the thousandth generation, but visit the guilt of the fathers upon their children after them. O great and mighty God whose name is LORD of Hosts, <sup>19</sup>wondrous in purpose and mighty in deed, whose eyes observe all the ways of men, so as to repay every man according to his ways, and with the proper fruit of his deeds! <sup>20</sup>You displayed signs and marvels in the land of Egypt with lasting effect, and won renown in Israel and among mankind to this very day. <sup>21</sup>You freed

הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת סֵפֶר הַמִּקְנָה הַזֶּה וְאֶת  
הַחֲתוּם וְאֶת סֵפֶר הַגְּלוּי הַזֶּה וְנָתַתָּם  
בְּכַל־חָרֶשׁ לְמַעַן יַעֲמְדוּ יָמִים רַבִּים: ס  
כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
עוֹד יִקְנּוּ בָתַיִם וְשָׂדוֹת וְכַרְמִים בְּאֶרֶץ  
הַיְזָאת: פ

<sup>16</sup>וְאֶת־פְּלִל אֶל־יְהוָה אַחֲרֵי תַתִּיל אֶת־  
סֵפֶר הַמִּקְנָה אֶל־בְּרוּךְ בֶּן־נְרִיָּה לֵאמֹר:  
<sup>17</sup>אֵהָה אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הַגָּדוֹל | אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ  
אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ בְּכַחֲךָ הַגְּדוֹל  
וּבְזִרְעֶךָ הַנְּטוּיָה לֹא־יִפְלֵא מִמֶּךָ כָּל־דְּבָר:  
<sup>18</sup>עָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים וּמִשְׁלַם עֵינֵי אָבוֹת  
אֶל־חֵיק בְּנֵיהֶם אַחֲרֵיהֶם הָאֵל הַגְּדוֹל  
הַגְּבוּר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ: <sup>19</sup>גָּדַל הָעֵצָה  
וְרַב הָעֲלִילָיָה אֲשֶׁר־עֵינֶיךָ פָקְחוֹת עַל־  
כָּל־דָּרְכֵי בְנֵי אָדָם לְתַת לְאִישׁ כְּדַרְכּוֹ  
וּכְפָרֵי מַעַלְלָיו: <sup>20</sup>אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַתְּ אֹתוֹת  
וּמִפְתִּים בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל וּבָאָדָם וַתַּעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ שֵׁם כְּיוֹם

and a tied-up one in which they signed on the back” (M BB 10:1).

**15. Houses, fields, and vineyards** In the present setting, these three elements constitute a promise for the future. In the broadest terms, the rebuilding and replanting alludes to Jer. 1:10. More specifically, they are thematically linked to Jeremiah’s prophetic letter to the exiles of 597 B.C.E. In that document, the prophet wrote to his compatriots in exile telling them to build, plant, and marry in Babylon, because redemption has not come (Jer. 29:5–6, cf. 28). Jeremiah’s statement here counterpoints that letter: The redemption will come, and the people will again build and plant in their homeland.

**17. Ah, Lord God!** The Hebrew word *ahab* (Ah) is used in connection with cries of amazement, concern, or despair.

**18. O great and mighty God** In his prayer, Jeremiah extols God with two attributes: “great” (*ha-gadol*) and “mighty” (*ha-gibbor*). By contrast, Daniel praised God as “great” and “awesome” (*nora*), not using the epithet “mighty” (Dan. 9:4). All three attributes are combined in a praise for-

mula that praises “the great, the mighty, and the awesome God” (*ha-el ha-gadol ha-gibbor v’ha-nora*) (Deut. 10:17).

The Sages pondered these variations and tried to understand why the full formula enunciated by Moses (in Deut. 10:17) was subsequently changed. They emerged with the understanding that Jeremiah and Daniel wished to ascribe to God only those attributes that they could honestly affirm on the basis of their personal experience. In the context of the suffering and the destruction that they had experienced, they found it impossible to ascribe all three of the attributes to God. Therefore, each of them omitted one of the attributes. The Sages justify their liturgical revisions by stating that because “God insists on truth, these pious ones would not ascribe false things to Him” (JT Ber. 7:3; BT Yoma 69b). The full formula from Deuteronomy was restored to the liturgy by the men of the Great Assembly, according to talmudic tradition. It is now recited in the opening passage of the collection of blessings known as the *Amidah*.

Your people Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and marvels, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and with great terror. <sup>22</sup>You gave them this land that You had sworn to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey, <sup>23</sup>and they came and took possession of it. But they did not listen to You or follow Your Teaching; they did nothing of what You commanded them to do. Therefore you have caused all this misfortune to befall them. <sup>24</sup>Here are the siegemounds, raised against the city to storm it; and the city, because of sword and famine and pestilence, is at the mercy of the Chaldeans who are attacking it. What You threatened has come to pass—as You see. <sup>25</sup>Yet You, Lord GOD, said to me: Buy the land for money and call in witnesses—when the city is at the mercy of the Chaldeans!”

<sup>26</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:

<sup>27</sup>“Behold I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too wondrous for Me?”

הַזֶּה׃ <sup>21</sup>וַתַּצֵּא אֶת-עַמֶּךָ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאִתּוֹת וּבִמְוֹפְתִים וּבְיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְאִזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְמוֹרָא גָדוֹל׃ <sup>22</sup>וַתִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֲבוֹתָם לָתֵת לָהֶם אֶרֶץ זֶבֶת חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ׃ <sup>23</sup>וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיִּרְשׁוּ אֹתָהּ וְלֹא-שָׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלְךָ וּבְתוֹרֹתֶיךָ לֹא-הִלְכוּ אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָהּ לָהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת לֹא עָשׂוּ וַתִּקְרָא אֹתָם אֶת כָּל-הָרַעָה הַזֹּאת׃ <sup>24</sup>הִנֵּה הַסְּלָלוֹת בָּאוּ הָעִיר לְלִכְדָּהּ וְהָעִיר נִתְּנָה בְיַד הַכַּשְׂדִּים הַנֹּלְחָמִים עָלֶיהָ מִפְּנֵי הַחֶרֶב וְהָרֶעֶב וְהַדָּבָר וְאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ הִיא וְהַנֶּהָר רֵאָה׃ <sup>25</sup>וְאָתָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֵלַי אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה קְנֵה-לִּי הַשָּׂדֶה בַּכֶּסֶף וְהָעֵד עֲדִים וְהָעִיר נִתְּנָה בְיַד הַכַּשְׂדִּים׃

<sup>26</sup>וַיְהִי דִבְרֵי-יְהוָה אֵל-יִרְמְיָהוּ לֵאמֹר׃

<sup>27</sup>הִנֵּה אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי כָל-בָּשָׂר הֲמִמְנִי יִפְלֵא כָל-דְּבָר׃

# הַפְּטָרַת בְּחֻקֹּתַי

## HAFTARAH FOR B'ḤUKKOTAI

JEREMIAH 16:19–17:14

(When B'har and B'ḥukkotai are combined, recite this haftarah.)

This *haftarah* comprises a series of sayings by the prophet, spoken in Judea sometime in the late 7th to the early 6th century B.C.E. They include personal prayers of proclamation and petition, divine indictments and instructions, and impersonal maxims of a general and national character. The reality of divine punishment for false worship and for immorality and the overwhelming importance of proper trust in God constitute the general themes that bind the verses together. Sin occurs in the open and in the hiddenness of the human heart. Both are observed by God, and the offenders are brought to justice. One must, therefore, hope in the “Hope of Israel,” the only source and font of life. Jeremiah exemplifies true piety by his own personal assertions of theological trust and dependence.

This passage establishes a contrast between the faithfulness of the prophet and the sins of his contemporaries. Jeremiah’s trust is dramatized by his extraordinary prayers of reliance on God as his refuge and redeemer (16:19, 17:14). The sinners’ folly, by contrast, lies in their flagrant disregard of the divine way. They serve “no-gods,” hoping for fertility and success, not realizing that they rely on objects “futile and worthless” (vv. 19–20). They act with deception and stealth, hoping to increase unjust gain, not realizing that God who probes the heart undoes injustice and deceit. Thus will their projects be perverted: The verdant trees worshiped in their alien rites will be transformed into dry bushes of the wilderness. Abandoning the “Hope of Israel” (17:13), they reject the true source of living waters. Indeed, their blatant apostasy is marked on their cult objects, even as their rejection of true piety is written on the earth. There is no escape: God knows the inner heart and the outward acts of all.

Trust in God, unlike trust in idols, bestows on its bearers the blessings of heaven. In the language of natural growth and sustenance, the faithful are promised deep roots in flowing waters, bearing fruit despite external circumstances (17:7–8). This trust enables devoted individuals to overcome the destructive forces of the natural world. They withstand oppression by being rooted in divine reality. Accordingly, Jeremiah’s teaching is a counsel to choose the “the Fount of living waters” (v. 13) for the sake of such inner power. Hence God’s blessing is not external to this decision but at its very root. The wholly natural attitude that worships the forces of nature and the semblances of self-reliance is thus proclaimed a sham, a deceptive blindness to the divine source of life. Only through trust in God may this folly be transcended and one’s life transformed.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The *parashah* concludes the Book of Leviticus with a series of blessings and curses that may befall an individual, depending on obedience or disobedience to God and His covenant (Lev. 26:3, 14–15). These rewards and punishments are set forth in detail, and correspond to the central image of the *haftarah*: blessings for those who trust in God and curses for those who spurn His ways (Jer. 17:5–8). Read independently, Jeremiah’s exhortation of trust marks a spiritual or theological disposition and does not speak explicitly about covenantal observance as such. Nevertheless, in the wider context of the *haftarah*, which condemns false religious practice (17:1–4), Jeremiah’s words on trust serve as an exhortation to covenantal commitments. This is emphasized when the *haftarah* is read in conjunction with the *parashah*. Through this pairing, the prophet’s teaching serves to reinforce the concerns of Mo-

ses. Together they exhort the people to choose the blessed path of faithfulness to God and His Torah.

In diverse ways, the *parashah* and the *haftarah* emphasize that no aspect of life is immune to divine judgment: Inner deception yields external results that destroy one's life on the Land, and outward behavior affects a person's inner strength

and spiritual resilience to life. Put theologically, the texts affirm a deep correlation between spiritual trust and behavior on the one hand, and renewed stability and productivity on the other. Using natural images of earthly bounty and being rooted in the Land, the Torah and the *haftarah* foster a consciousness of this correlation and invite meditation on its truth.

**16** <sup>19</sup>O LORD, my strength and my stronghold,

My refuge in a day of trouble,

To You nations shall come

From the ends of the earth and say:

Our fathers inherited utter delusions,

Things that are futile and worthless.

<sup>20</sup>Can a man make gods for himself?

No-gods are they!

<sup>21</sup>Assuredly, I will teach them,

Once and for all I will teach them

My power and My might.

And they shall learn that My name is LORD.

**טז** <sup>19</sup>יְהוָה עֲזִי וּמְצִי

וּמְנוּסִי בַיּוֹם צָרָה

אֶלְיָךְ גּוֹיִם יָבֹאוּ

מֵאַפְסֵי-אָרֶץ וַיֹּאמְרוּ

אֶת-שִׁקְרֵךְ נִחַלּוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ

הַבָּל וְאִין-בָּם מוֹעִיל :

<sup>20</sup>הֲיַעֲשֶׂה-לוֹ אָדָם אֱלֹהִים

וְהֵמָּה לֹא אֱלֹהִים :

<sup>21</sup>לְכֵן הִנְנִי מוֹדִיעֵם

בַּפֶּעַם הַזֹּאת אוֹדִיעֵם

אֶת-יָדַי וְאֶת-גְּבוּרָתִי

וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי-שְׁמִי יְהוָה : ט

**17** The guilt of Judah is inscribed

With a stylus of iron,

Engraved with an adamant point

On the tablet of their hearts,

And on the horns of their altars,

**יז** חַטָּאת יְהוּדָה כְּתוּבָה

בְּעֵט בַּרְזֶל

בְּצַפְרָן שְׁמִיר חֲרוּשָׁה

עַל-לִבָּהּ לְבָם

וּלְקַרְנֹת מִזְבְּחֹתֵיכֶם :

**Jeremiah 16:19.** The underlying metaphor here is based on the fortresses that served as a fortified place of refuge (cf. Isa. 17:9). This accounts for the use of the term *m'nusi* (My refuge), presumably derived from the verb *nus*, "to run." It thus evokes a sense of sanctuary, insofar as just this verb is used in connection with the right of an accidental manslayer to flee to the protective custody of a city of refuge (Num. 35:6; Deut. 4:42).

**20. No-gods are they** The opprobrium "no-god" has polemical force (Deut. 32:17,21), and was often used rhetorically to signal Israel's rejection of the covenant with God (Deut. 32:21; Hos. 1:9).

**21. I will teach them** Or "inform them" (*odi-em*). A critique of the nations for idolatry is unusual in pre-exilic sources; Jeremiah is the first to enunciate this view (cf. Jer. 10:11, 50:35–39). By contrast, the Torah never condemns the nations for pagan worship but only for such perversions as child sacrifice (Deut. 12:29–31). Indeed, Deut. 4:19 even presents the worship of the sun, the moon, and the stars as the divine portion for all nations except Israel. However, the nations are always arraigned for immorality (cf. Amos 1).

**Jeremiah 17:1. The guilt of Judah . . . on the horns of their altars** Hebrew: *hattat Y'hudah*. Normally, the purging blood of the purification offering (*hattat*) was put on the horns of the altar.

<sup>2</sup>While their children remember  
Their altars and sacred posts,  
By verdant trees,  
Upon lofty hills.

<sup>3</sup>Because of the sin of your shrines  
Throughout your borders,  
I will make your rampart a heap in the field,  
And all your treasures a spoil.

<sup>4</sup>You will forfeit, by your own act,  
The inheritance I have given you;  
I will make you a slave to your enemies  
In a land you have never known.  
For you have kindled the flame of My wrath  
Which shall burn for all time.

<sup>5</sup>Thus said the LORD:

Cursed is he who trusts in man,  
Who makes mere flesh his strength,  
And turns his thoughts from the LORD.

<sup>6</sup>He shall be like a bush in the desert,  
Which does not sense the coming of good:  
It is set in the scorched places of the wilder-  
ness,

In a barren land without inhabitant.

<sup>7</sup>Blessed is he who trusts in the LORD,  
Whose trust is the LORD alone.

<sup>8</sup>He shall be like a tree planted by waters,  
Sending forth its roots by a stream:  
It does not sense the coming of heat,  
Its leaves are ever fresh;  
It has no care in a year of drought,  
It does not cease to yield fruit.

<sup>2</sup>כִּזְכֹּר בְּנֵיהֶם  
מִזְבְּחֹתָם וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם  
עַל-עֵץ רֵעֵנָן  
עַל גְּבְעוֹת הַגְּבוּהוֹת:

<sup>3</sup>חִילָּךְ כָּל-אוֹצְרוֹתֶיךָ לְבוֹ אֶתֶן  
בְּמַלְתֶּיךָ בַּחֲטָאֵת  
בְּכָל-גְּבוּלֶיךָ:

<sup>4</sup>וְשָׁמַטְתָּהּ וּבָרַךְ  
מִנְחַלְתְּךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָךְ  
וְהָעַבְדְתִיךָ אֶת-אֲיֹבֶיךָ  
בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִדְעֶתָ  
כִּי-אֵשׁ קִדְחָתָם בְּאִפִּי  
עַד-עוֹלָם תִּוְקָד: ס

<sup>5</sup>כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה  
אֲרוּר הַגֹּבֵל אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בְּאָדָם  
וְשֵׁם בָּשָׂר זִרְעוֹ  
וּמִן-יְהוָה יִסוּר לְבוֹ:

<sup>6</sup>וְהָיָה כְּעֵרְעֵר בְּעֵרְבָה  
וְלֹא יִרְאֶה כִּי-יָבוֹא טוֹב  
וְשָׁכַן חֲרוּרִים בְּמִדְבָּר  
אֶרֶץ מְלַחָה וְלֹא תִשָּׁב: ס

<sup>7</sup>בְּרוּךְ הַגֹּבֵר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בַּיהוָה  
וְהָיָה יְהוָה מִבְטָחוֹ:

<sup>8</sup>וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ | שָׁתוּל עַל-מַיִם  
וְעַל-יּוֹבֵל יִשְׁלַח שָׁרְשָׁיו  
וְלֹא יִרָא יִרְאָה כִּי-יָבֵא חֹם  
וְהָיָה עָלָיו רֵעֵנָן  
וּבְשָׁנָת בַּצָּרֹת לֹא יִדָּאָג  
וְלֹא יִמֵּשׁ מִעֲשׂוֹת פְּרִי:

This was done to purify the shrine (Lev. 8:15; cf. M Shev. 1:4–7). It was also performed in cases of accidental sin by the individual (Lev. 4:25,30). Jeremiah thus mocks Israel's practices by punning. It is their guilt, he implies, that is on their altars and not the blood of the expunging sacrifice.

**8. like a tree planted by waters** Jeremiah's

image of the regenerative bounty of one who trusts God echoes Ps. 1:3, where the beneficiary is the student of Torah. Jeremiah extends the metaphor with the words that the tree's "leaves are ever fresh (*ra-anan*).” This provides a powerful counterpoint to the critique of the sinners who worship “By verdant (*ra-anan*) trees” (17:2).

9Most devious is the heart;  
It is perverse—who can fathom it?  
10I the LORD probe the heart,  
Search the mind—  
To repay every man according to his ways,  
With the proper fruit of his deeds.

9 עֵקֶב הַלֵּב מִכָּל  
וְאִנֶּשׁ הוּא מִי יִדְעֵנוּ:  
10 אֲנִי יְהוָה חֹקֵר לֵב  
בַּחֲן פְּלִיּוֹת  
וְלַתַּת לְאִישׁ כְּדַרְכּוֹ  
בְּדַרְכּוֹ כִּי  
כִּפְרִי מֵעֲלָלָיו: ט

11Like a partridge hatching what she did  
not lay,  
So is one who amasses wealth by unjust  
means;  
In the middle of his life it will leave him,  
And in the end he will be proved a fool.

11 קָרָא דָּגַל וְלֹא יָלַד  
עֲשָׂה עֶשֶׂר וְלֹא בְּמִשְׁפָּט  
בַּחֲצֵי יָמָיו יָמִיּוֹ יַעֲזֹבֵנוּ  
וּבְאַחֲרֵיתוֹ יִהְיֶה נָבֶל:

12O Throne of Glory exalted from of old,  
Our Sacred Shrine!  
13O Hope of Israel! O LORD!  
All who forsake You shall be put to shame,  
Those in the land who turn from You  
Shall be doomed men,  
For they have forsaken the LORD,  
The Fount of living waters.

12 כִּסֵּא כְבוֹד מְרוֹם מְרֹאשׁוֹן  
מְקוֹם מְקֻדְשָׁנוּ:  
13 מְקוֹה יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה  
כָּל-עֹזְבֶיךָ יִבְשׁוּ  
יִסּוּרֵי וְסוּרֵי בְּאֶרֶץ  
יִכָּתְבוּ  
כִּי עֲזָבוּ  
מְקוֹר מַיִם-חַיִּים אֶת-יְהוָה: ט

14Heal me, O LORD, and let me be healed;  
Save me, and let me be saved;  
For You are my glory.

14 רְפָאֵנִי יְהוָה וְאֶרְפָּא  
הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי וְאֶוֹשַׁעַה  
כִּי תִהְיֶה לִּי אֶתָּה:

**10. fruit of his deeds** A deft pun linking verses 9–10 to the tree imagery of verses 5–8.

**12. O Throne of Glory** In modern times, the phrase has also been understood as an oath sworn “[By the] Throne” that “Israel’s hope is the LORD.”

**13. O Hope of Israel! O LORD!** Jeremiah’s cry of pathos. God is not only the focus of trust but the source of hope and “Font of living waters (*m’kor mayyim hayyim*).” Calling God “Hope” (*Mikveh*) condenses both theological ideas, insofar as this noun is a pun on the pool for ritual immersion (*mikveh*). Thus it also conveys the notion of divine purification. Akiva taught this idea powerfully, interpreting the phrase as “The LORD is the *mikveh* (ritual pool) of Israel,” adding: “Just

as the *mikveh* purifies the impure, so the Holy One purifies Israel” (M Yoma 8:9).

**14. Heal me, O LORD** The *haftarah* closes with this request. In context, it initiates a separate prayer of the prophet that concludes, after the *haftarah*, with a wish for the destruction of his enemies (Jer. 17:18). The Sages thus truncated this prayer for the *haftarah*, leaving only this line. The result is a powerful appeal for divine aid that balances the opening line (16:19). Subsequent Jewish tradition incorporated this prayer into the 8th blessing of the weekday *Amidah*. In an adaptation appropriate for communal worship, the compilers changed the singular personal pronoun (“me,” in “Heal me” and “Save me”) to the collective plural (“us,” in “Heal us” and “Save us”).