

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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<sup>26</sup>See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: <sup>27</sup>blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I enjoin upon you this day; <sup>28</sup>and curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn away from the path that I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods, whom you have not experienced. <sup>29</sup>When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and possess, you shall pronounce the blessing at Mount Gerizim and the curse at Mount Ebal.—<sup>30</sup>Both are on the other side of the Jor-

ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום בִּרְכָה וקִלְלָה: <sup>27</sup>אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם: <sup>28</sup>וְהַקְלָלָה אִם־לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְסַרְתֶּם מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעֶתֶם: <sup>29</sup>וְהָיָה כִּי יְבִיאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה בָּא־שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ וְנִתְּנָה אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה עַל־הָרִים גְּרִזִּים וְאֶת־הַקְלָלָה עַל־הָרֵי עֵיבָל: <sup>30</sup>הֲלֹא־הֵמָּה בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן אַחֲרֵי דֶרֶךְ

#### ISRAEL'S CHOICE: BLESSING AND CURSE (11:26–30)

**26.** The Israelites are given the choice between material well-being and misfortune (see Deut. 28).

**28. other gods, whom you have not experienced** The Lord's claim on Israel's loyalty is based on the fact that He alone has acted on Israel's behalf (see 5:6). Israel has received nothing from other gods.

**29.** The covenant relationship with God, vital for Israel's existence in the Promised Land,

is to be reaffirmed as soon as the people enter the land, in a public ceremony described in chapter 27. The mountains where the ceremony is to take place face each other south and north of Shechem, respectively. Shechem was located on the eastern approach to modern Nābulus.

**30. other side of the Jordan** West of the Jordan River, across from the side on which Moses is addressing the people.

This *parashah* emphasizes the concept of a central sanctuary in a place to be designated by God, to serve as the only legitimate site for sacrificial offerings and corporate worship. The Torah seems to fear that if the Israelites take over the holy places where the Canaanites worshiped, some of the residual paganism may cling to those sites and influence Israelite worship.

**26. See, this day I set before you blessing and curse** We have learned that different people absorb information in different ways—some by seeing, some by hearing, some by touching. Those Israelites who were not persuaded by hearing God's commandments at Sinai, or by hearing Moses' exhortations, are asked to see the difference that following God's ways can make in one's life.

The distinguishing characteristic of human beings, setting us apart from other animals, is our ability to choose the values by which we

live. Other animals are driven by instinct. The Torah repeatedly affirms that humans have the potential to control instinct. At our best, we are greater than the angels, who do not have to overcome temptation and apathy. At our worst, we are less than beasts. Their destructiveness is part of their nature; human cruelty is the result of choice.

**27. obey** Hebrew: *tishm'u*, which most commonly means "hear" (as "listen" in English can also mean "obey"). The reward of an observant life will be the ability to hear God's voice among the conflicting messages competing for our attention in a noisy world (*S'fat Emet*).

**28. and curse, if you do not obey** Does God curse and afflict the person who leads an immoral life? Or does the individual, through personal behavior, bring curses down on himself or herself and sometimes on others who are closely involved?

dan, beyond the west road that is in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the Arabah—near Gilgal, by the terebinths of Moreh.

<sup>31</sup>For you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and possess the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you. When you have occupied it and are settled in it, <sup>32</sup>take care to observe all the laws and rules that I have set before you this day.

**12** These are the laws and rules that you must carefully observe in the land that the LORD, God of your fathers, is giving you to possess, as long as you live on earth.

<sup>2</sup>You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshiped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills

מִבּוֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ הַפְּנִיעִי הַיָּשָׁב  
בְּעֶרְבָה מִוֶּל הַגִּלְגָּל אֶצֶל אֱלוֹנֵי מֹרֶה:  
<sup>31</sup>כִּי אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבֹא  
לָרֶשֶׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  
נָתַן לָכֶם וַיְרַשְׁתֶּם אֹתָהּ וַיִּשְׁבַּתֶּם־בָּהּ:  
<sup>32</sup>וְשִׁמְרַתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל־הַחֻקִּים  
וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לִפְנֵיכֶם  
הַיּוֹם:

**יב** אֵלֶּה הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר  
תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ לָךְ לָרֶשֶׁתָּהּ כָּל־הַיָּמִים  
אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל־הָאָדָמָה:  
<sup>2</sup>אֲבַד תֵּאַבְדוּן אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּקְדָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר  
עֲבָדוּ־שָׁם הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹרְשִׁים אֹתָם  
אֶת־אֱלֹהֵיהֶם עַל־הָהָרִים הַרְמִים וְעַל־

### *Moses' Second Discourse, Part 3: The Laws Given in Moab (11:31–26:15)*

The laws given in Moab constitute the core of Deuteronomy. Moses, keenly aware that the people need to be persuaded to follow the laws, spends as much time exhorting the Israelites to obedience as he does presenting the laws.

#### INTRODUCTION AND HEADING TO THE LAWS (11:31–12:1)

**31. For you are about to cross** Better: “When you cross.” This introduction specifies when the laws are to be put into effect.

### THE SANCTUARY AND OTHER RELIGIOUS MATTERS (12:2–16:17)

The first section of the laws focuses on the sanctuary and the rites and festivals celebrated within it. It includes other religious matters as well, such as shunning Canaanite religious practices, punishing instigation to worship other gods, and holiness in mourning and in diet.

#### THE PLACE OF WORSHIP (12:2–13:1)

##### DESTROYING CANAANITE SANCTUARIES (vv. 2–3)

Most of the Canaanite places of worship were open-air sanctuaries (with altars, sacred pillars, sa-

#### CHAPTER 12

**2.** Once again we see the Torah’s profound concern that the adolescent nation Israel might be led astray by the rituals of Canaanite paganism. These commands do not apply to mature Judaism’s relationship to the faiths of our neighbors today.

**on lofty mountains** Pagans worshiped nature as divine. However, even though nature can be beautiful, it is not moral. Falling rocks and disease germs afflict good and bad people alike. The pagans rarely saw beyond the beautiful—but amoral—natural world to recognize the God of righteousness who created it.

or under any luxuriant tree.<sup>3</sup> Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site.

<sup>4</sup>Do not worship the LORD your God in like manner,<sup>5</sup> but look only to the site that the LORD your God will choose amidst all your tribes as His habitation, to establish His name there. There you are to go,<sup>6</sup> and there you are to bring your burnt offerings and other sacrifices, your tithes and contributions, your votive and

הַגְּבֻעוֹת וְתַחַת כָּל-עֵץ רֵעֵן: <sup>3</sup> וְנִתְּצוּם אֶת-מִזְבְּחֵיכֶם וְשִׁבְרֵיכֶם אֶת-מַצְבְּתֵיכֶם וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בָּאֵשׁ וּפְסִילֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם תִּגְדְּעוּן וְאִבַּדְתֶּם אֶת-שְׁמֵם מִן-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא:

<sup>4</sup> לֹא-תַעֲשֹׂון כֵּן לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: <sup>5</sup> כִּי אִם-אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִכָּל-שְׁבִטֵיכֶם לְשׁוֹם אֶת-שְׁמוֹ שָׁם לִשְׁכְּנוֹ תִדְרָשׁוּ וּבָאתָ שָׁמָּה: <sup>6</sup> וְהִבַּאתֶם שָׁמָּה עֲלֵיתֶם וּזְבִיחֵיכֶם וְאֵת

cred posts, and images) rather than temple buildings. Those in the countryside outnumbered those in the cities.

**2. destroy all the sites** This does not refer to the geographic locations but to the altars and other objects used in worship at those sites.

**3. obliterating their name** Wiping out all reminders of their existence.

**from that site** The Torah does not require the Israelites to engage in a worldwide campaign against idolatry, but only to eliminate it from the land of Israel where it might influence them. This is consistent with the biblical view that for other nations idolatry is not a sin.

#### THE SINGLE PLACE OF SACRIFICE (vv. 4–7)

The reason for restricting sacrifice to a single place is not explicitly explained. The Torah appears to view multiple sacrificial sites as inherently pagan. This limitation is unique to Deuteronomy and its most far-reaching law. It affected the religious life of every Israelite, involving the sacrificial system, the celebration of festivals, the economic status of the Levites, and even the judicial system. The only known attempts to enforce such a restriction occurred in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E., during the reigns of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah (see 2 Kings 18, 22–23).

**4.** Israelites must not worship the Lord in the ways that Canaanites worshiped their gods: by sacrificing on hills and under trees, using pillars and idols and sacred posts.

**5. the site** Not named in the Torah. Even-

tually Jerusalem was chosen, but according to Jer. 7:12 it was preceded by Shiloh.

**God will choose** Presumably, the divine choice would be communicated by a prophet. The site where Solomon built the Temple was initially chosen by David for an altar on the instructions of the prophet Gad (see 2 Sam. 24:18).

**to establish His name there** The idea that God's name is "established" at the Temple means that He is accessible there in worship, because it is the focus of His attention. By speaking of God's name as dwelling in the chosen place, Deuteronomy seeks to correct the impression that God dwells there literally. Only His name dwells there, whereas God is in heaven. The doctrine of God's name dwelling in the Temple is central to Deuteronomy.

**6.** God, by choosing a single sanctuary, limits to that locale all sacrificial worship. The regular pilgrimage festivals were probably the most convenient occasions for these offerings, but farmers presumably made private pilgrimages at other times as well.

**burnt offerings** See Lev. 1.

**other sacrifices** The Hebrew is based on the term *zevach*, a sacrifice in which most of the meat is eaten by the one who offers it (see v. 27).

**tithes** Literally, a tenth; gifts or payments amounting to 10 percent of the value of the yield from agricultural products and cattle. They were originally used to support temples and their personnel, but their function changed when the local sanctuaries were abolished (see 14:22–29).

**4. Do not worship the LORD . . . in like manner** Literally, "you shall not act thus toward the LORD." Rashi cites a tradition that "thus" refers to words in the previous verse—"obliterate [the] names" of pagan gods.

He views this as the source of the custom not to discard a book or paper that bears God's name. This is why such documents are not discarded but buried or stored in a *g'nizah* (repository).

freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks. <sup>7</sup>Together with your households, you shall feast there before the LORD your God, happy in all the undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

<sup>8</sup>You shall not act at all as we now act here, every man as he pleases, <sup>9</sup>because you have not yet come to the allotted haven that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>10</sup>When you cross the Jordan and settle in the land that the LORD your God is allotting to you, and He grants you safety from all your enemies around you and you live in security, <sup>11</sup>then you must bring everything that I command you to the site where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name: your burnt offerings and other sacrifices, your tithes and contributions, and all the choice vo-

מַעֲשֵׂי־תִיכֶם וְאֵת תְּרוּמַת יָדְכֶם וְנִדְרֵיכֶם  
וְנִדְבָתֵיכֶם וּבְכֹרֹת בְּקִרְכֶּם וְצֹאנְכֶם:  
<sup>7</sup>וְאֹכַלְתֶּם-שָׁם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  
וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם בְּכֹל מַשְׁלַח יָדְכֶם אֲתֶם  
וּבְתִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ:  
<sup>8</sup>לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָנַחְנוּ עֲשִׂים פֹּה  
הַיּוֹם אִישׁ כְּלִי-הַיֶּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו: <sup>9</sup>כִּי לֹא-  
בְּאֲתֶם עַד-עֲתָה אֶל-הַמְּנוּחָה וְאֶל-  
הַנַּחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:  
<sup>10</sup>וְעָבַרְתֶּם אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן וְיִשְׁבַּתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ  
אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מְנַחֵל אֶתְכֶם  
וְהָיִיחַ לָכֶם מִכָּל-אִיְיִכֶם מִסָּבִיב  
וְיִשְׁבַּתֶּם-בְּטוֹחַ: <sup>11</sup>וְהָיָה הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-  
יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בּוֹ לְשָׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ  
שָׁם שָׁמָּה תָבִיאוּ אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי  
מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם עוֹלֹתֵיכֶם וְזִבְחֵיכֶם  
מַעֲשֵׂי־תִיכֶם וְתִרְמַת יָדְכֶם וְכֹל מִבְּחָר

**contributions** Literally, “the contribution of your hands” (*t’rumat yedkhem*). The word *t’rumah* refers to something separated (literally, “lifted”) from a larger amount and dedicated either to the sanctuary or to the priest. Here, it most likely refers to first fruits, although the term also refers to tithes, the priest’s share of a sacrificial animal, and the portion of war spoils assigned to the sanctuary.

**votive** A gift promised to God on condition that He grant a benefaction, such as the birth of a son or the safe return from a journey or a battle.

**freewill** An offering that the worshiper—usually with no prior obligation or commitment—promised to give as an expression of devotion or gratitude.

**firstlings** Firstborn male oxen, sheep, and goats, each of which had to be offered to God as a sacrifice (see 15:19–23).

**7. together with your households** Members of the household are listed in verses 12 and 18. It was common for wives to attend, except in special circumstances, as when they were nursing. This is indicated by the story of Hannah and Peninnah in 1 Samuel 1.

**feast** Eating the offerings of verse 6 (see vv. 17–18). This is a generalization, because some offerings (e.g., burnt offerings) were not eaten.

**happy** Literally, “you shall celebrate,” with a

sacrificial meal. Although each type of offering has a specific purpose, Deuteronomy emphasizes the overall value of sacrifices in providing occasions for celebrating God’s bounty. They serve to inculcate love and reverence for God (see esp. 14:23). Deuteronomy stresses the effect of offerings on people rather than on God.

#### WHEN CENTRALIZATION OF SACRIFICE IS TO TAKE EFFECT (vv. 8–12)

This section explains why sacrifice is not yet limited to a single site and indicates when the limitation is to be put into effect.

**8. every man as he pleases** Literally, “every man [doing] what is right in his own sight.” This implies that at the time of Moses’ address, Israelites were permitted to offer sacrifices wherever they wished. But Lev. 17:1–9 states that a restriction of sacrifice to a single place—the Tent of Meeting—had been commanded earlier, in the wilderness. Modern scholars assume that Deuteronomy was not aware of Lev. 17, which they assign to a different source.

**9.** The present situation is permitted because the Israelites are not yet settled in the land. Once there, they must possess it securely so that pilgrims may travel safely to the chosen place.

**11. choice votive offerings** Your votive offerings are to be of the choicest products.

tive offerings that you vow to the LORD. <sup>12</sup>And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God with your sons and daughters and with your male and female slaves, along with the Levite in your settlements, for he has no territorial allotment among you.

<sup>13</sup>Take care not to sacrifice your burnt offerings in any place you like, <sup>14</sup>but only in the place that the LORD will choose in one of your tribal territories. There you shall sacrifice your burnt offerings and there you shall observe all that I enjoin upon you. <sup>15</sup>But whenever you desire, you may slaughter and eat meat in any of your settlements, according to the blessing that the LORD your God has granted you. The impure and the pure alike may partake of it, as of the gazelle and the deer. <sup>16</sup>But you must not partake of the blood; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.

<sup>17</sup>You may not partake in your settlements of the tithes of your new grain or wine or oil, or

נְדִירֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרוּ לַיהוָה: <sup>12</sup> וּשְׂמִחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אַתֶּם וּבְנֵיכֶם וּבְנִיתֵיכֶם וְעַבְדֵיכֶם וְאִמְהַתֵּיכֶם וְהַלְוִי אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֵיכֶם כִּי אֵין לוֹ חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה אִתְּכֶם:

<sup>13</sup> הַשָּׁמֶר לָךְ פֶּן-תַּעֲלֶה עֲלֵתֶיךָ בְּכָל-מָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה: <sup>14</sup> כִּי אִם-בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה בְּאַחַד שְׁבָטֶיךָ שָׁם תַּעֲלֶה עֲלֵתֶיךָ וְשָׁם תַּעֲשֶׂה כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֻצְוֶה: <sup>15</sup> רַק בְּכָל-אֹת נִפְשָׁךְ תִּזְבַּח וְאָכַלְתָּ בָשָׂר בְּבִרְכַּת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לָךְ בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ הַטָּמֵא וְהַטָּהוֹר יֹאכְלֻהוּ כַּצִּבִּי וְכַאִיל: <sup>16</sup> רַק הַדָּם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁפְּכוּהוּ כַּמַּיִם:

<sup>17</sup> לֹא-תֹבֵל לֶאֱכֹל בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ מֵעֵשֶׂר דְּגָנְךָ

**12. slaves** The requirement to involve slaves in religious celebrations, like the requirement that slaves rest on *Shabbat* (5:14), is part of the Torah's unique concern for their welfare.

**along with the Levite** Once sacrifice is restricted to a single sanctuary, the Levites living in settlements around the country will lose the income they earned from officiating there. They had no tribal lands from which to earn a living, and the single chosen sanctuary could not possibly support all of them. Hence Deuteronomy urges solicitude for them, and establishes a special tithe for them, along with the poor, every three years (14:28–29). Here, their participation in sacrificial meals somewhat makes up for their former shares of sacrifices and donations.

#### CENTRALIZED SACRIFICE AND NONSACRIFICIAL SLAUGHTER (vv. 13–16)

**13. burnt offerings** Here, refers to all types of offerings.

**15. slaughter and eat meat** This signals a major change in religious and dietary practice. Previously, only game animals were permitted to be slaughtered outside of the framework of sacrificial offerings. Domestic cattle (oxen, sheep, and goats) could be slaughtered only on altars, as sacrifices, even if the offerer's purpose was solely

to use them for food. Only after the blood was dashed on the altar and certain of the innards burned could the remainder be eaten. This rule was practical as long as it was legitimate to have sanctuaries throughout the land. But the requirement would become nearly impossible to fulfill once a single sanctuary was chosen, because those who lived far from it would be able to eat meat only on the infrequent occasions when they visited there. To avoid this hardship, nonsacrificial slaughter of domestic cattle is to be permitted, and people may eat meat whenever they choose.

**according to the blessing . . . granted you** That is, as much as you can afford.

**The impure and the pure** As long as domestic cattle had to be slaughtered sacrificially, people who were ritually impure could eat meat only from nonsacrificial animals, such as gazelle and deer. Once the nonsacrificial slaughter of domestic cattle is permitted, they will be treated like game animals, and the ritually impure may eat their meat as well.

**16. you must not partake of the blood** The prohibition against eating blood (see v. 23) will remain in effect. When domestic animals are slaughtered only for food, their blood is to be poured on the ground, unlike the blood of sacrifices (v. 27).

of the firstlings of your herds and flocks, or of any of the votive offerings that you vow, or of your freewill offerings, or of your contributions. <sup>18</sup>These you must consume before the LORD your God in the place that the LORD your God will choose—you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levite in your settlements—happy before the LORD your God in all your undertakings. <sup>19</sup>Be sure not to neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land.

<sup>20</sup>When the LORD enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, “I shall eat some meat,” for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish. <sup>21</sup>If the place where the LORD has chosen to establish His name is too far from you, you may slaughter any of the cattle or sheep that the LORD gives you, as I have instructed you; and you may eat

וּתְיִרְשֶׁךָ וַיִּצְהָרְךָ וּבְכֹרֶת בְּקָרְךָ וּצְאֹנְךָ  
וְכָל־נִדְרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְּר וְנִדְבֹתֶיךָ וּתְרוֹמֹת  
יָדְךָ: <sup>18</sup> כִּי אִם־לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תֹאכְלֶנּוּ  
בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ אֶתֶּה  
וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתֶךָ וְהַלְוִי אֲשֶׁר  
בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְשִׁמְחֹת לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל  
מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ: <sup>19</sup> הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן־תִּעְזֹב אֶת־  
הַלְוִי כָל־יְמֵיךָ עַל־אֲדָמָתְךָ: ס

<sup>20</sup> כִּי־יִרְחִיב יְהוָה אֶת־גְּבוּלְךָ  
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לְךָ וַאֲמַרְתָּ אֹכְלָה בָּשָׂר כִּי־  
תֵאָנֶה נֹפֶשׁ לֶאֱכֹל בָּשָׂר בְּכָל־אֹת נִפְשֶׁךָ  
תֹאכַל בָּשָׂר: <sup>21</sup> כִּי־יִרְחֹק מִמֶּךָ הַמָּקוֹם  
אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹם שְׁמוֹ שָׁם  
וְזָבַחְתָּ מִבְּקָרְךָ וּמִצֹּאֲנֶךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה  
לְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָ\* וְאָכַלְתָּ בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ בְּכָל

21. v. חסר י'

#### SACRIFICIAL FOOD (vv. 17–19)

**17.** Both the act of sacrifice and the eating of the sacrifice are restricted to the chosen place. The new freedom to eat nonsacrificial meat at home will not mean that sacrificial food may be taken home and eaten there after having undergone the sacrificial procedure in the chosen place. The entire household must travel to the chosen place and eat the sacrificial food there, “before the LORD,” to experience the religious influence of the place (see 14:23).

#### NONSACRIFICIAL SLAUGHTER (vv. 20–25)

**20. enlarges your territory** This act will give you the entire Promised Land (see 19:8; Exod.

34:24). Full possession of the land, however, will come gradually (7:22). As long as some of it remains in the hands of the Canaanites, Israelites will lack the security that is a prerequisite for centralization (see v. 10).

**as He has promised you** In Exod. 34:24.

**21. too far from you** The text does not define what “too far” means and may intend to leave this to the discretion of each individual.

**slaughter** Hebrew: *zavah*. The verb refers to sacrificial slaughter and indicates that nonsacrificial slaughter should follow the same procedure—namely, slitting the animal’s throat. This method facilitates maximal drainage of blood, in keeping with verses 16 and 23–25.

**19. Be sure not to neglect the Levite** “Among a population engaged in farming and raising cattle, such ‘unproductive’ members of society could easily come to be neglected and resented. The people might fail to recognize the vital role of the Levites in their spiritual and moral welfare” (Hirsch).

**20.** Kook sees this passage as God’s reluctant compromise with the biblical ideal of vegetarianism (see Gen. 1:29; Isa. 11:6–7). In light

of the moral decline of the human race before the Flood, God finds it necessary to emphasize that there is a difference between human beings and animals. We are permitted to slaughter animals under restricted conditions, while the shedding of human blood is strenuously forbidden. We are commanded to cover the blood of the slaughtered animal (Lev. 17:13) to inculcate in us a sense of ambivalence for having taken an animal life to satisfy our appetites.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**12:21. as I have instructed you** From these words, the Sages determined (BT Hül. 28a) that the laws of kosher slaughter (*sh'hitah*) of animals for food are rooted in the Torah.

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to your heart's content in your settlements. <sup>22</sup>Eat it, however, as the gazelle and the deer are eaten: the impure may eat it together with the pure. <sup>23</sup>But make sure that you do not partake of the blood; for the blood is the life, and you must not consume the life with the flesh. <sup>24</sup>You must not partake of it; you must pour it out on the ground like water: <sup>25</sup>you must not partake of it, in order that it may go well with you and with your descendants to come, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD.

<sup>26</sup>But such sacred and votive donations as you may have shall be taken by you to the site that the LORD will choose. <sup>27</sup>You shall offer your burnt offerings, both the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God; and of your other sacrifices, the blood shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, and you shall eat the flesh.

<sup>28</sup>Be careful to heed all these commandments that I enjoin upon you; thus it will go well with you and with your descendants after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.

**22.** The ritually impure may eat meat from nonsacrificial slaughter; they may even eat from the same bowl as those who are ritually pure. Because the meat is not sacrificial, defilement by contact with impure persons does not disqualify it, and there is no need to avoid sharing meat with them.

**23. make sure** This exhortation and the reiteration of the blood prohibition in verses 24–25 indicate a concern that people might not be careful to avoid the blood, either because they want to consume it or because of the effort involved in removing it from the meat.

**partake . . . consume** Literally, in both cases, “eat.” The use of this verb instead of “drink” implies that the text is not dealing with the likelihood that people might drink blood but that they might consume it, in the form of blood pudding

אוֹת נֶפֶשׁ: <sup>22</sup> אֵךְ בְּאֶשׁ יֵאָכַל אֶת־הַצִּבִּי וְאֶת־הָאֵיל בֵּן תֹּאכְלֻנּוּ הַטָּמֵא וְהַטָּהוֹר יִחְדּוּ יֹאכְלֻנּוּ: <sup>23</sup> רַק חֹזֶק לְבַלְתִּי אֲכַל הַדָּם כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְלֹא־תֹאכַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ עִם־הַבָּשָׂר: <sup>24</sup> לֹא תֹאכְלֻנּוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁפְּכֻנּוּ בְּמַיִם: <sup>25</sup> לֹא תֹאכְלֻנּוּ לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לָךְ וּלְבִנְיֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי־תַעֲשֶׂה הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה:

<sup>26</sup> רַק קִדְשֶׁיךָ אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיוּ לָךְ וּנְדָרֶיךָ תִּשָּׂא וּבָאת אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה: <sup>27</sup> וְעֲשִׂיתָ עֲלֵתֶיךָ הַבָּשָׂר וְהַדָּם עַל־מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְדָם־וּבְחִירֶךָ יִשְׁפֹךְ עַל־מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהַבָּשָׂר תֹּאכַל:

<sup>28</sup> שָׁמֹר וְשָׁמַעְתָּ אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לָךְ וּלְבִנְיֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ עַד־עוֹלָם כִּי תַעֲשֶׂה הַטּוֹב וְהַיָּשָׁר

שלישי בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ס

or gravy, or simply while eating meat because of laxity in draining the blood.

**the blood is the life** Blood is the life force in living creatures (see Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11).

#### DETAILS ABOUT SACRIFICIAL SLAUGHTER (vv. 26–28)

**26. sacred and votive donations** Refers to anything sacrificial in character. Votive offerings are singled out because, since they are voluntary, the worshiper might be led to believe that there is greater discretion regarding where they may be presented.

**27.** The flesh of the burnt offering is consumed entirely by fire. The flesh of the other sacrifices is eaten by the one who offered the sacrifice and by the priests (18:3). In both cases, the blood is poured on the altar.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**12:23–24. do not partake of the blood** These verses restate to the Israelites what God commanded Noah in Gen. 9:4, that meat may be eaten only if its blood is first drained. Cf. Comment to Lev. 11:3 and the essay titled “Dietary Laws” for a summary of the other requirements for kosher meat.

<sup>29</sup>When the LORD your God has cut down before you the nations that you are about to enter and dispossess, and you have dispossessed them and settled in their land, <sup>30</sup>beware of being lured into their ways after they have been wiped out before you! Do not inquire about their gods, saying, "How did those nations worship their gods? I too will follow those practices." <sup>31</sup>You shall not act thus toward the LORD your God, for they perform for their gods every abhorrent act that the LORD detests; they even offer up their **13** sons and daughters in fire to their gods. <sup>1</sup>Be careful to observe only that which I enjoin upon you: neither add to it nor take away from it.

<sup>2</sup>If there appears among you a prophet or a dream-diviner and he gives you a sign or a por-

שלישי <sup>29</sup> כִּי־יִכְרִית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם  
אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בֹא־שָׁמָּה לְרִשֹּׁת אוֹתָם  
מִפְּנֵי וּרְשֹׁת אֹתָם וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בְּאַרְצָם:  
הַשְׁמַר לְךָ פֶּן־תִּנְקֹשׁ אַחֲרֵיהֶם אַחֲרֵי  
הַשְׁמָדָם מִפְּנֵי וּפֶן־תִּדְרֹשׁ לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם  
לֵאמֹר אֵיכָּה יַעֲבֹדוּ הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה אֶת־  
אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְאָעֲשֶׂה־כֵן גַּם־אֲנִי: <sup>31</sup> לֹא־  
תַעֲשֶׂה כֵן לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי כָל־תוֹעֵבֶת  
יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂא עָשׂוּ לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי גַם  
אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־בָּנֹתֵיהֶם יִשְׂרְפוּ בָאֵשׁ  
לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם: <sup>1</sup> אֵת כָּל־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר  
אֲנִי מְצִוֶּה אֶתְכֶם אֹתוֹ תִּשְׁמְרוּ  
לַעֲשׂוֹת לֹא־תִסָּף עָלֶיךָ וְלֹא תִגָּרַע  
מִמֶּנּוּ: פ  
<sup>2</sup> כִּי־יִקוּם בְּקִרְבְּךָ נָבִיא אוֹ חֹלֵם חֲלוֹם  
וַיִּתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ אוֹת אוֹ מוֹפֵת: <sup>3</sup> וּבֹא הָאוֹת

#### SHUNNING CANAANITE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES (12:29–13:1)

**31.** None of the Canaanite religious practices may be adopted, because many were abominable. *they even offer up their sons and daughters* Moses takes it for granted that the people know child sacrifice is wrong. He cites it as an extreme, shocking example of Canaanite abominations.

**13:1.** The Hebrew text does not begin a new passage here. This verse complements the first part of 12:31, indicating that Israelites may worship God only in the ways He commands, no less and no more. They may not abolish His commandments or add to them. Adopting any of the Canaanites' abominable practices would lead to both. See Comment to Deut. 4:2.

#### INSTIGATION TO WORSHIP OTHER GODS (vv. 2–19)

God is Israel's king; worshiping other gods is high treason. There are parallels to this law in Near Eastern treaties and similar texts. Ancient laws re-

quiring that agitation against the sovereign be reported and punished correspond closely to this chapter.

#### INSTIGATION BY A PROPHET OR A DREAMER (vv. 2–6)

The law puts a limit on prophecy and miracles by stipulating that the prohibition against worshipping gods is an eternally binding principle. Even prophecies and seemingly miraculous proofs to the contrary are to be disregarded.

**2.** Prophecy and dreams are two of the regular means by which God communicates with people in the Bible.

*prophet* Hebrew: *navi*, which probably means "proclaimer." Some interpret it as "spokesperson."

*dream-diviner* A person—either a prophet or a layperson—who claims to have received a message from God in a dream.

*gives you a sign or a portent* As Moses did in Exodus, to demonstrate that his message came from God. The signs refer to marvels that could

**30. beware of being lured into their ways** The Torah would sharpen the distinction between intellectual study of other faiths and the temptation to incorporate elements of those faiths into our own practice. Every religion has its own "grammar," its coherent way of ex-

pressing its values. We do violence to that coherence when we mix practices of one faith system with those of another.

#### CHAPTER 13

**1.** See Comment to 4:2.

tent, <sup>3</sup>saying, “Let us follow and worship another god”—whom you have not experienced—even if the sign or portent that he named to you comes true, <sup>4</sup>do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream-diviner. For the LORD your God is testing you to see whether you really love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul. <sup>5</sup>Follow none but the LORD your God, and revere none but Him; observe His commandments alone, and heed only His orders; worship none but Him, and hold fast to Him. <sup>6</sup>As for that prophet or dream-diviner, he shall be put to death; for he urged disloyalty to the LORD your God—who freed you from the land of Egypt and who redeemed you from the house of bondage—to make you stray from the path that the LORD your God commanded you to follow. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst.

וְהַמוֹפֵת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר גִּלְכָּה אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּם וְנִעַבְדָּם: <sup>4</sup> לֹא תִשְׁמַע אֶל-דִּבְרֵי הַנָּבִיא הַהוּא אֹו אֶל-חֹלֶם הַחֲלֹם הַהוּא כִּי מִנְטָה יִהְיֶה אֲלֵהֶיכֶם אֶתְכֶם לְדַעַת הִישָׁכֶם אֲהִיבִים אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם: <sup>5</sup> אַחֲרֵי יְהוָה אֲלֵהֶיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ וְאֹתוֹ תִירָאוּ וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּבְקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמָעוּ וְאֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹדוּ וְכֹן תִּדְבָּקוּ: <sup>6</sup> וְהַנָּבִיא הַהוּא אֹו חֹלֶם הַחֲלֹם הַהוּא יוֹמֵת כִּי דִבֶּר-סָרָה עַל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהַפְדֶּךָ מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים לְהַדְיָחָךְ מִן-הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָלֶכֶת בָּהּ וּבִעֲרַת הָרַע מִקִּרְבְּךָ:

have been brought about only by supernatural power (Exod. 4:1–9).

**3.** What follows is Moses' pejorative paraphrase of the proposal offered by the dream-diviner or prophet. An instigator would not use vague and disparaging phrases like “another god, whom you have not experienced” but would identify a specific god.

**Let us follow** Literally, “Let us walk after.” This idiom is frequently used to express loyalty to a king. By paraphrasing the prophet's invitation as calling for “walking after” a god, Moses indicates that it is tantamount to proposing treason against the Lord.

**4. testing you** By allowing the sign to come true, Moses does not explain why God would test Israel, but counters the false prophet's argument that the sign proves his prophecy true.

**with all your heart and soul** That is, whether your loyalty to Him is undivided.

**5. none but the LORD** In contrast to what the false prophet urges.

**6. urged disloyalty** The law refers to a prophet of the Lord who advocates the worship of gods and claims that such worship is compatible with loyalty to Israel's God. Such a prophet

is guilty of false prophecy, a capital crime (see 18:20).

**who freed you from the land of Egypt** The Lord, unlike false gods “whom you have not experienced” (v. 3), has proven Himself to Israel. This underscores the gravity of the prophet's sin, because the Lord's redemption of the Israelites from bondage established their obligation to worship Him alone (see 5:6–7).

**to make you stray** This is a second reason for executing the instigator. Urging apostasy—the religious equivalent of sedition—is also a capital crime (see v. 11).

**Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst** This expression, which appears several times at the close of instructions for punishing a criminal, reflects the view that the punishment removes a tangible evil from the community.

#### INSTIGATION BY A CLOSE RELATIVE OR FRIEND (vv. 7–12)

A secret proposal to worship a god is difficult to resist when it comes from a relative or a dear friend. Because it originates with someone very close, one may be inclined to take no action against the instigator.

**5. hold fast to Him** God is envisioned as a raging fire—how can one hold fast to fire? We cling to God by doing what God does, so to

speak; this includes visiting the sick, sustaining the poor, freeing the enslaved, and comforting the grieving (BT Sot. 14a).

7If your brother, your own mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your closest friend entices you in secret, saying, "Come let us worship other gods"—whom neither you nor your fathers have experienced —<sup>8</sup>from among the gods of the peoples around you, either near to you or distant, anywhere from one end of the earth to the other: <sup>9</sup>do not assent or give heed to him. Show him no pity or compassion, and do not shield him; <sup>10</sup>but take his life. Let your hand be the first against him to put him to death, and the hand of the rest of the people thereafter. <sup>11</sup>Stone him to death, for he sought to make you stray from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. <sup>12</sup>Thus all Israel will hear and be afraid, and such evil things will not be done again in your midst.

<sup>13</sup>If you hear it said, of one of the towns that

7 כִּי יִסִּיתֶךָ אֲחִיךָ בֶן-אִמְךָ אוֹ-בְנֶךָ אוֹ-בִתְּךָ אוֹ אִשְׁתְּ חֵיקֶךָ אוֹ רַעַתְּ אֲשֶׁר כִּנְפֹשָׁה בִּסְתֵּר לֵאמֹר נִלְכֶּה וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ אֶתָּה וְאֲבֹתֶיךָ: <sup>8</sup> מֵאֱלֹהֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֶיכֶם הַקְּרִבִּים אֵלֶיךָ אוֹ הַרְחֻקִּים מִמֶּךָ מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ וְעַד-קְצֵה הָאָרֶץ: <sup>9</sup> לֹא-תֹאבְדָה לוֹ וְלֹא תִשָּׁמַע אֵלָיו וְלֹא-תַחֹס עֵינֶךָ עָלָיו וְלֹא-תַחְמַל וְלֹא-תִכְסֶּה עָלָיו: <sup>10</sup> כִּי הָרֹג תִּהְרֹגֵנוּ יָדְךָ תִּהְיֶה-בּוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹנָה לְהַמִּיתוֹ וְיָד כָּל-הָעָם בְּאַחֲרֹנָה: <sup>11</sup> וְסָקְלֹתוֹ בָּאֲבָנִים וּמָת כִּי בָקֵשׁ לְהִדְיָחְךָ מֵעַל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַמוֹצִיאֶךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: <sup>12</sup> וְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְעוּ וְיִירָאוּ וְלֹא-יִוָּסְפוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה בְּקִרְבָּךְ: <sup>13</sup> כִּי-תִשְׁמַע בְּאַחַת עָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה

**7. your brother, your own mother's son** The most closely related brother, the son of your mother as well as of your father.

**the wife of your bosom** That is, your wife, who lies in your bosom. One would be reluctant to prosecute an instigator toward whom one feels particularly affectionate.

**in secret** Given the stigma and punishment that were to befall those who worshiped gods, it was expected that instigators would make their proposals secretly.

**9. do not assent or give heed** Verse 4 states only "do not give heed" to a prophet or dreamer. The additional verb here reflects the fact that family and friends can exert sustained pressure in the service of their cause, and greater effort is required to resist their importuning.

**Show him no pity or compassion** You might be tempted to spare him out of love. But the danger to public welfare posed by these instigators requires the stifling of normal feelings.

**do not shield him** By keeping his proposal secret.

**10. take his life** This is not accomplished by summary execution, but only after a thorough in-

vestigation, as we see from verses 13–19 and 17:2–7. The person approached by the instigator must report the crime and later take part in the execution (see 17:7).

**the rest of the people** Of his city (see 21:21).

**11.** Stoning, the most common form of capital punishment in the Bible, normally took place outside the city. The witnesses to the crime cast the first stones, followed by the rest of the people. Punishment by stoning enabled the entire public to participate and thereby express its outrage against the crime and the threat it posed to God's authority and society's welfare.

**12.** By taking part in the execution, the townspeople will be dissuaded from committing the same crime. News of the execution will have the same effect on the rest of the nation.

#### REPORTED SUBVERSION OF AN ENTIRE TOWN (vv. 13–19)

The most serious circumstance is one in which the instigation has apparently succeeded, and an entire town has committed the crime.

**13. If you hear it said** The authorities learn of it by rumor—unlike the first two instances,

**13. If you hear it said** The authorities are required to investigate only if the crime is re-

ported to them by others; they need not search for such cases on their own (*Sifrei*).

the LORD your God is giving you to dwell in,<sup>14</sup> that some scoundrels from among you have gone and subverted the inhabitants of their town, saying, "Come let us worship other gods"—whom you have not experienced—<sup>15</sup> you shall investigate and inquire and interrogate thoroughly. If it is true, the fact is established—that abhorrent thing was perpetrated in your midst—<sup>16</sup> put the inhabitants of that town to the sword and put its cattle to the sword. Doom it and all that is in it to destruction: <sup>17</sup> gather all its spoil into the open square, and burn the town and all its spoil as a holocaust to the LORD your God. And it shall remain an everlasting ruin, never to be rebuilt. <sup>18</sup> Let nothing that has been doomed stick to your hand, in order that the LORD may turn from His blazing anger and show you compassion, and in His

אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ לָשֶׁבֶת שָׁם לֵאמֹר:  
 יֵצְאוּ אֲנָשִׁים בְּנֵי-בְלִיעַל מִקִּרְבְּךָ וַיִּדְּיֵחוּ<sup>14</sup>  
 אֶת-יֹשְׁבֵי עִירָם לֵאמֹר נִלְכָּה וְנַעֲבֹדָה  
 אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּם:  
 וְדָרַשְׁתָּ וְחָקַרְתָּ וְשָׁאֲלַתָּ הֵיטֵב וְהִנֵּה<sup>15</sup>  
 אֲמַתְּ נֶכּוֹן הִדְבָּר נַעֲשִׂיתָה הַתּוֹעֵבָה הַזֹּאת  
 בְּקִרְבְּךָ: <sup>16</sup> הִכָּה תַּכָּה אֶת-יֹשְׁבֵי הָעִיר  
 הַהוּא הִיא לְפִי-חֶרֶב הַחֶרֶם אֹתָהּ וְאֶת-  
 כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּהּ וְאֶת-בְּהֶמְתָּהּ לְפִי-חֶרֶב:  
<sup>17</sup> וְאֶת-כָּל-שְׁלָלָהּ תִּקְבֹּץ אֶל-תּוֹךְ רְחֹבָהּ  
 וְשָׂרַפְתָּ בָאֵשׁ אֶת-הָעִיר וְאֶת-כָּל-שְׁלָלָהּ  
 כָּלִיל לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהָיְתָה תֵּל עוֹלָם  
 לֹא תִבְנֶה עוֹד: <sup>18</sup> וְלֹא-יִדְבֵּק בְּיָדְךָ  
 מְאוּמָה מִן-הַחֶרֶם לְמַעַן יָשׁוּב יְהוָה  
 מִחֲרוֹן אָפוֹ וְנָתַן-לָךְ רַחֲמִים וְרַחֲמֶנָּה

in which there are witnesses to the instigation. Hence the law stresses the necessity of carefully investigating the rumor.

**that the LORD . . . is giving you** An act of benevolence that the inhabitants have repaid with treachery.

**15. investigate . . . inquire . . . interrogate** The use of three verbs here for the investigative process, instead of one verb as elsewhere (17:4, 19:18), and the use of three phrases to confirm the charge, indicate the need for the most careful investigation and absolute certainty in the verdict.

**16.** Apparently the text deals only with a hypothetical case in which the entire town is guilty. There is no indication of what is to be done with any innocent inhabitants.

**to the sword** Individual apostates are executed by stoning (17:5), but it would be impossible to stone large numbers of people, as they would resist. The meaning here is that the town is to be conquered militarily.

**Doom it . . . to destruction** The apostate

town is to be subjected to the *heirem* (utter destruction). This *heirem* is more severe than the one to be applied to the Canaanites (see 7:2, 20:17), whose booty, except in the case of Jericho, is permitted. Shunning the booty expresses utter abhorrence at Israelites who apostasize.

**17. open square** The large open space of the town where gatherings were held and public business was transacted.

**as a holocaust** Burn it totally, leaving nothing for human use, as if it were a burnt offering.

**ruin** A tell, the mound formed by the accumulated ruins of a city.

**18. His blazing anger** God's anger at the town's apostasy is such that His favor toward all of the Israelites is suspended until every trace of the offenders is removed.

**increase you as He promised your fathers** This is an implicit reminder that the nation's continued growth will be jeopardized unless the apostate city is destroyed.

**16. put the inhabitants of that town to the sword** Why so comprehensive a punishment for an entire town, rather than simply punishing the guilty? In all likelihood, the Torah deemed it inconceivable for a good person to remain in a town totally given over to idolatry. In the absence of a supportive community loyal to

God, the lonely faithful individual would either leave in disgust or remain and become corrupted. Later, the Sages deemed it impossible for such a situation actually to occur. They considered it to be a purely hypothetical situation, included here to warn us of the serious consequences of idol worship (BT Sanh. 71a).

compassion increase you as He promised your fathers on oath—<sup>19</sup>for you will be heeding the LORD your God, obeying all His commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, doing what is right in the sight of the LORD your God.

וְהִרְפֹּךְ בְּאִשֶּׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתָּיִךְ: <sup>19</sup> כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מֵצִוְךָ הַיּוֹם לַעֲשׂוֹת הִישָׁר בְּעֵינַי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ס

**14** You are children of the LORD your God. You shall not gash yourselves or shave the front of your heads because of the dead. <sup>2</sup>For you are a people consecrated to the LORD your God: the LORD your God chose you from among all other peoples on earth to be His treasured people.

<sup>3</sup>You shall not eat anything abhorrent. <sup>4</sup>These

**יד** בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ וְלֹא-תִשְׁיִמוּ קֶרֶחַהּ בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לְמֹת: <sup>2</sup> כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבָךְ בָּחַר יְהוָה לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סֻגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: ס  
<sup>3</sup> לֹא תֹאכַל כָּל-תּוֹעֵבָה: <sup>4</sup> זֹאת הַבְּהֵמָה רביעי

#### LAWS OF HOLINESS (14:1–21)

Laws of mourning (vv. 1–2) and laws of diet (vv. 3–21) are presented together here because, in the view of Deuteronomy, they share a common theme: the Israelites' obligation to maintain holiness by avoiding pagan practices and everything abhorrent.

#### HOLINESS IN MOURNING (vv. 1–2)

##### **1. You are children of the LORD your God**

Hence, you may not disfigure yourselves during mourning. No reason is given for the connection between being a child of God and disfiguring oneself when mourning. Rashi explains: "Because you are children of the LORD, it is appropriate for you to be comely, not gashed and balded."

**shave the front of your heads** The Hebrew phrase refers to any form of removing hair, cutting and plucking as well as shaving. Gashing the flesh until the blood runs and removing hair are known as mourning rites the world over and were practiced by Israel's neighbors and by some Israelites.

Scholars think that these acts were believed to have an effect on the ghost of the dead person, either as offerings of blood and hair to strengthen the ghost in the netherworld or to assuage the ghost's jealousy of the living by showing it how grief-stricken they are. These rites could also be acts of self-punishment expressing feelings of guilt, which are often experienced by survivors after a death.

**2.** The entire people must maintain a near-priestly level of holiness. The actions mentioned in verse 1 are incompatible with that status.

#### HOLINESS IN DIET (vv. 3–21)

This section is largely identical with the dietary laws in Lev. 11.

#### Land Animals (vv. 3–8)

**3.** Deuteronomy places forbidden foods in the same category of abhorrence as idolatrous and immoral actions that would defile the Israelites' holiness.

#### CHAPTER 14

**1.** As children of God, each of us has infinite value, even in the absence of the loved one who has died. True, "God is found in relationships," as Buber taught; and one cannot be a fully realized human being alone. Nonetheless, we diminish the worth of the individual, bearer of the image of a single God, when we become so attached to someone else that we would harm or destroy ourselves when that person is taken from us.

**You shall not gash yourselves** The Sages, basing their comment on a play on words, used this verse to demand that we not bicker among ourselves as a community, dividing into sects (BT Yev. 13b,14a).

**3.** Dietary rules are part of Deuteronomy's emphases on manifesting one's humanity by controlling instinct and on the Israelites separating themselves from pagans whose land they would shortly be entering.

are the animals that you may eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat; <sup>5</sup> the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, the mountain sheep, <sup>6</sup> and any other animal that has true hoofs which are cleft in two and brings up the cud—such you may eat. <sup>7</sup> But the following, which do bring up the cud or have true hoofs which are cleft through, you may not eat: the camel, the hare, and the daman—for although they bring up the cud, they have no true hoofs—they are impure for you; <sup>8</sup> also the swine—for although it has true hoofs, it does not bring up the cud—is impure for you. You shall not eat of their flesh or touch their carcasses.

<sup>9</sup> These you may eat of all that live in water: you may eat anything that has fins and scales.

<sup>10</sup> But you may not eat anything that has no fins and scales: it is impure for you.

<sup>11</sup> You may eat any pure bird. <sup>12</sup> The following

אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ שׁוֹר שֶׁהַכְּשָׁבִים וְשֵׂה עֲזִים:  
<sup>5</sup> אֵיל וְצִבִּי וְיִחְמוֹר וְאֶקָּו וְדִישָׁן וְתֹאוֹ  
 וְזֶמֶר: <sup>6</sup> וְכָל-בְּהֵמָה מִפְּרִסֵּת פְּרָסָה  
 וְשִׁסְעַת שִׁסְעַל שְׁתֵּי פְּרִסוֹת מַעֲלַת גֵּרָה  
 בְּבֵהֶמָה אֹתָהּ תֹּאכְלוּ: <sup>7</sup> אֲךָ אֶת-זֶה לֹא  
 תֹּאכְלוּ מִמַּעֲלֵי הַגֵּרָה וּמִמְּפִרִּי הַפְּרָסָה  
 הַשְּׁסוּעָה אֶת-הַגָּמֵל וְאֶת-הָאֲרֻבָּת וְאֶת-  
 הַשָּׁפָן כִּי-מַעֲלָה גֵרָה הֵמָּה וּפְרָסָה לֹא  
 הִפְרִיסוּ טְמֵאִים הֵם לָכֵם: <sup>8</sup> וְאֶת-הַחֲזִיר  
 כִּי-מִפְּרִיס פְּרָסָה הוּא וְלֹא גֵרָה טְמֵא  
 הוּא לָכֵם מִבְּשָׂרָם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ וּבִגְבֻלָתָם  
 לֹא תִגְעוּ: <sup>9</sup> ס

<sup>9</sup> אֶת-זֶה תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם כָּל  
 אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ סִנְפִּיר וְקִשְׁקֶשֶׁת תֹּאכְלוּ: <sup>10</sup> וְכָל  
 אֲשֶׁר אֵין-לוֹ סִנְפִּיר וְקִשְׁקֶשֶׁת לֹא תֹאכְלוּ  
 טְמֵא הוּא לָכֵם: <sup>11</sup> ס

<sup>11</sup> כָּל-צִפּוֹר טְהוֹרָה תֹּאכְלוּ: <sup>12</sup> וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר

**5. ibex** Or “bison.”

**7.** Four animals are listed, to illustrate the principle that those that have only one of the required characteristics are forbidden.

**camel** Only the upper part of the camel's hoof is split. The bottom is joined.

**the hare and the daman** Because these animals chew their food for a long time and sometimes move their jaws from side to side, they look as if they were chewing the cud, although they are not ruminants (who chew the cud).

**impure** That is, ritually impure.

*Water Animals* (vv. 9–10)

**9. fins and scales** As in Leviticus, only a general rule is given for distinguishing between permitted and forbidden aquatic animals.

*Winged Animals and Other Restrictions* (vv. 11–21)

All the winged animals listed here are birds except for the bat, which is a winged rodent. The permitted and the forbidden winged animals are not

**8.** The Midrash portrays a reclining pig stretching out its hooves and saying “Look, I’m pure,” while concealing the fact that it does not chew the cud; such was the hypocrisy of the

Roman Empire, which posed as being dedicated to law and justice while oppressing the peoples it ruled (Lev. R. 13:5).

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**14:6. hoofs . . . cud** The flesh only of animals that have split hooves and chew their cud can be kosher. See Comment to Lev. 11:3.

**14:9. fins and scales** See Comments to Lev. 11:9,12.

**14:11ff. any pure bird** The Sages, generalizing from this list of kosher fowl, established four criteria for a kosher fowl, including that it not be a bird of prey (M. H. 3:6). Later Jewish law determined that only those birds that traditionally have been accepted as kosher may be eaten. These are the birds (and their eggs) considered permissible: chicken, capon, Cornish hen, turkey, domestic duck and goose, house sparrow, pigeon, squab, palm dove, turtledove, partridge, peacock, and—according to some authorities—guinea fowl, quail, and what is today called pheasant.

you may not eat: the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture; <sup>13</sup>the kite, the falcon, and the buzzard of any variety; <sup>14</sup>every variety of raven; <sup>15</sup>the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, and the hawk of any variety; <sup>16</sup>the little owl, the great owl, and the white owl; <sup>17</sup>the pelican, the bustard, and the cormorant; <sup>18</sup>the stork, any variety of heron, the hoopoe, and the bat.

<sup>19</sup>All winged swarming things are impure for you: they may not be eaten. <sup>20</sup>You may eat only pure winged creatures.

<sup>21</sup>You shall not eat anything that has died a natural death; give it to the stranger in your community to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people consecrated to the LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

<sup>22</sup>You shall set aside every year a tenth part of all the yield of your sowing that is brought

distinguished by easily observable external characteristics. Hence, no general rule is given for distinguishing among them, but only a list identifying those that are impure.

**12.** Virtually all the forbidden winged creatures are scavengers or birds of prey. They share four characteristics: they lack a crop (the pouched enlargement of the gullet that stores food), they lack an extra toe on the back of the foot, the sac in their gizzards cannot be peeled off, and they tear their prey. Note that the identification of several of the birds is not certain.

**eagle** Hebrew: *nesher*, which can refer also to a griffon vulture.

**19. swarming things** Hebrew: *sheretz*, creatures that swarm or crawl—such as insects, rodents, reptiles, and ambulatory marine animals.

**20. pure winged creatures** Certain leaping locusts (Lev. 11:21–23).

**21. died a natural death** It was not torn by another creature.

**give it to the stranger . . . sell it to a foreigner** Deuteronomy, unlike Lev. 17:15, does not mandate that “strangers” (i.e., resident aliens) must avoid impurity, because they are not subject to the requirements of holiness that are incumbent

לֹא־תֹאכְלוּ מֵהֶם הַנֶּשֶׁר וְהַפֶּרֶס וְהַעֲזִינִיָּה׃  
וְהָרָאָה וְאֶת־הָאֵיָּה וְהָרִיָּה לְמִינָהּ׃  
וְאֶת כָּל־עֹרֵב לְמִינוֹ׃<sup>15</sup> וְאֶת בֵּת־  
הַיַּעֲנָה וְאֶת־הַתַּחֲמָס וְאֶת־הַשְּׁחָף וְאֶת־  
הַנֶּץ לְמִינָהּ׃<sup>16</sup> אֶת־הַכּוֹס וְאֶת־הַיִּנְשׁוּף  
וְהַתְּנַשְׁמָת׃<sup>17</sup> וְהַקָּאֵת וְאֶת־הַרְחֻמָּה  
וְאֶת־הַשִּׁלָּף׃<sup>18</sup> וְהַחֲסִידָה וְהָאֲנָפָה לְמִינָהּ  
וְהַדּוֹכִיפֹת וְהָעֵטְלָף׃

<sup>19</sup> וְכָל־שָׂרֵץ הָעוֹף טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם לֹא  
יֵאָכְלוּ׃<sup>20</sup> כָּל־עוֹף טָהוֹר תֹּאכְלוּ׃  
<sup>21</sup> לֹא תֹאכְלוּ כָל־נֶבֶלָה לְגֵר אֲשֶׁר־  
בְּשַׁעְרֵיכֶם תִּתְּנָנָהּ וְאָכְלָהּ אֹ מִכֹּל לִנְכָרִי  
כִּי עִם קְדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךְ  
לֹא־תִבְשֹׁל גְּדִי בַחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ׃ פ

חמישי <sup>22</sup> עֲשֹׂר תַעֲשֹׂר אֶת כָּל־תְּבוּאָת זְרַעְךָ

on Israelites. Hence they may eat the flesh of animals that die of natural causes. The distinction between “giving” the meat to resident aliens and “selling” it to foreigners reflects the differing economic status of the two classes. Resident aliens were often poor and objects of charity. Nonresident foreigners normally were in the land for purposes of trade and were able to support themselves.

**You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk**

This rule is listed with the food prohibitions because meat cooked this way may not be eaten (see Exod. 23:19, 34:26). Meat boiled in sour milk (*leben*) was probably regarded as a delicacy, as it is by Arabs. The prohibition is similar to the rule against slaughtering cattle and their young on the same day and the requirement that newborn cattle remain with their mothers at least one week before they are sacrificed, to prevent acts of insensitivity against animals.

PERIODIC DUTIES (14:22–16:17)

TITHES (vv. 22–29)

The farmer must set aside a tithe of his produce each year. Tithing was a well-known practice in



from the field. <sup>23</sup>You shall consume the tithes of your new grain and wine and oil, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks, in the presence of the LORD your God, in the place where He will choose to establish His name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God forever. <sup>24</sup>Should the distance be too great for you, should you be unable to transport them, because the place where the LORD your God has chosen to establish His name is far from you and because the LORD your God has blessed you, <sup>25</sup>you may convert them into money. Wrap up the money and take it with you to the place that the LORD your God has chosen, <sup>26</sup>and spend the money on anything you want—cattle, sheep, wine, or other intoxicant, or anything you may desire. And you shall feast there, in the presence

הֵיִצֵּא הַשְּׂדֵה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה: <sup>23</sup> וְאָכַלְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם מֵעֵשֶׂר דְּגָנְךָ תִּירְשָׁךְ וְיִצְהָרְךָ וּבְכֹרֶת בְּקָרְךָ וּצְאֹנְךָ לְמַעַן תִּלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל-הַיָּמִים: <sup>24</sup> וְכִי-יִרְבֶּה מִמֶּךָ הַדֶּרֶךְ כִּי לֹא תוּכַל שְׂאֹתוֹ כִּי-יִרְחַק מִמֶּךָ הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָשׂוּם שְׁמוֹ שָׁם כִּי יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: <sup>25</sup> וְנִתְּתָה בַכֶּסֶף וְצָרְתָּ הַכֶּסֶף בִּידֶךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ: <sup>26</sup> וְנִתְּתָה הַכֶּסֶף בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר-תִּאֲוֶה נַפְשְׁךָ בַּבָּקָר וּבַצֹּאן וּבַיִּין וּבַשֵּׁכָר וּבְכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁאָלָה נַפְשְׁךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ

the ancient world. Because there are inconsistencies among the various tithe laws in the Torah (see Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 18:21–32), modern scholars generally assume that they were not originally parts of a single system but reflect practices in different times or places.

*The Annual Tithe* (vv. 22–27)

In four years out of seven, the tithe is to be consumed by the farmer and his household during the course of worship at the chosen sanctuary.

**22.** This verse introduces the first tithe, which is given in years 1, 2, 4, and 5 of the cycle. (Verses 28–29 deal with years 3 and 6. And in year 7, no tithe can be given because there is no harvest; see Exod. 23:10–11, Lev. 25:2–7).

**the yield . . . brought in from the field** Including wine and oil as well as grains (see v. 23).

**23. in the presence of the LORD** The text does not say when these offerings are to be brought to the sanctuary. The regular pilgrimage festivals were probably the most convenient occasions, although farmers probably made private pilgrimages at other times, too.

**firstlings of your herds and flocks** They are

mentioned here because, like the tithe, they are brought to the chosen sanctuary by their owners and eaten there. All firstlings are consumed, not merely a tenth of them (15:19–20).

**so that you may learn to revere the LORD** Reverence will be fostered in the chosen city by contact with the priests, who teach piety and law.

**24. because the LORD . . . has blessed you** Because this was the blessing of abundant crops, the tithe would be too ample for transport over a long distance.

**25. money** Hebrew: *kesef*; literally, “silver.” Money consisted of precious metal, most often silver. The metal was shaped into rings, bracelets, and ingots, the value of which was established by their weight at the time of each transaction.

**wrap up the money** Keep it intact in a money bag, spending none of it along the way.

**26. wine, or other intoxicant** This phrase refers either to different types of grape wine, such as new and old or mixed and unmixed, or to grape wine and another intoxicant, such as date wine, pomegranate wine, or beer.

**anything you may desire** To eat as part of the feast.

**23.** How will consuming the tithe in Jerusalem teach us to revere God? Seeing the Temple in all its glory and the priests at their service will inspire a sense of reverence (Rashbam). Another commentator suggests that we attain a sense of reverence not through an intellectual process

but by experiencing God’s grace in our lives.

**24. because the place . . . is far from you** *Makom* (place) is also one of the names of God—the site of all reality. Thus the verse can mean, “should the distance seem too great for you because God is far from your heart.”

of the LORD your God, and rejoice with your household.

<sup>27</sup>But do not neglect the Levite in your community, for he has no hereditary portion as you have. <sup>28</sup>Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your yield of that year, but leave it within your settlements. <sup>29</sup>Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake.

שָׂם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ אִתָּהּ וּבֵיתְךָ:

<sup>27</sup>וְהִלֹּלִי אֲשֶׁר-בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲזֹבֵנּוּ כִּי אֵין לוֹ חֶלֶק וְנִחְלָה עִמָּךְ: <sup>28</sup>מִקְצֶה אֶשְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים תּוֹצִיא אֶת-כָּל-מַעֲשֶׂר תְּבוּאָתְךָ בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִוא וְהִנַּחְתָּ בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ: <sup>29</sup>וּבָא הִלּוּלִי כִּי אֵין-לוֹ חֶלֶק וְנִחְלָה עִמָּךְ וְהִגֵּר וְהִיתוֹם וְהַאֲלַמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְאָכְלוּ וְשָׂבְעוּ לְמַעַן יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-מַעֲשֶׂה יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה: ס

## 15 Every seventh year you shall practice re-

## טו מִקָּץ שִׁבְעֵ-שָׁנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה שְׂמִטָּה: ששי

**rejoice with your household** A farmer and his household could not possibly consume the entire tithe during the required 9 days of pilgrimage to the sanctuary each year (16:1–17). Theoretically, a household producing at subsistence level would require 35.4 days to consume 10 percent (a tithe) of its produce. Even if the farmers invited the Levites and the poor to the festival meals, as required, and doubled their normal consumption, they still could not dispose of all the food—unless there were as many Levites and poor as there were members of the farmers' households, which is unlikely. Perhaps whatever was left over had to be given away to the poor or was destroyed.

**27. Levite in your community** Those residing in the various towns and cities.

*The Triennial Poor Tithe* (vv. 28–29)

In the third and sixth years of each seven-year cycle (see 15:1), the farmers shall not eat the tithe at the sanctuary but must deposit it in their hometowns to feed the Levites and the poor. Presumably, the produce collected in each of these two years was expected to suffice for three or four years until the next collection. It seems unlikely that the poor were to be fed only two years out of seven.

**28. bring out** From your property.

**full tithe** None of it is to be diverted to any other use.

**leave it within your settlements** Public storage facilities and threshing floors near the city gate would have been natural locations for the deposit, distribution, and long-term stockpiling of the produce.

**29. the fatherless, and the widow** That is, the poor.

**come and eat their fill** The recipients of the tithe would be given food daily as needed.

**so that the LORD . . . may bless you** Such assurances are given with laws that require economic sacrifice for the sake of the poor. Because the Israelite might fear that these sacrifices would cause economic hardship, the donor is assured that, in the end, they will lead to prosperity.

### MEASURES TO PROTECT THE POOR (15:1–18)

This section deals with extreme difficulties that can befall the poor: inability to obtain loans, inability to pay off debts, and indentured servitude. Some of these laws are also found elsewhere in the Torah and in other ancient Near Eastern societies.

## CHAPTER 15

**1.** Most of this chapter is concerned with ensuring that there not emerge in Israel a permanent underclass—persons unable to lift themselves out of poverty. Such a condition

would be unfair to human beings, fashioned in God's image, and dangerous to society as a breeding ground for lawlessness and irresponsibility. The first step in the direction of preventing that is the remission of debts in the seventh year.

mission of debts. <sup>2</sup>This shall be the nature of the remission: every creditor shall remit the due that he claims from his fellow; he shall not dun his fellow or kinsman, for the remission proclaimed is of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>You may dun the foreigner; but you must remit whatever is due you from your kinsmen.

<sup>4</sup>There shall be no needy among you—since the LORD your God will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion—<sup>5</sup>if only you heed the LORD your God and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. <sup>6</sup>For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you: you will extend loans to many nations, but require none yourself; you will dominate many nations, but they will not dominate you.

<sup>7</sup>If, however, there is a needy person among

וְזֶה דְּבַר הַשְּׁמִטָּה שְׁמוֹט כָּל־בַּעַל מַשָּׁה <sup>2</sup>  
יָדוּ אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂה בִרְעֻהוּ לֹא־יִגָּשׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ  
וְאֶת־אָחִיו בִּי־קָרָא שְׁמִטָּה לַיהוָה: <sup>3</sup> אֶת־  
הַנֹּכְרִי תִגָּשׁ וְאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לָּךְ אֶת־אָחִיךָ  
תִּשְׁמַט יָדְךָ:

<sup>4</sup> אָפֶס כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה־בָּךְ אֶבְיוֹן כִּי־בִרְךָ  
יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
נָתַן־לָךְ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: <sup>5</sup> רַק אִם־שָׁמוּעַ  
תִּשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמּוֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת  
אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה  
הַיּוֹם: <sup>6</sup> כִּי־יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בִּרְכָּךְ כַּאֲשֶׁר  
דִּבֶּר־לָךְ וְהִעֲבַטְתָּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְאֶתָּה לֹא  
תַעֲבֹט וּמִשְׁלָלָהּ בְּגוֹיִם רַבִּים וּבָךְ לֹא  
יִמְשְׁלוּ: ס

<sup>7</sup> כִּי־יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאַחַד אָחִיךָ בְּאַחַד

#### Remission of Debts (vv. 1–6)

The Torah is here concerned with the type of debt incurred by the poor and insolvent: a farmer in dire need of funds because of crop failure and a city dweller destitute as a result of unemployment. Loans to such individuals were regarded as acts of philanthropy rather than commercial ventures, and the forgiving of such loans was an extension of the generosity. The remission of debts and other provisions for the relief of debtors are part of the Torah's program for preserving a balanced distribution of resources across society (see Exod. 22:24–26; Lev. 25:36–37; Deut. 23:20–21, 24:6,10–13,17).

**1. Every seventh year** According to talmudic law, debts were canceled at sunset on the last day of the seventh year.

**remission of debts** Hebrew: *sh'mittah*; literally, “dropping, release.” In Exod. 23:10–12, “*sh'mittah*” refers to land, not debts.

**2. every creditor** Because the remission is for the benefit of the poor, it probably does not cover all types of debts. (According to later Jewish law, unpaid wages, bills owed to shopkeepers for merchandise, and certain types of secured loans are not canceled.)

**his fellow or his kinsman** That is, “his fellow, who is his kinsman.” Both terms refer to one person.

**for the remission proclaimed is of the LORD**

This seems to be the equivalent of the formula in Mesopotamian decrees explaining that debts may not be collected “because the king has established a remission for the land.” In the Torah it is God—Israel's divine king—who establishes the remission.

**3.** The remission applies only to debts owed by fellow Israelites, not by foreigners. Similarly, the remission edict of the Babylonian king Ammitsaduka canceled only the debts of kinsmen: Akkadians and Amorites in Babylon. Collecting debts is a legitimate right, and forgiving debts is an extraordinary sacrifice that members of society are willing to forgo only on behalf of those who have a special family-like claim on their compassion.

**4. your God will bless you** With prosperity.

**6. as He has promised you** The promises are linked to the Israelites' obedience.

**you will extend loans** If the Israelites will obey God's laws, not only will they have no poor who need loans but they will be so prosperous that other nations will turn to them for loans.

**you will dominate** Economically.

*Lend to the Poor!* (vv. 7–11)

Even those who normally would be willing to lend to the poor might hesitate as the year of remission approaches, because it is likely that they would lose what they had loaned. Moses urges the people to disregard such calculations. Such appeals for

you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. <sup>8</sup>Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup>Beware lest you harbor the base thought, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching,” so that you are mean to your needy kinsman and give him nothing. He will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will incur guilt. <sup>10</sup>Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the LORD your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. <sup>11</sup>For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

compassion are characteristic of Deuteronomy (see v. 18).

**7. If . . . there is a needy person among you** If the ideal promised in verse 4 is not achieved.

**9. you will incur guilt** Guilt builds up until it leads to punishment, just as merit builds up and leads to reward.

**7–10.** An obligation to generously support a kinsman who has fallen on hard times without calculating whether the help will be repaid. This is not so much a loan as an investment in a decent, compassionate, stable society.

**7. do not harden your heart** One who ignores the needy is like an idolater (BT Ket. 68a). Also, it is forbidden to insult the poor or accuse them of being undeserving.

**9.** In late Second Temple times, the law of remission did become a deterrent to lending, as anticipated by this verse. To protect people who needed loans and to prevent violation of verses 9 and 10, the sage Hillel (1st century B.C.E.–1st century C.E.) devised a legal means for circumventing the remission. The means was a document or declaration (*prosbul*) in which the lender declares that a specific loan will not be subject to

שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאַרְצֶךָ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת־לִבְבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת־יָדְךָ מֵאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן: <sup>8</sup>כִּי־תִפְתָּח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֶעֱבַט תַּעֲבִיטֵנּוּ דִּי מִחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסֹר לוֹ: <sup>9</sup>הִשְׁמַר לָךְ פֶּן־יִהְיֶה דְבַר עַם־לִבְבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל לֵאמֹר קָרְבָה שְׁנַת־הַשְּׁבַע שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה וְרָעָה עֵינֶךָ בְּאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקָרָא עֲלֶיךָ אֶל־יְהוָה וְהָיָה בָּךְ חֲטָא: <sup>10</sup>נָתַן תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא־יִרַע לִבְבְּךָ בְּתִתֶנּוּ לוֹ כִּי בְּגִלָּל הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְכָל מְשָׁלַח יָדְךָ: <sup>11</sup>כִּי לֹא־יִחָדֵל אֲבִיּוֹן מִקְרֵב הָאָרֶץ עַל־כֵּן אֲנִכִּי מִצְוֶיךָ לֵאמֹר פָּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לְאֲחִיךָ לַעֲנִיָּה וּלְאֲבִינָה בְּאַרְצֶךָ: ט

**10. God will bless you** The closer the year of remission, the more likely it is that the loan will end up as a gift. But any loss incurred will be more than made up by God.

**11. there will never cease to be needy ones** The realism of this verse contrasts with the ideal described in verse 4.

remission. By this means, Hillel ensured that the law would not undermine its own purpose.

**10.** The Midrash imagines God saying, “You sustain My dependents (the poor, the widow, and the orphan) and I will sustain your dependents” (Tanh. 18).

**11. For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land** Therefore, you must build the solution to poverty into the social structure, and not rely on people’s generosity. A poor person need never be embarrassed to accept help, because giving *tz’dakah* is an obligation, not charity resulting from kindness. At the same time, the Sages also tell us: “Better to flay carcasses in the marketplace than to depend on public assistance because you feel the available work is beneath your dignity” (BT Pes. 113a).

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**15:7–11. open your hand** These verses undergird Jewish poverty laws requiring us to feed, clothe, and house poor non-Jews as well as Jews. See also Exod. 12:49; Lev. 19:9–10, 25:25, 35; Deut. 24:10–22.

<sup>12</sup>If a fellow Hebrew, man or woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall set him free. <sup>13</sup>When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: <sup>14</sup>Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the LORD your God has blessed you. <sup>15</sup>Bear in mind that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I enjoin this commandment upon you today.

<sup>16</sup>But should he say to you, “I do not want to leave you”—for he loves you and your household and is happy with you—<sup>17</sup>you shall take an awl and put it through his ear into the door,

<sup>12</sup> כִּי־יִמָּכַר לְךָ אֲחִיךָ הָעִבְרִי אוֹ הָעִבְרִיָּה וְעָבַדְךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים וּבִשְׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּשְׁלַחְנֻהוּ חֲפָשִׁי מֵעִמְּךָ: <sup>13</sup> וְכִי־תִשְׁלַחְנֻהוּ חֲפָשִׁי מֵעִמְּךָ לֹא תִשְׁלַחְנֻהוּ רִיקָם: <sup>14</sup> הָעֵנִיק תַּעֲנִיֵק לוֹ מִצֹּאֲנֶךָ וּמִגֶּרְנֶךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִּתֶּן־לוֹ: <sup>15</sup> וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עָבַד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּפְדֶּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם:

<sup>16</sup> וְהָיָה כִּי־יֹאמַר אֵלֶיךָ לֹא אֶצֵּא מֵעִמְּךָ כִּי אֶהְבֶּךָ וְאֶת־בֵּיתְךָ כִּי־טוֹב לוֹ עִמָּךְ: <sup>17</sup> וּלְקַחְתָּ אֶת־הַמַּרְצֵעַ וְנָתַתָּהּ בְּאָזְנוֹ

*Manumission of Indentured Servants* (vv. 12–18)

This is one of several laws in the Torah that deal with servitude, an accepted fact of life in ancient Israel as it was everywhere else in the ancient world. Biblical law and ethical teachings aimed at securing humane treatment for servants (see Exod. 21:2–6; Lev. 25:39–55).

**12. fellow Hebrew** That is, “Hebrew kinsman” (literally, “brother”). The law limits the amount of time during which one Israelite may control another. Only foreigners may be owned in perpetuity and passed on to heirs (Lev. 25:39–55). The phrase reminds one of the special, brotherly obligations toward fellow Israelites.

**woman** Who becomes indentured because of insolvency or debt—her own or that of her husband or father.

**sold to you** The law refers to the sale of a son or a daughter by an indigent father or the sale of a thief by the court. The aim in either case would be to satisfy a debt or raise the funds to do so. It could also refer to the self-sale of a destitute person for self-support or support of family.

**six years** The standard term of indenture (see also v. 18; Exod. 21:2).

**13.** Here Deuteronomy goes beyond Exod. 21:2, in requiring that newly freed servants be given capital and supplies for living as they resume independent life. The aim is to prevent them from starting off penniless and possibly returning to the same wretched condition that originally led to servitude.

**14. flock, threshing floor, and vat** Some sheep or goats (or their products, such as milk or wool), some grain, and some wine.

**16.** The servant might consider that the security gained through subservience is preferable to the risks of independence. The fact that the law thinks it possible that the servant might love the master and desire servitude implies that the treatment of indentured servants was expected to be quite benign.

**happy** In the sense of being well off.

**17. you shall take an awl** See Exod. 21:2–6. The ceremony for making the servant’s status permanent consists of driving the point of an awl through his ear into the door of the master’s

**12.** The parallel passage in Exodus (21:2ff.) does not speak of the slave as “your brother” (*ahikha*), does not provide for freeing a female slave on the same terms as a male, and makes no provision for sending the freed slave forth with food and gifts. It may be that, in the weeks im-

mediately following the Exodus, the people could imagine slaveholding only after the Egyptian model. Their idea of progress was treating slaves with a modicum of decency. Only a later generation, nurtured in freedom, could empathize with the slave’s yearning to be free.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**15:13–14. do not let him go empty-handed** On the basis of these verses, some Jewish authorities require employers to pay severance to employees hired on more than a temporary basis. Others see it as a moral duty exclusively (Seifer *Ha-Hinnukh* 481–482).

and he shall become your slave in perpetuity. Do the same with your female slave. <sup>18</sup>When you do set him free, do not feel aggrieved; for in the six years he has given you double the service of a hired man. Moreover, the LORD your God will bless you in all you do.

<sup>19</sup>You shall consecrate to the LORD your God all male firstlings that are born in your herd and in your flock: you must not work your firstling ox or shear your firstling sheep. <sup>20</sup>You and your household shall eat it annually before the LORD your God in the place that the LORD will choose. <sup>21</sup>But if it has a defect, lameness or blindness, any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. <sup>22</sup>Eat it in your settlements, the impure among you no less than the pure, just like the gazelle and the deer.

house. The significance of this action is unclear. It might symbolize the servant's obligation to heed the master's orders; the pierced ear might have held an earring that served as a slave mark; driving the awl into the door might signify the servant's becoming permanently attached to the master's house.

**in perpetuity** According to Jewish law, for the rest of the master's life, unless a jubilee year (as prescribed in Lev. 25) comes first. Even a servant who chooses to remain with the master is not passed on to the master's heirs and does not remain beyond the jubilee.

**18. do not feel aggrieved** Deuteronomy is interested in the Israelite's feelings, not just in compliance with the law. Having grown accustomed to a servant's usefulness, a master might regard the Torah's demand to free the servant as an unreasonable hardship. The text reminds masters that they have profited handsomely from their servants and have no reason to feel deprived.

**double the service of a hired man** The point may be that the wages of a hired man would have been twice what the servant cost in room and board and perhaps a defaulted loan. Furthermore, a hired man would have worked only during the day, whereas the servant was available day and night.

**God will bless you** Any loss incurred will be more than made up by God.

וּבְדִלַת וְהָיָה לְךָ עֶבֶד עוֹלָם וְאָף לְאַמְתֶּךָ  
תַּעֲשֶׂה-כֵן: <sup>18</sup> לֹא-יִקְשֶׁה בְּעֵינֶךָ בְּשִׁלַּחְךָ  
אֹתוֹ חֲפָזִי מֵעֲמֶךָ כִּי מִשְׁנֶה שְׂכָר שְׂכִיר  
עֲבַדְךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים וּבִרְכָּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה: פ

שְׁבִיעִי <sup>19</sup> כָּל-הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר יוֹלֵד בְּבָקְרֶךָ וּבְצֹאֲנֶךָ  
הַזָּכָר תִּקְדִּישׁ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲבֹד  
בְּבָכָר שׁוֹרְךָ וְלֹא תִגְזֹ בְכוֹר צֹאֲנֶךָ: <sup>20</sup> לִפְנֵי  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תֹאכְלֻנּוּ שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה בַּמָּקוֹם  
אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֶתְּךָ וּבֵיתְךָ: <sup>21</sup> וְכִי-  
יְהִי בּוֹ מוֹם פֶּסֶחַ אוֹ עֵזֶר כָּל מוֹם רָע  
לֹא תִזְבְּחֻנּוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: <sup>22</sup> בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ  
תֹאכְלֻנּוּ הַטֶּמֶא וְהַטְּהוֹר יַחְדָּו כַּצִּבִּי

#### THE SACRIFICE OF FIRSTBORN CATTLE

(vv. 19–23)

The first issue of all living things is considered holy, reserved for the Lord. Only after these are given to God, thereby acknowledging Him as the source and owner of all life, are the remainder of the crop and subsequent offspring of animals desacralized and freed for human use. Such practices were common in the ancient world.

**19. consecrate** Treat them as holy by not using them for any secular purpose and by eating them in a sacrificial meal.

**20. eat it annually before the LORD** As a *sh'lamim* sacrifice. According to 12:17–18, Levites also would be invited to take part in the meal (see Lev. 3).

**annually** Firstborn cattle must be sacrificed within a year of their birth, presumably on one of the pilgrimage festivals.

**21. if it has a defect** Offering a defective animal to God shows contempt. One would never present such an animal to a human ruler. Hence, in 17:1, sacrificing flawed animals is regarded as an abomination. It is among the offenses that profane God's name in Lev. 22:2,17–25,32.

**22.** A disqualified firstling may be eaten as food and need not be replaced sacrificially by another animal, redeemed for money, or destroyed, as would be the case with the firstling of an impure animal.

<sup>23</sup>Only you must not partake of its blood; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.

וְכַאֲלֵּי: <sup>23</sup>רַק אֶת־דָּמּוֹ לֹא תֹאכַל עַל־  
הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁפְּכֶנּוּ כַּמַּיִם: פ

**16** Observe the month of Abib and offer a passover sacrifice to the LORD your God, for it was in the month of Abib, at night, that the LORD your God freed you from Egypt. <sup>2</sup>You shall slaughter the passover sacrifice for the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the

**טז** שְׁמוֹר אֶת־חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ  
פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בַחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב  
הוֹצִיאָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לִילָה:  
<sup>2</sup>וְזָבַחְתָּ פֶסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ צֹאן וּבָקָר  
בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ

#### PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS (16:1–17)

The main themes of these festivals are commemoration of the Exodus and gratitude for the harvest. Deuteronomy mentions the festivals to make the point that they must be observed only at the chosen sanctuary. Before the time of the single sanctuary, the festivals would have been observed by a pilgrimage to any of the country's temple cities.

#### *The Pesah Sacrifice and the Feast of Unleavened Bread* (vv. 1–8)

The first festival consists of two distinct celebrations: (a) the *pesah*, the protective sacrifice offered at the end of the 14th day of the first month; and (b) the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the 7-day festival that begins on the 15th day (see Lev. 23:6; Num. 28:17). Note the difference between the *pesah* sacrifice described here and the one in Exod. 12, especially in regard to the nature of the animal, the method of its cooking, and where it is to be offered.

**1. month of Abib** Literally, “new ears of grain.” It is the old name of the month that falls in March and April, when ears of grain have just begun to appear. During the Babylonian exile (6th century B.C.E.), when Jews adopted the Babylonian month names that are still in use today, Abib (or *Aviv*) became known as *Nisan*.

**passover sacrifice** This sacrifice (*pesah*) reenacts the original *pesah* offering brought by the

Israelites on the eve of the Exodus immediately before the last of the Ten Plagues. The name is derived from the verb *pasah*, which describes the manner in which God spared the firstborn in the houses of the Israelites after the blood of the sacrifice was smeared on their doorposts and lintels (Exod. 12:13,23,27). In the Vulgate, the verb appears as “[the LORD] passed over,” and the sacrifice is called “passover.” The Hebrew verb, however, does not mean “to pass over.” Most of the ancient translations and commentaries render the verb as the Lord “spared,” “had compassion,” or “protected.” The sacrifice, accordingly, is called the “protective sacrifice,” referring to the protection of the Israelites during the final plague. This very likely is the correct translation.

**at night** Although the Israelites themselves started to leave Egypt “on the morrow of the passover offering” (Num. 33:3), God’s action—the slaying of Egypt’s firstborn at night—is viewed as the essence of the event.

**2. from the flock and the herd** According to Exod. 12:3–5 and 21, the *pesah* offering was brought only from the flock and limited to sheep and goats. Deuteronomy clearly indicates that herd animals, large bovines, may be used as well. Perhaps this reflects a different economy, or a time when the sacrifice would be made at a central sanctuary where many households could share a larger animal.

#### CHAPTER 16

The summary of the festivals in other books of the Torah (Exod. 23:14–17; Lev. 23; Num. 28–29) tell us how to celebrate the holidays. In contrast, Deuteronomy tells us why: “for it was in the month of Abib, at night, that the LORD your God freed you from Egypt” (v. 1), “for you departed . . . hurriedly” (v. 3), “Af-

ter the ingathering” (v. 13). One might think that the reason for observance should precede the commandment to observe, so that people would know why they were celebrating. It seems to be more effective pedagogy, though, especially for children, to start with the deed and only later explain that this is why we eat *matzah* on *Pesah* and live in booths on *Sukkot*.

place where the LORD will choose to establish His name. <sup>3</sup>You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress—for you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly—so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live. <sup>4</sup>For seven days no leaven shall be found with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh of what you slaughter on the evening of the first day shall be left until morning.

<sup>5</sup>You are not permitted to slaughter the pass-over sacrifice in any of the settlements that the LORD your God is giving you; <sup>6</sup>but at the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name, there alone shall you slaughter the passover sacrifice, in the evening, at sunset, the time of day when you departed from

שָׁם: <sup>3</sup>לֹא-תֹאכַל עָלֶיךָ חֶמֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים  
תֹּאכַל-עָלֶיךָ מִצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי בְּחִפְזוֹן  
יֵצְאֲתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת-יוֹם  
צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:  
<sup>4</sup>וְלֹא-יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שְׂאֵר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלְךָ שִׁבְעַת  
יָמִים וְלֹא-יָלִין מִן-הַבֶּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר תִּזְבַּח  
בְּעֶרֶב בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן לַבֹּקֶר:  
<sup>5</sup>לֹא תֹכַל לְזַבֵּחַ אֶת-הַפֶּסַח בְּאַחַד  
שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ: <sup>6</sup>כִּי  
אִם-אֶל-הַמִּקְוֶה אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
לְשֹׁכֶן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם תִּזְבַּח אֶת-הַפֶּסַח בְּעֶרֶב  
כְּבוֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מוֹעֵד מוֹעֵד צֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם:

**3. anything leavened** Food prepared from dough to which a leavening agent was added to make it rise. In postbiblical *halakhah*, this means any leavened product of wheat, barley, spelt, rye, or oats. Most *Ashk'nazim* also include rice, millet, corn, and legumes in this prohibition.

**unleavened bread** *Matzah*, bread made without yeast and not allowed to rise. It can be made quickly and was commonly prepared for unexpected guests. It is similar to the flat unleavened bread that Bedouins still bake on embers.

**bread of distress** The *matzah* is “bread of affliction” or “bread of poverty,” eaten by prisoners or by the poor. It is unpretentious, primitive fare that one would not normally eat. There is no evidence that the Israelites ate *matzah* when they were slaves. It commemorates the Exodus, not the enslavement.

**remember the day of your departure** By re-enacting the first *pesah* sacrifice and eating unleavened bread.

**4. leaven** Hebrew: *s'or*. Here refers to leavening agents, such as sourdough or yeast. It differs from “anything leavened” (*hametz*; v. 3), which

refers to foodstuffs that have been leavened by leavening agents.

**none of the flesh . . . shall be left until morning**

The sacrifice is offered at sunset (v. 6). It must be eaten through the night and finished by morning, thereby emulating procedures with the original *pesah* sacrifice in Egypt (see Exod. 12:8).

**5.** Once sacrificial worship is centralized in the chosen place, the *pesah* must be offered there. This is a characteristic requirement of Deuteronomy.

**6. the time of day when you departed from Egypt** The original *pesah* sacrifice, which was indispensable in ensuring the safety of the Israelites during the 10th plague, is here seen as the onset of the Exodus.

**7. cook** Literally, “boil,” reflecting the practice of a populace settled in the promised land. (Compare this with Exod. 12:9, which requires roasting, reflecting pastoral nomadic practice.)

**in the morning you may start on your journey back home** The entire seven days need not be spent at the chosen place, because it is necessary to return home in time to begin the harvest. Either

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**16:3. you shall not eat anything leavened** From this verse, the Talmud determines that the use or ownership of *hametz* (leavened products) is prohibited from midday on the day preceding *Pesah*, the 14th of *Nisan* (BT Pes. 28b). As a precautionary measure, the Sages rule that the *hametz* be burned at least one hour before midday (S.A. O.H. 434:2) and that one refrain from eating *hametz* from two hours before midday (i.e., the fourth hour after sunrise) (see Exod. 12:15; Lev. 2:11).



Egypt. <sup>7</sup>You shall cook and eat it at the place that the LORD your God will choose; and in the morning you may start back on your journey home. <sup>8</sup>After eating unleavened bread six days, you shall hold a solemn gathering for the LORD your God on the seventh day: you shall do no work.

<sup>9</sup>You shall count off seven weeks; start to count the seven weeks when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. <sup>10</sup>Then you shall observe the Feast of Weeks for the LORD your God, offering your freewill contribution according as the LORD your God has blessed you. <sup>11</sup>You shall rejoice before the LORD your God with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite in your communities, and the stranger,

וּבִשְׁלֹתָ וְאָכַלְתָּ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ וּפְנִיתָ בִּבְקָר וְהִלַּכְתָּ לְאֹהֲלֶיךָ: <sup>8</sup>שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מִצֹּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי עֲצַרְתָּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה: <sup>ט</sup>

<sup>9</sup>שִׁבְעָה שָׁבָעַת תִּסְפֹּר-לָךְ מֵהַחֵל חֲרֹמֶשׁ בְּקִמָּה תַחֵל לִסְפֹּר שִׁבְעָה שָׁבָעוֹת: <sup>10</sup>וַעֲשִׂיתָ חֹג שָׁבָעוֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִסֹּת נִדְבַת יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן פֶּאֶשֶׁר יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: <sup>11</sup>וְשִׂמְחָתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאַמְתֶּךָ וְהַלִּוִי

Deuteronomy does not consider travel to be forbidden on festival days or it does not regard the second part of the day, following the *Pesah* sacrifice and meal, as sacred. Some traditional commentators hold that “in the morning” refers to the morning of the second day of the festival.

**8. six days** That is, for the first six of the seven days on which it must be eaten (v. 3). According to postbiblical Jewish law, eating unleavened bread is obligatory only on the first day and not on the remaining days, though nothing leavened may be eaten.

**solemn gathering** Because this gathering occurs after the people have returned home, it must take place in their hometowns. This clearly indicates that Deuteronomy intends to allow nonsacrificial religious gatherings to take place throughout the country. Only sacrifice is restricted to the chosen place.

**do no work** Unlike on *Shabbat*, preparation of food is allowed (Exod. 12:16).

*The Feast of Weeks* (vv. 9–12)

The name of the festival is derived from the fact that it is observed exactly seven weeks after the onset of the harvest. The passage of seven weeks

is an essential aspect of the festival. Until seven weeks have passed, it is not known whether the harvest will be successfully completed and plentiful enough to sustain life and not be damaged by late rain or pests.

**9. count off** That is, calculate.

**seven weeks** The time needed to complete the harvest.

**when the sickle is first put to the standing grain** That is, when the grain harvest begins, normally in April. The text gives no exact date, probably because the harvest cannot begin everywhere on the same date owing to regional variations in the climate. Thus farmers from diverse places probably would have observed the feast at different times.

**10. Observe the Feast of Weeks** A time of solemn gathering on which no work is permitted and loaves made of new grain are offered as first fruits of the grain harvest (see Lev. 23:16–21). Presumably, tithes, firstlings, freewill, and obligatory offerings were also brought, as on other festivals.

**freewill contribution** Offering what you can afford as a result of the harvest (cf. v. 17, 12:15, 15:14). The contribution might be of produce, animals, or money.

**7. in the morning you may start back on your journey home** According to the Tosafot, the prohibition of traveling on festivals is not found in the Torah; it is a Rabbinic enactment (BT Hag. 17b, s.v. *dikhtiv*).

**9–11.** *Shavu-ot* (the Feast of Weeks) is presented in the Torah as a celebration of the early harvest, marked by bringing the first fruits to

the Temple. In Second Temple times, it was calculated that the 50th day after the Exodus—the date of *Shavu-ot*—was the day on which the Torah was given at Mount Sinai. *Shavu-ot* became *z'man matan Torateinu* (the time of the giving of our Torah). Like *Pesah* and *Sukkot*, *Shavu-ot* thus acquired a historical dimension along with its agricultural significance.

the fatherless, and the widow in your midst, at the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name. <sup>12</sup>Bear in mind that you were slaves in Egypt, and take care to obey these laws.

<sup>13</sup>After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. <sup>14</sup>You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. <sup>15</sup>You shall hold a festival for the LORD your God seven days, in the place that the LORD will choose; for the LORD your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy.

<sup>16</sup>Three times a year—on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths—all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed, <sup>17</sup>but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the LORD your God has bestowed upon you.

**12.** The memory of slavery is invoked to motivate extending this prescription to the servants and the poor mentioned in verse 11.

*The Feast of Booths* (vv. 13–15)

The third feast, at the end of the summer, celebrates the gathering of grain and new wine into storage for the coming year, the goal of all the preceding agricultural activities. This is the most exuberant of the festivals and has come to be called “the time of our rejoicing” (*z'man simḥateinu*).

**13. After the ingathering from your threshing floor and from the vat** That is, after the processed grain and the unfermented grape juice are put in containers and stored away in advance of the autumn rains.

**Feast of Booths** According to Lev. 23:42, the name is derived from the practice of dwelling in booths, or bowers, during the seven-day festival.

**14.** The harvest season and festivals were proverbial times for celebration.

אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ וְהִיתוּם וְהָאֱלֹמָנָה  
אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם: <sup>12</sup> וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי-עֶבֶד  
הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְשָׁמַרְתָּ וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת-  
הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה: פ

<sup>13</sup> חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים  
בְּאַסְפֹּךְ מִגֶּרְנֶךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶּךָ: <sup>14</sup> וְשָׂמַחְתָּ בַּחֲגֹךָ  
אֹתָהּ וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וְהָלֹאִי  
וְהִגֵּר וְהִיתוּם וְהָאֱלֹמָנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ:  
<sup>15</sup> שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תַּחֲגֹל לִיהוָה לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה כִּי יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכָל מַעֲשֶׂה יָדְךָ  
וְהִיִּיתָ אֶף שְׂמֵחַ:

<sup>16</sup> שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים | בְּשָׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל-זָכוֹר  
אֶת-פָּנָי | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר  
בַּחֲגֵי הַמִּצְוֹת וּבַחֲגֵי הַשְּׂבָעוֹת וּבַחֲגֵי  
הַסֻּכּוֹת וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה אֶת-פָּנָי יְהוָה רִיקָם:  
<sup>17</sup> אִישׁ כַּמֶּתְנֶת יָדוֹ כְּבִרְכַּת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לָּךְ: ס

**15. all your crops . . . all your undertakings . . . nothing but joy** The soaring extent of the blessing explains why the celebrating is to last a full seven days.

**16. Feast of Unleavened Bread** Here, the term must refer to the night of the *pesah* sacrifice (and not the following seven days), because that is the only time (according to v. 7) when worshippers are required to be at the chosen place.

**males** Only the adult males are obligated to appear, probably because pregnant and nursing women and young children could not reasonably be required to make long trips. Nevertheless, women and children frequently did take part, as is clear from verses 11 and 14.

**appear before the LORD** To pay Him homage at His sanctuary. This resembles the practice of homage to human sovereigns as reflected in treaties.

**17. each with his own gift** Literally, “each according to his means” (as in v. 10).

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**16:14. rejoice** Prohibitions on transferring fire and carrying are less restrictive for the biblical festivals than for *Shabbat*. This is in order to add joy to the festivals (MT Festivals 1:4–6).

# הפטרה שלישית דנחמתא

## THIRD HAFTARAH OF CONSOLATION HAFTARAH FOR R'EIH

ISAIAH 54:11–55:5

(Recite on the 3rd Shabbat after the 9th of Av, coinciding with the reading of R'eih. On the Seven Haftarat of Consolation, see p. 1032.)

Bold promises of physical and spiritual transformation introduce this passage from Isaiah. They are presented in unilateral terms. Nothing is demanded of the people. God promises a spectacular rebuilding of Zion, a thorough restoration to raise it out of a depressing situation (54:11–12). And Zion's children will be transformed into disciples of the Lord, who will protect them (vv. 13–17).

The second part of the *haftarah* (55:1–5) bespeaks a more bilateral relationship. Repeatedly God calls on the nation to turn to Him: "Give heed to Me"; "Incline your ear and come to Me." Spiritual transformation, a condition for renewal, promises true sustenance: "Hearken, and you

shall be revived" (v. 3). Then Israel will lead other nations (vv. 4–5).

A rhetoric of assurance features the Hebrew particle *hinnei* or *hen* (behold, surely). In the first part it emphasizes freedom from fear (54:15). Although the translation does not render it directly, this particle also punctuates the promise of Zion's riches and highlights Israel's new role among the nations (54:11,16; 55:4,5). In the Hebrew text, it both evokes the immediacy of God's presence and creates an insistent, decisive tone.

Modulation from Israel's disconsolate condition to one of confidence in God's creative reality is underscored by the Hebrew particle *lo* (no, not). It also highlights the nation's shift from a lack of life's essentials to bounty, and from discomfort among other nations to being their commander (54:14,17; 55:2,5).

**54** <sup>11</sup>Unhappy, storm-tossed one, uncomfortable!

I will lay carbuncles as your building stones  
And make your foundations of sapphires.

<sup>12</sup>I will make your battlements of rubies,

Your gates of precious stones,

The whole encircling wall of gems.

<sup>13</sup>And all your children shall be disciples of  
the LORD,

And great shall be the happiness of your children;

**Isaiah 54:13. disciples** Hebrew: *limmudei*, a technical term (see 8:16, 50:4).

**your children** Hebrew: *banayikh*, spelled בניך. In a well-known *midrash*, the second in-

**נדר**  
<sup>11</sup>ענייה סערה לא נחמה  
הנה אנכי מרביץ בפורי אבניך  
ויסדתיך בספירים:  
<sup>12</sup>ושמתי כדכר שמשתך  
ושעריך לאבני אקדח  
וכל-גבולך לאבני-חפץ:  
<sup>13</sup>וכל-בניך למודי יהוה  
ורב שלום בניהך:

stance of this word in v. 13 is reread as *bonayikh* (your builders); it became the basis for teaching that knowledgeable children are the culture builders of the next generation (BT Ber. 64a). The

<sup>14</sup>You shall be established through righteousness.  
ness.

You shall be safe from oppression,  
And shall have no fear;  
From ruin, and it shall not come near you.

<sup>15</sup>Surely no harm can be done  
Without My consent:

Whoever would harm you  
Shall fall because of you.

<sup>16</sup>It is I who created the smith  
To fan the charcoal fire  
And produce the tools for his work;  
So it is I who create  
The instruments of havoc.

<sup>17</sup>No weapon formed against you  
Shall succeed,  
And every tongue that contends with you at  
law

You shall defeat.  
Such is the lot of the servants of the LORD,  
Such their triumph through Me  
—declares the LORD.

<sup>14</sup>בַּצְדָּקָה תִּכּוֹנְנִי

רַחֲמֵי מַעֲשֶׂק

כִּי־לֹא תִירָאִי

וּמִמְחִתָּהּ כִּי לֹא־תִקְרַב אֵלֶיךָ:

<sup>15</sup>הֵן גֹּזֵר יָגוּר

אֶפֶס מֵאוֹתִי

מִי־גָר אֶתָּךְ

עָלֶיךָ יִפּוֹל:

<sup>16</sup>הֵן הֵנָּה אֲנֹכִי בָרָאתִי חָרָשׁ

נִפְחָ בְּאֵשׁ פָּחָם

וּמוֹצִיא כְּלֵי לְמַעֲשָׂהּוּ

וְאֲנֹכִי בָרָאתִי

מִשְׁחִית לְחַבֵּל:

<sup>17</sup>כָּל־כְּלֵי יוֹצֵר עָלֶיךָ

לֹא יִצְלַח

וְכָל־לְשׁוֹן תִּקְוִים־אֶתָּךְ לְמִשְׁפָּט

תִּרְשָׁעִי

זֹאת נִחְלַת עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה

וְצִדְקָתָם מֵאֵתִי

נֹאם־יְהוָה: ס

**55** Ho, all who are thirsty,

Come for water,  
Even if you have no money;  
Come, buy food and eat:  
Buy food without money,  
Wine and milk without cost.

<sup>2</sup>Why do you spend money for what is not  
bread,

**נה** הוּי כָּל־צָמֵא

לָבוֹ לַמַּיִם

וְאִשֶּׁר אֵין־לּוֹ כֶּסֶף

לָבוֹ שִׁבְרוּ וְאָכְלוּ

וּלְכוּ שִׁבְרוּ בְּלוֹא־כֶסֶף

וּבְלוֹא מַחִיר יַיִן וְחֶלֶב:

<sup>2</sup>לָמָּה תִּשְׁקֹל־כֶּסֶף בְּלוֹא־לֶחֶם

spelling is בוניכי in the large Isaiah scroll from Qumran (the “Dead Sea Scrolls”), which supports the midrashic vocalization *bonayikh*. However, this spelling may equally indicate that the original sense was “your learned ones” (from the root בִּין, “to know”). If so, this noun would thus parallel “disciples of the LORD” in the first part of the verse.

**14. You shall be established through righteousness** This phrase recalls Isa. 1:27, “Zion shall be redeemed with justice; / Her repentant

ones with righteousness” (see Comment, p. 1004). In this case, however, the divine word conveys assurance, not a condition to be fulfilled.

**17. triumph** Hebrew: *tz’dakah*, justification or vindication in court. Here it counterpoints the opening clause of the verse. God brings triumph as the vindicator of Israel. Both senses of the word recur in Isa. 40–66 (see 42:21, 45:25, 50:8, 58:2,8, 63:1).

**Isaiah 55:1. thirsty** Lacking divine instruction (see Amos 8:11).

Your earnings for what does not satisfy?  
 Give heed to Me,  
 And you shall eat choice food  
 And enjoy the richest viands.  
<sup>3</sup>Incline your ear and come to Me;  
 Hearken, and you shall be revived.  
 And I will make with you an everlasting cov-  
 enant,  
 The enduring loyalty promised to David.  
<sup>4</sup>As I made him a leader of peoples,  
 A prince and commander of peoples,  
<sup>5</sup>So you shall summon a nation you did not  
 know,  
 And a nation that did not know you  
 Shall come running to you—  
 For the sake of the LORD your God,  
 The Holy One of Israel who has glorified you.

וַיִּגְיַעְכֶּם בְּלֹא לְשַׂבְּעָה  
 שָׁמְעוּ שְׁמוֹעַ אֵלַי  
 וְאָכְלוּ-טוֹב  
 וְתַתְּעִנְג בְּדָשׁן נִפְשְׁכֶם:  
<sup>3</sup>הִטּוּ אָזְנוֹכֶם וּלְכוּ אֵלַי  
 שָׁמְעוּ וּתְחִי נִפְשְׁכֶם  
 וְאֶכְרַתָּה לָכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם  
 חֶסֶדִי דָוִד הַנֶּאֱמָנִים:  
<sup>4</sup>הֵן עַד לְאוֹמִים נִתְּנִי  
 נָגִיד וּמִצְנָה לְאֻמִּים:  
<sup>5</sup>הֵן גּוֹי לֹא-תִדְעַ תִּקְרָא  
 וְגוֹי לֹא-יֵדְעוּךָ  
 אֵלֶיךָ יָרוּצוּ  
 לְמַעַן יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
 וּלְקִדּוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי פָאֲרָךְ: ס

**3. enduring loyalty promised to David** The royal covenant given to David (2 Sam. 7:15) is now transferred to the entire people. Here *hesed* (enduring loyalty) means faithfulness to that covenant.

**4. leader** Hebrew: *ed*, literally, “witness.” The figure “leader of peoples” combines images of Israel’s mission as a “light of nations” and as “witnesses” to God’s power (see 42:7, 43:10).