

**TORAH AND
HAFTARAH
READING
FOR
TISHA B'AV
AND OTHER FAST DAYS
FROM THE ETZ HAYIM HUMASH**

of Egypt, have acted basely. ⁸They have been quick to turn aside from the way that I enjoined upon them. They have made themselves a molten calf and bowed low to it and sacrificed to it, saying: "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

⁹The LORD further said to Moses, "I see that this is a stiffnecked people. ¹⁰Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation." ¹¹But Moses implored the LORD his God, saying, "Let not Your anger, O LORD, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. ¹²Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and an-

מהר מן-הדרך אשר צויתם עשו להם
עגל מסכה וישתחווי-לו ויזבחי-לו
ויאמרו אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך
מארץ מצרים:

⁹ויאמר יהוה אל-משה ראייתי את-העם
הזה והנה עם-קשה-ערוף הוא: ¹⁰ועתה
הפיחה לי ויחר-אפי בהם ואכלם
ואעשה אותך לגוי גדול: ¹¹ויחל משה
את-פני יהוה אלהיו ויאמר למה יהוה
יחרה אפך בעמך אשר הוצאת מארץ
מצרים בכח גדול ובניד חזקה: ¹²למה
יאמרו מצרים לאמר ברעה הוציאם
להרג אתם בהרים ולכלתם מעל פני

8. to turn aside from the way The text does not say "from Me"; the people have adopted pagan modes of worship, but still they worship the God of Israel.

9. I see Divine "seeing" as opposed to Aaron's "seeing" in verse 5.

stiffnecked A frequent image of obstinacy, derived from the farmer's experience with work animals. When an animal's neck is stiff, it is hard for the driver, using the reins to turn it in any direction.

10. a great nation The phrase evokes the di-

vine promises made by God to Abraham and is seized on at once by Moses.

11. Moses rejects God's offer to make his own descendants the sole heirs to the promises made to the patriarchs. This unselfish characteristic is again displayed in verse 32.

12. The effect of the events of the Exodus would now be undone, for the basic objective of the events in Egypt was that the Egyptians might "know" the Lord, i.e., recognize His incomparable nature.

9. a stiffnecked people Ami is quoted in the Midrash: "Is that a criticism? Rather it is to their credit. That stubbornness is what has permitted us to remain Jews" (Exod. R. 42:9). According to Abравanel, to be stiffnecked means to be unable to turn one's head and look down the road to see the consequences of one's actions.

10. let Me be In the words of the Midrash: Who is stopping God—that God must say, "Let Me be"? It seems to be a hint that God wants to be talked out of such fierce anger (Exod. R. 42:9). This may have encouraged Moses' intercession on the people's behalf. A striking *midrash* pictures God as a wife and Moses as God's husband (*ish ha-elohim*, "the man of God" [Deut. 33:1], understood as "the husband of God") exercising his right to cancel God's vow, as a husband in ancient times could annul a vow that had been made by his wife in his hearing; see Num. 30:14 (Exod. R. 43:4). The Mid-

rash envisions God saying, "Whenever I win an argument with My children, as at the time of the Flood or of Sodom and Gomorrah, I lose" (i.e., God ends up destroying culpable human beings). "Whenever I lose an argument, I win" (as here, when Moses persuades God not to punish Israel) (PR 21).

11. Moses implored The unusual Hebrew verb translated as "implore" (*va-y'hal*) resembles the verb meaning "to be sick," which prompted the Midrash to suggest that Moses became physically ill when he realized what the people had done. God then responded, not so much to Moses' argument as to the strength of his love for and identification with his people (Exod. R. 43:4).

12. Let not the Egyptians say Should God renounce the people now, not only Israel will suffer but God's reputation, so to speak, would be diminished as well.

nihilate them from the face of the earth.' Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people. ¹³Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, how You swore to them by Your Self and said to them: I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke, to possess forever." ¹⁴And the LORD renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people.

¹⁵Thereupon Moses turned and went down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, tablets inscribed on both their surfaces: they were inscribed on the one side and on the other. ¹⁶The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing, incised upon the tablets. ¹⁷When Joshua heard the sound of the people in its boisterousness, he said to Moses, "There is a cry of war in the camp." ¹⁸But he answered,

"It is not the sound of the tune of triumph,
Or the sound of the tune of defeat;
It is the sound of song that I hear!"

¹⁹As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became en-

13. Remember See Comment to 2:24.

14. the LORD renounced Moses' intercession succeeded in averting the threatened punishment.

MOSES SMASHES THE TABLETS AND DESTROYS THE CALF (vv. 15-20)

15. bearing the two tablets Although their size is not recorded here, their maximum dimensions can be determined by the size of the Ark in which they were to repose, as presented in 25:10.

13. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel The reference to the patriarchs here involves the concept known as "the merit of the ancestors" (*z'khut avot*). Our own failings are balanced in part by the remembered virtues of our forebears. Solomon Schechter translated this concept felicitously as "original virtue," in contrast to the notion of "original sin" inherited from one's ancestors. The Mid-

האדמה שוב מחרון אפך והנחם על-
הרעה לעמך: ¹³ זכר לאברהם ליצחק
ולישׂראל עבדיך אשר נשבעת להם בך
ותדבר אלהם ארבה את-זרעכם בכוכבי
השמים וכל-הארץ הזאת אשר אמרתי
אתן לזרעכם ונחלו לעלם: ¹⁴ וינחם
יהוה על-הרעה אשר דבר לעשות
לעמו: פ

¹⁵ ויפן וירד משה מן-ההר ושני לחת
העדת בידו לחת כתבים משני עבריהם
מזה ומזה הם כתבים: ¹⁶ והלחות מעשה
אלהים המה והמכתב מכתב אלהים
הוא חרות על-הלחות: ¹⁷ וישמע יהושע
את-קול העם ברעה ברעה ויאמר אל-
משה קול מלחמה במחנה: ¹⁸ ויאמר
אין קול ענות גבורה
ואין קול ענות חלושה
קול ענות אנכי שמע:

¹⁹ ויהי כאשר קרב אל-המחנה וירא

16. God's work... God's writing This verse amplifies God's instruction to Moses in 24:12. **incised** -Hebrew: *harut*; found in the Bible only here.

17. Joshua He was stationed partway up the mountain awaiting Moses' return, as told in 24:13; thus he could hear the rising din but could not view the scene.

18. But he answered Verses 7 and 8 tell us that Moses has already been informed.

19. As Moses approaches the camp and wit-

rash here compares Israel to a grapevine. Just as branches bearing new grapes support themselves on earlier, dead branches, so the Israelites and later generations of Jews are supported and sustained by the example and memory of their departed ancestors (Exod. R. 44:1).

19. A Rabbinic legend describes Moses, a man of advanced age, carrying the heavy stone tablets down the mountainside with ease. But

enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰He took the calf that they had made and burned it; he ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water and so made the Israelites drink it.

²¹Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?" ²²Aaron said, "Let not my lord be enraged. You know that this people is bent on evil. ²³They said to me, 'Make us a god to lead us; for that man Moses, who brought us from

nesses the scene, he realizes the full extent of the people's degradation and recognizes the enormity of their sin. He no longer is thinking of appeasing God. He, too, burns with anger.

he hurled the tablets This was not an impetuous act; rather, it quite deliberately signified the abrogation of the Covenant. In ancient Near Eastern legal terminology "to break the tablet" means to invalidate or repudiate a document or agreement.

at the foot of the mountain Where the people were assembled.

²⁰ The same series of destructive acts is found in the description of the annihilation of the god Mot, god of the underworld, in Ugaritic literature. It conveys a picture of the total annihilation of the obnoxious object.

water Unidentified here, the water is described in Deut. 9:21 as "the brook that comes

when he sees the Israelites dancing around the Golden Calf, the letters fly off the tablets, which become two large blank stones. At that point, they become too much for Moses to carry; they fall from his grasp and break. When Moses felt he was bringing God's word to a people eager to receive it, he was capable of doing something difficult and demanding. When he had reason to suspect that his efforts were in vain, the task became too hard for him (PdRE 45). Another *midrash* pictures Moses deliberately breaking the tablets of stone, not out of anger or a sense that Israel was not worthy of them but to destroy the evidence that Israel had ever been commanded not to worship idols (Exod. R. 43:1), "Sometimes, canceling the Torah is the only way to save it" (BT Men. 99b).

את־הַעֲגֹל וּמַחֲלֹת וַיִּחַר־אֶף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֶךְ מִיָּדוֹ מִיָּדָיו אֶת־הַלְּחֹת וַיִּשְׂבֵר אֹתָם תַּחַת הַהָר: ²⁰ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָעֲגֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׂרֹף בָּאֵשׁ וַיִּטְחֵן עַד אֲשֶׁר־דָּק וַיִּזֶר עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׁק אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ²¹ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן מַה־עָשָׂה לָּךְ הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי־הִבֵּאתָ עָלָיו חַטָּאת גְּדוֹלָה: ²² וַיֹּאמֶר אַהֲרֹן אֶל־יְהוָה אֵף אֲדֹנָי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֶת־הָעָם כִּי בָרַע הוּא: ²³ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לִי עֲשֵׂה־לָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ

down from the mountain." This implies a single source of water for the entire camp so that, apparently, no individual could escape drinking the mixture.

made the Israelites drink it And thereby to identify the transgressors (cf. the trial by ordeal in Num. 5:12-31).

AARON'S APOLOGIA (vv. 21-24)

Moses breaks his silence. The question he puts to Aaron is actually a harsh rebuke.

^{21. great sin} This is a legal term. Found in ancient Near Eastern marriage contracts, it always refers to adultery, suggesting here that the worship of the Golden Calf is an act of gross infidelity.

^{22-24.} Aaron excuses himself by reviling the people and glossing over his involvement in the making of the calf image. He also claims that he did not fashion it, implying divine approval!

A 19th-century commentator observes that Moses here makes the point that there is no intrinsic holiness in things. Only God is intrinsically holy. Physical objects can be holy only insofar as they lead people to God. When Israel disregards the words on the stone tablets, they become mere stones (*Meshekh Hokhmah*).

Hirsch asks why Moses broke the tablets in despair only when he saw the Israelites dancing around the Calf (v. 19)—and not earlier, when he learned of their transgression (v. 8). He answers his own question: "When false conceptions of idolatry are rooted merely in the intellect, they can be eradicated by intellectual argument and instruction." When the attachment to wrongdoing reaches the emotional level, however, it becomes nearly impossible to talk people out of it.

the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.’²⁴ So I said to them, ‘Whoever has gold, take it off!’ They gave it to me and I hurled it into the fire and out came this calf!”

²⁵Moses saw that the people were out of control—since Aaron had let them get out of control—so that they were a menace to any who might oppose them. ²⁶Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come here!” And all the Levites rallied to him. ²⁷He said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Each of you put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay brother, neighbor, and kin.” ²⁸The Levites did as Moses had bidden; and some three thousand of the people fell that day. ²⁹And Moses said, “Dedicate yourselves to the LORD this day—for each of you has been against son and brother—that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.”

³⁰The next day Moses said to the people, “You

out came this calf As though it produced itself.

SELECTION OF THE LEVITES (vv. 25–29)

The destruction of the Golden Calf sparks a riot among its worshipers. The Levites are called in to suppress it and to punish the guilty ones.

25. since Aaron . . . out of control This is a clear rejection of Aaron’s lame excuse and a condemnation of his action.

26. all the Levites Moses’ own tribe. They remained faithful to the Covenant and maintained the purity of Israel’s worship. This is the foundation story for the special place of the Levites in Israelite religion.

27. This is indeed a harsh measure, made intelligible by the realization that the idolatry of the calf worshipers very nearly caused God to give up on everyone, ending the Israelite enterprise almost as soon as it had begun. The Midrash recalls that the Levites’ eponymous ancestor, Levi son of Jacob, did something similar when he slaughtered the men of Shechem to avenge the dishonoring of his sister, Dinah; see Gen. 34 (Sifrei Deut. 349). The tribe of Levi

כִּי־יֵצֵא מִן־הָאֵשׁ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֵנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדְעֵנוּ מִה־הָיָה לוֹ: ²⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר
לָהֶם לְמִי זֶהב הַתְּפָרְקוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ־לִי
וַאֲשַׁלְכֵהוּ בָאֵשׁ וַיֵּצֵא הָעֵגֶל הַזֶּה:

²⁵ וַיִּרְא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם כִּי פָרַע הוּא
כִּי־פָרַעַה אֶהְרֹן לְשִׁמְצָה בְּקִמְיָהֶם:
²⁶ וַיַּעֲמֵד מֹשֶׁה בַשַּׁעַר הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מִי
לַיהוָה אֵלָי וַיֵּאֲסֹפוּ אֵלָיו כָּל־בְּנֵי לֵוִי:
²⁷ וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁימוּ אִישׁ־חַרְבּוֹ עַל־יָרְכוֹ עִבְרוּ
וּשׁוּבוּ מִשַּׁעַר לְשַׁעַר בַּמַּחֲנֶה וְהִרְגוּ אִישׁ־
אֶת־אָחִיו וְאִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת־
קָרְבוֹ: ²⁸ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי־לֵוִי כְּדִבְרֵי מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפְּל
מִן־הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כֶּשֶׁלֶשֶׁת אֲלָפֵי
אִישׁ: ²⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מָלְאוּ יְדֵכֶם הַיּוֹם
לַיהוָה כִּי אִישׁ בָּבְנוּ וּבְאָחִיו וּלְתַת
עֲלֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה:

³⁰ וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרֶת וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם

27. Thus says the LORD This solemn formula is employed here to signify that the assignment to the Levites is beyond the right of any human authority to impose. It cannot be taken as a precedent for the disposition of future cases.

slay brother They must be absolutely impartial while carrying out their grim task.

MOSES’ SECOND INTERCESSION (vv. 30–34)

Moses, through his first intercession with God, secured the annulment of the divine decree to destroy Israel. Now he attempts to gain complete forgiveness for the people.

30. The next day After the carnage.

would soon be asked to sublimate its fierce passion in the task of guarding and transporting the portable shrine. Just as the people have to learn not to treat an idol as an embodiment of God, God has to learn not to expect the average person to comprehend a totally abstract, invisible deity. The answer to the quest for a representation is not a Golden Calf but the tabernacle, as discussed in the previous and subsequent *parashiyot*.

have been guilty of a great sin. Yet I will now go up to the LORD; perhaps I may win forgiveness for your sin.”³¹ Moses went back to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold. Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the record which You have written!”³³ But the LORD said to Moses, “He who has sinned against Me, him only will I erase from My record.³⁴ Go now, lead the people where I told you. See, My angel shall go before you. But when I make an accounting, I will bring them to account for their sins.”

³⁵Then the LORD sent a plague upon the people, for what they did with the calf that Aaron made.

אתם חטאתם חטאה גדלה ועתה אעלה אל־יהוה אולי אכפרה בעד חטאתכם: ³¹וישב משה אל־יהוה ויאמר אנא חטא העם הזה חטאה גדלה ויעשו להם אלהי זקב: ³²ועתה אם־תשא חטאתם ואם־אין מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת: ³³ויאמר יהוה אל־משה מי אשר חטא־לי אמחנו מספרי: ³⁴ועתה לך נחה את־העם אל אשר־דברתי לך הנה* מלאכי לך לפניך וביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם חטאתם:

³⁵ויגף יהוה את־העם על אשר עשו את־העגל אשר עשה אהרן: ט

33 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Set out from here, you and the people that you have

לג וידבר יהוה אל־משה לך עלה מזה אתה והעם אשר העלית

v. 34. סבירין ומטעין "והנה"

go up To the summit of Sinai.

31-32. The prayer blends confession with a plea for pardon. And another element is introduced: Moses ties his personal destiny to his people's fate. There can hardly be a more impressive example of selfless “love of Israel.”

erase me from the record This request seems to reflect a widespread ancient Near Eastern popular belief in the existence of heavenly “books.” Here, Moses' request is framed in the figurative language of the book of life. He is asking to die if Israel is not forgiven.

33-34. God responds to Moses' entreaty, demanding individual accountability. In addition, the people as a whole bear collective responsibility. Divine promises of national territory made to the people of Israel are unalterable, but total absolution for the sin of the Golden Calf cannot be given. The Israelites receive a suspended sentence; they are on probation. The punishment, however, will come in due time (see Ezek. 20).

35. This verse belongs after verse 20, where it would indicate that the water ordeal caused the guilty ones to be stricken—the goal of a similar procedure to be followed in the case of a suspected

adulteress (Num. 5). The calf worshipers thus would have been readily identifiable to the Levites.

for what they did This difficult phrase seems to mean that Aaron and the people shared the blame equally; they, for demanding a visible “god”; he, for yielding to them.

MOSES SEEKS GOD'S CONTINUED PRESENCE (33:1-23)

Although Moses' intercession saves the people from annihilation, the Israelites have not yet secured full pardon and reconciliation with God. The unifying theme of this chapter is Moses' concern for the continued presence of God in the midst of His people, as symbolized by the mobile sanctuary.

WITHDRAWAL OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE (vv. 1-6)

Implementation of the punishment decreed in 32:10 has been suspended, only because of God's promise to the patriarchs (32:13), not because of the people's merit.

1. Set out Hebrew: *lekh alei*; literally “go, ascend.” This is in contrast to 32:7, *lekh red*, “go,

brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, "To your offspring will I give it"—²I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites—^{3a}a land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go in your midst, since you are a stiffnecked people, lest I destroy you on the way."

⁴When the people heard this harsh word, they went into mourning, and none put on his finery.

⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelite people, 'You are a stiffnecked people. If I were to go in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now, then, leave off your finery, and I will consider what to do to you.'" ⁶So the Israelites remained stripped of the finery from Mount Horeb on.

⁷Now Moses would take the Tent and pitch it outside the camp, at some distance from the camp. It was called the Tent of Meeting, and

descend," signifying that there has been a reversal of fate.

you Moses' request in the last part of 32:32 is emphatically denied.

the people It is no longer "your people" as God said to Moses in 32:7. The shift connotes some softening of the effect of Israel's alienation from God.

2. an angel The promise of 23:20–33 and 32:34 is repeated, but here the emissary is not designated "My" angel. The change is ominous.

3. I will not go . . . lest I destroy you Paradoxically, God's withdrawal of His Presence is a merciful measure; it is intended to avert the inevitable destructive consequences of another episode such as that of the Golden Calf.

4. This decision has a shattering effect on the people, for it was the absence of a representation of God's immanence that had provoked the demand for a material image in the first place.

5. leave off The people have already done this. Hence, it is best to invert the order of verses 4–5, taking verse 4 as the response to the divine command.

6. from Mount Horeb on From that time on, throughout the wilderness wanderings. It is

מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי
לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר לְזֶרְעִי
אֶתְנַנֶּה: ² וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ מַלְאָךְ וְגִרְשִׁיתִי
אֶת-הַכְּנַעֲנִי הָאֹמֹרִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהַפְּרִזִּי הַחִוִּי
וְהַיְבוּסִי: ³ אֶל-אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ כִּי
לֹא אֵעֲלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ כִּי עִם-קִשְׁה-עֲרֹף
אֶתָּה פֹן-אֶכְלֶךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ:

⁴ וַיִּשְׁמַע הָעָם אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וַיִּתְאַבְּלוּ
וְלֹא-שָׂתוּ אִישׁ עֲדוּיו עָלָיו:

⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אֲמַר אֶל-בְּנֵי-
יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם עִם-קִשְׁה-עֲרֹף רַגַע אַחַד
אֵעֲלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ וְכָלִיתִיךָ וְעַתָּה הוֹרֵד עֲדִיךָ
מֵעֲלֶיךָ וְאֲדַעֵה מָה אֲעֲשֶׂה-לָּךְ: ⁶ וַיִּתְנַצְּלוּ
בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-עֲדֵימָם מִהָר חוֹרֵב:

⁷ וּמֹשֶׁה יָקַח אֶת-הָאֹהֶל וְנִטְה-לוֹ | מִחוּץ
לַמַּחֲנֶה הַרְחֵק מִן-הַמַּחֲנֶה וְקָרָא לוֹ אֹהֶל

a sign of the people's remorse over their transgression. See Comment to 3:1.

MOSES' EXCEPTIONAL STATUS (vv. 7–11)

This section continues the theme of God's presence and connects with verse 3. Because God withholds His indwelling in the camp of Israel, Moses employs an extraordinary stratagem. He pitches "the Tent" outside the camp. This is not the tabernacle—which has not yet been constructed—but a private tent where he might commune with God.

7. the Tent The definite article seems to indicate a well-known, specific tent, although one has not yet been mentioned. Apparently, it was the site of Moses' previous dialogues with God. It is possible that there were two different traditions regarding a "tent," with the tabernacle in the heart of the camp serving as a shrine for sacrifices without speech, and the Tent outside serving as a place for inquiring of God.

outside the camp, at some distance The description draws attention to the Israelites' alienation from God. The camp has become polluted spiritually through the impurity brought on by the episode of the Golden Calf.

whoever sought the LORD would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp. 8Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he had entered the Tent. 9And when Moses entered the Tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the Tent, while He spoke with Moses. 10When all the people saw the pillar of cloud poised at the entrance of the Tent, all the people would rise and bow low, each at the entrance of his tent. 11The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. And he would then return to the camp; but his attendant, Joshua son of Nun, a youth, would not stir out of the Tent.

12Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Lead this people forward,' but You have not made known to me whom You will send with me. Further, You have said, 'I have singled you out by name, and you have, indeed, gained My favor.' 13Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and continue in Your favor. Con-

9. at the entrance of the Tent Not inside the tabernacle, where the divine Presence is said to rest continuously and where God converses with Moses from within the Holy of Holies. The place of communication here is at the entrance, where God's self-manifestation is intermittent.

11. face to face. The same expression is used in Deut. 34:10, whereas in Num. 12:6-8 it is said that God communicated with Moses "mouth to mouth." This figurative language is intended to convey the pre-eminence and uniqueness of Moses as a prophetic figure who experiences a special mode of revelation. His experience is personal and direct, not mediated through visions or dreams, and the message always is plain and straightforward, free of cryptic utterances.

Joshua He remained inside the tent and did not share in Moses' direct experience with God.

DIALOGUE WITH GOD (vv. 12-23)

This section depicts how Moses and God engage in the intimate talk mentioned in verse 11.

מועד והיה פל־מבקש יהיה יצא אל־
 אהל מועד אשר מחוץ למחנה: 8 והיה
 כצאת משה אל־האהל יקומו כל־העם
 ונצבו איש פתח אהלו והביטו אחרי
 משה עד־באו האהלה: 9 והיה כבא
 משה האהלה ירד עמוד הענן ועמד
 פתח האהל ודבר עם־משה: 10 וראה
 כל־העם את־עמוד הענן עמד פתח
 האהל וקם כל־העם והשתחויו איש
 פתח אהלו: 11 ודבר יהוה אל־משה פנים
 אל־פנים כאשר ידבר איש אל־רעהו
 ושב אל־המחנה ומשרתו יהושע בן־נון
 נער לא ימיש מתוך האהל: 8

שלישי 12 ויאמר משה אל־יהוה ראה אתה אמר
 אלי העל את־העם הזה ואתה לא
 הודעתני את אשר־תשלח עמי ואתה
 אמרת ידעתיה בשם וגם־מצאת חן
 בעיני: 13 ועתה אם־נא מצאתי חן
 בעיניך הודעני נא את־דרכך ואדעך

12. Moses now reverts to the subject matter of 32:34 and 33:1-3—the order to proceed to the Promised Land without the tabernacle, the token of God's immediate presence in the camp of Israel. He complains that the aforementioned "angel" is unidentified. Is it to be human or celestial? Is God's name to "be in him," as is promised in 23:21, or not?

I have singled you out by name Literally, "I know you by name." This Hebrew idiom, with God as the subject, is applied to no one else in the Bible. It signifies a close, exclusive, and unique association with God.

13. let me know Your ways Moses asks for comprehension of God's essential being—the attributes that guide His actions in dealing with humankind, the norms by which He operates in His governance of the world. "Ways" here is a play on the literal and the figurative meanings of Hebrew word *derekh*; it means both the right path through the wilderness and also God's way of acting, His nature.

sider, too, that this nation is Your people.”
 14And He said, “I will go in the lead and will lighten your burden.” 15And he said to Him, “Unless You go in the lead, do not make us leave this place. 16For how shall it be known that Your people have gained Your favor unless You go with us, so that we may be distinguished, Your people and I, from every people on the face of the earth?”

17And the LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name.” 18He said, “Oh, let me behold Your Presence!” 19And He answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. 20But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for man may

this nation Moses stresses that the people Israel, and none other, constitute God’s people. He wants to extend God’s favor to embrace Israel as well as himself.

14. God does not yet respond to Moses’ last point but addresses only his immediate personal concerns.

lighten your burden Literally, “I will give you rest.” This phrase is normally found in a context of giving relief from national enemies, especially in relation to the occupation of the Land. The Hebrew word for “rest,” *m’nuhab*, probably means “camping places,” a pun on Hebrew for “camp” (*mahaneh*) (see Num. 10:33).

15–16. Moses, sensitive to God’s omission of any mention of Israel, reacts immediately by stressing the people’s interests, thereby affirming once again that he sees his own reputation inextricably bound up with the fate of his people. Note his repetition of “us” and “Your people.”

we may be distinguished Israel’s distinctiveness lies in its unique relationship with God.

18. *Oh, let me behold Your Presence!* Hebrew: *kavod* (Presence); one of the most impor-

למען אמצא־חן בעיניך וראֵה פִּי עִמָּךָ
 הַגּוֹי הַזֶּה: 14 וַיֹּאמֶר פָּנֵי יִלְכוּ וְהִנְחֹתִי
 לָךְ: 15 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אִם־אֵין פְּנִיךָ הַלְכִים
 אֶל־תַּעֲלֶנּוּ מִזֶּה: 16 וּבְמֶה | יוֹדַע אֲפּוֹא
 כִּי־מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲנִי וְעַמָּךְ הַלּוֹא
 בְּלִבְתָּךְ עִמָּנוּ וּנְפַלְיֵנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמָּךְ מִכָּל־
 הָעַם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: פ

17 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה גַם אֶת־הַדְּבָר
 הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּי־מִצָּאתִי חֵן
 בְּעֵינֶי וְאֲדַעַךְ בְּשֵׁם: 18 וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרֹאֲנִי נֹא
 אֶת־כַּבְּדֶךָ: 19 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעֱבִיר כָּל־טוֹבִי
 עַל־פְּנֶיךָ וְקִרְאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ
 וְחַנּוּתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲחֹן וְרַחֲמֹתַי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר
 אֲרַחֵם: 20 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־

tant concepts in biblical theology. See Comment to 16:7. Here Moses is pleading for an exclusively individual experience, one close at hand and immediate, as a response to his personal request there and then.

19. *all My goodness* This refers to the compassionate attributes that God reveals in dealing with His creatures (see 34:6–7).

proclaim . . . the name LORD This name is *YHWH*; see Comment to 3:14. This clause parallels the immediately preceding one—“I will make all My goodness pass before you.” It reaffirms God’s intention of voluntarily disclosing to Moses His defining characteristics. This is fulfilled in 34:5.

and the grace Literally, “I shall be gracious to whomever I am gracious and I shall show mercy to whomever I show mercy.” The syntax indicates indefiniteness, as in 3:14. God is reminding Moses that He is a free agent. There is no magical practice that is automatically effective in influencing His behavior.

20. Moses’ second plea is only partially granted. By virtue of their humanity, human beings, in-

CHAPTER 33

19. *I will make all My goodness pass before you* We encounter the reality of God when we experience goodness in the world, from the gift of life itself to the discovery of the capacity

to do good in our own souls; and the love and generosity of people around us whom God has inspired to do good.

20–23. What does it mean that a human being cannot see God’s face, but can see God’s back? In the words of the Hatain Sofer, we can-

not see Me and live.”²¹ And the LORD said, “See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock²² and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by.²³ Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen.”

34 The LORD said to Moses: “Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered.² Be ready by morning, and in the morning come up to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to Me, on the top of the mountain.³ No one else shall come up with you, and no one else shall be seen

cluding Moses, cannot directly and closely observe God.

21. on the rock At the top of Mount Sinai (see 34:2). For a similar scene, see 1 Kings 19.

22. My Presence passes by Rashbam notes that God’s action is characteristic of covenant making, as in Gen. 15:17 and Jer. 34:18,19. The manifestation of God here would then be a ceremony that signals renewal of the Covenant.

פני כי לא יראני האדם וחי: ²¹ ויאמר יהוה הנה מקום אתי ונצבת על-הצור: ²² והיה בעבר כבדי ושמתיה בנקרת הצור ושכתי כפי עליך עד-עברי: ²³ והסרתני את-כפי וראית את-אחרי ופני לא יראו: ח

לד חמישי ויאמר יהוה אל-משה פסל-לך שני-לוחות אבנים פראשנים וכתבתלי על-הלוחות את-הדברים אשר היו על-הלוחות הראשנים אשר שברת: ² והיה נכון לבקר ועלית בבקר אל-הר סיני ונצבת לי שם על-ראש ההר: ³ ואיש לא-יעלה עמך וגם-איש אל-ירא בכל-ההר גם-

23. My back This daring human image for God, contrasted with the usual biblical term *panim*, “face, presence,” refers to the traces of the divine Presence, the afterglow of His supernatural radiance.

must not be seen No human being can ever penetrate the ultimate mystery of God’s Being. Only a glimpse of the divine reality is possible, even for Moses.

RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT (34:1–35)

PREPARATORY MEASURES (vv. 1–3)

Moses, assured that God will manifest His Presence privately to him, is instructed to prepare for the experience, which actually initiates the reinstatement of the Covenant.

1. Carve God had given the first set to Moses. **words** They are identified as the Decalogue in verse 28.

3. No one else This time Aaron is excluded, because of his role in the episode of the Golden Calf.

not see God directly. We can only see the difference that God has made after the fact. We can recognize God’s reality by seeing the difference God has made in people’s lives.

CHAPTER 34

1. The first set of tablets was fashioned by God alone. Moses passively received them. The second set will be a joint divine-human effort (Y. Nissenbaum). This second set was written with a greater knowledge of human weakness, at the hand of an imperfect human being,

rather than by a perfect deity. Heschel taught that God revealed the Torah to Moses in all its fullness, and Moses, a finite human being, wrote down what he could comprehend. The Talmud tells us that the fragments of the first set of tablets were carried in the Ark along with the replacement set (BT Ber. 8b). That which was once holy retains its holiness even when it is broken. So too the elderly, the senile, and the infirm may not be cast aside. They must be accorded the reverence they have earned in their lives.

anywhere on the mountain; neither shall the flocks and the herds graze at the foot of this mountain.”

⁴So Moses carved two tablets of stone, like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets with him. ⁵The LORD came down in a cloud; He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name LORD. ⁶The LORD passed before him and proclaimed: “The LORD! the LORD! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, ⁷extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

GOD’S SELF-DISCLOSURE (vv. 4–9)

5. stood . . . proclaimed The text is ambiguous. The subject of the two verbs may be either Moses, as verses 2 and 33:21 indicate, or God, as the first clause and 33:19 would suggest. Or perhaps the first verb is governed by Moses and the second by God.

THE DIVINE RESPONSE (vv. 6–7)

These verses are the divine response to Moses’ two requests—that he “know” God’s ways (33:13) and that he “behold” God’s Presence (33:18). God’s mysterious passing before Moses answers to the second; the recital of the divine attributes, to the first. God’s self-disclosure is confined to a proclamation of His moral qualities. To “know” them is to achieve a higher conception of Deity.

6. The LORD! the LORD! The Hebrew text also allows the first *YHVH* to be taken as the subject of the antecedent verb; thus “And the LORD proclaimed.”

6–7. These two verses contain a passage recited and chanted on the High Holy Days and the Festivals. This summary of God’s compassionate qualities is known as the “Thirteen Attributes of God” or the “Covenant of the Thirteen” [*b’rit sh’losh esrei*].

visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children Bothered by the ap-

הַצֵּאתָ וְהִבְקַרְתָּ אֶל-יָרְעוּ אֶל-מֹול הַהָרִי הַהוּא:

וַיִּפְסֹל שְׁנֵי-לֹחַת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֹׁנִים וַיִּשְׁבֹּם מֹשֶׁה בְּבִקְרָ וַיַּעַל אֶל-הָרִי סִינַי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ שְׁנֵי לֹחַת אֲבָנִים: וַיֵּרֵד יְהוָה בְּעָנָן וַיִּתְיַצֵּב עִמּוֹ שָׁם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה: וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה אֶל-עַל-פְּנֵיו וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה | יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב-חַסֵּד וְאֶמֶת: נֹצֵר חַסֵּד לְאֲלֹפִים נֹשֵׂא עֵינָי וּפֹשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקְמָה לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד | עֵינָי אֲבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-בָּנֵי בָנִים עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רְבָעִים:

7. נִרְבַּתִּי לְפִי-נִוְסָחִים מִקֹּבָלִים

compassionate and gracious In the Decalogue (20:5–6) the order of attributes, unlike here, presents judgment before kindness. Emphasis and priority are here given to God’s magnanimous qualities rather than to His judgmental actions.

kindness and faithfulness The Hebrew words *hesed v’emet* appear frequently together to express a single concept. *Hesed* involves acts of beneficence and obligation that flow from a legal relationship. See Comment to 15:13. *Emet*, usually translated “truth,” encompasses the notions of reliability, durability, and faithfulness. When used together, the two words express God’s absolute and eternal dependability in dispensing His benefactions.

7. extending kindness The phrase may express either God’s continuous *hesed* or the idea that merit for the *hesed* that people perform endures beyond their own generation.

He does not remit Divine mercy does not mean that sinners can expect wholly to escape the consequences of their wrongs.

parent unfairness of the text, a Hasidic interpretation takes it to mean that God holds parents responsible for not giving their children a proper religious and moral upbringing. We recognize the unfairness of such punishment, yet it is true that the bad habits of parents are too often repeated by their children, for whom parents are the primary role models.

⁸Moses hastened to bow low to the ground in homage, ⁹and said, "If I have gained Your favor, O Lord, pray, let the Lord go in our midst, even though this is a stiffnecked people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your own!"

¹⁰He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will work such wonders as have not been wrought on all the earth or in any nation; and all the people who are with you shall see how awesome are the LORD's deeds which I will perform for you. ¹¹Mark well what I command you this day. I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ¹²Beware of making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land against which you are advancing, lest they be a snare in your midst. ¹³No, you must tear down their altars, smash their pillars, and cut down their sacred posts; ¹⁴for you must not worship any other god, because the LORD, whose name is Impassioned, is an impassioned

8 וַיִּמְהַר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְדּוּ אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה׃
9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶם-נָא מְצֵאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי
יְלֹהֵי-נָא אֲדֹנָי בְּקִרְבֵּנוּ כִּי עַם-קָשֶׁה-
עָרָף הוּא וְסָלַחְתָּ לְעוֹנֵינוּ וּלְחַטָּאתֵנוּ
וַיַּחֲלֵתֵנוּ׃

10 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי בֹרֵת בְּרִית נֶגֶד שׁוֹי
כָּל-עַמֶּךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-נִבְרָאוּ
בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הַגּוֹיִם וְרָאָה כָּל-הָעַם
אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כִּי-
נֹרָא הוּא אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ׃ 11 שְׁמַר-
לְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּךָ הַיּוֹם הַנִּנְי
גֵרֶשׁ מִפְּנֵיךָ אֶת-הָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּנִיעֵנִי וְהַחֲתִילִי
וְהַפְּרִיזִי וְהַחֲוִי וְהַיְבוֹסִי׃ 12 הִשְׁמַר לְךָ
פְּנֵי-תְכָרֶת בְּרִית לַיּוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה
בָּא עֲלֶיךָ פְּנֵי-יְהוָה לְמוֹקֵשׁ בְּקִרְבְּךָ׃
13 כִּי אֶת-מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם תִּתְּצוּן וְאֶת-מִצְבְּתֵיהֶם
תִּשְׁבְּרוּן וְאֶת-אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם תִּכְרֹתוּן׃ 14 כִּי לֹא
תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאֵל אֲחֵר* כִּי יְהוָה קָנָא שְׁמוֹ

v. 14. ר' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

^{9.} Moses emphasizes God's merciful qualities in asking that the punishment in 33:3 be set aside. *even though* Allow for human frailty.

INAUTHENTIC AND AUTHENTIC WORSHIP
(vv. 10–26)

This section concentrates on two fundamental issues that flow directly from the people's sin: false modes of worship (vv. 10–17) and the legitimate festivals and ritual obligations to God (vv. 18–26).

APOSTASY (vv. 10–17)

Mindful of the act of apostasy, the renewed covenant contains stricter admonitions than those

given before (23:23,24) regarding the inroads of foreign forms of worship into the religion of Israel. If the people Israel is to be "distinguished . . . from every people on the face of the earth" (33:16), they must make themselves unique by exclusive loyalty to their covenantal relationship with God.

13. sacred posts Hebrew: *asherim* (singular *asherah*); pagan objects of worship often mentioned in the Bible. These wooden poles derive their name from the Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah, whom they symbolized.

14. any other god This Hebrew phrase in the singular—*el aher*—appears nowhere else in the

10. The Decalogue proclaims universal laws applicable to all humanity. This supplemental covenant deals with the specific rituals of the Israelite people. Our calendar and our kitchens would keep the Jewish people distinctive.

13. Why this troubling emphasis on destroying the holy places of the Canaanites and shunning their sacrificial occasions? The

Israelites were a young, impressionable nation, and the Torah is concerned that the highly sexualized, orgiastic fertility cult of the Canaanites would be irresistibly seductive for them (as the incident of Baal-peor in Num. 25 attests). Even decent people can be vulnerable to sexual temptation, which is why the Torah speaks out in such extreme, uncompromising terms against the Canaanite cult.

allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven; ²⁰but you the LORD took and brought out of Egypt, that iron blast furnace, to be His very own people, as is now the case.

²¹Now the LORD was angry with me on your account and swore that I should not cross the Jordan and enter the good land that the LORD your God is assigning you as a heritage. ²²For I must die in this land; I shall not cross the Jordan. But you will cross and take possession of that good land. ²³Take care, then, not to forget the covenant that the LORD your God concluded with you, and not to make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, against which the LORD your God has enjoined you. ²⁴For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, an impassioned God.

²⁵When you have begotten children and children's children and are long established in the land, should you act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, causing the LORD your God displeasure and vexation; ²⁶I call heaven and earth this day to witness against you that you shall soon perish

20. iron blast furnace A metaphor for the severity of the Egyptian bondage (iron was smelted in ancient times at a temperature of about 2000°F).

His very own people Literally, "a people that is His inheritance." The Hebrew word for "inheritance" (*nahalah*) expresses not only God's sovereignty over the Israelites but also His attachment to them. Inherited land was precious because it was received from one's ancestors and passed on to one's descendants; it was regarded as inalienable.

24. consuming fire God's fiery destructive

21. on your account Is Moses taking out his frustrations on the people, blaming them for his own mistakes? It would be a very human thing to do, however unjustified in a leader.

25. long established Biblical Hebrew has two words for "old": *zaken*, which is the opposite of "young"; and *yashan* (used here with

יהוה אלהיך אתם לכל העמים תחת כל השמים: ²⁰ ואתכם לקח יהוה ויוצא אתכם מכור הברזל ממצרים להיות לו לעם נחלה פיוס הזה:

²¹ ויהוה התאנף בי על דבריכם וישבע לבלתי עברי את הירדן ולבלתי בא אל-הארץ הטובה אשר יהוה אלהיך נתן לך נחלה: ²² כי אנכי מת בארץ הזאת אינני עבר את הירדן ואתם עברים וירשתם את הארץ הטובה הזאת: ²³ השמרו לכם פן תשכחו את ברית יהוה אלהיכם אשר פרת עמכם ועשיתם לכם פסל תמונת כל אשר צוה יהוה אלהיך: ²⁴ כי יהוה אלהיך אש אכלה הוא אל קנא: פ

²⁵ כי תוליד בנים ובני בנים וגושתם בארץ והשחתם ועשיתם פסל תמונת כל ועשיתם הרע בעיני יהוה אלהיך להכעיסו: ²⁶ העידתי בכם היום את השמים ואת הארץ כי אבד תאבדון

power had struck the Exodus generation several times.

26. I call heaven and earth . . . to witness In ancient Near Eastern covenants, heaven and earth are often called as witnesses along with the gods and other parts of nature regarded as supreme authorities in the universe, so that they would punish those who violate the agreement. In the Bible, however, the supreme authority is the Lord, who is Himself a party to the covenant. Heaven and earth are subordinate to Him and cannot act independently. Their role here as "witnesses" is merely a reflection of that ancient motif.

the connotation of growing stale), which is the opposite of "fresh" (Hirsch).

26. I call heaven and earth . . . to witness Heaven and earth do indeed witness against us when we make improper use of that with which God has blessed us. Poisoning the air and water, despoiling the environment do threaten to cause us to "perish from the land."

from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess; you shall not long endure in it, but shall be utterly wiped out. ²⁷The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a scant few of you shall be left among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. ²⁸There you will serve man-made gods of wood and stone, that cannot see or hear or eat or smell.

²⁹But if you search there for the LORD your God, you will find Him, if only you seek Him with all your heart and soul—³⁰when you are in distress because all these things have befallen you and, in the end, return to the LORD your God and obey Him. ³¹For the LORD your God is a compassionate God: He will not fail you nor will He let you perish; He will not forget

מהר מעל הארץ אשר אתם עברים את-הירדן שמה לרשתה לא-תאריכון ימים עליה כי השמד תשמדון: ²⁷ והפיץ יהוה אתכם בעמים ונשאתם מתי מספר בגוים אשר ינהג יהוה אתכם שמה: ²⁸ ועבדתם-שם אלהים מעשה ידי אדם עץ ואבן אשר לא-יראון ולא ישמעון ולא יאכלון ולא יריחון: ²⁹ ובקשתם משם את-יהוה אלהיך ומצאת כי תדרשנו בכל-לבבך ובכל-נפשך: ³⁰ בצר לך ומצאוך כל הדברים האלה באחרית הימים ושבת עדי-יהוה אלהיך ושמעת בקלו: ³¹ כי אל רחום יהוה אלהיך לא ירפך ולא ישחיתך ולא

shall be utterly wiped out This is a hyperbole, meaning, "be ruined." As verse 27 indicates, there will be survivors.

27. The punishments are the precise opposites of God's promises: instead of possessing the land (v. 1), the Israelites will be exiled from it; instead of being numerous (1:10–11), they will become few.

28. Exile will bring an additional punishment: worshiping gods that can do nothing. Despite the fact that the Bible regards the Lord as accessible anywhere (see v. 29), it considers only the land of Israel as the "Holy Land" (Zech. 2:16), and other lands as impure. Therefore, it is not permissible to conduct normal, sacrificial worship of God outside the land. (An exception was the wilderness period when a portable sanctuary accompanied Israel in its wanderings.)

that cannot see or hear or eat or smell The Bible considers the worship of statues to be the most preposterous aspect of non-Israelite religion and the most telling argument against it (cf. 27:15,

28:36,64, 29:16). Polytheism held that special ceremonies imparted to the statues all the powers that this verse denies them: sight, hearing, eating, smelling. The more educated idolaters certainly did not believe that the statue actually was the deity but that the god was absent from the statue before the special ceremony and might abandon it at will. The distinction between statue and deity, however, was easily overlooked, and many idolaters sometimes considered images to be the deity or fetishes possessing powers of their own.

30. in the end That is, afterward, ultimately. *return*. Hebrew: *shuv*, the verb from which the term for "repentance" (*t'shuvah*) is derived.

31. compassionate God The Lord is not only impassioned (v. 24), but also compassionate. These are two aspects of God's personality in the Bible: He both punishes and forgives.

nor will He let you perish; He will not forget the covenant God's actions are thus contrasted with those of the Israelites. God will not act as they acted.

27. only a scant few of you shall be left Indeed in Jewish history, whenever disaster has befallen a major Jewish community, a saving remnant has survived to carry on.

28. There you will serve man-made gods Losing their relationship with God and attaching themselves to false gods who cannot see or hear (in contrast to God who saw their plight and heard their cry in Egypt) will not be just

their sin but also their punishment. Abravanel, who lived at the time of the Inquisition and the expulsion from Spain, applied this verse to the Marranos of his time: "Many Jews will be brought to forced conversion, worshiping idols but knowing full well that they are made of wood and stone. Unable to practice the observance of Judaism, their seeking of God will be in their hearts and minds alone" (v. 29).

the covenant which He made on oath with your fathers.

³²You have but to inquire about bygone ages that came before you, ever since God created man on earth, from one end of heaven to the other: has anything as grand as this ever happened, or has its like ever been known? ³³Has any people heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have, and survived? ³⁴Or has any god ventured to go and take for himself one nation from the midst of another by prodigious acts, by signs and portents, by war, by a mighty hand and outstretched arm and awesome power, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? ³⁵It has been clearly demonstrated to you that the LORD alone is God; there is none beside Him. ³⁶From the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; on earth He let you see His great fire; and from amidst that fire you heard His words. ³⁷And because He loved your fathers, He chose their heirs after them; He Himself, in His great

ישפח את־ברית אבותיך אשר נשבע להם:

³² כִּי שֶׁאֵל־נָא לְיָמִים רִאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר־הָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ לְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם עַל־הָאָרֶץ וּלְמַקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד־קֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם הִנְהִיחָה פִּדְבָר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה אוֹ הִנְשַׁמַּע כְּמָהוּ: ³³ הֲשָׁמַע עִם קוֹל אֱלֹהִים מִדְּבַר מִתּוֹךְ־הָאֵשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַעְתָּ אֶת־ה' וַיַּחֲיֵי: ³⁴ אוֹ הֲנִסָּה אֱלֹהִים לְבוֹא לְקַחֵת לּוֹ גּוֹי מִקְרֹב גּוֹי בְּמִסַּת בְּאַתַּח וּבְמוֹפְתִים וּבְמִלְחָמָה וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזִרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדוֹלִים כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לָכֶם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֶיךָ: ³⁵ אֶת־הָרְאִיתָ לְדַעַת כִּי יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים אֵין עוֹד מִלְּבָדוֹ: ³⁶ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם הִשְׁמִיעָךְ אֶת־קוֹל לְיִסְרָךְ וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ הִרְאָךְ אֶת־אִשׁוֹ הַגְּדוֹלָה וּדְבַרְיוֹ שָׁמַעְתָּ מִתּוֹךְ־הָאֵשׁ: ³⁷ וַתַּחַח כִּי אָהַב אֶת־אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וַיִּבְחַר בְּזֶרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו וַיּוֹצֵאֲךָ

BASED ON MONOTHEISM (vv. 32–40)

Following the warning of exile, Moses concludes with a final appeal to observe the commandments so that the Israelites may prosper and remain in the Land forever.

32. ever since God created man on earth As far back as human memory goes.

from one end of heaven to the other That is, from one end of earth to another. Heaven was pictured as a dome standing atop pillars situated at the ends of the earth.

33. A direct, visual encounter with God was thought to be too awesome to endure. This passage and 5:21–23 imply that hearing God was regarded as equally dangerous.

34. take . . . one nation from the midst of another This is the most telling point of Moses' argument: The Lord took Israel out of Egypt,

thereby showing the powerlessness of the gods of Egypt and that the Lord is the only true God (see Exod. 12:12).

by prodigious acts The signs Moses and Aaron performed before Pharaoh, including the Ten Plagues and the defeat of Egypt at the Sea of Reeds.

35. The events just described, witnessed by the entire nation, established that the Lord alone is God. This demonstration goes beyond the practical concern of the 2nd commandment, which prohibits worshiping other gods. Here Moses states clearly that there are no others.

36. Deuteronomy never describes God as descending to earth or as dwelling in the sanctuary. Unlike the previous books of the Torah, it avoids allusions to the physical or human nature of God. Divine transcendence is central to Deuteronomy.

37. He Himself Literally, "with His face."

35. Because this verse refers to the revelation at Mount Sinai, it is the first in a collection of verses recited when the Torah scrolls are

taken from the Ark on *Simhat Torah*, among *Ashk'nazim*. Among *S'fardim*, it is recited every *Shabbat* at that point in the service.

might, led you out of Egypt,³⁸ to drive from your path nations greater and more populous than you, to take you into their land and assign it to you as a heritage, as is still the case.³⁹ Know therefore this day and keep in mind that the LORD alone is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other.⁴⁰ Observe His laws and commandments, which I enjoin upon you this day, that it may go well with you and your children after you, and that you may long remain in the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you for all time.

⁴¹Then Moses set aside three cities on the east side of the Jordan⁴² to which a manslayer could escape, one who unwittingly slew a fellow man without having been hostile to him in the past; he could flee to one of these cities and live:⁴³ Bezer, in the wilderness in the Tableland, belonging to the Reubenites; Ramoth, in Gilead, belonging to the Gadites; and Golan, in Bashan, belonging to the Manassites.

⁴⁴This is the Teaching that Moses set before the Israelites:⁴⁵ these are the decrees, laws, and

בפניו בכהו הגדל ממצרים: ³⁸ להוריש גוים גדלים ועצמים ממך מפניך להביאך לתת לך את ארצם נחלה כיום הזה: ³⁹ וידעת היום והשבת אל לבבך כי יהוה הוא האלהים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אין עוד: ⁴⁰ ושמרתי את חקיו ואת מצותיו אשר אנכי מצוה היום אשר ייטב לך ולבניך אחריך ולמען תאריך ימים על האדמה אשר יהוה אלהיך נתן לך כל הימים: פ

שלישי ⁴¹ אז יבדיל משה שלש ערים בעבר הירדן מזרחה שמש: ⁴² לנס שמה רוצח אשר ירצח את רעהו בבלי דעת והוא לא שנא לו מתמל שלשום ונס אל אחת מן הערים האל וחי: ⁴³ את בצר במדבר בארץ המישר לראובני ואת ראמת בגלעד לגדי ואת גולן בבשן למנשי:

⁴⁴ וזאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל: ⁴⁵ אלה העדות והחקים

The Hebrew equivalent of "in person." The idiom emphasizes that God used no intermediary (such as an angel) in freeing the Israelites, but freed them personally as a sign of His favor.

^{39.} That God spoke from heaven and acted on earth shows His dominion in both realms. He is God everywhere.

^{40.} The fact that the Lord alone is God leads to the conclusion that observance of His commandments is the prerequisite for prosperity and well-being. The address thus ends on the same note with which it began. It reminds the audience that its central message is proper behavior.

ASYLUM CITIES IN TRANSJORDAN

(vv. 41-43).

These verses are not part of Moses' address but

a narrative appendix, relating that Moses designated three cities in Transjordan to provide asylum for accidental manslaughter. The law establishing these cities appears in 19:1-13. (19:3-5 is abridged here) and Num. 35:9-34. According to Num. 35:14, six such cities were to be chosen, three of them in Transjordan.

^{41.} Then This could refer to any time after the conquest of Transjordan, which took place shortly before Moses' address. It is possible that Moses selected the cities after the actions described in 3:18-29. Because verses 41-43 are by the narrator, and not Moses, they were placed here to avoid interrupting his address.

^{43.} The cities are listed in order from south to north.

Bezer In Moab.

in Gilead That is, upper Gilead.

^{41.} Why was the institution of cities of refuge so important to Moses? Because he himself

was once a manslayer (Exod. 2:11-15) and had to flee [Deut. R. 2:27].

הפטרה לתשעה באב (שחרית)

HAFTARAH FOR TISHAH B'AV MORNING

JEREMIAH 8:13-9:23

In this *haftarah* of doom and destruction, the terror to come is first announced and then envisioned in a cluster of powerful images (Jer. 8:13-17, 9:7-9, 20-21). The calamities will be the result of deceit and dishonesty at the level of human relations in society (9:1-5), and the rejection of the Torah and proper worship at the level of religious practice (9:11-15). The prophet himself laments the horror to come, and women who know dirges are invited to bewail the onset of doom (see 8:18, 21, 9:16-21). The concluding teaching counsels proper conduct (9:22-23), although such behavior cannot diminish or prevent the severity of the predicted doom. The counsel of earnest devotion and proper behavior stands as a counterpoint to the perversion of morality and of divine service, which have been denounced (9:1-5, 11-15).

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

This prophetic reading's account of national doom due to sin links it to the themes of the *Tishah b'Av* fast day, which recalls the destruc-

tion of the Temple. The prophet's call for public wailers to recite words of mourning for the people and the Land evokes the central ritual of this day of sorrow—the public recitation of lamentations over Zion and Jerusalem.

The *haftarah* is dominated by rapidly alternating voices and perspectives: The divine voice (8:13, 17), the voice of Jeremiah (8:18, 21, 23), and the voice of the people (8:14, 15). Verbal repetition adds another dimension to the *haftarah*. Thus, the fourfold repetition of "dirge" (*n'hi* or *nehi*) or the eightfold use of "nothing," "not" (*ein* or *ayin*) add to the dominant mood of desolation and despair.

Hebrew puns create unexpected connections between the units. Particularly notable is the network created by the phrases *asof asifem* (I will make an end of them, 8:13) and *v'ein m'assef* (and none to pick them up, 9:21). These phrases at the beginning and near the end of the *haftarah* enclose it in a framework of desolation. Also effective is the pun linking the words *kinah* (wailing) and *mikneh* (cattle) in 9:9, which creates a striking relationship between the form of lament and the object of loss.

8 ¹³I will make an end of them

—declares the LORD:

No grapes left on the vine,
No figs on the fig tree,
The leaves all withered;
Whatever I have given them is gone.
¹⁴Why are we sitting by?
Let us gather into the fortified cities
And meet our doom there.

ח
אָסֹף אֶסִּיפֶם ¹³
נְאֻם־יְהוָה
אֵין עֲנָבִים בַּגֶּפֶן
וְאֵין תְּאֵנִים בְּתֵאנָה
וְהָעֵלֶה נָבֵל
וְאֶתֵּן לָהֶם יַעֲבְרוּם :
¹⁴ עַל־מָה אֲנַחֲנוּ יוֹשְׁבִים
הָאֶסְפוּ וְנִבּוֹא אֶל־עָרֵי הַמְּבֻצָּר
וְנִדְמָה־שָׁם

For the LORD our God has doomed us,
He has made us drink a bitter draft,
Because we sinned against the LORD.

¹⁵We hoped for good fortune, but no happiness came;

For a time of relief—instead there is terror!

¹⁶The snorting of their horses was heard from Dan;

At the loud neighing of their steeds

The whole land quaked.

They came and devoured the land and what was in it,

The towns and those who dwelt in them.

¹⁷Lo, I will send serpents against you,

Adders that cannot be charmed,

And they shall bite you

—declares the LORD.

¹⁸When in grief I would seek comfort,

My heart is sick within me.

¹⁹“Is not the LORD in Zion?

Is not her King within her?

Why then did they anger Me with their images,

With alien futilities?”

Hark! The outcry of my poor people

From the land far and wide:

²⁰“Harvest is past,

Summer is gone,

But we have not been saved.”

כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הִדְמָנוּ

וַיִּשְׁקְנוּ מִי־רָאשׁ

כִּי חָטְאנוּ לַיהוָה:

¹⁵ קָנָה לְשָׁלוֹם וְאִין טוֹב

לָעֵת מִרְפָּה* וְהִנֵּה בָעֵתָה:

¹⁶ מִהֵן נִשְׁמַע נַחֲרַת סוּסָיו

מִקּוֹל מִצְהָלוֹת אַבְיָרָיו

רָעִשָׁה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ

וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ אֶרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהָ

עִיר וַיִּשְׁבִּי בָּהָּ: ס

¹⁷ כִּי הִנְנִי מְשַׁלַּח בְּכֶם נָחָשִׁים

צַפְעָנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לָהֶם לַחֵשׁ

וְנִשְׁכוּ אֶתְכֶם

נְאֻם־יְהוָה: ס

¹⁸ מִבְּלִיגִיתִי עָלַי יִגּוֹן

עָלַי לִבִּי דוּי:

¹⁹ הֲנִהְיֶה־קוֹל שׁוֹעַת בַּת־עַמִּי

מֵאֶרֶץ מְרַחֲקִים

הֲיִהְיֶה אֵין בְּצִיּוֹן

אִם־מֶלֶכָּה אֵין בָּהּ

מִדּוּעַ הִכְעַסוּנִי בַפְּסִלִיָּהֶם

בְּהַבְלֵי נִכְרִ:

²⁰ עָבַר קָצִיר

כָּלָה קַיִץ

וְאִנְחָנוּ לֹא נוֹשָׁעֵנוּ:

v. 15. ה' במקום א'

Jeremiah 8:14. *Because we sinned against the LORD* Evokes the confessional form *hatanu*, “We have sinned.”

19. Many commentators have understood the first two questions in this verse to be challenges spoken by Israel. They elicit God’s response (“Why then did they anger Me?”). Other

commentators understand all three questions as spoken by God. It is a feature of the triple rhetorical question to create a graded intensification, in which the first two queries imply a negative response. This sets up the challenging and judgmental question at the end.

²¹Because my people is shattered I am shattered;

I am dejected, seized by desolation.

²²Is there no balm in Gilead?

Can no physician be found?

Why has healing not yet

Come to my poor people?

²³Oh, that my head were water,

My eyes a fount of tears!

Then would I weep day and night

For the slain of my poor people.

9 Oh, to be in the desert,
At an encampment for wayfarers!
Oh, to leave my people,
To go away from them—
For they are all adulterers,
A band of rogues.

²They bend their tongues like bows;

They are valorous in the land

For treachery, not for honesty;

They advance from evil to evil.

And they do not heed Me

—declares the LORD.

³Beware, every man of his friend!

Trust not even a brother!

For every brother takes advantage,

Every friend is base in his dealings.

⁴One man cheats the other,

They will not speak truth;

Jeremiah 9:1-5. This passage exemplifies the reuse of patriarchal themes in prophecy. Here the Jacob cycle is deftly alluded to by a play on the name "Jacob" (*Ya-akov*): "For every brother [*ah*] takes advantage, is a deceitful supplanter [*akov ya-akov*]." Many other key words of the prophetic oracle derive from that narrative in the Torah. Another example (from Gen. 27:35-37):

עַל-שֶׁבֶר בַּת-עַמִּי הִשְׁבַּרְתִּי

קִדְרְתִּי שָׁמָּה הִחֲזַקְתִּנִּי:

הַצָּרִי אֵין בְּגִלְעָד

אִם-רֹפֵא אֵין שָׁם

כִּי מְדוּעַ לֹא עָלְתָה

אֲרַכַּת בַּת-עַמִּי:

מִיִּיתָן רֹאשִׁי מִיַּם

וְעֵינַי מִקּוֹר דְּמָעָה

וְאֶבְכֶּה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה

אֶת חֲלָלֵי בַת-עַמִּי:

ט מִיִּיתָנִי בַּמִּדְבָּר

מְלוֹן אֲרָחִים

וְאֶעֱזֹבָה אֶת-עַמִּי

וְאֶלְכָה מֵאַתֶּם

כִּי כֻלָּם מְנַאֲפִים

עֲצַרְתָּ בְּגָדִים:

² וַיִּדְרְכוּ אֶת-לְשׁוֹנָם קִשְׁתָּם

שֶׁקֶר וְלֹא לְאִמוּנָה

גָּבְרוּ בְּאֶרֶץ

כִּי מִרְעָה אֶל-רְעָה | יֵצְאוּ

וְאֶתִּי לֹא יִדְעוּ

וְאִם-יִהְיֶה:

³ אִישׁ מִרְעָהוּ הִשְׁמִרוּ

וְעַל-כָּל-אֶחָד אֶל-תִּבְטְחוּ

כִּי כָל-אֶחָד עֲקוֹב יַעֲקֹב

וְכָל-רֵעַ רֵכִיל יִהְיֶה:

⁴ וְאִישׁ בְּרֵעָהוּ יִהְיֶה לֹו

וְאִמַּת לֹא יִדְבְּרוּ

"Your brother [*ah*] has come in deceit [*mirmah*]. . . . Therefore is he called Jacob [*Ya-akov*] because he has deceived me [*va-ya-keveini*] twice." The noun *mirmah* occurs in Jer. 9:5.

2. They bend their tongues like bows. Their arrows are the false and bitter words they speak (Radak). See also verse 7.

They have trained their tongues to speak
falsely;

They wear themselves out working iniquity.

⁵You dwell in the midst of deceit.

In their deceit, they refuse to heed Me

—declares the LORD.

⁶Assuredly, thus said the LORD of Hosts:

Lo, I shall smelt and assay them—

For what else can I do because of My poor
people?

⁷Their tongue is a sharpened arrow,

They use their mouths to deceive.

One speaks to his fellow in friendship,

But lays an ambush for him in his heart.

⁸Shall I not punish them for such deeds?

—says the LORD—

Shall I not bring retribution

On such a nation as this?

⁹For the mountains I take up weeping and
wailing,

For the pastures in the wilderness, a dirge.

They are laid waste; no man passes through,

And no sound of cattle is heard.

Birds of the sky and beasts as well

Have fled and are gone.

¹⁰I will turn Jerusalem into rubble,

Into dens for jackals;

And I will make the towns of Judah

A desolation without inhabitants.

¹¹What man is so wise

That he understands this?

To whom has the LORD's mouth spoken,

So that he can explain it:

Why is the land in ruins,

Laid waste like a wilderness,

With none passing through?

לְמַדּוֹ לְשׁוֹנֵם דְּבַר־שֶׁקֶר

הַעֲוֵה נִלְאוּ:

⁵שִׁבְתֶּךָ בְּתוֹךְ מַרְמָה

בְּמַרְמָה מֵאַנּוֹ דַּעַת־אוֹתִי

נֹאֵם־יְהוָה: ט

⁶לִכְן כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת

הַנְּנִי צוֹרֶפֶס וּבַחֲנֻתִים

כִּי־אֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה מִפְּנֵי בְּתַעֲמִי:

⁷חַץ שׁוֹחֵט שְׁחוּט לְשׁוֹנֵם

מַרְמָה דְּבַר

בְּפִיו שְׁלוֹם אֶת־רַעְהוּ יְדַבֵּר

וּבִקְרָבוֹ יִשִּׁים אָרְבוֹ:

⁸הַעֲלֵ־אֱלֹהִים לֹא־אֶפְקֹד־בָּם

נֹאֵם־יְהוָה

אִם בְּגוֹי אֲשֶׁר־כָּזְּבָה

לֹא תִתְנַקֵּם נַפְשִׁי: ט

⁹עַל־הַהָרִים אֲשָׂא בְכִי וְנָהִי

וְעַל־נְאוֹת מִדְּבַר קִינָה

כִּי נִצַּתוּ מִבְּלִי־אִישׁ עֵבֶר

וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ קוֹל מִקְנֵה

מֵעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה

נִדְּדוּ הַלְכוּ:

¹⁰וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־ירוּשָׁלַם לְגִלְתִּים

מֵעוֹן תַּנִּינִים

וְאֶת־עָרֵי יְהוּדָה אֶתֵּן

שְׁמָמָה מִבְּלִי יוֹשֵׁב: ט

¹¹מִי־הָאִישׁ הַחָכֵם

וַיִּבֶן אֶת־זֹאת

וְאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר פִּי־יְהוָה אֵלָיו

וַיִּגְדֵּה

עַל־מָה אֲבָדָה הָאָרֶץ

נִצַּתָּה כַּמִּדְבָּר

מִבְּלִי עֵבֶר: ט

¹²The LORD replied: Because they forsook the Teaching I had set before them. They did not obey Me and they did not follow it, ¹³but followed their own willful heart and followed the Baalim, as their fathers had taught them. ¹⁴Assuredly, thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to feed that people wormwood and make them drink a bitter draft. ¹⁵I will scatter them among nations which they and their fathers never knew; and I will dispatch the sword after them until I have consumed them.

¹⁶Thus said the LORD of Hosts:

Listen!

Summon the dirge-singers, let them come;
Send for the skilled women, let them come.

¹⁷Let them quickly start a wailing for us,
That our eyes may run with tears,
Our pupils flow with water.

¹⁸For the sound of wailing

Is heard from Zion:

How we are despoiled!

How greatly we are shamed!

Ah, we must leave our land,

Abandon our dwellings!

¹⁹Hear, O women, the word of the LORD,

Let your ears receive the word of His mouth,

And teach your daughters wailing,

And one another lamentation.

²⁰For death has climbed through our windows,

Has entered our fortresses,

To cut off babes from the streets,

Young men from the squares.

¹²וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה עַל-עֲזֹבְכֶם אֶת-תּוֹרָתִי
אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֵיהֶם וְלֹא-שָׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלִי
וְלֹא-הִלְכוּ בָהּ: ¹³וַיִּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי שְׂרָרוֹת
לְבָבָם וְאַחֲרַי הַבְּעָלִים אֲשֶׁר לְמַדּוּם
אֲבוֹתָם: ¹⁴כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִנְנִי מֵאֲכִילֶם
אֶת-הָעֵם הַזֶּה לְעֵנָה וְהִשְׁקִיתִם מִי-
רָאשׁ: ¹⁵וְהִפְצוֹתִים בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ
הַמָּה וְאֲבוֹתָם וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי אַחֲרֵיהֶם אֶת-
הַחֶרֶב עַד כְּלוֹתִי אוֹתָם: ^פ

¹⁶כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת

הַתְּבוֹנָנוּ

וְקִרְאוּ לְמְקוֹנְנוֹת וּתְבוֹאֲינָה

וְאֶל-הַחֲכָמוֹת שְׁלַחוּ וּתְבוֹאֲנָה:

¹⁷וּתְמַהֲרְנָה וּתְשַׁנְּנָה * עֲלֵינוּ נְהִי

וּתְרַדְנָה עֵינֵינוּ דְמָעָה

וְעַפְעֵפֵינוּ יְזִל־מַיִם:

¹⁸כִּי קוֹל נְהִי

נִשְׁמַע מִצִּיּוֹן

אֵיךְ שָׁדְדָנוּ

בְּשָׁנוּ מְאֹד

כִּי-עֲזַבְנוּ אֶרֶץ

כִּי הִשְׁלִיכוּ מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֵינוּ: ^ס

¹⁹כִּי-שָׁמְעָה נָשִׁים דְּבַר-יְהוָה

וַתִּקַּח אֶזְנוֹכֶם דְּבַר-פִּי

וּלְמַדְנָה בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם נְהִי

וְאִשָּׁה רְעוּתָה קִינָה:

²⁰כִּי-עָלָה מָוֶת בַּחֲלוֹנֵינוּ

כָּא בְּאַרְמְנוֹתֵינוּ

לְהַכְרִית עוֹלָל מְחוּץ

בַּחוּרִים מִרְחֻבוֹת:

²¹Speak thus—says the LORD:

The carcasses of men shall lie
Like dung upon the fields,
Like sheaves behind the reaper,
With none to pick them up.

21 דִּבֶּר כֹּה נְאֻם־יְהוָה
וּנְפִלָה נְבֵלַת הָאָדָם
כְּדֹמֶן עַל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה
וּכְעֵמִיר מֵאַחֲרֵי הַקְצֹר
וְאֵין מֵאֶסְף: ט

²²Thus said the LORD:

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom;
Let not the strong man glory in his strength;
Let not the rich man glory in his riches.

22 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה
אֶל־יִתְהַלֵּל חָכֶם בְּחָכְמָתוֹ
וְאֶל־יִתְהַלֵּל הַגִּבּוֹר בְּגִבּוֹרָתוֹ
אֶל־יִתְהַלֵּל עֲשִׂיר בְּעִשְׂרוֹ:

²³But only in this should one glory:

In his earnest devotion to Me.
For I the LORD act with kindness,
Justice, and equity in the world;
For in these I delight

23 כִּי אִם־בְּזָאת יִתְהַלֵּל הַמִּתְהַלֵּל
הַשְּׂכֵל וַיִּדַע אוֹתִי
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד
מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה בְּאָרֶץ
כִּי־בְאֵלֶּה חִפְצֹתַי
נְאֻם־יְהוָה: ט

—declares the LORD.

23. kindness, / Justice, and equity Hebrew: *hesed, mishpat, and tz'dakah*. The last pair of terms recurs frequently in the Bible as both a human and a divine ideal (see, e.g., Gen. 18:19). The triad of elements is also found elsewhere, both for God (Ps. 33:5, 89:15) and for mortals (Isa. 16:5).

This verse links these divine attributes—and knowledge of God—with the covenant ideal (see also Hos. 2:21; *Guide* III:53). The *haftarah* thus ends with a summary of covenantal virtues that serves as a counterpoint to the moral and religious sins denounced earlier (9:1–5, 11–15).

הַפְּטָרָה לַתְּעֲנִית צָבוֹר (מִנְחָה)

HAFTARAH FOR FAST DAY AFTERNOONS

ISAIAH 55:6–56:8

Words of admonition, exhortation, and comfort form this *haftarah*. They were spoken in the Babylonian exile sometime around 538 B.C.E. At that time, Cyrus the Mede conquered Babylon and decreed that his foreign subjects, including the Judeans, could return to their native lands and practices. Isaiah urges the Judeans to repent of their evil ways and plans (Isa. 55:6–7), and to do what is right and just, before their approaching deliverance from exile (55:12–13, 56:1). They should take comfort in the merciful and forgiving nature of God (55:7), whose promise of salvation is ensured (55:10–11). Eunuchs and foreigners who have attached themselves to God and the Covenant also receive words of comfort, allaying their fears of rejection. They are promised a place among the future worshipers in Zion if they remain observant (56:3–8).

Divine grace and loving kindness are characteristic of this *haftarah*. God's care embraces everyone—native and alien alike—who turns to God and observes His commandments. Repentant sinners especially may take heart in God's forgiveness, which is grounded in His utterly transcendent nature (55:8).

There are several types of prophetic discourse in this *haftarah*. The first is a direct call for repentance (55:6–7). To allay any concern that a full pardon might not necessarily follow repentance, God reinforces the assertion of His transcendent "plans" and "ways" by an analogy. Divine "ways" are said to go beyond those of mortals as the heavens are high above the earth. God's ways of mercy are not only beyond scrutiny and expectation but also utterly beyond the grasp and understanding of human beings.

The second important type of prophetic speech here is the prophetic prediction and the assertion of its infallibility. The prophet articulates a new analogy, comparing God's event-begetting word with rain that descends from above to fertilize the

seeds of vegetation. Just as this rain falls and does not return to heaven, so will God's prophetic "word that issues from My mouth . . . not come back to Me unfulfilled" (55:10–11).

The third type of prophetic discourse is the instructional exhortation, which appears in two forms. The first form is a brief statement of proper action at the beginning of Isa. 56. "Observe what is right and do what is just" (literally, "observe justice [*mishpat*], do righteousness [*tz'dakah*]"). This call condenses the moral duties required of the nation, using the terms often employed in the Bible to characterize proper covenantal behavior.

The second form elaborates on the initial call to "observe [*shimru*] justice" (Isa. 56:1) by proclaiming the happiness that accrues to one who observes or "keeps [*shomer*] the sabbath," and who "stays [*shomer*] his hand from doing any evil" (56:2). One might even state that the two phrases characterize the Decalogue. Observing *Shabbat* is the first positive ritual commandment there, and staying one's hand from evil applies to all the interpersonal prohibitions in the Decalogue.

Observing *Shabbat* and holding fast to the Covenant constitute the two conditions required of the foreigners and the eunuchs who would receive the benefits of inclusion in God's Temple (56:4,6). These benefits are declared in the fourth type of prophetic discourse found in this reading: the authorization of innovation (56:4–8). That foreigners could take part in the sacrificial service was unprecedented. It was a universalist proclamation of sorts, erasing the distinction between native and outsider in lay worship. The promise that the eunuchs would have a place in the House of God gives yet another expression to the prophet's inclusionist temper.

The diverse discourses of the *haftarah* are bound together by theme words. The verb *shuv* indicates not only the "turn" to God in repentance but also the "return" of rain and of the pro-

phetic word (55:7,10). And *karet* (55:13, 56:5) refers to the fact that neither God's miracles during the deliverance nor the monument erected for the eunuchs in the Temple will "perish." The word *karov* (near) refers both to God's nearness to the penitent and to the nearness of the day of salvation (55:6, 56:1).

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH
TO THE CALENDAR

The Torah reading for the afternoon service on fast days (Fast of Gedaliah, 10th of *Tevet*, Fast of Esther, 17th of *Tammuz*, and *Tish-ah b'Av*) is Exod. 32:11-14 and 34:1-10. In the first selec-

tion, Moses appeals to God to relent in His anger against His people; in the second, Moses receives a revelation of God's attributes of mercy. In particular, the Lord is called "compassionate" (*rahum*) and "abounding [*rav*] in kindness," forgiving iniquity and sin (Exod. 34:6-7). The *haftarah* echoes these themes. In it the prophet calls on the people to repent of their evil plans and ways, emphasizing that God will compassionately "pardon" (*vi-yrahameihu*) the sinner and "freely [or "fully," *yarbeh*] pardon him" (Isa. 55:7). A key reason for selecting this *haftarah* was undoubtedly its emphasis on divine mercy—so central on a day of penance and fasting.

55 ⁶Seek the LORD while He can be found,

Call to Him while He is near.

⁷Let the wicked give up his ways,

The sinful man his plans;

Let him turn back to the LORD,

And He will pardon him;

To our God,

For He freely forgives.

⁸For My plans are not your plans,

Nor are My ways your ways

—declares the LORD.

⁹But as the heavens are high above the earth,

So are My ways high above your ways

And My plans above your plans.

¹⁰For as the rain or snow drops from heaven

נה ⁶דְּרֹשׁוּ יְהוָה בְּהִמְצְאוֹ

קְרֹאוּהוּ בְּהִיוֹתוֹ קְרוֹב:

⁷יַעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דְרָכָו

וְאִישׁ אָוֶן מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ

וְיָשָׁב אֶל־יְהוָה

וְיִרְחַמֵּהוּ

וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֵינוּ

כִּי־יִרְבֶּה לְסִלּוֹחַ:

⁸כִּי לֹא מִחֲשַׁבּוֹתַי מִחֲשַׁבּוֹתֵיכֶם

וְלֹא דְרָכֵיכֶם דְרָכַי

נְאֻם יְהוָה:

⁹כִּי־גָבְהוּ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ

כֵּן גָבְהוּ דְרָכַי מִדְרָכֵיכֶם

וּמִחֲשַׁבְתִּי מִמִּחֲשַׁבְתֵיכֶם:

¹⁰כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר יֵרֵד הַגֶּשֶׁם וְהַשֶּׁלֶג מִן־

הַשָּׁמַיִם

Isaiah 55:6. Seek the LORD while He can be found The phrasing echoes the Torah; Moses, anticipating a time of exile, told the people that "if you search there for the LORD your God, you will find Him, if only you seek Him with all your heart and soul . . . and, in the end, return" to Him (Deut. 4:29-30). God's compassion is stressed there (Deut. 4:31), as here.

Call This imperative is either synonymous with "seek," in the first clause, or it introduces a separate act of penitential prayer.

while He is near The quality of divine closeness to those who call is presented as a distin-

guishing characteristic of Israel's God in Deut. 4:7.

8. My ways In the Torah, after the people sinned with the Golden Calf, Moses asked to be shown God's "ways"; he received the revelation of God's 13 attributes of mercy (Exod. 34:6-7). Centuries later, when Ezekiel taught God's readiness to forgive the penitent, the exiles responded with wonder and doubt at God's incomprehensible "way" (Ezek. 18:25,29); they assumed that iniquity had to be punished. Here, too, it appears that the people need to be convinced that God will forgive those who turn from evil. But God's

And returns not there,
 But soaks the earth
 And makes it bring forth vegetation,
 Yielding seed for sowing and bread for
 eating,
¹¹So is the word that issues from My mouth:
 It does not come back to Me unfulfilled,
 But performs what I purpose,
 Achieves what I sent it to do.
¹²Yea, you shall leave in joy and be led home
 secure.
 Before you, mount and hill shall shout aloud,
 And all the trees of the field shall clap their
 hands.
¹³Instead of the brier, a cypress shall rise;
 Instead of the nettle, a myrtle shall rise.
 These shall stand as a testimony to the LORD,
 As an everlasting sign that shall not perish.

וְשָׁמָּה לֹא יָשׁוּב
 בִּי אִם־הִרְוָה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
 וְהוֹלִינָהּ וְהִצְמִיחָהּ
 וְנָתַן זֶרַע לְזֵרַע וְלֶחֶם לְאֹכֵל:
¹¹ כֵּן יִהְיֶה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִפִּי
 לֹא־יָשׁוּב אֵלַי רִיקָם
 כִּי אִם־עָשָׂה אֶת־אֲשֶׁר הִפְצֵיתִי
 וְהִצְלִיחַ אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּיו:
¹² כִּי־בִשְׂמִיחָה תֵצְאוּ וּבִשְׁלוֹם תּוּבְלוּן
 הַהָרִים וְהַגְּבְעוֹת יִפְצְחוּ לִפְנֵיכֶם רִנָּה
 וְכָל־עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה יִמְחֲאוּ־כַף:
¹³ תַּחַת הַנְּעֻצוֹן יַעֲלֶה בְרוֹשׁ
 תַּחַת וְתַחַת הַסְּרָפֵד יַעֲלֶה הַדָּס
 וְהָיָה לִיהוָה לְשֵׁם
 לְאֹת עוֹלָם לֹא יִכָּרֵת: ס

56 Thus said the LORD:

Observe what is right and do what is just;
 For soon My salvation shall come,
 And My deliverance be revealed.
²Happy is the man who does this,
 The man who holds fast to it:
 Who keeps the sabbath and does not profane
 it,
 And stays his hand from doing any evil.
³Let not the foreigner say,
 Who has attached himself to the LORD,

נֹו כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה
 שְׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפָּט וַעֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה
 כִּי־קִרְבָּה יִשׁוּעָתִי לְבוֹא
 וְצִדְקָתִי לְהַגְלוֹת:
² אֲשֶׁר־יֵאָנוּשׁ יַעֲשֶׂה־זֹאת
 וּבֶן־אָדָם יִחְזִיק בָּהּ
 שָׁמַר שַׁבָּת מִחֻלְלוֹ
 וְשָׁמַר יָדוֹ מִמַּעֲשׂוֹת כָּל־רָע: ס
³ וְאֶל־יֹאמְרֵי בְנֵי־הַנֹּכְרִים
 הַגְּלוּיָהּ אֶל־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר

ways are those of compassion and of openness to repentance.

11. This idiom for the prophetic word is rooted in prophetic traditions about the effectiveness of divine predictions (see 1 Sam. 9:6; cf. 2 Kings 10:10).

come back Hebrew: *yashuv*, which plays on *v'yashov* ("Let him turn back") in verse 7.

13. a testimony Hebrew: *shem*; "a name" that is an "everlasting sign that shall not perish [*lo yikkaret*]." Compare 56:5 below, where the eu-

nuchs who observe the covenant will have a "name" (*shem*) in the Temple—"an everlasting name [*shem*] that shall not perish [*lo yikkaret*]."

Isaiah 56:1. do what is just The call to morally righteous behavior is a hallmark of biblical prophecy.

2. Who keeps the sabbath . . . And stays his hand This instruction epitomizes the ritual law and the moral law, the duties to God and to other human beings.

3. Who has attached himself Hebrew:

“The LORD will keep me apart from His people”;

And let not the eunuch say,

“I am a withered tree.”

⁴For thus said the LORD:

“As for the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths,

Who have chosen what I desire

And hold fast to My covenant—

⁵I will give them, in My House

And within My walls,

A monument and a name

Better than sons or daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name

Which shall not perish.

⁶As for the foreigners

Who attach themselves to the LORD,

To minister to Him,

And to love the name of the LORD,

To be His servants—

All who keep the sabbath and do not profane

it,

And who hold fast to My covenant—

⁷I will bring them to My sacred mount

And let them rejoice in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices

Shall be welcome on My altar;

For My House shall be called

A house of prayer for all peoples.”

⁸Thus declares the Lord God,

Who gathers the dispersed of Israel:

“I will gather still more to those already gathered.”

הַבְּדֵל יַבְדִּילֵנִי יְהוָה מֵעַל עַמּוֹ
וְאֶל-יְאֹמְרֵי הַפְּרִיס
הֵן אֲנִי עֵץ יָבֵשׁ: ס
כִּי-כֵן אָמַר יְהוָה
לְפָרִיסִים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת-שַׁבְּתוֹתַי
וּבָחֲרוּ בְאֲשֶׁר הִפַּצְתִּי
וּמַחְזִיקִים בְּבְרִיתִי:
וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם בְּבֵיתִי
וּבְחֹמֹתַי
יָד וְשֵׁם
טוֹב מִבָּנִים וּמִבָּנוֹת
שֵׁם עוֹלָם אֶתֶּן-לָו
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִפְרֹת: ס
וּבְנֵי הַנֹּכֵר
הַגֵּלִיִּם עַל-יְהוָה
לְשֵׁרְתוֹ
וְלֹא-הִכָּה אֶת-שֵׁם יְהוָה
לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַבְדִּים
כִּלְ-שִׁמְרֵי שַׁבַּת מִחֻלָּלוֹ
וּמַחְזִיקִים בְּבְרִיתִי:
וְהִבִּיאֹתִים אֶל-הָר קֹדְשִׁי
וְשִׁמְחֹתִים בְּבֵית הַתְּפִלָּה
עוֹלְתֵיהֶם וּזְבַחֵיהֶם
לְרַצּוֹן עַל-מִזְבְּחִי
כִּי בֵיתִי בֵּית-תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא
לְכָל-הָעַמִּים:
נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה
מִקְבֹּץ נְדָחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
עוֹד אֶקְבֹּץ עָלָיו לְנִקְבְּצָיו:

ha-nilvah, a late technical designation for foreigners who join the community of Israel (see Zech. 2:15; Esther 9:27).

5. A monument and a name Hebrew: *yad va-shem*. This phrase seems to indicate a special place (Ibn Ezra; cf. Deut. 23:13), monument (cf. 1 Sam. 15:12), or Temple role that would compensate the pious eunuchs for their lack of progeny (cf. 2 Sam. 18:18). Nearly 2500 years later, it was adopted by the State of Israel as the name of its Holocaust memorial site, in Jerusalem.

7. house of prayer A new designation for the Temple. Its role as a place of prayer for everyone was spelled out by King Solomon in his prayer inaugurating the Temple (1 Kings 8:41-42). In Isaiah, foreigners who join the Israelite covenant and observe its duties are promised participation in the sacrificial service, making them equal in all respects to the native Israelites (Radak). This is a bold example of prophetic universalism, authorized by God. All may join the Covenant—and may worship with full rights.