

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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

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

²¹You 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.

²²You 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 וְהָעֹזְנִיָּה׃
¹³וְהָרָאָה וְאֶת־הָאֵיָּה וְהַדִּיָּה לְמִינָהּ׃
¹⁴וְאֵת כָּל־עֶרְב לְמִינֹו׃ ¹⁵וְאֵת בַּת־
הַיַּעֲנָה וְאֶת־הַתְּחֹמֶס וְאֶת־הַשְּׁחָף וְאֶת־
הַנֶּץ לְמִינָהּ׃ ¹⁶אֶת־הַכּוֹס וְאֶת־הַיִּנְשׁוּף
וְהַתְּנַשְׁמַת׃ ¹⁷וְהַקָּאֵת וְאֶת־הַרְחֻמָּה
וְאֶת־הַשִּׁלְף׃ ¹⁸וְהַחֲסִידָה וְהָאֲנָפָה לְמִינָהּ
וְהַדּוֹכִיפַת וְהָעֵטְלָף׃

¹⁹וְכֹל שָׂרֵץ הָעוֹף טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם לֹא
יֵאָכְלוּ׃ ²⁰כָּל־עוֹף טָהוֹר תֹּאכְלוּ׃
²¹לֹא תֹאכְלוּ כָל־נִבְלָה לֶגֶר אֲשֶׁר־
בַּשָּׂעֲרִיף תִּתְּנֶנָּה וְאָכְלָהּ אֹ מְכֹר לְנִכְרֵי
כִּי עִם קְדוֹשׁ אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ
לֹא־תִבְשַׁל גְּדִי בְחֵלֶב אִמּוֹ׃ פ

חמישי ²²עֶשֶׂר תַּעֲשֹׂר אֶת כָּל־תְּבוּאָת וְרַעֲךָ

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. ²³You 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. ²⁴Should 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, ²⁵you may convert them into money. Wrap up the money and take it with you to the place that the LORD your God has chosen, ²⁶and 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

הִיֵּצֵא הַשְּׂדֵה שְׁנָה שְׁנָה : ²³ וְאָכַלְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר לְשִׁבְן שְׁמוֹ שֶׁם מֵעֶשֶׂר דְּגַנְךָ תִּירֹשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהָרֶךָ וּבְכֹרֹת בְּקָרְךָ וְצֹאנֶךָ לְמַעַן תִּלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל־הַיָּמִים : ²⁴ וְכִי־יִרְבֶּה מִמֶּךָ הַדֶּרֶךְ כִּי לֹא תוּכַל שְׂאֵתוֹ כִּי־יִרְחַק מִמֶּךָ הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׂוּם שְׁמוֹ שֶׁם כִּי יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ : ²⁵ וְנָתַתָּה בַּכֶּסֶף וְצִרְתָּ הַכֶּסֶף בִּידֶךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ : ²⁶ וְנָתַתָּה הַכֶּסֶף בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תִּאֱוָה נַפְשֶׁךָ בַּבָּקָר וּבַצֹּאן וּבַיִּין וּבַשֵּׁכָר וּבְכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁאָלֶךָ נַפְשֶׁךָ 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.

²⁷But do not neglect the Levite in your community, for he has no hereditary portion as you have. ²⁸Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your yield of that year, but leave it within your settlements. ²⁹Then 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 וְשִׂמְחָתָא אֲתָה
וּבֵיתְךָ:
וְהַלְוִי אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲזֹבֵנּוּ כִּי
אֵין לוֹ חֶלֶק וְנִחְלָה עִמָּךְ: ס ²⁸ מִקְצֵה א
שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים תּוֹצִיא אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֶׂר
תְּבוֹאֲתָךְ בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִוא וְהִנַּחְתָּ בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:
וּבֹא הַלְוִי כִּי אֵין־לוֹ חֶלֶק וְנִחְלָה עִמָּךְ ²⁹
וְהַגֵּר וְהִיתָנוּם וְהֶאֱלַמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ
וְאָכְלוּ וְשָׂבְעוּ לְמַעַן יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בְּכָל־מַעֲשֶׂה יָדֶךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה: ס

15 Every seventh year you shall practice re-

טו ששי מקץ שבע-שנים תעשה שמטה:

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. ²This 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. ³You may dun the foreigner; but you must remit whatever is due you from your kinsmen.

⁴There 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—⁵if only you heed the LORD your God and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. ⁶For 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.

⁷If, however, there is a needy person among

וְזֶה דְבַר הַשְּׁמִטָּה שְׁמוֹט כָּל-בַּעַל מִשָּׂה יָדוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִשֶׁה בְּרַעְיוֹ לֹא-יִגֹּשׁ אֶת-רַעְיוֹ וְאֶת-אָחִיו כִּי-קָרָא שְׁמִטָּה לַיהוָה: ³ אֶת-הַנִּכְרִי תִגֹּשׁ וְאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֶת-אָחִיךָ תִשְׁמַט יָדְךָ:

⁴ אָפֶס כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה-בְּךָ אֲבִיוֹן כִּי-יִבְרַךְ יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נִתְּנָן-לְךָ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ⁵ רַק אִם-שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׁמֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-הַמִּצְוֹת הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מֵצִוְּךָ הַיּוֹם: ⁶ כִּי-יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּרַכְךָ בְּאֲשֶׁר יִבְרַכְךָ וְהִעֲבַטְתָּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְאֶתָּה לֹא תִעֲבֹט וּמִשְׁלַתָּ בְּגוֹיִם רַבִּים וּבְךָ לֹא יִמְשִׁלוּ: ס

⁷ כִּי-יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֲבִיוֹן מֵאֶחָד אֶחָיֶךָ בְּאֶחָד

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. ⁸Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. ⁹Beware 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. ¹⁰Give 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. ¹¹For 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.

שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן
 לְךָ לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת־לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפָּץ
 אֶת־יָדְךָ מֵאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן: ⁸ כִּי־פָתַחַ
 תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֵעֵבֵט תַּעֲבִיטְנוּ דִי
 מִחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יַחֲסֹר לוֹ: ⁹ הַשְּׁמֹר לְךָ
 פֶּן־יִהְיֶה דְבַר עִם־לִבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל לְאִמֹר
 קָרְבָה שְׁנַת־הַשְּׁבַע שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָה וְרַעַה
 עֵינֶךָ בְּאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקִרָא
 עָלֶיךָ אֶל־יְהוָה וְהָיָה בְּךָ חַטָּא: ¹⁰ נָתַתָּן
 תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא־יִרַע לְבָבְךָ בְּתִתֵּן לוֹ כִּי
 בְּגִלְלָה הַדְּבַר הַזֶּה יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 בְּכָל־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְכָל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ: ¹¹ כִּי
 לֹא־יִחַדֵּל אֲבִיּוֹן מִקְרֹב הָאָרֶץ עַל־פְּנֵי
 אֲנָכִי מִצְוֶיךָ לְאִמֹר פָּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ
 לְאֲחִיךָ לְעֲנִיךָ וּלְאֲבִינֶךָ בְּאֶרֶץ: ^ס

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.

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.

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

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).

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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.

¹²If 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. ¹³When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: ¹⁴Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the LORD your God has blessed you. ¹⁵Bear 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.

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

כִּי־יִמָּכַר לְךָ אֶחֱיֶיךָ הָעִבְרִי אוֹ הָעִבְרִיָּה ¹²
וְעַבְדְּךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת
תְּשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ חֲפָשִׁי מֵעִמָּךְ: ¹³ וְכִי־תִשְׁלַחְנֶנּוּ
חֲפָשִׁי מֵעִמָּךְ לֹא תִשְׁלַחְנֶנּוּ רִיקָם:
¹⁴ הָעֵגֶיֶן תַּעֲנִיֵק לּוֹ מִצֹּאֲנֶיךָ וּמִגֶּרְנֶיךָ
וּמִיִּקְבֶּיךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּרִכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִתֶּן־
לוֹ: ¹⁵ וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
וַיַּפְדֶּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ
אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם:

וְהָיָה כִּי־יֹאמַר אֵלֶיךָ לֹא אֵצֵא מֵעִמָּךְ
כִּי אֶהְבֶּךָ וְאֶת־בֵּיתְךָ כִּי־טוֹב לוֹ עִמָּךְ:
¹⁷ 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” (*aḥikha*), 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.

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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-Ḥinnukh* 481–482).

and he shall become your slave in perpetuity. Do the same with your female slave. ¹⁸When 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.

¹⁹You 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. ²⁰You and your household shall eat it annually before the LORD your God in the place that the LORD will choose. ²¹But if it has a defect, lameness or blindness, any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. ²²Eat 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.

וּבְדָלַת וְהָיָה לְךָ עֶבֶד עוֹלָם וְאַף לְאִמָּתְךָ
תַּעֲשֶׂה-כֵן: ¹⁸ לֹא-יִקְשֶׁה בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּשַׁלְּחֶךָ
אֹתוֹ חֲפָזִי מִעֲמֹךָ כִּי מִשְׁנֵה שְׂכָר שְׂכִיר
עֲבָדְךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים וּבִרְכָךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה: פ

שביעי ¹⁹ כָּל-הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר יוֹלֵד בְּבָקְרֶךָ וּבְצֹאֲנֶךָ
הַזָּכָר תִּקְדִּישׁ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲבֹד
בְּבָכָר שׁוֹרְךָ וְלֹא תִגְזוּ בְּכוֹר צֹאֲנֶךָ: ²⁰ לְפָנָי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תֹאכְלֶנּוּ שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה בַּמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֶתָּה וּבֵיתְךָ: ²¹ וְכִי-
יְהִי בּוֹ מוֹם פֶּסֶחַ אוֹ עִוָּר כֹּל מוֹם רָע
לֹא תִזְבְּחֶנּוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ²² בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ
תֹאכְלֶנּוּ הַטָּמֵא וְהַטְּהוֹר יַחְדָּו בְּצִבְי

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.

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

וְכֹאֵיל: ²³רַק 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. ²You shall slaughter the passover sacrifice for the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the

טז שְׁמֹר אֶת־חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב וְעֲשֵׂיתָ
פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בַחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב
הוֹצִיאָךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה:
²וּזְבַחְתָּ פֶסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ צֹאן וּבָקָר
בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה לְשַׁבַּן 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. ³You 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. ⁴For 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.

⁵You are not permitted to slaughter the pass-over sacrifice in any of the settlements that the LORD your God is giving you; ⁶but 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 sundown, the time of day when you departed from

שָׁם: ³ לֹא-תֹאכַל עָלָיו חֶמֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים
תֹּאכַל-עָלָיו מִצֹּת לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי בְּהַפְּזוֹן
יָצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת-יְוֹם
צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:
וְלֹא-יִרְאֶה לְךָ שָׂאֵר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלְךָ שִׁבְעַת
יָמִים וְלֹא-יִלִּין מִן-הַבֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר תִּזְבַּח
בְּעֶרֶב בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן לַבֶּקֶר:
⁵ לֹא תֹכַל לִזְבַּח אֶת-הַפֶּסַח בְּאַחַד
שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ: ⁶ כִּי
אִם-אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לְשַׁבֵּן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם תִּזְבַּח אֶת-הַפֶּסַח בְּעֶרֶב
כְּבוֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ 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

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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. ⁷You 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. ⁸After 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.

⁹You shall count off seven weeks; start to count the seven weeks when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. ¹⁰Then 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. ¹¹You 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,

7 וּבִשְׁלֹתָ וְאָכַלְתָּ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ וּפְנִיתָ בִּבְקָר וְהִלַּכְתָּ לְאֶהְלִיךָ: 8 שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מִצֹּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי עֲצַרְתָּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה: ט

9 שִׁבְעָה שָׁבָעַת תִּסְפָּר־לָךְ מִהַחֵל חֲרִמְשׁ בְּקִמָּה תַחֵל לִסְפֹּר שִׁבְעָה שָׁבָעוֹת: 10 וְעֲשִׂיתָ חַג שָׁבָעוֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִסֹּת נְדִבַת יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר יְבָרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: 11 וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְהַלְוִי

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. ¹²Bear in mind that you were slaves in Egypt, and take care to obey these laws.

¹³After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. ¹⁴You 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. ¹⁵You 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.

¹⁶Three 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, ¹⁷but 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 simhateinu*).

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 וְהִגַּר וְהִיתוּם וְהָאֱלֹמְנָה
אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁפֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם : ¹² וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי-עֶבֶד
הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְשָׁמַרְתָּ וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת-
הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה: פ

¹³ חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לְךָ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים
מִפְּטוּר
בְּאֶסְפָּף מְגֻרְנֶךָ וּמִקִּבְּךָ: ¹⁴ וְשִׂמְחֶת בַּחֲגֹךָ
אִתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְהַלְוִי
וְהִגַּר וְהִיתוּם וְהָאֱלֹמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ:
¹⁵ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תַּחֲגֹ לַיהוָה לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה כִּי יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ
וְהָיִיתָ אִף שְׂמֵחַ:

¹⁶ שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים | בְּשָׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל-זְכוּרְךָ
אֶת-פָּנָיו | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר
בַּחֲגֵי הַמִּצְוֹת וּבְחַג הַשְּׂבָעוֹת וּבְחַג
הַסֻּכּוֹת וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה אֶת-פָּנָיו יְהוָה רִיקָם:
¹⁷ אִישׁ כַּמִּתְנַת יָדוֹ כְּבִרְכַּת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ: 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 worshipers 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).

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to the LORD,¹⁷ and on the fifteenth day of that month a festival. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days.¹⁸ The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.¹⁹ You shall present a gift, a burnt offering, to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs—see that they are without blemish.²⁰ The grain offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in: prepare three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram;²¹ and for each of the seven lambs prepare one-tenth of a measure.²² And there shall be one goat for a purification offering, to make expiation in your behalf.²³ You shall present these in addition to the morning portion of the regular burnt offering.²⁴ You shall offer the like daily for seven days as food, a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD; they shall be offered, with their libations, in addition to the regular burnt offering.²⁵ And the seventh day shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall not work at your occupations.

²⁶On the day of the first fruits, your Feast of Weeks, when you bring an offering of new grain to the LORD, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.²⁷ You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs.²⁸ The grain offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed

לְחֹדֶשׁ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה: ¹⁷ וּבַחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לְחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה חֵג שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מִצּוֹת יֹאכְל: ¹⁸ בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרֵא־קֹדֶשׁ כָּל־מִלֵּאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: ¹⁹ וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אִשָּׁה עֹלָה לַיהוָה פָּרִים בְּנֵי־בָקָר שְׁנַיִם וְאֵיל אֶחָד וְשִׁבְעָה כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה תְּמִימִם יִהְיוּ לָכֶם: ²⁰ וּמִנְחֹתָם סֹלֶת בָּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן שְׁלֵשָׁה עֶשְׂרֹנִים לְפָר וּשְׁנֵי עֶשְׂרֹנִים לְאֵיל תַּעֲשׂוּ: ²¹ עֶשְׂרוֹן עֶשְׂרוֹן תַּעֲשֶׂה לַכֹּפֶשׁ הָאֶחָד לְשִׁבְעַת הַכֹּפְשִׁים: ²² וְשִׁעִיר חֲטָאֵת אֶחָד לְכִפֹּר עֲלֵיכֶם: ²³ מִלֵּבֶד עֹלֹת הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר לְעֹלֹת הַתָּמִיד תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־אֵלֶּה: ²⁴ כָּאֵלֶּה תַּעֲשׂוּ לַיּוֹם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לֶחֶם אִשָּׁה רִיח־נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה עַל־עֹלֹת הַתָּמִיד יַעֲשֶׂה וְנִסְבּוּ: ²⁵ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרֵא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מִלֵּאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: ²⁶ וּבַיּוֹם הַבְּכוּרִים בְּהִקְרִיבְכֶם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה בְּשִׁבְעַת־יָמֵיכֶם מִקְרֵא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מִלֵּאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: ²⁷ וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עֹלָה לְרִיח־נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה פָּרִים בְּנֵי־בָקָר שְׁנַיִם אֵיל אֶחָד שִׁבְעָה כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה: ²⁸ וּמִנְחֹתָם סֹלֶת בָּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן שְׁלֵשָׁה עֶשְׂרֹנִים

even though it is a private sacrifice (see Exod. 12:1–11) indicates that by this time the two festivals had become fused.

17. festival Both the paschal sacrifice and the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread are observed at the sanctuary, precisely as instituted by Deut. 16:1–6.

18. occupations Hebrew: *m'lekhet avodah*; literally, “laborious work,” of the sort that is forbidden on the festivals. This is in contrast to “any work” (*kol m'lakhah*), which is forbidden on *Shabbat* and *Yom Kippur* (Num. 29:7; Lev. 23:3,28). The nonlaborious work permitted (by implication) on the festivals is not defined, except for the explicit permission to pre-

pare food on the first and last days of *Pesah* (Exod. 12:16).

FEAST OF WEEKS (vv. 26–31)

This festival, which marks the start of the wheat harvest, does not depend on the lunar calendar. It occurs seven weeks after the beginning of the barley harvest (Lev. 23:15–16). In this regard it is like *Shabbat*, which is also independent of the lunar calendar.

26. day of the first fruits This day is also called “the Feast of the Harvest” (*Hag ha-Katzir*) in Exod. 23:16, and “the Feast of Weeks” (*Hag [ha-]Shavu-ot*) in Exod. 34:22, Deut. 16:10,16, and 2 Chron. 8:13.

in, three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram, ²⁹and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. ³⁰And there shall be one goat for expiation in your behalf. ³¹You shall present them—see that they are without blemish—with their libations, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its grain offering.

29 In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded. ²You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the LORD: one bull of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs, without blemish. ³The grain offering with them—choice flour with oil mixed in—shall be: three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram, ⁴and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. ⁵And there shall be one goat for a purification offering, to make expiation in your behalf—⁶in addition to the burnt offering of the new moon with its grain offering and the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, each with its libation as prescribed, gifts of pleasing odor to the LORD.

⁷On the tenth day of the same seventh month

FIRST DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH
(29:1–6)

The seventh new moon is to the ordinary new moon as the seventh day is to the ordinary day, thereby indicating how the sabbatical cycle was preserved in the lunar calendar. The seventh month is actually the beginning of the agricultural year, as is apparent from the oldest calendars of the Bible (see Exod. 23:16, 34:22). The Jewish religious calendar still preserves the first day of the seventh month as the beginning of the year: *Rosh ha-Shanah*, “The Head of the Year,” or New Year’s Day. The Bible neither mentions it by name nor describes any New Year festival.

לֶפָר הָאֶחָד שְׁנֵי עֶשְׂרִים לְאֵיל
הָאֶחָד: ²⁹עֶשְׂרוֹן עֶשְׂרוֹן לִכְבֹּשׁ הָאֶחָד
לְשִׁבְעַת הַכֹּבָשִׁים: ³⁰שְׁעִיר עֲזִים אֶחָד
לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם: ³¹מִלֶּבֶד עַל־תְּתִיבֵי
וּמִנְחָתוֹ תַעֲשׂוּ תְּמִימִם יְהִי־לְכֶם
וְנִסְפִיהֶם: פ

כט וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ
מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלָאכֶת
עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם:
²וַעֲשִׂיתֶם עֹלָה לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה פֶּרֶךְ
בֶּן־בָּקָר אֶחָד אֵיל אֶחָד כֹּבָשִׁים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה
שִׁבְעָה תְּמִימִם: ³וּמִנְחָתָם סֶלֶת בָּלוּלָה
בְּשֶׁמֶן שְׁלֹשָׁה עֶשְׂרִים לֶפָר שְׁנֵי עֶשְׂרִים
לְאֵיל: ⁴וְעֶשְׂרוֹן אֶחָד לִכְבֹּשׁ הָאֶחָד
לְשִׁבְעַת הַכֹּבָשִׁים: ⁵וְשְׁעִיר־עֲזִים אֶחָד
חֹטָאת לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם: ⁶מִלֶּבֶד עַל־תְּתִיבֵי
הַחֹדֶשׁ וּמִנְחָתָהּ וְעַל־תְּתִיבֵי וּמִנְחָתָהּ
וְנִסְפִיהֶם כְּמִשְׁפָּטָם לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ אִשָּׁה
לַיהוָה: ס
⁷וּבַעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה מִקְרָא־

1. a day when the horn is sounded Hebrew: *yom t'ru-ah*, “a day of acclaim,” probably the royal acclaim of God as King and Creator. The horn blowing on this day should not be confused with the prescription that horns should be blown on all festivals (10:10).

TENTH DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH
(vv. 7–11)

The day is known as *Yom ha-Kippurim*, “The Day of Purgation,” which refers to the purgation of the sanctuary following its year-long defilement by mortals. Thus the purgation rituals are entirely within the confines of the sanctuary

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

29:1. a day when the horn is sounded Maimonides cites this verse as the source for the commandment to listen to the *shofar* blasts on *Rosh ha-Shanah* (MT *Shofar* 1:1).

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הַפְּטָרָה לַשַּׁבּוּעוֹת (יוֹם שֵׁנִי)

HAFTARAH FOR SHAVU·OT, SECOND DAY

HABAKKUK 3:1–19 (*Ashk'nazim*)

HABAKKUK 2:20–3:19 (*S'fardim*)

The revelation of God's heavenly Glory to the prophet (Hab. 3:3–15) dominates the imagery of this *haftarah*. As in Ezek. 1 (recited on the first day of *Shavu-ot*), that Glory appears on a chariot and is terrifying. This prophetic vision is encased within an opening petition for divine mercy and a concluding personal response (Hab. 3:1–2, 16–19). Chapter 3 is recited by *Ashk'nazim*. Meanwhile, *S'fardim* begin with the final verse of chapter 2 (v. 20), which refers to God in His heavenly temple. That verse thus serves as a prologue to the vision of God's appearance.

The inner frame of the composition contains the opening petition of the prophet (3:2), and the final response (vv. 16–19). Use of the verb *shama* (“I learned” in v. 2 and “I heard” in v. 16) punctuates the past and the present—the record of ancient divine deeds and the immediate experience of God who is coming to deliver the people.

At the center of the *haftarah* is the terrifying vision of God's appearance on a storm chariot. This wreaks havoc throughout the natural world, making “the earth burst into streams” and making “the mountains rock” (vv. 9–10). It also unloosens the world of mortals, smashing homes and cracking skulls of the enemy. Amid the radiance that emanates from God's glory (v. 4), an avenging hoard of furies (pestilence and plague) march forth and add to the mayhem (v. 5). A horrendous divine rage is described, leading the speaker to wonder at the need for such cosmic force against earthly foes (vv. 8–9) and to quiver in place. “Rot entered into my bone, / I trembled where I stood” (v. 16).

Alongside this cosmic imagery is the theme of bashing and battering the water. This too is an old mythic motif, found frequently in Scripture as part of dramatic accounts of God's might at the Creation and at the Exodus.

Habakkuk's vision is notable in another regard. As a manifestation of God out of a whirlwind responding to a human cry of divine injustice, the text begs comparison with the Book of Job. God's appearance to Habakkuk comes in response to his prayer for divine compassion. The answer has a direct mythic force. Divine presence is everything—and sufficient. Despite his fears, the prophet is now empowered with confidence and joy. No supernatural wisdom is conveyed here, only the certitude of God's historical providence.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

Habakkuk was selected for reading on the second day of *Shavu-ot*, according to Rashi, “For it speaks of the Giving of the Torah: ‘God comes from Teman’ [the south, i.e., the Sinai wilderness; v. 3].” In this explanation, Rashi follows the Targum and an old midrashic tradition (*Sifrei Deut.*). Rashi goes further in his commentary to the biblical verse itself. He alludes to a tradition whereby God went to the other nations to see if they would accept the Torah, but they refused. This is based on a midrashic interpretation of Hab. 3:6 (literally: “When He stands, He measures [*va-y'moded*] the earth; when He glances, He unlooses [*va-yater*] nations”). According to a *midrash*, God took the measure of the mountains, but found only Sinai “worthy” for the Revelation (Gen. R. 99:1). Taking the measure of the earth, God found only the land of Israel “worthy” for His people. He thereupon gave the Israelites a dispensation (*better*) with respect to the other nations, and permitted (*bittir*) the nations a certain leniency in their ritual life.

Habakkuk 3 thus proves central in ancient homilies attempting to explain or justify why Is-

rael alone received God’s revelation. One view teaches that Torah is Israel’s sacred destiny, and the source of its national and spiritual life. This truth is reconfirmed on the festival of *Shavu-ot*,

when the community of Israel stands before the ongoing reality of Sinai and “renews” it “in these years” (Hab. 3:2).

2 ²⁰The LORD is in His holy Abode—
Be silent before Him all the earth!

ב ²⁰וַיְהִי הָיָה בְּהִיבֵל קְדֻשׁוֹ
הַסּ מִפְּנֵי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ: פ

3 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk. In the mode of *Shigionoth*.

ג * תְּפִלָּה לַחֲבַקּוּק הַנְּבִיא עַל שְׂגִינּוֹת:

²O LORD! I have learned of Your renown;
I am awed, O LORD, by Your deeds.
Renew them in these years,
Oh, make them known in these years!
Though angry, may You remember compassion.

²יְהוָה שָׁמַעְתִּי שְׁמִיעָךְ
יִרְאֵתִי יְהוָה פָּעֲלֶךָ
בְּקָרֵב שָׁנִים חִיִּיהוּ
בְּקָרֵב שָׁנִים תּוֹדִיעַ
בְּרָגְזוֹ רַחֵם תִּזְכּוֹר:

³God is coming from Teman,
The Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah.*
His majesty covers the skies,
His splendor fills the earth:

³אֵלֹהִים מִתִּימָן יָבֹוא
וְקְדוֹשׁ מִהַר-פָּאָרָן סֵלָה
כְּסָה שָׁמַיִם הוֹדוֹ
וַתִּהְלֶתָּ מִלְּאָה הָאָרֶץ:

⁴It is a brilliant light
Which gives off rays on every side—
And therein His glory is enveloped.

⁴וַנִּגַּה פָּאֹר תְּהִיָּה
קַרְנִים מִיָּדוֹ לֹ

⁵Pestilence marches before Him,
And plague comes forth at His heels.

וְשֵׁם חֲבִיּוֹן עִזּוֹ:
⁵לְפָנָיו יִלֶּךְ דָּבָר

⁶When He stands, He makes the earth shake;
When He glances, He makes nations tremble.

וַיֵּצֵא רָשָׁף לְרַגְלָיו:
⁶עֲמֵד | וַיִּמּוֹד אֶרֶץ

The age-old mountains are shattered,
The primeval hills sink low.
His are the ancient routes:

רָאָה וַיִּתֵּר גּוֹיִם
וַיִּתְפָּצְצוּ הַרְרֵי-עֵד
שָׁחוּ גְבְעוֹת עוֹלָם
הַלִּיכוֹת עוֹלָם לֹ:

Habakkuk 2:20. The LORD is in His holy Abode The Lord’s heavenly dwelling is the place to which prayers ascend (Ps. 18:7; cf. 1 Kings 8:30) and from which divine rescue proceeds (Ps. 18:8–10; cf. 68:34–36).

Habakkuk 3:1. Habakkuk The word in Hebrew is otherwise unknown. In Akkadian (*habbaququ* or *hambaququ*) it means “fragrant herb.”

3–15. A long-standing rabbinic tradition

* Ashk’nazim start here.

7As a scene of havoc I behold
The tents of Cushan;
Shaken are the pavilions
Of the land of Midian!

תַּחַת אָוֹן רָאִיתִי
אֶהְלֵי כוּשָׁן
יִרְעוֹת יִרְעוֹת
אֶרֶץ מִדְיָן: ט

8Are You wroth, O LORD, with Neharim?
Is Your anger against Neharim,
Your rage against Yam—
That You are driving Your steeds,
Your victorious chariot?

הַבְּנֵהָרִים חָרָה יְהוָה
אִם בְּנֵהָרִים אַפָּךְ
אִם-בַּיָּם עִבְרָתְךָ
כִּי תִרְכַּב עַל-סוּסֶיךָ
מִרְכַּבְתֶּיךָ יְשׁוּעָה:

9All bared and ready is Your bow.
Sworn are the rods of the word. *Selah.*

עֲרִיָּה תַעוֹר קִשְׁתְּךָ
שְׁבָעוֹת מַטּוֹת אָמַר סֵלָה

You make the earth burst into streams,
10The mountains rock at the sight of You,
A torrent of rain comes down;
Loud roars the deep,
The sky returns the echo.

נְהָרוֹת תִּבְקַע-אֶרֶץ:
רָאוּךָ יַחֲלִילוּ הָרִים
זֶרֶם מַיִם עָבַר
נָתַן תְּהוֹם קוֹלוֹ
רוֹם יִדְהוּ נִשְׂאָ:

11Sun [and] moon stand still on high
As Your arrows fly in brightness,
Your flashing spear in brilliance.

שֶׁמֶשׁ יָרַח עָמַד זְבֻלָּה
לְאֹר חֲצִיף יִהְלְכוּ
לְנִגְהָ בְרַק חֲנִיתְךָ:

12You tread the earth in rage,
You trample nations in fury.
13You have come forth to deliver Your people,
To deliver Your anointed.
You will smash the roof of the villain's house,

בְּזַעַם תִּצְעַד-אֶרֶץ
בְּאַף תִּדְרוֹשׁ גּוֹיִם:
יִצְאֲתָ לַיִשָּׁע עִמָּךְ
לַיִשָּׁע אֶת-מְשִׁיחְךָ
מִחֲצַת רֹאשׁ* מִבַּיִת רָשָׁע

v. 13. ר' דגושה

transforms the mythological sequences of Hab. 3 into specific episodes in the sacred history of Israel. The Targum interprets Hab. 3 as a systematic presentation of the great events of Israel's history of salvation. Thus the references to "iniquity" and "Cushan" in verse 7 were understood to hint at the sin of idolatry in the era of the chieftains ("judges") and divine punishment through Cushan Rishataim (cf. Judg. 3:7–8). The quaking mountains in verse 10 are linked to the revelation at Sinai, and the image of the sun and moon standing still in verse 11 evokes Joshua's battle cry and the miracle in Gibeon (Josh. 10:12–13). The statement that God will crack the "skull" of the enemy "with [His] bludgeon" (v. 14) alludes to

God's use of Moses' staff to defeat Pharaoh's warriors at the Sea.

9. Sworn are the rods of the word An old riddle that has puzzled commentators and translators since antiquity. The Hebrew consists of three words, meaning "oaths," "staves," and "word," which interrupt the continuity of the passage. An intriguing suggestion has been offered that these three words were originally in the margin of the text, placed there to indicate when this *haftarah* selection was to be read—not only on *Shavu-ot* but also with the sections of *Mattot* ("staves," Num. 17:16ff.) and *Va-yomer* ("And He said," related to "word," Gen. 12:1ff.) in one version of the ancient triennial cycle.

Raze it from foundation to top. *Selah.*

¹⁴You will crack [his] skull with Your bludgeon;

Blown away shall be his warriors,

Whose delight is to crush me suddenly,

To devour a poor man in an ambush.

¹⁵You will make Your steeds tread the sea,

Stirring the mighty waters.

¹⁶I heard and my bowels quaked,

My lips quivered at the sound;

Rot entered into my bone,

I trembled where I stood.

Yet I wait calmly for the day of distress,

For a people to come to attack us.

¹⁷Though the fig tree does not bud

And no yield is on the vine,

Though the olive crop has failed

And the fields produce no grain,

Though sheep have vanished from the fold

And no cattle are in the pen,

¹⁸Yet will I rejoice in the LORD,

Exult in the God who delivers me.

¹⁹My Lord GOD is my strength:

He makes my feet like the deer's

And lets me stride upon the heights.

For the leader; with instrumental music.

עָרוֹת יְסוּד עַד-צִוָּאר סָלָה: פ

¹⁴נִקְבַּת בְּמַטְיוֹ רֹאשׁ

פָּרוּזוּ פָּרוּזוֹ יִסְעָרוּ

לְהַפְּיֵצְנִי עַל־יְצַתְּם

כְּמוֹ-לֶאֱכֹל עָנִי בַּמְּסַתֵּר:

¹⁵דְּרַכְתָּ בַיָּם סוּסֶיךָ

חֹמֶר מֵיָם רַבִּים:

¹⁶שָׁמַעְתִּי | וַתִּרְגַּזוּ בְטִנִּי

לְקוֹל צִלְלוֹ שִׁפְתֵי

יָבוֹא רֶקֶב בְּעֶצְמִי

וַתַּחֲתִי אֲרַגּוּ

אֲשֶׁר אָנוּחַ לַיּוֹם צָרָה

לְעֹלוֹת לַעַם יְגוֹדְנוּ:

¹⁷כִּי-תֵאָנֶה לֹא-תִפְרָח

וְאֵין יָבוֹל בַּגִּפְנִים

כַּחַשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה-זֵית

וּשְׂדֵמוֹת לֹא-עָשָׂה אֶכְל

גֹּזֵר מִמְּכֻלָּה צֹאן

וְאֵין בָּקָר בְּרִפְתִּים:

¹⁸וְאֲנִי בִיהוָה אֶעֱלוֹזָה

אֶגִּילָה בְּאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵי:

¹⁹יְהוָה אֲדַנִּי חִילִי

וַיִּשֶׂם רַגְלִי כְּאֵילוֹת

וְעַל בְּמוֹתַי יִדְרַכְנִי

לְמַנְצַח בְּנְגִינוֹתַי: