

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



Produced by THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly

Copyright © 2001 by The Rabbinical Assembly

*Hebrew text, based on Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,
© 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society*

English translation © 1985, 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society

First edition. All rights reserved

*No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any
means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any
information storage or retrieval system, except for brief passages in
connection with a critical review, without permission in writing from:*

*The Rabbinical Assembly
3080 Broadway
New York, NY 10027*

*Blessings for the Torah and haftiarot have been adapted from
Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals, © 2000 by The Rabbinical Assembly.
Maps © by Oxford University Press, supplied by Oxford Cartographers. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.
Illustrations of the tabernacle and its furnishings by Joe Sikora.*

*Composition by VARDA Graphics, Skokie, Illinois
Design by Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden
Manufactured in the United States of America*

09 10 10 9 8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

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

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

p. cm.

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

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

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

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

BS1222 .L54 2001

222'.1077—dc21

2001029757

31 Moses went and spoke these things to all Israel. ²He said to them:

I am now one hundred and twenty years old, I can no longer be active. Moreover, the LORD has said to me, "You shall not go across yonder Jordan." ³The LORD your God Himself will cross over before you; and He Himself will wipe out those nations from your path and you shall dispossess them.—Joshua is the one who shall cross before you, as the LORD has spoken.—⁴The LORD will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites, and to their countries, when He wiped them out. ⁵The LORD will deliver them up to you, and you shall deal with them in full accordance with the Instruction that I have enjoined upon you. ⁶Be strong and resolute, be not in fear or in dread of them;

וילך לא

וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל: ²וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם
בֶּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אֲנֹכִי הַיּוֹם לֹא־
אוּכַל עוֹד לַעֲצֹאת וּלְבֹאֹת וַיְהִי הָאָמַר אֵלַי
לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה: ³יְהוָה
אֶלְהֵינוּ הוּא | עֲבַר לִפְנֵיךְ הוּא־יִשְׁמָד
אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִלִּפְנֵיךְ וִירְשָׁתָם
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ הוּא עֲבַר לִפְנֵיךְ בְּאֶשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
שְׁנֵי יְהוָה: ⁴וַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה לָהֶם כְּבְּאֶשֶׁר עָשָׂה
לְסִיחֹן וּלְעֹג מַלְכֵי הָאֲמֹרִי וּלְאֶרְצָם
אֶשֶׁר הִשְׁמִיד אֹתָם: ⁵וְנָתַנָּם יְהוָה
לִפְנֵיכֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם לָהֶם כְּכָל־הַמִּצְוָה
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֹתְכֶם: ⁶חֲזָקוּ וְאַמְצוּ אֶל־
תִּירְאוֹ וְאֶל־תַּעֲרָצוֹ מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי | יְהוָה

Epilogue: Moses' Last Days (31:1–34:12)

Chapters 31–34 are the epilogue both to Deuteronomy and to the entire Torah. They describe the steps taken by Moses, on concluding his major

addresses, to prepare the Israelites for the future; and they end with his death and the people's mourning.

PREPARING FOR NEW LEADERSHIP (31:1–30)

MOSES' DEPARTURE AND REPLACEMENT (vv. 1–6)

God denied Moses' request to enter the Promised Land (in 3:23–28), instructing him to appoint Joshua as his successor and then ascend the mountain where he would die. Now Moses proceeds to carry out God's instructions.

2. He said to them After saying the "things" to which verse 1 refers, Moses went on to inform the Israelites that he could not continue as their leader.

be active I can no longer come and go, perform the task at hand, exercise military leadership.
the LORD has said to me See 3:27.

3. Moses is voicing a fundamental biblical concept: God, not Joshua, will lead the Israelites across the Jordan. God's role, not Joshua's, will be the decisive factor in the conquest of the Land.

as the LORD has spoken To Moses, in 3:28.

4. To bolster the people's confidence, Moses reminds them of their recent victories (2:31–3:7).

6. The promise that God will accompany someone is a succinct assurance of divine assistance and protection; it is often given by God, or in His name, when He charges an individual with a mission, especially a military one. Trusting in God's strength, not their own, they may be fully confident of victory.

CHAPTER 31

2. one hundred and twenty years old The maximum span of human life (Gen. 6:3), which

is a notion also found in ancient Sumerian literature. This is the origin of the Jewish wish for a long and full life: "May you live to 120!" See 34:7.

for the LORD your God Himself marches with you: He will not fail you or forsake you.

⁷Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: "Be strong and resolute, for it is you who shall go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their fathers to give them, and it is you who shall apportion it to them. ⁸And the LORD Himself will go before you. He will be with you; He will not fail you or forsake you. Fear not and be not dismayed!"

⁹Moses wrote down this Teaching and gave it to the priests, sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant, and to all the elders of Israel.

¹⁰And Moses instructed them as follows: Every seventh year, the year set for remission, at the Feast of Booths, ¹¹when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Teach-

אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ עִמָּךְ לֹא יִרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבְךָ: פ

7 וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לְעֵינַי כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֹזֵק וְאַמֵץ כִּי אַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לֵאמֹר לְאַבְתָּם לָתֵת לָהֶם וְאַתָּה תִּנְחִילֵנָה אוֹתָם: 8 וַיְהִי הָהוּא | הַהֹלֵךְ לִפְנֵיךָ הוּא יְהִי עִמָּךְ לֹא יִרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבְךָ לֹא תִירָא וְלֹא תַחַת:

9 וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וַיִּתְּנָהּ אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי הַנִּשְׁאָאִים אֶת־אֲרֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה וְאֶל־כָּל־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

10 וַיִּצַּו מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מִקֵּץ | שְׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּמַעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בַּחֹג הַסְּפֹת: 11 בְּבוֹא כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר תִּקְרָא אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת נֹגֵד כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַזְנֵיהֶם:

רביעי 10 וַיִּצַּו מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מִקֵּץ | שְׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּמַעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בַּחֹג הַסְּפֹת: 11 בְּבוֹא כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר תִּקְרָא אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת נֹגֵד כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַזְנֵיהֶם:

MOSES APPOINTS JOSHUA (vv. 7–8)

Following God's instructions (1:38, 3:28), Moses now publicly appoints Joshua as his successor.

7. Speaking to Joshua in the hearing of the people, Moses emphasizes that Joshua is one of them ("you . . . shall go with") to avoid any implication that Joshua rather than God is the real leader. But in verse 23, God says to Joshua, "you who shall bring." Speaking privately to Joshua, God is unconcerned about that implication.

8. The same encouragement that Moses addressed to Joshua privately in 3:22 he now addresses to him publicly, making his appointment known to all.

WRITING AND READING THE TEACHING (vv. 9–13)

Moses has finished expounding the Teaching (1:5), which he has imparted orally until now. He writes it down and arranges for its regular public reading so that the people may be reminded reg-

ularly of its contents and future generations may learn it.

9. *Moses wrote down this Teaching* The laws and other parts of Deuteronomy.

gave it to the priests . . . and to all the elders These were the religious and civic leaders of the people, who would be responsible for guiding the nation's affairs in accordance with the Teaching and for having it read to the public every seven years. The priests were to keep the text in the Ark that was in their charge (see 31:25–26, 10:8).

10. *at the Feast of Booths* See 16:13–15. This festival attracted the largest number of pilgrims and lasted seven days. Because it came after the harvest was stored, the people would feel secure about their food supply for the coming year and could absorb the lessons of the reading with minds free of concern.

11. *in the place* Where the Feast of Booths was celebrated (16:16) and where the Ark was kept (1 Kings 8:1–9).

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

31:10–13. *Every seventh year, . . . read this Teaching aloud* The Torah takes steps to ensure that its contents would be known not only by the intellectual or priestly elite but also by the entire Jewish people, "men, women, and children." To accomplish this even more effectively, it has been Jewish practice from very early times to read a section of the Torah in the synagogue four times each week: on Monday morning, Thursday morning, *Shabbat* morning, and *Shabbat* afternoon. We now read the entire Torah through the course of one year or, in some synagogues, three years.

ing aloud in the presence of all Israel. ¹²Gather the people—men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities—that they may hear and so learn to revere the LORD your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching. ¹³Their children, too, who have not had the experience, shall hear and learn to revere the LORD your God as long as they live in the land that you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.

¹⁴The LORD said to Moses: The time is drawing near for you to die. Call Joshua and present yourselves in the Tent of Meeting, that I may instruct him. Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁵The LORD appeared in the Tent, in a pillar of cloud,

¹² הַקָּהֵל אֶת־הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנָּשִׁים וְהַטָּף וְגֵרָךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וּלְמַעַן יִלְמְדוּ וִירְאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְשִׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת: ¹³ וּבְנֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ יִשְׁמְעוּ וּלְמְדוּ לִירְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כָּל־הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: פ

¹⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֵן קָרְבוּ יָמַי לָמוֹת קָרָא אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְהִתִּיצְבוּ בָאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאַצּוֹנוּ וְיִלְךָ מֹשֶׁה וְיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְיִתִּיצְבוּ בָאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: ¹⁵ וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה בָּאֹהֶל בְּעַמּוּד

חמישי
[ששי]

read Hebrew: *tikra*, in the singular; Moses often addresses the entire people in this manner. Presumably, in speaking directly here to the priests and elders (v. 9), he means that they are the ones who must either read aloud the Teaching or arrange for the reading.

this Teaching All of Deuteronomy, which can be read aloud in three to four hours.

12. women, children, and the strangers Although normally only adult male Israelites are obligated to appear at the festival, on this occasion women, children, and strangers must also attend so that all may hear their duties and rights read to them and be inspired with reverence for God. The verse, addressing the need to learn the Teaching, makes no distinction between men and women.

that they may hear and so learn to revere The Teaching's account of God's mighty deeds on behalf of Israel and its presentation of His laws

will inspire the people to venerate Him and obey the commandments.

13. The children especially, who have not experienced the wonders of the present generation, need to hear of those experiences and the lessons they impart. Conducting the impressive public reading every seven years will ensure that every child would be imbued with the Teaching soon after reaching an educable age.

GOD MEETS WITH MOSES AND JOSHUA (vv. 14–15)

God informs Moses that He will appoint Joshua as Moses' successor. This will confirm Moses' action in verses 1–8 and remove any doubt that the appointment is divinely authorized.

15. in the Tent . . . at the entrance The Septuagint reads: "The LORD came down in a cloud and stopped at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting," thereby avoiding the possible inconsistency

12. Gather the . . . women . . . that they may . . . learn Some authorities in the Talmud contend that there is no obligation to teach Torah to women. Such opinions, however, are products of the Greco-Roman view of women as intellectually weak, a notion that began to appear in Jewish sources in the 3rd century B.C.E., during the Hellenistic period. In contrast, Ben Azzai held that a man is obliged to teach his daughter Torah (JT Hag. 1:1).

14. The time is drawing near for you to die The Midrash pictures God appearing to Joshua in a cloud. When the cloud lifted, Moses asked Joshua, "What did the LORD say to you?" Joshua replied, "When the LORD spoke to you, did you share the message with me?" At that moment, Moses became reconciled to his imminent death, saying to himself, "It is a hundred times better to depart now than to be jealous of my successor" (Deut. R. 9:9).

the pillar of cloud having come to rest at the entrance of the tent.

¹⁶The LORD said to Moses: You are soon to lie with your fathers. This people will thereupon go astray after the alien gods in their midst, in the land that they are about to enter; they will forsake Me and break My covenant that I made with them. ¹⁷Then My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them. They shall be ready prey; and many evils and troubles shall befall them. And they shall say on that day, "Surely it is because our God is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us." ¹⁸Yet I will keep My countenance hidden on that day, because

of the cloud being both inside the Tent and remaining outside at the entrance.

pillar of cloud The cloud is the vehicle by which God descends to earth.

COUNTERING ISRAEL'S FUTURE APOSTASY (vv. 16–22)

ISRAEL'S BETRAYAL (vv. 16–18)

16. lie with your fathers The idiom stands for "die and lie with one's fathers." It refers specifically to the reunion of one's spirit after death with the spirits of one's ancestors in Sheol, the netherworld, as in the phrase "be gathered to one's kin" in 32:50.

go astray Literally, "fornicate," "go whoring."

This metaphor for apostasy reflects the understanding that the bond between God and Israel is like a marriage bond. Worship of other gods is an act of betrayal as repugnant as adultery.

forsake Me Israelite idolaters did not literally cease worshiping the Lord; they worshiped Him along with gods, as was common in polytheism. But the exclusive, monotheistic character of the re-

עָנַן וַיַּעֲמֵד עַמּוּד הָעָנָן עַל-פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל: ס

¹⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה שָׁכַב עִם-אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה וְזָנָה | אַחֲרַי | אֱלֹהֵי גֵכַר-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוּא בָא-שָׁמָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ וַעֲזָבֵנִי וְהִפֵּל אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אִתּוֹ: ¹⁷ וְחָרָה אַפִּי בּו בְּיוֹם-הַהוּא וְעִזְבֹתִים וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם וְהָיָה לְאָכַל וּמִצָּאָהוּ רַעוּת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְאָמַר בְּיוֹם הַהוּא הֲלֹא עָל כִּי-אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקִרְבִּי מִצָּאוֹנִי הָרַעוּת הָאֵלֶּה: ¹⁸ וְאָנֹכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנַי בְּיוֹם הַהוּא עַל כָּל-הָרָעָה

lationship between God and Israel is so integral to biblical religion that the worship of any other deities is regarded as abandonment of the Lord. Any rapport the idolater continues to maintain with the Lord is viewed by the Bible as meaningless.

17. I will abandon them Punishing them in kind for abandoning Me (v. 16).

hide My countenance from them Withdraw My favor and protection; abandon them and ignore their pleas for help. (When God hides His countenance, His attentive presence, the Israelites are exposed and unprotected.)

because our God is not in our midst Israel will realize from its setbacks that it has lost divine protection. But it will not admit its own guilt and instead will complain that God is not involved, He no longer controls events and protects Israel, He has broken His promise and abandoned His people.

18. Yet I will keep My countenance hidden God is saying, "But it is because of all the evil they have done . . . that I will hide My countenance," thus explaining that He was justified in abandoning them.

17. I will . . . hide My countenance from them To understand the *Sho-ah*, Martin Buber, who fled Germany for Palestine when the Nazis came to power, fastened on this image of God's hiding. God is always present, but sometimes turns aside and hides the divine countenance. Terrible things happen when God's countenance is hidden, when God's attention is turned away.

Dov Ber of Mezeritch once found his young child crying. "I was playing hide-and-seek with my friends," the child explained, "and I hid so well that they stopped looking for me and went away." Dov Ber mused, "This must be how God feels, hiding the divine countenance from us to the point where some of us stop looking—and start living our lives without God."

of all the evil they have done in turning to other gods. ¹⁹Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be My witness against the people of Israel. ²⁰When I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey that I promised on oath to their fathers, and they eat their fill and grow fat and turn to other gods and serve them, spurning Me and breaking My covenant, ²¹and the many evils and troubles befall them—then this poem shall confront them as a witness, since it will never be lost from the mouth of their offspring. For I know what plans they are devising even now, before I bring them into the land that I promised on oath.

²²That day, Moses wrote down this poem and taught it to the Israelites.

אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בִּי פָנָה אֶל־אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים: ¹⁹וְעַתָּה כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמָּדָה אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמָּה בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה־לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבִנִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ²⁰כִּי־אָבִיָּאֲנֹו אֶל־הָאָדָמָה | אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לֵאבֹתָיו זִכַּת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ וְאָכַל וְשָׂבַע וְדָשַׁן וּפָנָה אֶל־אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַעֲבָדוּם וְנִאֲצֹנִי וְהִפָּר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי: ²¹וְהִיא בִּי־תִמְצָאֵן אֹתוֹ רַעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְעַתָּה הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְפָנָיו לְעֵד כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת־יִצְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה הַיּוֹם בְּטָרִם אָבִיָּאֲנֹו אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי:

ששי
[שביעי]

²²וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיְלַמְּדָהּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

turning to other gods That is, relying on them or displaying loyalty to them.

WRITING A POEM (vv. 19–22)

19. write down Hebrew: *kitvu lakhem*; literally, “write for yourselves” (i.e., Moses and Joshua) in the plural, although the remaining verbs in the verse (“teach it,” “put it in their mouths”) are in the singular. A written copy of the poem was made, and the intended audience heard it read aloud, as in the case of the Teaching (vv. 9–13).

put it in their mouths See Comment to 30:14. Memorization would be facilitated by the poetic form.

be My witness The poem will testify that God had treated the Israelites with justice and kindness, but that His people betrayed Him (see 32:1–18, esp. vv. 4–5). It will rebut their charge

that God violated His promise to remain with them; it will show that God’s abandonment of the Israelites was justified.

20. Their prosperity will lead them to forget God, the true source of their well-being; they will attribute their comfort to false Canaanite gods they believe responsible for fertility.

21. shall confront them . . . since it will never be lost Literally, “shall speak up . . . since it will never be forgotten.” The poem will be known by heart and will virtually speak up by itself. When the predicted disasters transpire, the poem will irresistibly spring to the lips of the people and bear witness to their guilt.

For I know what plans they are devising even now God concludes by repeating the point made at the beginning: The incidents of the Golden Calf and Baal-peor (4:3, 9:12–29) have revealed how susceptible the people are to idolatry.

19. that this poem may be My witness Does God need a poem as a reminder? The purpose of the poem would be to remind God not

to judge the people Israel harshly in the future, for God was aware of their nature (v. 27) and chose them nonetheless (Malbim).

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

31:19. write down this poem This verse is the source for the commandment for each Jew to write a personal copy of the Torah. One who commissions a ritual scribe (*sofer*) to write even one letter on one’s behalf is considered to have fulfilled this *mitzvah* (BT Men. 30a). Many congregations that acquire a new Torah scroll celebrate its completion (*Siyyum Seifer Torah*) by having individuals who have contributed to its purchase fill in a letter of the Torah.

23 וַיֵּצֵא אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון וַיֹּאמֶר חֹזֶק
וַאֲמַץ כִּי אַתָּה תִּבְיֹא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָהֶם וְאַנֹכִי
אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ:

24 וַיְהִי | בְּכָלוֹת מֹשֶׁה לִכְתֹּב אֶת־דִּבְרֵי
 שְׁבִיעִי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל־סֵפֶר עַד תִּמָּם׃ 25 וַיְצַו
 מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַלְוִיִּם נְשֹׂאֵי אָרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה
 לֵאמֹר׃ 26 לָקַח אֶת סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּה
 וּשְׂמַתֶּם אֹתוֹ מִצֵּד אָרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה
 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהָיָה־שָׁם בֵּן לְעַד׃ 27 כִּי אֲנֹכִי
 יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־מֶרְיָךְ וְאֶת־עֲרֻפְךָ הַקָּשָׁה הֵן
 בַּעֲדוֹנֵי חַי עִמָּכֶם הַיּוֹם מִמֶּרִים הָיִיתֶם
 עִם־יְהוָה וְאַף כִּי־אַחֲרֵי מוֹתִי׃ 28 הַקְהִילוּ
 מִפִּטְוֵי אֱלֹי אֶת־כָּל־זִקְנֵי שְׁבִטֵיכֶם וּשְׁטָרִיכֶם
 וְאִדְבַּרְתֶּם בְּאָזְנוֹתֵיכֶם אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

or a box, to protect it from damage by moisture or worms.

as a witness against you Against the Israelites, whom the Levites here represent. Moses assigns the Teaching a new function: It is to be a witness, like the poem (v. 19). Unlike the poem, however, it does not testify to Israel's betrayal of God after settling in Canaan. He probably means that the Teaching will serve as evidence that Israel accepted the terms and conditions of the Covenant; this will enable the people to understand their misfortunes.

27. Well I know No one knows better than I, having experienced your defiance so often.

defiant and stiffnecked Moses used these terms to characterize Israel's behavior earlier, particularly its refusal to advance on the Promised Land and the incident of the Golden Calf (see 9:13,23).

how much more, then Even Moses, despite his authority, could not restrain the Israelites while he was alive; how much more likely are they to rebel after his death.

28. Gather As the people are to be gathered to hear the Teaching (v. 12), so their leaders are to be gathered to hear the poem.

elders of your tribes Because verse 30 indicates that Moses addressed the entire people, one

final challenge for anyone, was coming to terms with his own mortality.

final challenge for anyone, was coming to terms with his own mortality.

that I may call heaven and earth to witness against them. ²⁹For I know that, when I am dead, you will act wickedly and turn away from the path that I enjoined upon you, and that in time to come misfortune will befall you for having done evil in the sight of the LORD and vexed Him by your deeds.

³⁰Then Moses recited the words of this poem to the very end, in the hearing of the whole congregation of Israel:

would have expected the text to contain a statement referring to all of the Israelites and not only the elders. The Septuagint has a longer reading, "the heads of your tribes, your elders, judges, and officials."

all these words The poem.

heaven and earth to witness Heaven and earth will be the third "witness" (after the poem and the Teaching) that Israel was warned.

וְאָעִידָהּ בָּם אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ:
²⁹ כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אַחֲרַי מוֹתִי כִּי־הִשְׁחָת
 תִּשְׁחָתוּן וְסָרְתֶּם מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי
 אֶתְכֶם וְקָרָאת אֶתְכֶם הָרָעָה בְּאַחֲרִית
 הַיָּמִים כִּי־תַעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הָרָע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה
 לְהַכְעִיסוֹ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵיכֶם:

³⁰ וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בְּאָזְנוֹ כָּל־קֹהֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת עַד תָּמָם: פ

29. in time to come The situation described in the poem fits several periods in Israel's later history, beginning with the time of the chieftains ("Judges") after Joshua's death.

30. This verse is the introduction to the poem in chapter 32.

whole congregation of Israel The entire nation, now formally assembled for the occasion.

הפטרה לשבת שובה

HAFTARAH FOR SHABBAT SHUVAH

HOSEA 14:2–10; MICAH 7:18–20 (*Ashk'nazim*—with *Va-yeilekh*)

HOSEA 14:2–10; JOEL 2:15–27 (*Ashk'nazim*—with *Ha-azinu*)

HOSEA 14:2–10; MICAH 7:18–20 (*S'fardim*)

(Shabbat T'shuvah [*the Sabbath of Repentance*] is the Shabbat before Yom Kippur, also called Shabbat Shuvah after the first word of this haftarah. This occasion coincides with the reading of either Va-yeilekh or Ha-azinu. Among Ashk'nazim, some congregations recite the passages from Hosea and Joel every year; others recite all three passages.)

In this *haftarah*, the core passage from Hosea focuses on a great call for human repentance, supplemented by the promise of divine healing and sustenance for those who have returned to God. The added selection from Joel introduces rituals of penitence and another promise of divine restoration; the added selection from Micah celebrates God's attributes of mercy and forgiveness of sin.

Combinations of nonconsecutive passages occur several times in the annual *haftarah* cycle. However, such "skipping" (as the Sages call it) from unit to unit is permitted only within the same prophetic book or within a single scroll. In the case of this *haftarah*, all selections are taken from within a single unit, the anthology of 12 prophetic books called "The Twelve" (*Trei Asar*).

Hosea's opening call for repentance dominates the *haftarah*. His appeals to "return to" (*shuvah* . . . *ad* and *shuvu el*) God (vv. 2–3) exhort the people to turn from their sin and rebellion. His call is also the hinge on which a human–divine dynamic turns, as shown by plays on the operative verb. In the sequel, God declares that, after the people take the initiative to repent, He "will heal their backsliding [*m'shuvatam*]" and take them back in love—for His "anger has turned [*shav*]" from them (v. 5). The result of such divine favor will be a period of national restoration and renewal. Not only will Israel be healed but "They

who sit [*yosh'vei*] in his [i.e., Israel's] shade will be revived [*yashuvu*]" as well (v. 8). God's blessing to the people will sustain all who come in contact with them.

Turning and transformation thus constitute the basic structure of the first part of the *haftarah*, embracing the people's turning from sin to God, and God's turning from wrath to loving care.

After Hosea's instruction in repentance, Joel's liturgical instructions articulate a deeper ritual structure: a shofar blast to assemble the nation for fasting and purification, and the priests' supplication to God on behalf of His people. Meanwhile, the liturgical proclamation of divine forgiveness in Micah 7:18–20 supplements Hosea in a different way. Here God's assertion of loving care is climaxed by a human declaration that God's forgiveness is incomparable.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

Shabbat Shuvah concludes an 11-week cycle of special Sabbaths that began after the fast of the 17th of *Tammuz*. For this period, *haftarah* texts were chosen according to the theme of the day and not because of any verbal correspondence with the weekly Torah portion. Prophetic readings for *Shabbat Shuvah* highlight the themes of human repentance and divine mercy. Hosea, in particular, expresses confession of sins and commitment to God; Joel refers to rituals of contrition and purification, along with priestly prayers; and Micah celebrates divine forgiveness of sin.

The *haftarah* readings emphasize the activity of repentance—the external acts (verbal and behavioral) that announce and activate a transformation of religious life. The inward journey "to-

ward” God is left for the individual worshiper, along with the “words” that must be taken to heart and spoken with integrity. According to a

later master, this journey is a return to one’s spiritual source, to a transcendent point of integration symbolized on earth by *Shabbat*.

14 ²Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,

For you have fallen because of your sin.

³Take words with you

And return to the LORD.

Say to Him:

“Forgive all guilt

And accept what is good;

Instead of bulls we will pay

[The offering of] our lips.

⁴Assyria shall not save us,

No more will we ride on steeds;

Nor ever again will we call

Our handiwork our god,

Since in You alone orphans find pity!”

⁵I will heal their affliction,

Generously will I take them back in love;

For My anger has turned away from them.

⁶I will be to Israel like dew;

He shall blossom like the lily,

יד ²שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעֹנֶיךָ:

³קַח־וְעִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים

וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה

אָמְרוּ אֵלָיו

כָּל־תְּשׁוּאָ עֹן

וְקַח־טוֹב

וְנִשְׁלַמָּה פְּרִים

שְׁפָתֵינוּ:

⁴אֲשׁוּר | לֹא יוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ

עַל־סוֹס לֹא נִרְכָּב

וְלֹא־נֹאמַר עוֹד

אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ

אֲשֶׁר־בָּךְ יִרְחַם יְתוֹם:

⁵אֶרְפָּא מִשׁוֹבָתָם

אֲהַבֵּם נְדָבָה

כִּי שָׁב אִפִּי מִמֶּנּוּ:

⁶אֶהְיֶה כְּטֵל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

יִפְרַח כְּשׁוֹשְׁנָה

Hosea 14:2–4. The prophet Hosea calls on the nation to repent. Elements of this act include the recognition of guilt and its rejection (vv. 2,4); repentance (v. 2); confession of sin and appeal to mercy (v. 3); and the rejection of past practices, with the decision never again to engage in them (vv. 4,9). This fourfold structure anticipates the teachings on repentance formulated in the Middle Ages by Saadia (*Doctrines and Beliefs*) and by Maimonides (MT Repentance 2:2,4).

References to repentance in the Torah differ from those in the prophets. In the Torah, repentance is something that the people may do after divine punishment has occurred, something that may lead to God’s merciful cancellation of the “distress” (see Deut. 4:29–31, 30:1–10). Characteristically, however, the prophets’ call for repentance precedes any punishment, because it is an

act that may avert the divine decree. This is its use in most traditional Jewish sources.

The prophet instructs the people in the use of appropriate words of confession (Ibn Ezra, Radak), appealing to them that they ask God to “Forgive all guilt” (*kol tissa avon*). This phrase alludes to the divine attribute of mercy (see *nosei avon* [forgiving iniquity] in Exod. 34:7 and elsewhere).

And accept what is good Hebrew: *v’kah tov*. The meaning is obscure, perhaps a request that God accept the good deeds done (Kara), the good heart (Radak), or even words of contrition (Ibn Ezra).

Instead of bulls we shall pay / [The offering of] our lips The Hebrew is obscure. Based on the Septuagint reading “fruit” in the singular, many modern scholars read the word *parim*

He shall strike root like a Lebanon tree.

⁷His boughs shall spread out far,

His beauty shall be like the olive tree's,

His fragrance like that of Lebanon.

⁸They who sit in his shade shall be revived:

They shall bring to life new grain,

They shall blossom like the vine;

His scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

⁹Ephraim [shall say]:

“What more have I to do with idols?

When I respond and look to Him,

I become like a verdant cypress.”

Your fruit is provided by Me.

¹⁰He who is wise will consider these words,

He who is prudent will take note of them.

For the paths of the LORD are smooth;

The righteous can walk on them,

While sinners stumble on them.

וַיִּךְ שָׁרְשָׁיו כְּלִבְנוֹן:

⁷יִלְכוּ יִנְקוּתָיו

וַיְהִי כְזִית הָדוּד

וְרִיחַ לוֹ כְּלִבְנוֹן:

⁸יִשְׁבוּ יֹשְׁבֵי בְצֵלוֹ

יַחֲזִי דָגָן

וַיִּפְרְחוּ כַגֶּפֶן

זָכְרוּ כִּי־נִין לְבָנוֹן: ^ט

אֶפְרַיִם ⁹

מֵה־לִּי עוֹד לַעֲצָבִים

אֲנִי עֲנִיתִי וְאֲשׁוּרְנוּ

אֲנִי כְּבָרוֹשׁ רַעֲוֹן

מִמֶּנִּי פָרִיחַ נִמְצָא:

¹⁰מִי חָכָם וַיִּבֶן אֱלֹהִים

נֶבֶן וַיִּדְעֵם

כִּי־יִשְׁרָיִם דְּרָכֵי יְהוָה

וַיִּדְקִים יִלְכוּ בָם

וּפִשְׁעִים יִפְשְׁלוּ בָם:

2 ¹⁵Blow a horn in Zion,

Solemnize a fast,

Proclaim an assembly!

¹⁶Gather the people,

Bid the congregation purify themselves.

Bring together the old,

Gather the babes

And the sucklings at the breast;

ב ¹⁵תִּקְעוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּצִיּוֹן

קִדְשׁו־צוֹם

קְרָאוּ עֲצָרָה:

¹⁶אִסְפוּ־עָם

קִדְשׁוּ קָהָל

קִבְצוּ זָקֵנִים

אִסְפוּ עוֹלָלִים

וַיִּנְקִי שָׂדִים

(bulls) as *p'ri* (fruit of) + *m*, understanding the *m* as a poetic embellishment. This yields: “We shall pay the fruit of our lips [i.e., confess].” Thus prayer substitutes for a sacrificial offering, and confession is an offering of contrition.

9. A fitting conclusion to the prophet's call, affirming the main point: Spiritual fidelity leads to a thorough transformation of Ephraim's earthly life.

10. consider . . . take note A concluding exhortation.

these words . . . of them If “these” refers to the preceding counsel to repent (Rashi), then v.

10a is the rhetorical conclusion to verses 2–9. Alternatively, if “these” refers to the “paths of the LORD” in the following phrase (Ibn Ezra), then the reference is to the justice of God (“path,” or “way,” indicates divine providence; cf. Exod. 33:13). By contrast, Radak understood “these” to mean the prophet's earlier words of reproof. In this view, the exhortation calls on the people to take heed of God's judgment.

Joel 2:15–16. Blow a horn This proclamation of alarm invokes a national assembly. Technical terms are used to stress the significance of the ingathering. The call for “the bridegroom [to]

Let the bridegroom come out of his chamber,
The bride from her canopied couch.

¹⁷Between the portico and the altar,
Let the priests, the LORD's ministers, weep
And say:
"Oh, spare Your people, LORD!
Let not Your possession become a mockery,
To be taunted by nations!
Let not the peoples say,
'Where is their God?'"

¹⁸Then the LORD was roused

On behalf of His land
And had compassion
Upon His people.

¹⁹In response to His people
The LORD declared:
"I will grant you the new grain,
The new wine, and the new oil,
And you shall have them in abundance.
Nevermore will I let you be
A mockery among the nations.

²⁰I will drive the northerner far from you,
I will thrust it into a parched and desolate
land—

Its van to the Eastern Sea
And its rear to the Western Sea;
And the stench of it shall go up,
And the foul smell rise."
For [the LORD] shall work great deeds.

יֵצֵא חֲתָן מִחֲדָרוֹ
וְכִלָּה מִחֻפָּתָהּ:
¹⁷בֵּין הַפּוֹרְטִיכוֹ וְלִמְזִבְחֵהּ
יִבְכוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים מִשְׁרָתֵי יְהוָה
וַיֹּאמְרוּ
חֲסֹסָה יְהוָה עַל-עַמָּךְ
וְאַל-תִּתֵּן נִחְלָתְךָ לְחִרְפָּה
לְמַשְׁלָבָם גּוֹיִם
לֵמָּה יֹאמְרוּ בְּעַמִּים
אֵיזָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:

¹⁸וַיִּקְנָא יְהוָה
לְאַרְצוֹ
וַיַּחְמַל
עַל-עַמּוֹ:
¹⁹וַיַּעַן יְהוָה
וַיֹּאמֶר לְעַמּוֹ
הִנְנִי שֹׁלַח לָכֶם אֶת-הַדֶּגֶן
וְהַתִּירוֹשׁ וְהַיֵּצֶהָר
וּשְׂבַעְתֶּם אֹתוֹ
וְלֹא-אֶתֶן אֶתְכֶם עוֹד
חֲרִפָּה בְּגוֹיִם:
²⁰וְאֶת-הַצְפוֹנִי אֶרְחִיק מֵעֲלֵיכֶם
וְהַדְחֵתִיו אֶל-אֶרֶץ צִיָּה וּשְׂמָמָה
אֶת-פָּנָיו אֶל-הַיָּם הַקְדְּמֹנִי
וּסְפוֹ אֶל-הַיָּם הָאֲחֵרוֹן
וְעָלָה בָּאֵשׁ
וְתַעַל צַחֲנָתוֹ
כִּי הִגְדִּיל לַעֲשׂוֹת:

come out of his chamber" provides a dramatic counterpoint to those terms, heightening the sense of communal obligation over all personal pleasure. By law, bridegrooms were exempted from military service and other public obligations (see Deut. 20:7, 24:5).

17. Between the portico and the altar The portico was an entrance area, or vestibule, in front of the Temple. The outer altar was at the other end of the courtyard. This area was used for public prayer.

And say This threefold supplication begins with an appeal to "spare" (*husab*) the nation (see Jon. 4:10–11). Then it asks God to prevent the people from being taunted. It climaxes with an example of mockery ("Where is their God?"), saving for last the appeal's theological dimension, with its suggestion of God's lack of power.

18. Then the LORD was roused As if in direct response to the supplication of verse 17.

20. northerner Many interpreters understand this as a reference to the "enormous horde"

21 Fear not, O soil, rejoice and be glad;
For the LORD has wrought great deeds.
22 Fear not, O beasts of the field,
For the pastures in the wilderness
Are clothed with grass.
The trees have borne their fruit;
Fig tree and vine
Have yielded their strength.
23 O children of Zion, be glad,
Rejoice in the LORD your God.
For He has given you the early rain in [His]
kindness,
Now He makes the rain fall [as] formerly—
The early rain and the late—
24 And threshing floors shall be piled with
grain,
And vats shall overflow with new wine and
oil.
25 “I will repay you for the years
Consumed by swarms and hoppers,
By grubs and locusts,
The great army I let loose against you.
26 And you shall eat your fill
And praise the name of the LORD your God
Who dealt so wondrously with you—
My people shall be shamed no more.
27 And you shall know
That I am in the midst of Israel:
That I the LORD am your God
And there is no other.
And My people shall be shamed no more.”

21 אֶל־תִּירָאִי אֲדָמָה גִּילִי וּשְׂמַחִי
כִּי־הִגְדִּיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת:
22 אֶל־תִּירָאוּ בַּהֲמוֹת שָׂדֵי
כִּי דָשְׁאוּ נְאוֹת מִדְבָּר
כִּי־עָלָן נֶשֶׁא פְרִיָו
תֵּאֲנֶה וּגְפֶן
נָתְנוּ חֵילָם:
23 וּבְנֵי צִיּוֹן גִּילוּ
וּשְׂמַחוּ בִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
כִּי־נָתַן לָכֶם אֶת־הַמּוֹרָה לְצִדְקָה
וַיּוֹרֵד לָכֶם גֶּשֶׁם
מּוֹרָה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ בְּרֹאשׁוֹן:
24 וּמָלְאוּ הַגִּרְנוֹת בַּר
וַהֲשִׁיקוּ הַיִּקְבִּים תִּירוֹשׁ וַיִּצְהַר:
25 וּשְׁלַמְתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־הַשָּׁנִים
אֲשֶׁר אָכַל הָאַרְבֶּה הַיֵּלֶק
וַהֲחִסִּיל וְהִגּוֹם
חֵילִי הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּי בָכֶם:
26 וְאָכַלְתֶּם אָכּוֹל וּשְׂבֹעַ
וַהֲלַלְתֶּם אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה עִמָּכֶם לְהַפְלִיא
וְלֹא־יִבְשׁוּ עַמִּי לְעוֹלָם:
27 וַיִּדְעֻתֶם
כִּי בִקְרֵב יִשְׂרָאֵל אָנִי
וְאֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וְאֵין עוֹד
וְלֹא־יִבְשׁוּ עַמִּי לְעוֹלָם: ס

prophesied in Joel 2:2, whose devastation is now reversed. Some commentators interpret this as a metaphor for the locust (Rashi, Ibn Ezra).

23. The beneficence of rain will cause the earth, the animals, and the people to rejoice (vv. 21–23).

[*as formerly*] Better: “[both] at the beginning [of the rainy season],” following Ibn Ezra

and the Masoretic notes. Early rabbinic tradition understood this as doubled rainfall—not a poetic hyperbole but rather a miracle (BT Taan. 5a).

27. I am in the midst of Israel The concluding oracle of assurance announces God’s self-manifestation among the people. God’s indwelling presence is revealed through the bounty of the Land.

7 ¹⁸Who is a God like You,
 Forgiving iniquity
 And remitting transgression;
 Who has not maintained His wrath forever
 Against the remnant of His own people,
 Because He loves graciousness!
¹⁹He will take us back in love;
 He will cover up our iniquities,
 You will hurl all our sins
 Into the depths of the sea.
²⁰You will keep faith with Jacob,
 Loyalty to Abraham,
 As You promised on oath to our fathers
 In days gone by.

ז ¹⁸ מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ
 נוֹשֵׂא עוֹן
 וְעוֹבֵר עַל־פֶּשַׁע
 לְשִׁאֲרֵית נִחְלָתוֹ
 לֹא־הִחְזִיק לְעַד אָפוּ
 כִּי־חָפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא:
¹⁹ יָשׁוּב יִרְחֲמֵנוּ
 יִכְבֹּשׁ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ
 וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם
 כָּל־חַטָּאוֹתָם:
²⁰ תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב
 חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם
 אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
 מִיָּמֵי קֶדֶם:

19. v. מלא ר'

Micah 7:18–19. Customarily these verses are also recited during the *Tashlikh* ceremony on the afternoon of the first day of *Rosh ha-Shanah*.

On that occasion, the community enacts the reference to God casting sins into the sea and asserts faith in divine forgiveness.