

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary  
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<sup>9</sup>You stand this day, all of you, before the LORD your God—your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel, <sup>10</sup>your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer—<sup>11</sup>to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is concluding with you this day, with its sanctions; <sup>12</sup>to the end that He may establish you this day as His people and be your God, as He

<sup>9</sup>אַתֶּם נִצְבִים הַיּוֹם כְּלֶכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם רְאִשֵׁיכֶם שְׂבֵטֵיכֶם וְזִקְנֵיכֶם וְשׂוֹטְרֵיכֶם כָּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>10</sup>טַפְּכֶם וְנִשְׂיֵיכֶם וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ מֵהַטֹּב עַד עַד עַד מִיַּמִּיךָ: <sup>11</sup>לְעַבְרְךָ בְּבְרִית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְאֵלֹהֶיךָ אֲלֹהֶיךָ שְׂנֵי כִּרְתַת עִמָּךְ הַיּוֹם: <sup>12</sup>לְמַעַן הָקִים-אֶתְךָ הַיּוֹם | לֹא לְעַם וְהוּא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ לְאֱלֹהִים

*Moses' Third Discourse: A Summons to Ratify the Covenant Made in Moab* (continued)

THE COVENANT CEREMONY (29:9–20)

Every Israelite participates in the ceremony establishing the covenant with God. The text does not tell us when the ceremony took place or of what it consisted. Other covenant texts from the ancient Near East likewise allude to ceremonies without describing the actual proceedings; they recount only the content of the agreement.

**9.** Moses lists those present in the order of their social status.

**You stand** You are presenting yourselves before God.

**10. your children, your wives** Not only the leaders and the adult males but each individual member of the community takes part in affirming the covenant. The responsibility is so momentous, and the consequences of disobedience so dire, that all must commit themselves personally, and not through the action of a parent, husband, or superior.

**stranger** Although they are not Israelites (14:21), resident aliens are subject to the civil law

and certain religious prohibitions, enjoy particular rights, and are permitted to participate in various religious celebrations. For this reason, they, too, must take part in the covenant ceremony and listen as the Teaching is read. This probably consisted of the laws of Deuteronomy beginning with chapter 12.

**from woodchopper to water drawer** Because all categories of Israelites have already been listed, this phrase must refer to aliens who served as menial laborers. The wording includes other types of menial laborers as well.

**11. the covenant . . . with its sanctions** Hebrew: *b'rit v'alab*; more literally, “a covenant guarded by imprecations.” The word *alah* means “curse” or “imprecation” (also v. 13), alluding to the curses detailed in chapter 28.

**12. He promised you** Refers to the mutual relationship God promised to the Exodus generation (in Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12). Among those Moses is now addressing, the older people were alive then and received the promise, although they were minors.

This *parashah* is read (usually together with *Va-yeilekh*) on the *Shabbat* before *Rosh ha-Shanah*, a time for taking to heart the commitment to God's covenant.

**9. all of you** The whole of the community is greater than the sum of its parts. Each individual Israelite may be flawed and imperfect, but when all of them join together, the strengths and good qualities of each are reinforced and magnified. This also teaches that no one should say, “It is not my responsibility.”

Everyone must do his or her share (Barukh of Medzibozh).

**11. to enter into the covenant** To reaffirm the covenant that was entered into at Mount Sinai. Just as a husband and wife need to reaffirm their commitment to each other when the early days of romantic attraction have given way to the day-to-day struggle to overcome accumulated disappointments, so too God and the people Israel need to reaffirm the covenant at this later date (Shneur Zalman).

promised you and as He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>13</sup>I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, <sup>14</sup>but both with those who are standing here with us this day before the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here this day.

<sup>15</sup>Well you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we passed through the midst of various other nations; <sup>16</sup>and you have seen the detestable things and the fetishes of wood and stone, silver and gold, that they keep. <sup>17</sup>Perchance there is among you some man or woman, or some clan or tribe, whose heart is even now turning away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations—perchance there is among you a stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood. <sup>18</sup>When such a

כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּיךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלִיַּעֲקֹב: <sup>13</sup> וְלֹא אֶתְכֶם לְבַדְכֶם אֲנֹכִי כָרַת אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת: <sup>14</sup> כִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁנוּ פֹה עִמָּנוּ עַמְדָה הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנוּ פֹה עִמָּנוּ הַיּוֹם: <sup>15</sup> כִּי־אַתֶּם יָדַעְתֶּם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁבְּנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־עֲבַרְנוּ בְּקֶרֶב הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עֲבַרְתֶּם: <sup>16</sup> וְתָרְאוּ אֶת־שְׁקוּצֵיהֶם וְאֵת גְּלִילֵיהֶם עֵץ וְאֶבֶן כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב אֲשֶׁר עִמָּהֶם: <sup>17</sup> פֶּן־יִשׁ בְּכֶם אִישׁ אִו־אִשָּׁה אִו מִשְׁפָּחָה אִו־שִׁבְט אֲשֶׁר לָבְבוּ כַּנֶּה הַיּוֹם מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְלַכֵּת לְעַבֹד אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם פֶּן־יִשׁ בְּכֶם שָׂרֵשׁ פְּרִה רָאֵשׁ וְלַעֲנָה:

שלישי

**He swore to your fathers** Refers to the Lord's promise that He would be God to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:7–8).

**14. those who are not with us here this day** Future generations. The mutual commitments made here by God and by the people Israel are binding for all future generations. Ancient Near Eastern treaties likewise stipulate that they are binding on the parties' descendants.

**15. various other nations** Literally, "the nations through which you passed." It refers to the nations of Transjordan, particularly Moab, which exposed Israel to the pagan cult of Baal-peor (see 4:3; Num. 25:1–3).

**16. detestable things** Hebrew: *shikkutzim*, a disparaging term used in the Bible for idols. It comes from the verb *shakketz* (spurn, reject as abominable; see 7:26). It is commonly employed in connection with the ban on impure foods.

**silver and gold** Used as plating on the statues.

**17.** Advocates of idolatry are to be punished whether they are individuals, males or females, relatives, or entire cities. The concern to make the warning as comprehensive as possible is also found in other ancient treaties and oaths.

**Perchance there is** Beware in case there is. **gods of those nations** This refers to the fetishes mentioned in verse 16. In the Bible's view, there is no substance to foreign gods beyond their images; and pagans worship the images themselves, mistakenly thinking that they have power. Moses fears that Israel's exposure to those images may have left some people with a temptation to worship them, which is what happened at Peor (4:3).

**stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood** A person, clan, or tribe whose delusions would have bitter, deadly consequences.

**14. those who are not with us here this day** The souls of all future Jews—present at this moment, as they had been at Mount Sinai (Tanḥ.). Moses' words can also be understood as referring to the physically or mentally handicapped, who perhaps could not be present but were still part of the community, or to those Jews who reject the covenant but are still claimed by it and included in it.

What right did our ancestors have to impose

the obligations of the covenant on us? Why do we have to feel bound by their actions? Many aspects of our lives were determined by decisions of our parents and ancestors, including when and where we would be born, what skills and physical qualities we would possess, and where and how we would be educated. Maturity consists in accepting those conditions as the facts of our lives, rather than fantasizing about how our lives would have been easier had we been born otherwise.

one hears the words of these sanctions, he may fancy himself immune, thinking, “I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart”—to the utter ruin of moist and dry alike. <sup>19</sup>The LORD will never forgive him; rather will the LORD’s anger and passion rage against that man, till every sanction recorded in this book comes down upon him, and the LORD blots out his name from under heaven.

<sup>20</sup>The LORD will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for misfortune, in accordance with all the sanctions of the covenant recorded in this book of Teaching. <sup>21</sup>And later generations will ask—the children who succeed you, and foreigners who come from distant lands and see the plagues and diseases that the LORD has inflicted upon that land, <sup>22</sup>all its soil devastated by sulfur and salt, beyond sowing and

וְהָיָה בְּשִׁמְעוֹ אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה־לִּי כִּי בִשְׂרָרוֹת לְבִי אֵלַי לְמַעַן סְפוֹת הָרוּחַ אֶת־הַצְּמֵאָה: <sup>19</sup> לֹא־יִאֲבֹה יְהוָה סְלַח לֹא כִּי אֲזוּ יַעֲשֶׂן אֶף־יְהוָה וְקִנְאָתוֹ בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא וּרְבִצָּה בּוֹ כָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַזֶּה וּמַחָה יְהוָה אֶת־שְׁמוֹ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

וְהִבְדִּילוּ יְהוָה לְרַעָה מִכָּל שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֱלוֹת הַבְּרִית הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּה: <sup>21</sup> וְאָמַר הַדּוֹר הָאֲחֵרוֹן בְּנֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר יָקוּמוּ מֵאֲחֵרֵיכֶם וְהִנְבְּרִי אֲשֶׁר יָבֹא מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה וְרָאוּ אֶת־מִכּוֹת הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא וְאֶת־תַּחֲלָאִיהָ אֲשֶׁר־חָלָה יְהוָה בָּהּ: <sup>22</sup> גְּפָרִית וּמֶלַח שִׂרְפָּה כָּל־אֲרָצָהּ לֹא תִזְרַע וְלֹא תִצְמַח

**18. such a one** Man or woman, clan or tribe. **fancy himself immune** The culprit may delude himself or herself, thinking that by remaining silent while others swear allegiance to the covenant he or she will be exempted from its consequences.

**be safe** Literally, “have *shalom* (safety, well-being).”

**willful heart** Refers to one who says, “I’ll follow my own sights, doing as I see fit.”

**moist and dry alike** The unique and problematic Hebrew phrase probably is an expression meaning “everything.” Moses is commenting on the consequences of the sinner’s delusion: God will sweep away everything that belongs to the sinner or to the entire nation.

**19. will never forgive him** Nothing that one does will assuage God’s anger.

**passion** Illustrates the Decalogue’s warning that the Lord, in reaction to the worship of other gods, is an “impassioned God” (see 5:9).

**every sanction** Such as those in chapter 28.

**blots out his name** Such a person’s fate will

be the same as that which God threatened to inflict on worshipers of the Golden Calf (9:14) and which He commands that Israel impose on the Canaanites and the Amalekites (7:24, 25:19).

**20. single . . . out** The would-be sinner should not imagine that God deals only with the community as a whole, that individuals can escape punishment as long as the community is virtuous.

#### THE AFTERMATH OF PUNISHMENT

(vv. 21–27)

Future generations and foreigners will ask what caused the disaster and give the answer themselves: It is because Israel violated the terms of God’s covenant. Foreign nations, who would admire Israel’s wisdom if it obeys God’s laws (see 4:6), would recognize its folly if it disobeys.

**21. plagues and diseases** This is a metaphorical reference to the natural disasters of verse 22.

**22. sulfur and salt** As a severe punishment, conquerors sometimes spread salt on the soil of

**18. moist and dry alike** Honest and deceitful alike. The wicked person calculates that a society can tolerate a certain amount of dishonesty. As long as most people tell the truth, a liar will be believed. If most people are honest, a swindler can

take advantage of their presumption of good faith.

**21.** Later generations will ask, “How did those who lived before us permit themselves to despoil the earth, air, and water, not leaving us a livable environment?”

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producing, no grass growing in it, just like the upheaval of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His fierce anger—<sup>23</sup>all nations will ask, “Why did the LORD do thus to this land? Wherefore that awful wrath?” <sup>24</sup>They will be told, “Because they forsook the covenant that the LORD, God of their fathers, made with them when He freed them from the land of Egypt; <sup>25</sup>they turned to the service of other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not experienced and whom He had not allotted to them. <sup>26</sup>So the LORD was incensed at that land and brought upon it all the curses recorded in this book. <sup>27</sup>The LORD uprooted them from their soil in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is still the case.”

<sup>28</sup>Concealed acts concern the LORD our God; but with overt acts, it is for us and our children ever to apply all the provisions of this Teaching.

וְלֹא־יַעֲלֶה בָּהּ כָּל־עֵשֶׂב כַּמְהַפְכַת סֹדִם  
וְעַמְרָה אֲדָמָה וְצִבּוּיִם וְצִבּוּיִם אֲשֶׁר הִפְּךָ  
יְהוָה בְּאָפוֹ וּבַחֲמָתוֹ: <sup>23</sup> וְאָמְרוּ כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם  
עַל־מָה עָשָׂה יְהוָה כִּכָּה לְאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת  
מִה חָרִי הָאֵף הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה: <sup>24</sup> וְאָמְרוּ עַל  
אֲשֶׁר עָזְבוּ אֶת־בְּרִית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָם  
אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת עִמָּם בְּהוֹצִיאֹ אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם: <sup>25</sup> וַיִּלְכוּ וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים  
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּם  
וְלֹא חָלַק לָהֶם: <sup>26</sup> וַיַּחַר־אֵף יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ  
הַהוּא לְהָבִיא עָלֶיהָ אֶת־כָּל־הַקְּלָלָה  
הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַזֶּה: <sup>27</sup> וַיִּתְּשֶׂם יְהוָה  
מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָם בְּאֵף וּבַחֲמָה וּבְקֶצֶף גָּדוֹל  
וַיִּשְׁלַכְם\* אֶל־אֶרֶץ אַחֶרֶת כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה:  
<sup>28</sup> הַנְּסֻתָרֹת לִיהוָה אֲלֵהֵינוּ וְהַנְּגַלֹּת לָנוּ  
וְלִבְנֵינוּ\* עֲד־עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי

הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת: ס רביעי [שני]

v. 27. ל' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

v. 28. נקוד על ל' נ' ו' ל' ב' נ' י' נ' ו', ולפי נוסחים מקובלים גם נקוד על ע'

conquered lands to render it infertile. An Aramaic treaty warns that the gods will sow salt on the city that violates its terms. Apparently, the effect of sulfur was also known in antiquity: Excessive amounts make soil too acidic for cultivation.

**grass** In the sense of vegetation, herbage.

**just like the upheaval of Sodom** That is, just like Sodom and its sister cities, which were overturned (see Gen. 19:24–25). The comparison is not to the manner of destruction but to its consequences.

**23.** The devastation will be so great that the entire world will learn of it and join future Israelites and passersby in asking about it.

**24. covenant** See Comment to 28:69.

**25. gods whom they had not experienced** Who had done nothing for them.

**whom He had not allotted to them** As ob-

jects of worship. They were to worship the Lord alone (see 4:19–20).

**27. as is still the case** In the days of the exile, when this question and answer will take place.

**28. Concealed acts** Sins committed secretly are known to God, and He will punish them.

**for us and our children** In Hebrew texts of the Torah, dots are placed over these words and the first letter of the following word. In 15 places in the Bible, such dots appear over letters or words. They were a scribal device to call attention to an otherwise unspecified problem in the text. Frequently, the Sages interpreted via *midrash* the words marked with these points.

**apply all the provisions** Overt acts (known sins) are the community's responsibility to punish by applying to the perpetrators the stipulations in the Covenant.

**28.** In scrolls and printed volumes of the Torah (*humashim*), dots appear above some of the letters in this challenging verse. The dots, which probably indicate the Sages' perplexity over the verse, have prompted several interpre-

tations: God will punish secret sins, but society must punish sins committed openly (Targ.). We cannot always understand God's will, but we must do what we are called on to do nonetheless (or do what we can understand

**30** When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the LORD your God has banished you, <sup>2</sup>and you return to the LORD your God, and you and your children heed His command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, <sup>3</sup>then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in love. He will bring you together again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. <sup>4</sup>Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, from there He will fetch you. <sup>5</sup>And the LORD your God will bring you

**ל** רביעי [שני] וְהָיָה כִּי־יָבֹאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּ אֶל־לִבְּךָ בְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִדְּיִיחְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה: <sup>2</sup> וְשִׁבַּתְתָּ עַד־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלוֹ בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם אֶתְּהָ וּבְנֵיךָ בְּכָל־לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשֶׁךָ: <sup>3</sup> וְשָׁב יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצֶךָ מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְּצֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה: <sup>4</sup> אִם־יְהִיֶּה נִדְּחֶךָ בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם יִקְבְּצֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ: <sup>5</sup> וְהִבְיֵאֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־

#### THE POSSIBILITY OF RESTORATION (30:1–10)

Moses now offers assurance that if Israel should be exiled, God will reinstate it if the people sincerely repent of their rebellion and return to Him and His instruction.

**1.** Moses refers not only to the curses described in chapter 29 but also to the blessings (and

curses) of chapter 28. By doing so he declares that if the Israelites should bring disaster on themselves, the stocktaking necessary for their restoration should include the recollection that while disobedience led to disaster, obedience led to success.

*that I have set before you* That I have offered you as alternatives.

**5.** This promise is perhaps intended to en-

and accept). We should be reluctant to judge others, for only God can see into a person's heart and know that person's motivation, whereas we can only see the person's deeds. And most imaginatively: Anonymous saints are a source of pleasure to God, but society needs role models whose virtuous lives escape anonymity and are conspicuous, that we might learn from them (Meir Yehiel of Ostrowiec).

#### CHAPTER 30

The Hebrew verb meaning "return" or "repent" (*shuv*) occurs seven times in verses 1–10. This repetition is appropriate to its being read at the season of penitence, the High Holy Day season.

**1. the blessing and the curse** The blessing within the curse. There is no calamity that does not have a kernel of blessing concealed

within it, even if it only motivates us to seek the cause of the calamity and prevent it from recurring.

**2. return to** Hebrew: *v'shavta ad*; literally, "turn around toward." Similarly, a phrase in verse 10 (*tashuv el*) means "return to." This variation in language reflects two stages in the process of repentance. The first stage is a realization that our behavior is wrong and requires a change of direction. This is "turning toward" God. The second stage is coming into the presence of God as the result of one's new way of life, "returning to" God (Malbim).

**3. take you back in love** God will help you repent by sharing with you the divine capacity for love and empathy. One who regards others compassionately will not sin against them. One who comes to love God, reciprocating God's love, will not sin against God.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**30:2. return** *T'shuvah*, turning to God in repentance with a plea for forgiveness, is a *mitzvah* in its own right (see Comment to Num. 5:7).

to the land that your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your fathers.

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD your God will open up your heart and the hearts of your offspring to love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul, in order that you may live. <sup>7</sup>The LORD your God will inflict all those curses upon the enemies and foes who persecuted you. <sup>8</sup>You, however, will again heed the LORD and obey all His commandments that I enjoin upon you this day. <sup>9</sup>And the LORD your God will grant you abounding prosperity in all your undertakings, in the issue of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil. For the LORD will again delight in your well-being, as He did in that of your fathers, <sup>10</sup>since you will be heeding the LORD your God and keeping His commandments and laws that are recorded in this book of the Teaching—once you return to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.

<sup>11</sup>Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is

יִרְשׁוּ אֲבֹתֵיךָ וִירִשְׁתָּהּ וְהִיטְבֶּךָ וְהִרְבֶּךָ  
מֵאֲבֹתֵיךָ:

<sup>6</sup> וּמַל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת-לִבְּךָ וְאֶת-לִבְב

זְרַעֲךָ לְאֵהָבָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-

לִבְּבֹךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ לְמַעַן חַיֶּיךָ: <sup>7</sup> וְנָתַן

חמישי  
[שלישי]

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵת כָּל-הָאֲלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה

עַל-אִיבֶיךָ וְעַל-שׂוֹנְאֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר רָדְפוּךָ:

<sup>8</sup> וְאַתָּה תָּשׁוּב וְשָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה

וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּךָ

הַיּוֹם: <sup>9</sup> וְהוֹתִירְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל |

מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָךְ בְּפָרִי בִטְנְךָ וּבְפָרִי בְהֵמָתְךָ

וּבְפָרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ לְטוֹבָה כִּי | יָשׁוּב יְהוָה

לְשׂוֹשׁ עֲלֶיךָ לְטוֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר-שָׂשׂ עַל-

אֲבֹתֶיךָ: <sup>10</sup> כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

לְשָׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר

הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

בְּכָל-לִבְּבֹךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ: <sup>פ</sup>

<sup>11</sup> כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּךָ

ששי

הַיּוֹם לֹא-נִפְלְאָת הוּא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רַחֲקָה

courage a future generation to return to God, assuring it that the nation's sinful past will not be held against it in any way.

**6. will open up your heart** Literally, “will circumcise your heart.” In contrast to 10:16, where Moses exhorts Israel to circumcise its own heart, here he promises that once Israel returns to God, God Himself will remove the psycho-

logical impediments to wholehearted devotion.

#### CONCLUSION (vv. 11–20)

Moses assures the present generation that the terms of the Covenant are not too difficult to know, understand, and fulfill.

**11. Instruction** Hebrew: *ha-mitzvah*; Deuteronomy's instructions, the Teaching (*torah*).

**11. this Instruction** Hebrew: *ha-mitzvah ha-zot*. The Sages of the Talmud understand this as referring to the entire Torah. It is not so baffling that only the theologically astute can understand it, nor so challenging that only the spiritually gifted can fulfill it. It is well within the abilities of the average person.

To later scholars (Ramban, Albo), this phrase referred to the *mitzvah* of repentance, the subject of the previous 10 verses. It is difficult to break a bad habit, to change one's way of life. Yet people who have succeeded

in doing that will testify it can be done. A *midrash* offers us the image of a mirror. The figure we see in the mirror seems to be twice as far from us as it really is. But with every step we take toward the mirror, the reflection takes a step toward us. So it is with repentance. Our goal seems so far off, but God says to us, “Take one step toward Me and then another, and I will meet you more than halfway.”

**not too baffling** It is suitable for all, not only for scholars and philosophers.



it beyond reach. <sup>12</sup>It is not in the heavens, that you should say, “Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?” <sup>13</sup>Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?” <sup>14</sup>No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

<sup>15</sup>See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup>For I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. <sup>17</sup>But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, <sup>18</sup>I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long

הוא: <sup>12</sup>לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אותה ונעשנה: <sup>13</sup>ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אותה ונעשנה: <sup>14</sup>כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו: ס

<sup>15</sup>ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המוות ואת הרע: <sup>16</sup>אשר אנכי מצוך היום לאהבה את יהוה אלהיך ללכת בדרךיו ולשמר מצותיו וחקתיו ומשפטיו וחיית ורביית וברכך יהוה אלהיך בארץ אשר אתה בא שמה לרשתה: <sup>17</sup>ואם יפנה לבבך ולא תשמע ונדחת והשתחית לאלהים אחרים ועבדתם: <sup>18</sup>הגדתי לכם היום כי אבד תאבדון לא תאריכון ימים על-

שביעי  
[רביעי]

מפסיר

**12. not in the heavens** The proverbial inability of humans to reach heaven is conveyed by Prov. 30:4, “Who has ascended heaven and come down?” It is also conveyed by the Mesopotamian saying, “Who is tall enough to reach heaven, who is tall enough to encompass the earth?”

**13. beyond the sea** Mesopotamian literature describes the effort of crossing the sea as so difficult that only gods and heroes can accomplish it.

**14. very close to you** The instruction is not beyond reach (v. 11) but nearby. Because it is known and understood, it can be put into practice by everyone in the community.

**in your mouth** It is readily accessible to you, you know it by heart. (The Hebrew idiom *b'al peh* [by mouth] is equivalent to the English “by heart,” “from memory.”) This manner of speaking reflects a predominantly oral culture in which learning and review are accomplished primarily by recitation.

**in your heart** In your mind, known with understanding and not merely by rote.

**15.** Here Moses concludes his summons to the Covenant by urging the Israelites to obey it, for that is the only way, under its terms, to survive.

**16. His ways** The ways that He commands.

**12. It is not in the heavens** It is meant for everyone, not only for people willing to renounce earthly pleasures.

The Talmud tells of a dispute among scholars over a technical point of Jewish law. One scholar, Eliezer, called on God to affirm the correctness of his position. A voice from heaven proclaimed: “Why do you quarrel with Rabbi Eliezer, when he is correct?” The

other Sages, however, were not impressed. One of them quoted this phrase: “The Torah ‘is not in the heavens’—it has been entrusted to us, to study and to interpret.” Whereupon God approved of that declaration (BT BM 59b).

**13. Neither is it beyond the sea** It applies to our own place and time, not only to people living in other countries, in other eras.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**30:12. It is not in the heavens** The Sages derive their authority to interpret and apply Scripture to changing circumstances from this verse, among others (BT BM 59b; see Deut. 17:9).

endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—<sup>20</sup>by loving the LORD your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the LORD swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבֹא  
שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: <sup>19</sup> הָעֵידוּתִי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם  
אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת  
נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבַחֲרֹתָ  
בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה אֶתָּה וְזַרְעֶךָ:  
<sup>20</sup> לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמּוֹעַ בְּקוֹלוֹ  
וּלְדַבְּקָה־בּו כִּי הוּא חַיֶּיךָ וְאַרְךָ יָמֶיךָ  
לְשֵׁבֶת עַל־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה  
לְאַבְתֶּיךָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְתַת  
לָהֶם: \* פ

**19. Choose life** The Sages derived from this the obligation of a parent to teach a child a trade.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH  
**30:19. Choose life** See Comment to Lev. 18:5.

\* For the haftarah for this portion, see p. 1180.

# הַפְטָרָה שְׁבִיעִית דְּנַחֲמָתָא

## SEVENTH HAFTARAH OF CONSOLATION HAFTARAH FOR NITZAVIM

ISAIAH 61:10–63:9

*(Recite on the 7th Shabbat after the 9th of Av, which is also the Shabbat before Rosh ha-Shanah. This occasion coincides with the reading of Nitzavim either alone or combined with Va-yeilekh. On the Seven Haftarat of Consolation, see p. 1032. On the Shabbat before Yom Kippur, recite the haftarah on p. 1234.)*

This passage opens with the jubilant exultation of Zion after generations of desolation and exile. The city and the nation that felt abandoned and forsaken shall be espoused by God (62:5). Never again shall His people suffer defeat or disgrace. Renewal of God's beneficence (63:8–9) is the powerful theme that charges every verse with confident expectation.

The *haftarah* develops through a series of speeches that move from hopeful anticipation to thanksgiving. The shift from Zion's hope to God's advent is marked by the motif of garments, which manifest the people's new condition (cf. Isa. 52:1, "Awake, awake, O Zion! / Clothe yourself in splendor") as the redemption quickens its pace. This new reality is then mirrored in the divine garments of victory.

Marital imagery conveyed through wedding garments (61:10) is further developed in the prophet's word of encouragement. God shall take back His city and land, espousing the one and taking delight in the other: "And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (62:5). Jewish liturgy knows these words through their incorporation into the 16th-century

poem that is sung on Friday night, "L'kha Dodi."

New designations for Zion and for the Land express the new national reality (62:2,4), a transformed state of physical and spiritual renewal. As with the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, new names both create and affirm a new destiny (see Gen. 17:4–5, 35:9–12; cf. 32:29). And this transformed state is part of the recompense to come, brought by Israel's deliverer on His return to Zion (Isa. 62:11, cf. 40:10). Anticipation of this moment is the beginning of hope, which this *haftarah* celebrates. Zion's fear that "The LORD has forsaken me" (Isa. 49:14), poignantly expressed near the beginning of this *haftarah* cycle of consolation, is completely dispelled.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

This selection brings to a celebratory close the Seven *Haftarot* of Consolation. As a concluding recitation, it is replete with themes and phrases from the previous readings. For example, the call to "Clear the road [*panu derekh*] for the people" and the declaration that God comes with "reward" and "recompense" (62:10–11) echo a proclamation in the first *Haftarah* of Consolation: "Clear . . . / A road [*panu derekh*] for the LORD" who has "reward" and "recompense" with Him (Isa. 40:3,10). Repetitions like these combine to create an aura of climactic summation, at once the conclusion of consolation and the onset of redemption.

61 <sup>10</sup>I greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
My whole being exults in my God.

סא <sup>10</sup>שׁוֹשׁ אֲשִׁישׁ בַּיהוָה  
תִּגְלַגְל נַפְשִׁי בַּאֱלֹהֵי

For He has clothed me with garments of triumph,  
 Wrapped me in a robe of victory,  
 Like a bridegroom adorned with a turban,  
 Like a bride bedecked with her finery.  
<sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth her growth  
 And a garden makes the seed shoot up,  
 So the Lord GOD will make  
 Victory and renown shoot up  
 In the presence of all the nations.

כִּי הִלְבִּישְׁנִי בְּגָדֵי-יְשׁוּעָה  
 מְעִיל צְדָקָה יַעֲטֵנִי  
 כְּחַתָּן יִכְהֶן פָּאֵר  
 וְכַפְלָה תַעֲדָה כְּלִיהָ:  
<sup>11</sup> כִּי כְּאֶרֶץ תּוֹצִיא צִמְחָהּ  
 וּכְגִנָּה יִרְוַעֶיהָ תִצְמִיחַ  
 כֵּן | אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה  
 יִצְמִיחַ צְדָקָה וּתְהִלָּה  
 נִגַּד כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם:

**62** For the sake of Zion I will not be silent,  
 For the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still,  
 Till her victory emerge resplendent  
 And her triumph like a flaming torch.  
<sup>2</sup>Nations shall see your victory,  
 And every king your majesty;  
 And you shall be called by a new name  
 Which the LORD Himself shall bestow.  
<sup>3</sup>You shall be a glorious crown  
 In the hand of the LORD,  
 And a royal diadem  
 In the palm of your God.

**סב** לְמַעַן צִיּוֹן לֹא אֶחְשָׁה  
 וּלְמַעַן יְרוּשָׁלַם לֹא אֶשְׁקוּט  
 עַד-יֵצֵא כְּנֹגֶה צְדָקָה  
 וַיִּשְׁוַעְתָּהּ כְּלַפִּיד יִבְעֶר:  
<sup>2</sup> וְרָאוּ גוֹיִם צְדִקְךָ  
 וְכָל-מְלָכִים כְּבוֹדְךָ  
 וְקָרָא לְךָ שֵׁם חָדָשׁ  
 אֲשֶׁר פִּי יְהוָה יִקְבְּנֵי:  
<sup>3</sup> וְהָיִיתָ עֶטְרַת תְּפָאֶרֶת  
 בְּיַד-יְהוָה  
 וּצְנוּף וּצְנִיף מְלוּכָה  
 בְּכַף-אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

<sup>4</sup>Nevermore shall you be called “Forsaken,”  
 Nor shall your land be called “Desolate”;  
 But you shall be called “I delight in her,”  
 And your land “Espoused.”  
 For the LORD takes delight in you,  
 And your land shall be espoused.  
<sup>5</sup>As a youth espouses a maiden,  
 Your sons shall espouse you;  
 And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,  
 So will your God rejoice over you.

<sup>4</sup> לֹא-יֵאמָר לְךָ עֲזוּבָה  
 וּלְאֶרֶץ לֹא-יֵאמָר עוֹד שְׁמָמָה  
 כִּי לְךָ יִקְרָא חֶפְצִי-בָהּ  
 וּלְאֶרֶץ בְּעוּלָה  
 כִּי-חֶפֶץ יְהוָה בָּךְ  
 וְאַרְצְךָ תִּבְעַל:  
<sup>5</sup> כִּי-יִבְעַל בְּחֹר בְּתוּלָה  
 יִבְעֹלוּךָ בְּנֵיךָ  
 וּמִשׁוֹשׁ חַתָּן עַל-כַּלָּה  
 יִשִּׁישׁ עֲלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

*Isaiah 62:1. I will not be silent* Apparently the word of the prophet, who reports that the people shall receive a new name.

6Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,  
I have set watchmen,  
Who shall never be silent  
By day or by night.  
O you, the LORD's remembrancers,  
Take no rest  
7And give no rest to Him,  
Until He establish Jerusalem  
And make her renowned on earth.

8The LORD has sworn by His right hand,  
By His mighty arm:  
Nevermore will I give your new grain  
To your enemies for food,  
Nor shall foreigners drink the new wine  
For which you have labored.  
9But those who harvest it shall eat it  
And give praise to the LORD;  
And those who gather it shall drink it  
In My sacred courts.  
10Pass through, pass through the gates!  
Clear the road for the people;  
Build up, build up the highway,  
Remove the rocks!  
Raise an ensign over the peoples!  
11See, the LORD has proclaimed  
To the end of the earth:  
Announce to Fair Zion,  
Your Deliverer is coming!  
See, his reward is with Him,

על-חומתיך ירושלים  
הפקדתי שמרים  
כל-היום וכל-הלילה תמיד  
לא יחשו  
המזכרים את-יהוה  
אל-דמי לכם:  
7ואל-תתנו דמי לו  
עד-יכוון ועדי-ישים את-ירושלם  
תהלה בארץ:

8נשבע יהוה בימינו  
ובזרוע עזו  
אם-אתן את-דגנך עוד  
מאכל לאיבויך  
ואם-ישתו בני-נכר תירושך  
אשר יגעת בו:  
9כי מאספיו יאכלהו  
והללו את-יהוה  
ומקבציו ישתהו  
בחצרות קדשי: ס  
10עברו עברו בשערים  
פנו דרך העם  
סלו סלו המסלה  
סקלו מאבן  
הרימו נס על-העמים:  
11הנה יהוה השמיע  
אל-קצה הארץ  
אמרו לבת-ציון  
הנה ישעך בא  
הנה שכרו אתו

**6. the LORD's remembrancers** The "mourners of Zion" mentioned in Isa. 61:3, or perhaps others who reminded God of His promises to Israel and of Israel's present state.

**8. His mighty arm** The oath taken by God "by His own arm" anticipates the destruction "wrought" by His "own arm" (63:5).

**10. Pass through, pass through** Reformulating the "highway" theme in the first *Haftarah*

of Consolation (Isa. 40:3). There, the preparation was for the divine advent. Here, the expectation is for the return of the people from captivity. In both texts, God's "recompense" comes with Him (see Isa. 40:10, 62:11). Later tradition gave the image of removing stumbling blocks a moral and spiritual sense, thereby indicating the human participation that is required for redemption (Num. R. 15:16).

His recompense before Him.

<sup>12</sup>And they shall be called, “The Holy People,  
The Redeemed of the LORD,”

And you shall be called, “Sought Out,  
A City Not Forsaken.”

וּפְעֻלָּתוֹ לְפָנָיו:  
וְקָרְאוּ לָהֶם עַם־הַקֹּדֶשׁ  
גְּאוּלַי יְהוָה  
וְלָךְ יִקְרָא דְרוּשָׁה  
עִיר לֹא נֶעְזְבָה: ס

**63** Who is this coming from Edom,  
In crimsoned garments from Bozrah—  
Who is this, majestic in attire,  
Pressing forward in His great might?  
“It is I, who contend victoriously,  
Powerful to give triumph.”  
<sup>2</sup>Why is Your clothing so red,  
Your garments like his who treads grapes?  
<sup>3</sup>“I trod out a vintage alone;  
Of the peoples no man was with Me.  
I trod them down in My anger,  
Trampled them in My rage;  
Their life-blood bespattered My garments,  
And all My clothing was stained.  
<sup>4</sup>For I had planned a day of vengeance,  
And My year of redemption arrived.  
<sup>5</sup>Then I looked, but there was none to help;  
I stared, but there was none to aid—  
So My own arm wrought the triumph,  
And My own rage was My aid.  
<sup>6</sup>I trampled peoples in My anger,  
I made them drunk with My rage,  
And I hurled their glory to the ground.”

**סג** מִי־זֶה | בָּא מְאֹדוֹם  
חֲמוּץ בְּגָדִים מִבְּצֻרָה  
זֶה הַדּוֹר בְּלְבוּשׁוֹ  
צֹעָה בְּרַב כֹּחַ  
אֲנִי מְדַבֵּר בְּצִדְקָה  
רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ:  
<sup>2</sup> מִדּוּעַ אָדָם לְלְבוּשׁוֹךְ  
וּבְגָדֶיךָ כְּדֹרֶךְ בְּגַת:  
<sup>3</sup> פּוֹרָה | דְּרַכְתִּי לְבִדִּי  
וּמַעֲמִים אֵין־אִישׁ אֶתִּי  
וְאֶדְרַכְכֶם בְּאַפִּי  
וְאֶרְמַסֶּם בְּחַמְתִּי  
וְיִזוּ נִצְחָם עַל־בְּגָדֵי  
וְכָל־מְלַבּוּשֵׁי אֲגָאֲלָתִי:  
<sup>4</sup> כִּי יוֹם נִקָּם בְּלִבִּי  
וּשְׁנַת גְּאוּלַי בָּאָה:  
<sup>5</sup> וְאֶבִּיט וְאֵין עֵזֶר  
וְאֶשְׁתּוּמֶם וְאֵין סוּמֶךְ  
וְתוֹשַׁע לִי זְרָעִי  
וְחַמְתִּי הִיא סִמְכָתִנִּי:  
<sup>6</sup> וְאֶבּוֹס עַמִּים בְּאַפִּי  
וְאֶשְׁכַּרֶם בְּחַמְתִּי  
וְאוֹרִיד לְאֶרֶץ נִצְחָם: ס

**12. The Holy People** Hebrew: *Am ha-Kodesh*, an intensification of the description in Deut. 7:6 (*am kadosh*, “holy people”).

**Isaiah 63:1. Who is this coming from Edom**  
In context, the query appears as that of the watchmen on the walls (62:6), awaiting the advent of the Lord.

**3–5.** Imagery of God trampling a vineyard and bespattered with blood (vv. 2–3) is connected with Edom and Botzrah (v. 1) by two puns:

*me-Edom* (from Edom) sounds like *m’uddam* (reddened, cf. v. 2), and *mi-botzrah* (from Botzrah) sounds like *mi-botzer* (from picking grapes). In rabbinic tradition, Edom is a symbol for Rome and for Christendom (see Ibn Ezra). This identification gave the *haftarah* immediate relevance in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. Edom’s downfall is here attributed to divine vengeance against its evil conduct and to Israel’s merit (Rashi).

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary

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7I will recount the kind acts of the LORD,  
The praises of the LORD—  
For all that the LORD has wrought for us,  
The vast bounty to the House of Israel  
That He bestowed upon them  
According to His mercy and His great kind-  
ness.

8He thought: Surely they are My people,  
Children who will not play false.  
So He was their Deliverer.

9In all their troubles He was troubled,  
And the angel of His Presence delivered  
them.

In His love and pity  
He Himself redeemed them,  
Raised them, and exalted them  
All the days of old.

7 חֲסִדֵי יְהוָה | אֲזַכִּיר  
תְּהִלַּת יְהוָה  
בְּעַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר-גָּמְלָנוּ יְהוָה  
וְרַב-טוֹב לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל  
אֲשֶׁר-גָּמְלָם  
בְּרַחֲמָיו וּבְכֶרֶב חֲסָדָיו:  
8 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶךְ-עַמִּי הֵמָּה  
בָּנִים לֹא יִשְׁקֶרוּ  
וַיְהִי לָהֶם לְמוֹשִׁיעַ:  
9 בְּכָל-צָרָתָם | לֹא לוֹ צָר  
וּמִלְאָךְ פָּנָיו הוֹשִׁיעֵם  
בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ וּבְחַמְלָתוֹ  
הוּא גֹאֲלָם  
וַיִּנְשָׂאֵם וַיִּנְשָׂאֵם  
כָּל-יְמֵי עוֹלָם:

7–9. In ending this prophetic teaching with divine praise, the Sages emphasized the positive—as was often their preference. In Isaiah, the conclusion of this passage (vv. 10–14) mentions Israelite rebellion and divine disfavor (followed by the return of grace).

The Hebrew text of verses 8–9 is difficult and ambiguous. The *k'rei* (Masoretic text as read) with its trope (cantillation marks) seems to refer to God as “their Deliverer” and then states that “In all their troubles He was troubled” (literally, “trouble was His [*lo*]”). This reading understands *lo* to be a possessive pronoun, spelled לו. (This theology has enjoyed an active midrashic life. Rabbinic teachings have long held that God in heaven takes part in Israel’s sorrows, while the *Sh’khinah* [divine Presence] on earth shares in Israel’s period

of exile.) Unfortunately, it then sets up two apparently contradictory remarks: “the angel . . . delivered them,” but “He Himself redeemed them.”

On the other hand, the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation) and the *k'tiv* (Masoretic text as written) present the passage as a continuous thought: “He was their Deliverer in all their troubles; no [*lo*] angel or messenger [was with Him], [but] His own Presence delivered them.” This reading understands *lo* to be a negative particle, spelled לא. This version features a clear structure and verbal correlations. Moreover, it emphasizes God’s direct, exclusive deliverance. (This theology is echoed in the *Pesah Haggadah*, through its well-known statement that God alone delivered the nation from Egypt: “I and no angel, I and no messenger.”)