

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

9 אַתֶּם נִצְבִים הַיּוֹם כְּלֶכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם רֵאשֵׁיכֶם שְׂבֵטֵיכֶם וְקַנְיֵיכֶם וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם כָּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל: ¹⁰ טַפְכֶם נְשֵׁיכֶם וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ מִחֹטֵב עֵצִיךָ עַד שֹׂאֵב מִיַּמִּיךָ: ¹¹ לְעִבְרְךָ בְּבְרִית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְאַלְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּרַת עִמָּךְ הַיּוֹם: ¹² לְמַעַן הִקִּים-אֶתְךָ הַיּוֹם | לֹא לְעַם וְהוּא יְהִי-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 *alab* 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).

18 וְהָיָה בְשִׁמְעֶךָ
וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבְךָ
כִּי בִשְׂרֹוֹת לֵךְ
אֶת־הַצְּמִאָה
כִּי אִזּוֹ יַעֲשֶׂן
הַהוּא וְרִבְעָה
בְּסִפְרֵ הַזֶּה וּמוֹ
הַשְּׂמָיִם:
20 וְהִבְדִּילוּ יָד
יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל־
בְּסִפְרֵ הַתּוֹרָה
הָאֲחֵרוֹן בְּנִיכּוֹ
וְהִנְבְּרִי אֲשֶׁר
אֶת־מִכּוֹת הָאֵל
אֲשֶׁר־חָלָה יָהּ
שִׂרְפָה כָּל־אֶרֶץ

promised you and as He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ¹³I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, ¹⁴but 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.

¹⁵Well you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we passed through the midst of various other nations; ¹⁶and you have seen the detestable things and the fetishes of wood and stone, silver and gold, that they keep. ¹⁷Perchance 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. ¹⁸When such a

כָּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם
לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב: 13 וְלֹא אֶתְכֶם
לְבַדְכֶם אֲנֹכִי כָרַת אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת
וְאֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת: 14 כִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁנֶוּ
פֹה עִמָּנוּ עַמֵּד הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנו פֹּה עִמָּנוּ הַיּוֹם:
15 שְׁלִישִׁי כִּי־אַתֶּם יָדַעְתֶּם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁבְּנוּ
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־עִבְרָנוּ בְּקִרְבֵּי
הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עִבְרָתָם: 16 וְתָרְאוּ אֶת־
שִׁקּוּצֵיהֶם וְאֵת גִּלְלֵיהֶם עֵץ וְאֶבֶן כֶּסֶף
וְזָהָב אֲשֶׁר עִמָּהֶם: 17 פְּנִי־שׁ בְּכֶם אִישׁ
אוֹ־אִשָּׁה אוֹ מִשְׁפָּחָה אוֹ־שִׁבְטֵ אֲשֶׁר
לָבְבוּ פָנָה הַיּוֹם מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
לְלַכֵּת לַעֲבֹד אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם
פְּנִי־שׁ בְּכֶם שִׂרְשׁ פְּרָה רֹאשׁ וְלַעֲנָה:

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 (Tanh.). 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.

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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. ¹⁹The 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.

²⁰The 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. ²¹And 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, ²²all its soil devastated by sulfur and salt, beyond sowing and

וְהָיָה בְּשִׁמְעוֹ אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת
וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה־לִּי
כִּי בְּשִׁרְרוֹת לִבִּי אֵלַי לִמְעַן סְפוֹת הַרְוָה
אֶת־הַצְּמָאָה: ¹⁹ לֹא־יִאֲבֹה יְהוָה סִלְחָ לּוֹ
כִּי אִזּוֹ יַעֲשֶׂן אֶף־יִהְוֶה וּקְנָאתוֹ בְּאִישׁ
הַהוּא וּרְבִצָּה בּוֹ כָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים הַפְּתוּבָה
בְּסֹפֶר הַזֶּה וּמָחָה יְהוָה אֶת־שְׁמוֹ מִתַּחַת
הַשָּׁמַיִם:

וְהִבְדִּילוּ יְהוָה לְרַעָה מִכָּל שְׁבִטֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּכֵל אֱלֹת הַבְּרִית הַפְּתוּבָה
בְּסֹפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה: ²¹ וְאָמַר הַדּוֹר
הַאֲחֵרוֹן בְּנֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר יִקְוּמוּ מֵאַחֲרֵיכֶם
וְהַנֹּכְרִי אֲשֶׁר יָבֹא מֵאַרְץ רְחוֹקָה וְרָאוּ
אֶת־מִכּוֹת הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא וְאֶת־תַּחֲלָאִיהָ
אֲשֶׁר־חָלָה יְהוָה בָּהּ: ²² גִּפְרִית וּמִלַּח
שָׂרְפָה כָּל־אֶרֶצָהּ 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?"

והיה כי
האלה הברכ
לפניה והשב
אשר הדיחה
עדיה והוא
אשר אנכי מ
לברכה ובכל
את שבויה
העמים אשר
אם יהיה נ
קבצה יהו
והביאה יהו

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—²³all nations will ask, “Why did the LORD do thus to this land? Wherefore that awful wrath?” ²⁴They 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; ²⁵they turned to the service of other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not experienced and whom He had not allotted to them. ²⁶So the LORD was incensed at that land and brought upon it all the curses recorded in this book. ²⁷The LORD uprooted them from their soil in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is still the case.”

²⁸Concealed 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.

ולא יעלה בה כל עשב כמהפכת סדם ועמרה אדמה וצבויים וצבויים אשר הפך יהוה באפו ובחמתו: ²³ ואמרו כל הגוים על-מה עשה יהוה ככה לארץ הזאת מה חרי האף הגדול הזה: ²⁴ ואמרו על אשר עזבו את-ברית יהוה אלהי אבתם אשר כרת עמם בהוציאם אתם מארץ מצרים: ²⁵ וילכו ויעבדו אלהים אחרים וישתחוו להם אלהים אשר לא ידעום ולא חלק להם: ²⁶ ויחר-אף יהוה בארץ ההוא להביא עליה את-פל-הקללה הכתובה בספר הזה: ²⁷ ויתשם יהוה מעל אדמתם באף ובחמה ובקצף גדול וישלכם אל-ארץ אחרת כיום הזה: ²⁸ הנסתרות ליהוה אלהינו והנגלות לנו ולבנינו* עד-עולם לעשות את-פל-דברי

התורה הזאת: ס

רביעי [שני]

v. 27. ל' רבתי לפני נוסחים מקובלים
v. 28. נקוד על ל' נ' ו' ל' ב' נ' ו' ו', ולפי נוסחים מקובלים גם נקוד על ע'

he declares that
saster on them-
for their resto-
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ates us to seek
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God.
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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, ²and 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, ³then 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. ⁴Even 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. ⁵And the LORD your God will bring you

וְהָיָה כִּי-יָבֹאוּ עֲלֵיךָ כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי
לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּ אֶל-לִבְבְּךָ בְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם
אֲשֶׁר הִדְיִיחְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה: ² וְשִׁבַּתְתָּ
עַד-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלוֹ בְּכָל-
אֲשֶׁר-אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם וּבְנִיךָ בְּכָל-
לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ: ³ וְשָׁב יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
אֶת-שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וּקְבַצְךָ מִכָּל-
הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְיָצְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה:
⁴ אִם-יִהְיֶה נִדְחֶךָ בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם
יִקְבָּצְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ:
⁵ וְהֵבִיאֲךָ 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.

6Then 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. 7The LORD your God will inflict all those curses upon the enemies and foes who persecuted you. 8You, however, will again heed the LORD and obey all His commandments that I enjoin upon you this day. 9And 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, 10since 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.

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

יִרְשׁוּ אֲבֹתֵיךָ וִירְשׁוּתָהּ וְהִיטְבָהּ וְהִרְבָּהּ מֵאֲבֹתֶיךָ:

6 וְיִמַּל יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת-לִבְבְּךָ וְאֶת-לִבְבֵי זַרְעֶךָ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ לְמַעַן חַיֶּיךָ: 7 וְנָתַן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת כָּל-הָאֲלוֹת הָאֵלֹהִים עַל-אִיבֶיךָ וְעַל-שׂוֹנְאֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר רִדְפוּךָ: 8 וְנָתַתָּה תְּשׁוּבָה וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם: 9 וְהִוָּתִירָךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל אֲמַעְשֶׂה יָדְךָ בְּפִרְיָ בְטֶנְךָ וּבַפְּרִי בְהִמְתָּךְ וּבַפְּרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ לְטוֹבָה כִּי יָשׁוּב יְהוָה לְשׁוֹשׁ עֲלֶיךָ לְטוֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר-שָׁשׂ עַל-אֲבֹתֶיךָ: 10 כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמּוֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו הַכְּתוּבֹת בְּסֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ: 11

חמישי [שלישי]

11 כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה 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 (*zorah*).

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.

הוא: 12 ל
יעלה-לנו ה
אתה ונעש
לאמר מי יע
לנו וישמענו
אליך הדבר
לעשותו: 15

שבועי [רביעי]

15 ראה נתתיו ואת-הטוב

16 אשר אנכי

יהוה אלהיך

מצותיו וחקך

וברכך יהוה

בא-שמה לך

ולא תשמעו

17 אחרים ועבדו

18 כי אבד האב

מפסיד

accessible to you, brew idiom *b'al* the English "by" manner of speech-culture in which lished primarily

known with un-

is summons to lites to obey it, rms, to survive. He commands.

ot impressed. :: "The Torah een entrusted " Whereupon ion (BT BM

2a It applies nly to people r eras.

to changing

it beyond reach. ¹²It 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?" ¹³Neither 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?" ¹⁴No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

¹⁵See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, ¹⁸I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long

הוא: ¹²לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: ¹³ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: ¹⁴כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשתו: ס

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

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. 19I 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—20by 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 אַתָּה עֹבֵר אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבֹא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: 19 הָעֵיזֹתַי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבְחַרְתָּ בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחַיֶּה אֶתָּה וְזַרְעֶךָ: 20 לְאַהֲבֹה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַת בְּקוּלֹךָ וּלְדַבְּקֵהוּ בּוֹ כִּי הוּא חַיֶּיךָ וְאַרְךָ יָמֶיךָ לְשֵׁבֶת עַל-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְתֵת לָהֶם: * פ

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

וַיִּלֶן
לֹא
הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-כִּי
בְּיָמֵי אֲמִי וְעַתָּה
אוֹכַל עוֹד לֵאמֹר
לֹא תֵעָבֵר
אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא
אֶת-הַגּוֹיִם
יְהוֹשִׁעַ הוּא
שְׁנֵי יְהוָה: 4 וְעַתָּה
לְסִיחָתְךָ וּלְעַתְּ
אֲשֶׁר הַשָּׁמַיִם
לְפָנֶיכֶם וְעַתְּ
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי
תִּירְאוּ וְאַל-

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id the people's

mental biblical
ad the Israelites
t Joshua's, will
nquest of the

Moses, in 3:28.
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ties (2:31-3:7).
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of divine assis-
ven by God, or
individual with
e. Trusting in
y may be fully

Sumerian lit-
e Jewish wish
live to 120!"

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

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