

OFF-RAMP TORAH

A JUDICIOUS DEPARTURE FROM
THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION

September 19, 2026



**“Fostering diverse modes of attention to textual details cultivates
correlative forms of attention to the world and divine reality”**

Michael Fishbane (1943-), *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

TO START: Parashat-haShavu'a Stats

Weekly Portion: Ha'azinu-Shuvah Deuteronomy 32;1-52

Sequence in Torah cycle: 53rd of 54

Sequence in Deuteronomy: 10th of 11



WHERE WE'RE GOING INSTEAD, and why

Run-Around the Torah

Context: For this Shabbat during the Ten Days of Repentance, we will explore the traditional Torah selections for Yom Kippur morning and afternoon, in comparison with the alternatives read in Progressive synagogues since the late 19th century.

A) Sh'muEil Yosef Agnon (1887-1970) *Days of Awe* - [On Yom Kippur morning] the Torah section beginning “And The Eternal One spoke to Moses, following the death of the two sons of Aaron,” [Leviticus 16:1-34] is read because **it deals with the service in the Temple on Yom Kippur.**

I) Traditional text for Yom Kippur Morning

excerpted reprise of Shabbat “Acharei Mot” (‘aliyot 1, 2, and 3):
Leviticus 16:1-34

The Eternal One spoke to Moses **after the death of the two sons of Aaron** (who died when they drew too close to the Presence of The Eternal One [on the eighth culminating day of their Ordination ritual - Leviticus 10:1-2]).

The Eternal One told Moses: “You must instruct your brother Aaron that **he is not to come at will into the Shrine beyond the Parochet**— to stand before the Cover atop the Ark— lest he die; for I manifest in the cloud over the Cover.

“**Only in this manner** is Aaron to enter the Shrine:

בְּזָאת יָבֹא אֶהְרֹן אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ

- more over

“[having first offered up] a bull of the herd for a purgation offering, together with a ram for a burnt offering,



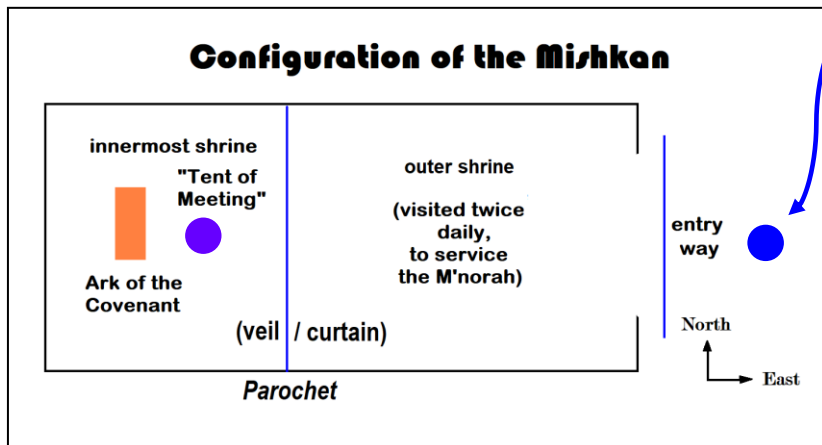
“and being attired only in the sacred linen tunic— with the linen trousers on his flesh girt with a linen sash, and wearing the linen miter[– like an ordinary priest. But since] these[, no less than his usual ‘golden robes’ as High Priest,] are sacral vestments, he is to purify himself by bathing in water, before putting them on [in contrast to the usual ablutions of priestly functionaries, who merely wash their hands and feet before serving at the Altar, or entering the outer section of the *Mishkan*, in accord with Exodus 32:19-20]).



“Then from the Israelite community he is to accept two he-goats to be offered up as a purgation offering and a ram for a burnt offering. Aaron is to offer up, with those, his own

bull of purgation offering [previously mentioned above], to make expiation for himself and for his household.

“Aaron shall take those two he-goats, and stand them before The Eternal One at the entry way of the Tent of Meeting,



casting lots between the two animals; one marked for The Eternal One, and the other marked for ‘Azazeil. Aaron shall bring forward the goat designated by lot for The Eternal One, to be ready to offer it as a purgation offering, while the goat designated by lot for

‘Azazeil shall be left standing alive before The Eternal One, to make expiation thereby by sending it off into the wilderness to ‘Azazeil.

“Then Aaron is to offer his bull of purgation offering, to make expiation for himself and his household. Having slaughtered his bull of purgation offer-



bronze fire pan for transporting hot coals and burning incense

ing, he is to take a panful of glowing coals scooped from the Altar before The Eternal One, together with two handfuls of finely ground aromatic incense, and bring this behind the *Parochet*— putting the incense on the fiery coals before The Eternal One, so that the cloud from the incense screens the cover that is over The Ark of the Covenant, lest he die. Taking some of the blood of the bull, he is to sprinkle it with his finger seven

times over the Ark Cover on its front, east side.

“Then he is to slaughter the goat of the people’s purgation offering, bringing some of its blood beyond the *Parochet*, and doing with its blood as he has done with the blood of the bull [of his own purgation offering]: sprinkling it over (and on the front of) the Ark Cover. **Thereby shall he purge the Shrine of the impurity and transgression of the Israelites, whatever their sins**, cleansing thereby the Tent of Meeting which abides in the midst of their impurity.

“When he goes in to make expiation in the Shrine, **until he comes out, nobody else shall be within the Tent of Meeting** [in order to carry out the regular daily service of the *M’norah* (per Exodus 27:20-21 and Leviticus 24:1-4) or the weekly changing of the display-bread].

“Once he has **made expiation for himself and his household**, and for **the whole congregation of Israel**, he shall go out to the Altar that is before The Eternal One and purge it by taking some of the blood of the bull [as his purgation-offering] and of the goat [as that of the assemblage] and applying it to each of the corner-posts of the Altar, then sprinkling the rest of the [comingled] blood on it with his finger seven times. Thereby shall he purify it of the defilement of the Israelites and consecrate it.

Now that he has finished purging the Shrine; the Tent of Meeting; and the Altar, the live goat



[as the other half of the purgation-offering for the assemblage] shall be brought forward. Laying both his hands upon the head of the goat, Aaron is to make confession over it **for all the iniquities and transgressions of the Israelites, whatever their sins**, putting them onto the head of the goat. Then a designated individual is to escort the goat off into the wilderness, **carrying on its head all their iniquities off into the wilderness**; the goat is to be turned loose in the desert.



“Then Aaron shall enter into the Tent of Meeting and remove the linen vestments that he put on upon entering the Shrine, leaving them there. Having bathed in water, within that sacred precinct, and then having put his vestments back on, he is to come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, **making expiation for himself and for the people**, and **turning the fat of the purgation offerings into smoke** on the Altar.

“The one charged with releasing the goat to ‘Azazel [“the scapegoote” - William Tyndale, 1530] shall launder his clothes and bathe in water, after which he may re-enter the camp. The [carcasses of the bull] of the [priest’s] purgation offering and the goat of [the peoples’] purgation offering, the blood of which had been brought in to purge the Shrine, are to be taken outside the camp, where their hides, flesh, and dung shall be consumed in fire. The one charged with burning them shall launder his clothes and bathe in water, after which he may re-enter the camp.

“And this shall be to you a law for all time: **In The Seventh Month, on the tenth day of the month**, you shall practice self-denial [וְעִנִּיתֶם אֶת נַפְשֵׁיכֶם] ‘you are to torment your

- more over

souls’], nor are you to engage in your productive labors (neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you); **for on this day atonement shall be made for you, to purify you of all your sins**— you shall be made pure before The Eternal One.

“It shall be a sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall practice self-denial; it is a law for all time. [As such, in generations to come] the priest who has been anointed and ordained to serve as High Priest in place of his father shall be the one to make these rituals of expiation. It is he who shall put on the sacral linen vestments; it is he who shall purge the innermost Shrine; it is he who shall purge the Tent of Meeting and the Altar; and it is he who shall make expiation for the other priests, and for all the people of the assemblage.

“This shall be to you a law **for all time: to make atonement for the Israelites for all their sins, once a year.**”

So Moses did as The Eternal One had commanded him.

The Babylonians Destroy Jerusalem - 586 BCE



by James Tissot, 1896

The Romans Destroy Jerusalem - 70 CE



by Francesco Hayez, 1867

B) Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 86b –
(1800 years after Sinai)

The Holy And Blessed One accepts the words of our mouths as atonement for our secret sins— even as it is said in Scripture: “take words, and return to God” [Hosea 14:3a]; and counts it to our credit as if we had offered sacrificial bulls— even as that same verse continues: “let us pay with our lips, instead of bulls” [Hosea 14:3b].

C) The Pittsburgh Platform, 1885 –
(3330 years after Sinai)

We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a **religious community**, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor [associated restoration in the rebuilt Temple of] a **sacrificial worship** under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.

D) Lawrence A. Hoffman (1942-), *Gates of Understanding II* - The early reformers denied the traditional belief in the eventual restoration of Temple sacrifice, and sought to end the distinctions of class based on presumed priestly progeniture. Rabbi David Einhorn generalized the priestly charge to include **all Jews who, together, were to practice the self-**

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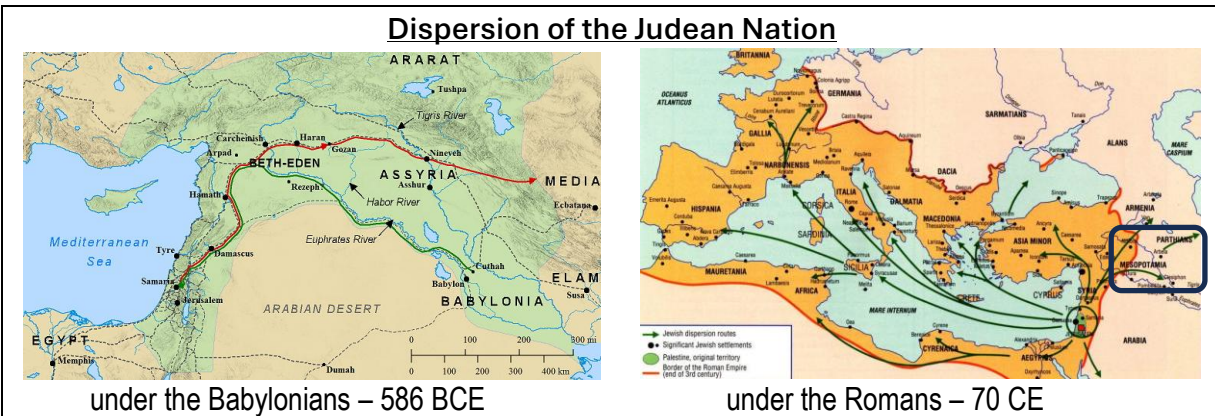
sacrifice necessary to achieve that totally just society of which our Jewish mission speaks. As such they elected to read on Yom Kippur morning a passage from Deuteronomy stressing the doctrine of personal responsibility.

II) Progressive alternative text for Yom Kippur Morning

excerpted reprise of Shabbat “Nitzavim” (‘aliyot 1, 2, and 4-7):
Deuteronomy 29:9-14 and 30:1-20

You stand poised this day, all of you, before The Eternal One, your God— the entire assemblage of Israel: your tribal heads; your elders and officials; your children; your wives; even the stranger within your camp, from the choppers of wood to the drawers of water— **to enter into the Covenant of The Eternal One, your God**, which The Eternal One, your God, is concluding with you this day (together with its sanctions), in order to establish you this day as God’s people and in order to be your God, as promised you and as sworn to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **Nor do I make this Covenant** (together with its sanctions) **merely with you alone— but**, rather, with both those who are standing here with us this day before The Eternal One our God, and **with those who are not [yet] with us here this day**.

When all these things befall you— the blessing and the curse that I have outlined to you— and you take them to heart (amidst the various nations to which The Eternal One, your God, has banished you), **and when you return to The Eternal One, your God**, and you and your children heed God’s command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, **then The Eternal One, your God, will restore your fortunes and take you back in love**. You will be brought together again from all the peoples among whom The Eternal One, your God, has scattered you. Even if your dispersal is at the far ends of the world, from there The Eternal One, your God, will gather you; even from there you will be brought back. For The



Eternal One, your God, will restore you to the land that your ancestors possessed, for it to be once more your possession, and in it you will be made even more prosperous and more numerous than were your forebears. Then The Eternal One, your God, will open up your heart and the hearts of your offspring— **to love The Eternal One, your God, with all your heart and soul— in order that you may live**, while The Eternal One, your God, will inflict all those curses instead upon the enemies and foes who persecuted you.

You, however, will again heed The Eternal One, obeying all the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day— and then The Eternal One, your God, will grant you abounding prosperity in all your undertakings: in issue of your womb; the offspring of your cattle; and the produce

- more over

from your soil. For **The Eternal One will once again delight in your well-being, as in that of your ancestors, since you will be obeying The Eternal One, your God** by keeping the commandments and laws that are recorded in this Torah book— **once you return to The Eternal One, your God, with all your heart and soul.**

Assuredly, this *mitzvah* that I enjoin upon you this day is not too hard for you, nor is it beyond reach. 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?” 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?” No, **the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.**

See, **I set before you this day** life and prosperity, death and adversity, by commanding you this day to love The Eternal One, your God; to walk in God’s ways; and to keep God’s commandments, laws, and rules so that you may thrive and increase, and that The Eternal One, your God, may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. But if your heart turns away— so that you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods— then I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you **this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life—** if you and your offspring would live— by loving The Eternal One, your God; heeding God’s commandments; and holding fast to God. For thereby you shall have life, **and shall long endure upon the soil that The Eternal One swore to your forebears Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.**



E) Benjamin Manesseh Lewin (1879-1940) *Otzar haG'onim* - The reason why the section about incest [Leviticus 18:1-30] is read **during the Afternoon Prayer on Yom Kippur is because there is no atoning for sins on Yom Kippur until one has turned in t'shuvah.** Hence, we read the section about incest so that if, God forbid, one of the children of Israel shall have broken the prohibition against incest, he will remember his transgression as soon as the prohibition is read before him, and will turn to *t'shuvah*, that he may be forgiven.

III) Traditional text for Yom Kippur Afternoon

excerpted reprise of Shabbat “*Acharei Mot*” (*‘aliyot* 5b, 6, and 7):
Leviticus 18:1-30

The Eternal One spoke to Moses, saying: “Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: “‘I, The Eternal One, am your God.

“‘You are not to emulate the practices of the land of Egypt where you used to live,

כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
יִשְׁבְּתֶם בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ

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“nor of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you—

“**for you are not to walk in their paths.**

“My rules alone are you to observe; My laws, you are to follow faithfully— for I, The Eternal One, am your God. You shall keep My laws and My rules, and **live by them**: I am The Eternal One.



remember this, Chanukah weekend

וּכְמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֵבִיא
אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ

וּבְחֻקֵּיהֶם לֹא תֵלְכוּ

אֶת מִשְׁפָּטַי תַּעֲשׂוּ וְאֶת חֻקֵּי
תִּשְׁמְרוּ לֵלְכֶת בָּהֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּשְׁמֹרְתֶם אֶת חֻקֵּי וְאֶת
מִשְׁפָּטַי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם הָאָדָם
וְחִי בָהֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה

“None of you is to approach **any of their near kin** to be physically intimate with them: I am The Eternal One.

אִישׁ אִישׁ אֶל כָּל שָׂאֵר בָּשָׂרוֹ לֹא
תִקְרְבוּ לְגִלּוֹת עֲרוּתָהּ אֲנִי יְהוָה

literally, “to uncover their nakedness”

Watch for the Yom Kippur confessional:

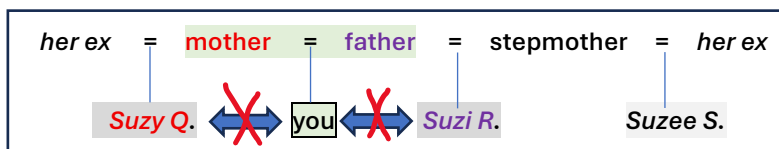
עַל חֲטָא שֶׁחֲטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּגִלּוֹי עֲרִיּוֹת

“For the sin with we have committed against You, by **sexual immorality**.”

“Your father’s “nakedness” (that is to say, his sexual prerogative) you may not claim— she is **your mother**; you may not be intimate with her.

“You may not “uncover the nakedness” of **your father’s wife**; the prerogative of sexual access to her, is **your father’s**.

“You may not **claim sexual access** to **your sister**— whether [she is only] **your father’s daughter**, or [only] your **mother’s**; whether she was born into your household, or outside.



“You may not **claim sexual access** to your **son’s or daughter’s daughter**; she is **near kin**.

“You may not **claim sexual access** to your **father’s wife’s daughter**, born into your father’s household; she is **your sister**.

“You may not **claim sexual access** to your **father’s sister**, she is your **father’s near kin**; neither may you **claim sexual access** to your **mother’s sister**; for she is **your mother’s near kin**.

“You may not “uncover the nakedness” of your **father’s brother**, by putting the moves on [לֹא תִקְרַב] **his wife**; she is **your aunt**.

“You may not **claim sexual access** to your **daughter-in-law**; because she is **your son’s wife**, you are not to be intimate with her.

“You may not **claim sexual access** to your **brother’s wife**; she is the sexual prerogative of your brother.

Exodus 20:13 -

לֹא תִנְאָף

“you may not
**commit
adultery**”

- more over

“You may not claim sexual access to both a woman and her daughter, nor be sexually intimate (in addition to her) with her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter— for such is זִמְמָה *zimmah* [depravity].

“You may not marry, and claim sexual access, a woman to be rival to her sister during [the first wife’s] lifetime.

“You may not claim sexual access to your wife during נִדְתָּהּ [her period of menstrual isolation].

“You may not engage in sexual congress with your neighbor’s wife, so as to defile yourself thereby.

“You may not pass any of your progeny through the fire to [the pagan king-god] Molech, so as to profane the Name of your God— I am The Eternal One.

“You may not lie with a man, as one lies with a woman; it is a תוֹעֵבָה *to’eivah* [ritual taboo].

ref. I Kings 15:12, II Kings 23:7

“You may not engage in sexual congress with any animal, so as to defile yourself thereby. Nor may a women stand before any animal, so as to mate with it; that is תֵּבַל *tevel* [perversion].

“Do not defile yourselves in any of those ways, for it is by such that the nations that I am casting out before you defiled themselves. Thus the land became defiled, and I called it to account for its iniquity, so that the land spewed out its inhabitants.

So it is that you must keep My laws and My rules, and you must not do any of those abhorrent things— neither the citizen nor the stranger who resides among you— for all those abhorrent things were done by the people who were in the land before you, so that the land became defiled. Thus let not the land spew you out for defiling it (the way it it spewed out the nation that came before you).

For all who would do such abhorrent things, those souls have cut themselves off from the midst of their people.

כִּי כָל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה מִכָּל הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת
הָאֵלֶּה וְנִכְרְתוּ הַנַּפְשׁוֹת הָעֹשֶׂת
מִקֶּרֶב עַמָּם

You shall keep My charge not to engage in any of the abhorrent practices that were carried on before you, so as not to defile yourselves through them: I The Eternal One am your God.

F) Lawrence A. Hoffman (1942-), *Gates of Understanding II* - Reform practice prefers Torah and *haftarah* selections with themes appropriate to the spiritual expectations of modern worshippers. On Yom Kippur morning, for example, we read Deuteronomy 29 and 30 on human responsibility, rather than the traditional section from Leviticus 16 which describes sacrifice. Here, too, it is customary for us to replace the traditional reading of Leviticus 18 with selections from Leviticus 19, which is part of what Bible scholars call “the Holiness Code.” It details a series of ethical actions entailed in our striving for holiness.

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IV) Progressive alternative text for Yom Kippur Afternoon

excerpted reprise of Shabbat “Q’doshim” (‘aliyot 1, 2a, and 4):

Leviticus 19:1-18, 19:32-37

The Eternal One spoke to Moses, saying: Address the entire Israelite assemblage, and tell them:

“**You shall be holy**— even as I, The Eternal One, your God, am holy.

“You shall each **revere your mother and your father**, and **keep My sabbaths**: I, The Eternal One, am your God.

“Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I, The Eternal One, am your God.

“When you sacrifice a celebration-offering to The Eternal One, **make that offering so that it may be accepted** in your behalf. It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it, or on the day after; but what is left by the third day must be consumed in fire. If it should be eaten on the third day, it is an offensive thing, it will not be acceptable— and any who do eat of it, shall bear the guilt for having profaned what is sacred to The Eternal One; that person shall be cut off from kin.

זָבַח שְׁלָמִים
Leviticus 3

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you may not reap all the way to the edges of your field— nor gather the gleanings of your harvest; nor pick your vineyard bare; nor gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard. **These you must leave for the poor and the stranger**: I, The Eternal One, am your God.

“You **shall not steal**; you **shall not deal deceitfully or falsely** with one another.

“You **shall not swear falsely by My name**, profaning the name of your God: I am The Eternal One.

“You shall **not defraud** your fellow, nor commit robbery: the wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning.

“You shall **not insult the deaf, nor place a stumbling block before the blind**, but shall revere your God: I am The Eternal One.

“You shall **not render an unfair decision**: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kindred fairly.

“Do **not deal basely** with members of your people. Do not profit by the blood of your fellow: I am The Eternal One.

“You shall **not hate your kinsfolk** in your heart. You shall assuredly rebuke your neighbor for wrong-doing, but are not to incur guilt on that account.

“You may not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. **Love your neighbor as yourself**: I am GOD.

----- jump to verse 32, ‘aliyah 4 -----

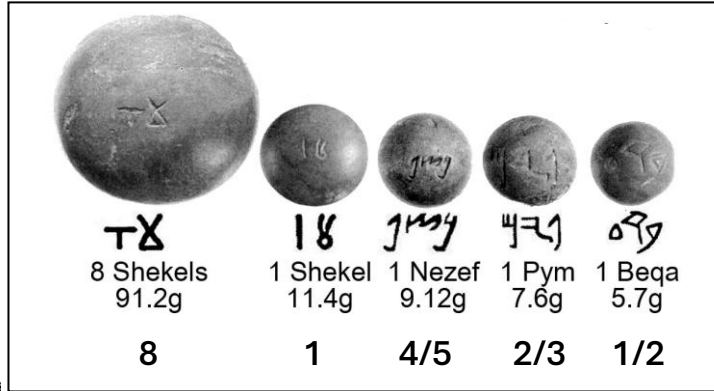
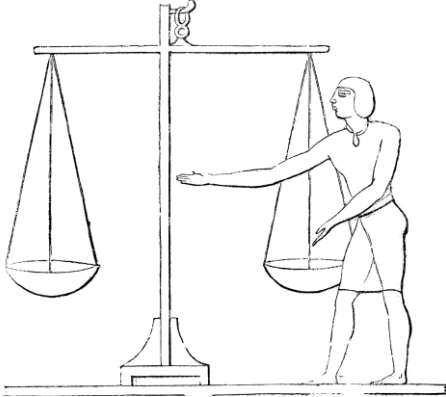
“You are to **rise before the aged, and show deference to the old**; you shall revere your God: I am The Eternal One.

“When foreigners reside with you in your land, **you shall not wrong them**. The foreigner who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born; you shall love each one as yourself—

- more over

for you, yourself, have been strangers in the land of Egypt: I, The Eternal One, am your God.

“ ‘You may **not falsify measures of length, weight, or volume.** You are to have an accurate and honest balance; accurate and honest *sh'qalim* [commercial weights of 1/40 pound standard]; an accurate and honest *eifah* [half-bushel measuring basket] and an accurate and honest *hin* [one-gallon measuring jar].



“ ‘I, The Eternal One, am your God, Who freed you from the land of Egypt. **You shall faithfully observe all My laws and all My rules— I am The Eternal One!**