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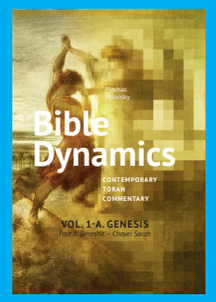

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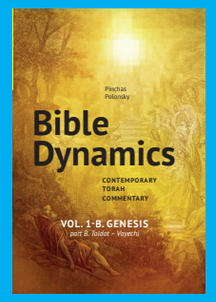

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ההתפתחותם האישית של אבות האומה

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Following the teaching of
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and Rabbi Ouri Cherki

VOL. 2. EXODUS

Translated from the Russian
by Betzalel (Todd) Shandelman

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of the "Bible Dynamics" commentary into English

The preface, explaining the particular features and objectives of the Bible Dynamics commentary, can be found in the beginning of volume 1-a.

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Pinchas Polonsky

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CHAPTER 1

MOSES AS A PERSONALITY AND THE DYNAMICS OF HIS DEVELOPMENT

1.1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PATRIARCHS AS A DYNAMIC PROCESS

Moses, as a personality, occupies a very prominent place in the Torah. He was the greatest of all prophets: Jewish tradition makes clear that no other prophet but Moses spoke to God "face to face" (Num. 12:8, Deut. 34:10). It was through him that the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, was given, which then became the foundation of Western civilization.

Nonetheless, this greatest of all prophets was a human being, which means that, like the rest of us, he made mistakes, and as a personality he had to tread his own individual path. This path is immensely important – in fact, the Torah's story unfolds around it. Therefore, we will preface our commentary to the book of Exodus with an overview of Moses' personal path of development.

As already mentioned in our introduction to the Book of Genesis, the approach we follow in this commentary tries to understand the Patriarchs within the context of their own personal development. The classical commentaries on the Torah have almost never pursued this course. But our approach is based on the teachings of Rabbi I. L. Ashkenazi (known as Manitou)[1], one of the outstanding Kabbalists of the twentieth

---

[1] For more detailed information on Rabbi I. L. Ashkenazi (Manitou) and his unique approach to understanding Judaism, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Ashkenazi.

century. A scion of one of the students of Rabbi Isaac Luria,[1] he received this approach to understanding the Torah as a part of the family tradition that was transmitted generation to generation over the centuries – "secrets of the Kabbalah." However, these traditions have heretofore never been published, as it was believed that the Jewish people were not yet ready to receive them. Our own generation, however, in the opinion of Manitou, is qualified to receive this approach and acknowledge it as true.

1.2. THE CONTRADICTIONS IN MOSES' PERSONALITY

We cannot but notice a number of strange moments in Moses' life story.

The first of those is Moses' attempts to evade God's order to lead the Jews out of Egypt, as first seen in the episode of the Burning Bush (Ch. 4[2]). Moses rejects the assignment five times, citing a different reason each time. In the end, Moses runs out of arguments, and he asks God simply to release him from the task (4:13). "Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent." (Literally, "Please, O Lord, just send whomever else You might send.") At that point the Almighty grows angry with Moses, and stops just short of using physical force to get Moses to accept the mission.

Such repeated refusals cannot be explained by Moses' humility alone, even if Moses was indeed "more humble than any other man on earth" (Num. 12:3). One might refuse once or twice because of humility, but not five times. Nor can it be explained by any lack of resoluteness on Moses' part, insufficient self-confidence, or the like. On the contrary, we often see that Moses is prepared, with no hesitation whatsoever, to undertake weighty, highly responsible decisions.

Let us cite a number of examples. Upon seeing an Egyptian beating a Jew, Moses kills the Egyptian forthwith (2:11). Then, the very next day, he notices an altercation between two Jews, and immediately intervenes (2:13). Soon after that, Moses escapes from Egypt to a foreign country.

---

1 Isaac ben Solomon Luria Ashkenazi (sixteenth century, Safed). More commonly known by the Hebrew acronym *"ARI ZaL,"* he is among the greatest of the Jewish kabbalists, and founder of the Lurianic school of Jewish mysticism.

2 All biblical references are to Exodus, unless otherwise indicated.

There, he comes to the rescue of a group of girls being abused by shepherds at the well where they have come to water their sheep (2:17).

Here we have three different situations of conflict: first, between a non-Jew and a Jew, then between two Jews, and, finally, between non-Jews. But in all of those and without hesitation, Moses intervenes, doing his best to restore justice. Later we will see that Moses does not hesitate even to make critical decisions that involve actual violence – for example, when he orders the execution of all Jews who had worshipped the golden calf[1] (32:27).

It is also obvious that Moses is not suffering from low self-esteem. He is fully aware of his royal status, and it is hard to imagine that he is simply too bashful or diffident to assume the monumental leadership role that God wishes to entrust to him.

It is therefore unclear why, at first, Moses is unwilling to accept the assignment, refusing so adamantly and repeatedly that God's anger is finally provoked.

The next oddity in the life story of Moses is the circumcision incident. Moses had not circumcised his infant son, and God wanted to punish him for this (4:24-26). Having just obtained Moses' consent to lead the Jews out of Egypt, God suddenly wants to kill him at the inn.

What is the point of all this? And why did Moses, leader of the Jewish nation, fail to circumcise his son in the first place? Or was there perhaps no particular reason, and it was simply an innocent mistake on Moses' part, in believing that circumcision was not obligatory[2] for a newborn while on the road? Why, then, does God want to kill Moses for this seemingly minor, unwitting oversight?

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[1] In light of this, it is all the more important for us to understand those situations where Moses appears incapable of coming to any decision at all. In later volumes of this commentary we will consider a number of such instances.

[2] If circumcision could pose a danger to the life (or health) of the child – and "all journeys are presumed to entail some danger," says the Talmud – then circumcision, which is normally performed on the eighth day following birth, must be postponed until any and all possibility of danger has been eliminated. Moses, who could not delay his return to Egypt from Midian, therefore had reasonable cause to believe that he should postpone his son's circumcision until a later time; that is, until he and his family had arrived safely at their destination in Egypt.

The third oddity we encounter is in God's dialogue with Moses on Mount Sinai after the Jews had worshipped the golden calf. In this conversation, God proposes to annihilate the Jews and create an entirely new nation from Moses himself. But Moses rejects that proposal, imploring God: "Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, how You swore to them by Your Self and said to them: I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke, to possess forever" (32:13).

God agrees with Moses, accepts his arguments, and forgives the people. But it is no less important to note that God's proposal is itself not clear. If God were to destroy all the Jews except Moses and then to create a new nation from him, why should we expect that the new nation will be any better than the one that already exists? To explain what Moses means by saying to God, "Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," the Midrash[1] comments: "If a table of three legs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) is unable to stand, how will a table of only one leg (Moses) possibly stand?" That is, there is no reason to believe that a nation produced from Moses alone will be more worthy than the nation that descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Why, then, does God even suggest it?

We now come to the fourth and most perplexing moment in Moses' story. Why was Moses not allowed to enter the Land of Israel? A straightforward reading of the Torah text would seem to indicate that the reason was Moses' disobedience. In the Book of Numbers (20:7-12) we read:

> "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'You and your brother Aaron take the rod and assemble the community, and before their very eyes order the rock to yield its water. Thus you shall produce water for them from the rock and provide drink for the

[1] The Midrash is a part of the Oral Torah, transmitted through Moses and across the ages as an essential component of Jewish tradition. Like the vast majority of the Oral Torah, the Midrash was eventually committed to writing during the Talmudic era and the centuries following (first century through tenth century C.E.). We can consider the Midrash a "literary reformulation" of the ideas and philosophical concepts expressed in the Torah, and, as such, its statements in most instances need not be taken literally.

> congregation and their beasts.' Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as He had commanded him. Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock; and he said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?' And Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. Out came copious water, and the community and their beasts drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them.'

This puzzling passage is usually understood to mean that Moses' sin consisted in his disobeying God, by smiting the rock instead of speaking to it with an order to yield its water.

The problem here is not only that the punishment seems inordinately severe. Even more incomprehensible is how and why Moses disobeyed God at all. Why did Moses strike the rock, rather than speaking to it as he had been told? We cannot explain it by suggesting that Moses was momentarily light-minded, or insufficiently attentive to the Divine word, or the like. The greatest of the prophets could not have so casually erred in such a critically decisive matter.

1.3. A VIEW OF MOSES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DYNAMICS OF HIS DEVELOPMENT

The ideas that Manitou propounds provide us with the tools we need for understanding all these problems as a single complex of interrelated factors.

Rabbi Manitou begins by pointing out that God would not have proposed to create a new people from Moses (32:10) had that offer not coincided, in some measure at least, with Moses' own inner desire. Surely it is impossible to entice a person with something that he finds completely unattractive. And as Rabbi Manitou explains, Moses did in fact have just such a desire earlier on. And in fact, it was precisely for that reason that Moses was averse to accepting the mission of leading the Jews out of Egypt.

Following this approach, Moses' life story is as follows.

Moses left Pharaoh's palace while still a youth, having a dual identity. He was both a Jew and an Egyptian. "He went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors" (2:11) precisely in order to help him cope with his problem of self-identification. Seeing an Egyptian beating a Jew, Moses, who considered the Jews his brothers, and himself primarily a Jew, killed the Egyptian, although as a prince he could easily have gone up against an ordinary Egyptian overseer.

Moses wanted not only to save that particular Jew, but to arouse in the Jewish people, collectively, a sense of dignity – the understanding that it was unacceptable for them to tolerate any violence perpetrated against them.

Seeing the Jews physically and spiritually oppressed, Moses, as a potential king called upon to correct the world, takes the side of the Jews. He decides that the Egyptian overseer is a ruthless criminal, sentences him to death, and executes the sentence himself. By this action, Moses, rebelling against the Egyptian system of power, breaks from it, and kills "the Egyptian within himself."

But "when he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, 'Why do you strike your fellow?' He retorted, 'Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known!" (2:13-14). And Moses flees Egypt.

We understand the words "the matter is known" as referring, of course, to the killing of the Egyptian. But the Midrash gives them a completely different meaning. Moses meant that it had now become known why the Jews were suffering in slavery. To wit: Even while unable to defend themselves, they censure a person who has come to help them. If things have come to that, thinks Moses, the Jews are hopeless. He flees Egypt, not only to escape from Pharaoh, but also to avoid having dealings with people whose behavior has greatly disappointed him.

Moses concludes that if the Jews in Egypt have so deteriorated on account of their slavery, this can only mean that the potential that they had inherited earlier from the Patriarchs is now completely lost. He therefore flees to Midian, where the descendants of Abraham from

Keturah are living, and where perhaps, Moses hopes, a certain spirit of Abraham's chosenness[1] is still preserved.

By marrying the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses hopes to become the father of a new chosen people. Moses comes "to Horeb, the mountain of God" (3:1), the future Mount Sinai, for he senses a Divine presence manifesting there. And that is exactly why Moses, when God calls on him to lead the Jews out of Egypt, refuses. Moses now has a different plan for creating a new chosen people, and an entire series of iterations is required until God finally persuades Moses to change his orientation.

We should note one of God's central arguments in this dialogue with Moses: "When you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain" (3:12). That is, the Sinai covenant will indeed be concluded, but it is predicated on principles quite different from those on which the covenant of the Patriarchs was based.

1.4. TWO LEVELS OF COVENANT: THE "PATRIARCH'S COVENANT" AND THE "SINAI COVENANT"

We have already noted in our commentary on the Book of Genesis that the covenant of the Patriarchs, mentioned many times in the Torah, was a covenant of ideals, a covenant to create a people and to possess a land, a covenant of direct connection with God[2]. But this covenant included no legislation or any detailed system of commandments.

The word "Patriarch" (from *pater*, "father") is itself a clear reference to family, to relations between parents and children. Family relations

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[1] Abraham gave the bulk of his inheritance to Isaac, distancing him from Midian and the other children of Keturah. However, those other children (and Ishmael too) did receive "gifts" from Abraham (Gen. 25:6). Thus, they too assimilated within themselves a reflection of Abraham's personality and the covenant that God had made with him. Moreover, Jethro and his family accepted Moses with admirable hospitality, the central principle of behavior in Abraham's family. In this way Jethro and his family demonstrated that they were indeed Abraham's spiritual heirs. See also §4.5.

[2] On the ideals of the Patriarchs, see *Bible Dynamics*, vol. 1, Genesis, §12.4

are built on love and understanding, not on the law. If the relationship of a husband and wife, or of parents and their children, is determined primarily by legalities, surely this is a family that has already splintered apart. While it is true that laws affect all family relationships, those laws normally remain only on the periphery of the system and not at its core. God's relationship with the Patriarchs is thus comparable to family relations, in which legal principles exist, but do not play the primary role.

At the national level, however, social relationships are constructed differently. Love for one's fellow human being is always very important, but the foundation of a properly functioning nation is a fair legislative system. In our dealings with family members, we expect to receive their love. But in the larger society, we mainly expect that all members of society will comply with the rules. Life at the national level necessarily includes a sound legislative system.

Moses, raised from infancy in the royal household of Pharaoh, the head of state, likewise communicates with the people in the manner of a legislator, not as a father[1]. In line with his upbringing, Moses believes that the life of the nation is governed primarily by the law. He is therefore particularly well-suited to induct the people into the Sinai covenant – the covenant of the Ten Commandments and its numerous detailed laws.

The line of the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – is the "Divine Immanence" that makes itself felt within every human being, The Patriarchs therefore feel the Torah as an integral part of themselves; this is Jewishness at the family level. The line of Moses is the "Divine Transcendence" that is revealed to man from the outside, from Above, from Sinai. This is Judaism at the national level.

The level of the Patriarchs is critically important. But for the advancement of mankind the "chosen family" would not suffice. It was

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[1] Not by mere chance, then, does Moses, in raising an objection with God concerning the Jewish nation, express himself in the following terms: "Did I conceive all this people, did I bear them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant,' to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers?" (Num. 1:12).

therefore necessary to create the "chosen people," because humanity consists not only of individuals and families, but of nations too, and only a nation can correct other nations. Therefore, the meaning of the life of the Patriarchs consisted in giving birth to a nation, of which the covenant of the Patriarchs, the covenant of love, affinity, and trust, was the first stage, which then had to be supplemented with the Sinai covenant, the covenant of law and justice.

Moreover, the "covenant of the law" must not be allowed to displace the "covenant of ideals"; the Sinai covenant was meant to complement the covenant of the Patriarchs, but not replace it. While the *mitzvot*, the Divine commandments as expressed in the Torah, are an integral part of Judaism, it is a major misconception (albeit, unfortunately, a rather common one) to consider those commandments the central essence of Judaism. The reality is quite the opposite. The foundation of Judaism is the ideals of the Patriarchs; the Sinai commandments are only a tool for implementing those ideals.

This duality of the Jewish covenant with God can be seen in the double meaning of the commandment of circumcision. Circumcision is an important element of both the covenant of the Patriarchs and the covenant of Sinai, but its meaning in these two covenants is different. In the Sinai covenant it is just one of the 613 commandments, but in the Abrahamic covenant it is symbolic of the entire covenant as a whole.

When Moses goes to lead the Jews out of Egypt, he does so on the basis of God's promise "when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain" (3:12). That is, he is already working within the framework of the future Sinai covenant. He therefore reasons, that just as all the Jews in Egypt (those who have not been circumcised from infancy) will have to be circumcised before the Exodus,[1] so will his own children be circumcised at the same time, along with everyone else. It makes no sense to Moses for his son to be entered at this time into the covenant of Abraham, which, to his

[1] A man who has not been circumcised is strictly forbidden to partake of the Passover sacrifice (Exod. 13:48). In this way, circumcision is inextricably connected to the Exodus.

thinking, has now already lost its relevance. By underestimating the enduring relevance of the covenant of the Patriarchs, Moses came very close to being the cause of his own death.

After God goes to considerable lengths to persuade him, Moses agrees to lead the Jews out of Egypt. That is, he assumes the leadership of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's physical heritage, but he has not yet fully accepted their spiritual heritage, nor does he identify with their "covenant of ideals." Because he believes that the essence of God's covenant can be reduced to the Law, it is precisely for this mistake that God "sought to kill him." But, more precisely, not to kill, but only to show him that the covenant of the Patriarchs still retained its relevancy and remained in force, and that without that covenant, Moses' mission would be devoid of meaning.

Moses marriage to a Midianite woman, a descendant of Abraham, expresses the connection he feels to Abraham's special status, his chosenness. However, this does not imply for Moses any essential connection with the covenant of the Patriarchs. Zipporah, by circumcising their child, is able to rectify the situation and redirect Moses' orientation[1].

Thus, in the story of the Burning Bush, Moses abandons his plan to create a new people from himself, and in the circumcision incident he acknowledges the importance of Abraham's covenant. But all this happens under duress, which means that Moses' assent to God's requirements is still incomplete.

Moses must thus undergo yet another stage of development, in order to correct and surmount, through his own efforts, his prior, erroneous attitudes. This will happen on Mount Sinai, when Moses' previously rejected plan to become the progenitor of a new nation will again seem plausible, because God Himself will propose it to Moses. When Moses on Mount Sinai refuses to create a new nation from himself, he refuses by his own free will, which becomes the most important step for Moses' further development.

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[1] In our commentary to the book of Numbers (12:1 ff.) we will consider in detail Zipporah's all-important role as a wife and personal counterbalance to Moses.

Generally speaking, God's relations with the heroes and greatest personalities of the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible), the Patriarchs and the prophets, are very often constructed according to this scheme. Over an initial, lengthy period, God works to move a person from his current position toward a different, more correct one. Then, when the change finally takes place, God will suddenly relieve the person of all previous pressure, with all possible paths now lying open before him, allowing him to exercise his own free choice. At just that moment, when a person is again free to choose and by his own free will and not by coercion he chooses the better position, his true spiritual growth then takes place.

As we noted in our commentary to the book of Genesis, this is also how God's relationship with Abraham develops in the matter of choosing an heir. God eliminates each of Abraham's potential heirs in turn – first his Haran disciples, and then Eliezer, Lot, and Ishmael – which means that Abraham must now turn all his attentions to Isaac. But when Abraham finally agrees to make Isaac his heir, God suddenly (through the story of the Akedah) orders Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on the altar, and the matter of Abraham's heir becomes again an open question. Only after Abraham himself designates Isaac as his heir does the connection between them become complete[1].

Here, too, we see something similar happen with Moses. First, God exhorts Moses to not create a new people, but to bring out from Egypt the nation that already exists. He explains that the Sinai covenant can come to pass only on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant. But then, in the incident of the golden calf, again God suddenly gives Moses the opportunity to choose. For indeed, if we view the Jews who created the golden calf from the perspective of the "covenant of the commandments," the Jews have violated the covenant and have thus forfeited their chosenness. Perhaps, then, it is worthwhile to return to Moses' original plan to create a new nation from himself? When Moses refuses this option by his own choice, he passes his most important test and rises to a new level of personal development.

The issue being decided here is this: What is more important – the national aspect (to create a nation specifically from the descendants of

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[1] See *Bible Dynamics*, Genesis, chapter 23.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) or the religious aspect (to create a nation from people who observe the laws of the Torah)? The Sinai covenant would seem to give preference to the religious aspect, the observance of the commandments, while the line of the Patriarchs is clearly ethnic, with kindred relations playing the main role – father and son retain their inner connection irrespective of religious prescriptions.

When Moses, the leading supporter and promoter of the "covenant of the commandments" supports an ethnic, nationally oriented line, he thereby acknowledges that the national aspect takes precedence over the religious. If Divine revelation is to be received, there must first be a people prepared to receive it. Therefore, the people come first, and the Torah second.

The nation, the family, and parental ties all represent something incomparably deeper than the observance of the law, even if it is the Divine Law. A nation must exist before the Torah can be realized, and not vice versa. The essence of Israel as a nation inheres in this principle, which states that "the national aspect takes precedence over the religious," that the Jewish people remain the Chosen People, even when individual Jews violate the covenant, and that the Divine light enters the world primarily through the Jewish people. Without all the aforementioned, the Jewish people could not bring Divine light to humanity.

The Midrash further emphasizes the paramount importance of Abraham's covenant by offering us the following image. The angels, upon seeing Moses ascending Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, were indignant. "Who is this person to receive the Torah? What has he done to deserve it?" God then made Moses' face identical in its appearance to the face of Abraham. And he told the angels: "Have you not eaten dinner with him recently?" (referring to the story of Abraham's hospitality to the angels, Gen. 18:8). Only then did the angels assent.

The meaning of this Midrash is that the Torah from Sinai cannot come into the world if it does not have the covenant of the Patriarchs as its foundation. The idea that "God made Moses' face identical in its appearance to the face of Abraham" means that Moses is heir to the Patriarchs, and that the Sinai covenant is only the continuation, an implementation detail, of the Abrahamic covenant. Only after that

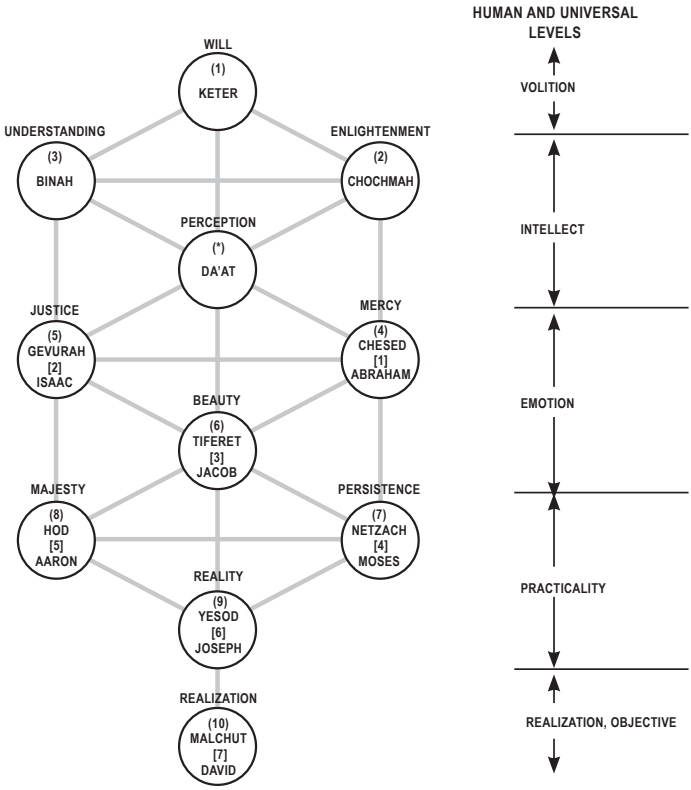
condition is fulfilled, will the angels (i.e. the universe) then agree to the giving of the legislative component of the Torah. In other words, the ideals promulgated by the Patriarchs occupy the central position in Judaism, while the Torah's commandments and laws are only secondary to them.

Ideals are the central value, and only for their sake God gives the Torah to humankind and communicates with them. The commandments are only auxiliaries to those ideals, because the ideals cannot be realized unless the commandments are observed. But if the commandments are allowed to supersede the ideals, if the Jewish religious world, as sometimes happens, is guided first and foremost by the commandments, the effect will be a significant distortion of the Divine order of things, which only leads to a degraded form of Judaism.

1.5. MOSES AND ABRAHAM IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE SEFIROT

As already discussed in our commentary on Genesis, one element of correcting the *Sefirot* is establishing the proper interrelationships between them, so as to effect the integration of all the *Sefirot* into a single, unified system. This correction is carried out by the Patriarchs and other national leaders, each of whose personalities is associated with one or more of the *Sefirot*.

Each *Sefirah* is a manifestation of one of the directions of Divine control in the world. The function of each *Sefirah* is therefore positive, for it transmits Divine light to the world. But when a given *Sefirah* has no connection with the other *Sefirot*, which means that the given *Sefirah* makes itself absolute, feeling itself autonomous and regarding itself as primary, the destructive state of *olam nekudim*, a "world of [isolated] points" then arises. This leads to *shevirat keilim*, the "shattering of the vessels." At that point, a process of *tikkun*, "correction, repair," becomes necessary. In the course of that correction, the *Sefirot* cement their interrelationships, thus becoming a single, unified system.



In the system of the *Sefirot*, Moses as a personality corresponds to *Netzach* ("Victory, Eternity").This extends *Chesed* ("Mercy") – Abraham's *Sefirah* – albeit at a more practical level of implementation. (In the Kabbalah, the more pragmatic and realizable attributes are said to be "lower." However, this does not mean that those attributes are more primitive, but only that they are closer to realization.)

Chesed ("Mercy") means **striving** to show mercy, a desire to bestow kindness on others[1]. *Netzach*, "Victory, Eternity" is the "pragmatiza-

[1] It would be incorrect to translate *Chesed* as "striving to perform good deeds." Every one of the *Sefirot*, and not only *Chesed*, represents a Divine quality, which always includes striving to do good. Those qualities differ only in the manner that it is accomplished.

tion" of *Chesed*, the **ability** to demonstrate mercy in real life. Thus, Abraham promotes the ideas of the Divine teachings by offering them to others, while Moses passes those teachings to the Jewish people, sometimes even imposing them by force[1]. Although the direction of their aspirations coincides[2], at first, Moses did not have a sufficient connection with the Abrahamic covenant; he believed that it was possible to build the life of the nation on the basis of commandments and duties (*Netzach*) alone, but not ideals (*Chesed*). In order to advance the Divine idea in the world, this connection must be restored. *Netzach* can function correctly only when it realizes itself as a promoter of *Chesed*. For Moses, this connection between *Netzach* and *Chesed* is restored in the incident of his son's circumcision at the inn, at night on the road to Egypt. And it is confirmed in its final form at Mount Sinai[3].

The difference between Abraham and Moses is also evident in their names. Abraham is the personification of majesty. His original name "Abram," means *av ram*, "the exalted father." Later he receives the name "Abraham," which means "the father of a multitude of nations" (Gen. 17:5). Thus, Abraham's names testify to his essential greatness.

But the Torah calls Moses *ben Amram*, "the son of Amram" (6:20) (his father's name was "Amram"), but it can also be understood as *ben am ram*, "the son of an exalted people." Moses' greatness is that of a son, and not the greatness of a "father of the nation," as was Abraham's. Moses' own greatness derives from that of the people, although he is himself unaware of this at first.

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1 Moses is prepared to impose God's teachings on the people even through coercion, by killing all who were directly involved in worshipping the golden calf. (To Abraham, this would have been unthinkable.) Even the actual receiving of the Torah by the Jewish people was, in a certain sense, achieved through coercion (see p. 239 note 1).

2 They are both directed toward mercy, but *Chesed* and Netzach are located on the rightmost, "extraverted" branch of the *Sefirot* tree. (The attributes appearing on the right side of the tree point outward, as distinguished from the "introverted" *Sefirot* on the left of the tree, which point inward.)

3 The connection between the giving of the Torah at Sinai and Abraham's covenant will be discussed at various points later in this commentary, in the relevant chapters of the book of Exodus.

Moses' connection with the people, at first quite weak, gradually intensifies in the course of the Exodus. As it later turns out, however, Moses is connected specifically with the generation of Jews whom he led out of Egypt, but he cannot become the leader of the new generation who grew up over the forty years of wanderings in the wilderness. For this reason, Moses cannot enter the Promised Land.

1.6. MOSES' ALIENATION FROM THE "WILDERNESS GENERATION"

We now have sufficient background to solve the final problem of Moses' life story – the reason that the Almighty would not allow him to enter the Promised Land. As already noted, the book of Numbers explains this as the consequence of Moses' disobedience: he struck the rock, rather than speaking to it, as God had instructed him to do[1]. But if we consider that incident and its consequences within the full context of Moses' life story, we will see that his blow to the rock was only a pretext for God's decision. The real reason for that decision actually lies much deeper.

Moses, in the course of the Exodus, lives in close contact with the Jewish nation whom he leads out of Egypt, and this culminates in his refraining from creating from himself a new nation. However, when the situation stabilizes and the Jews journey through the wilderness for forty years, Moses lives separately from the people, apart even from his own family.

After descending from the Mount Sinai, Moses' face is radiant, and he covers it with a veil (34:33). He removes the veil when he goes to the Tabernacle to speak "face to face" with God, and also when he teaches Torah to the Jews, so that they can learn "face to face" with him how he himself communicates with God.

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[1] The reason given in the book of Deuteronomy (1:37) is quite different, namely, the people's refusal to proceed to the Promised Land following the incident of the report of the spies (Num. 13 ff.). We will discuss this discrepancy in our commentary to Deuteronomy.

But when he finishes teaching, Moses again covers his face with a veil. Thus, Moses sees the people only during their study sessions, but he does not observe them in their day-to-day lives, for his face is then concealed. During all the years of wanderings through the wilderness, Moses taught the people Torah, but he had no actual communication with the people, even at a rudimentary level. He was unfamiliar with the new generation who grew up in the wilderness and had no knowledge of their challenges and aspirations. Another crisis[1] arises in the fortieth year, when after Miriam's death, the water supply runs dry and the people again begin to murmur, but Moses incorrectly interprets their discontent.

When Moses hears the people say, "Why did you make us leave Egypt to bring us to this wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates? There is not even water to drink!" (Num. 20:5), Moses is accustomed to thinking that the people want to return to Egypt. But in fact, the generation that grew up in the wilderness neither knows Egypt nor has any interest in returning there – on the contrary, it wants to enter the Land of Israel, having heard so much about it. Weary of their trek through the desert, they want, at last, to reach their final destination. Their description of the place where they hope to live – a place of figs, vines, and pomegranates – has nothing in common with Egypt, the land of vegetables and fish (Num. 11:5).

But Moses misunderstands the problems of the new generation and therefore improperly responds to them. When God says to Moses, "You and your brother Aaron take the rod and assemble the community, and before their very eyes order the rock to yield its water" (Num. 20:8), the meaning of this instruction is: "Take your rod and speak to the rock; you will see that it will give water. Let this be a lesson to you, that you must learn to talk with the new generation of Jews who grew up in the Wilderness. The era of coercion has now ended. Just as you must not smite the rock, you must not smite the people."

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[1] It should be noted that the Torah has almost nothing to say about the thirtyeight years of wanderings. After the second year following the Exodus, the Torah's story immediately cuts to the fortieth year (at the beginning of weekly portion *Chukkat*, Num. ch. 20).

When the nation consisted of slaves who just had left Egypt, they had to be "beaten" – not in the physical sense, but managerially speaking. Giving orders to the Jews at that time was proper and necessary. They responded appropriately by obeying. But now a new generation has grown up, having different aspirations, and with whom one needs to talk – they must be heard and understood. God therefore sends Moses to speak to the rock, as a demonstration to Moses that even a rock can respond to instructions and give water. And by virtue of that lesson, Moses was supposed to learn how to talk with the people as well.

But Moses follows the usual pattern, just as he did immediately after the Exodus (17:6). He believes that there is no need to talk, only to smite. There is no sense in trying to understand people, because their thinking is wrong in any case. You just need to state your instructions explicitly. And so, Moses smites the rock.

The people do get their water, but Moses has demonstrated that he is incapable of managing the new generation, and that he can no longer be their leader. Upon hearing nothing more than an indistinct murmur from his people, an astute leader can correctly assess what is happening[1]. He understands the people's problems, and does more than just give orders. Moses was just this kind of leader for the generation of the Exodus, but for the wilderness generation, who must conquer the Land, his approach is no longer adequate. And that is why God removes Moses from the helm of leadership, and not merely because he smote the rock. Moses has by now become "professionally unfit" to lead.

According to the Midrash, Moses asked God to be allowed, at very least, to enter the Land of Israel as just an ordinary citizen, and not a leader. But this too turned out to be impossible. Moses' personality so dominated that neither Joshua nor anyone else could have led the people effectively while Moses was still alive. A new and different life requires a new style and form of leadership. Moses must therefore leave the stage.

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[1] For example, in the incident of the golden calf, when Moses and his disciple Joshua hear cries coming from the camp (Exod. 32:17-18), Moses immediately grasps what is happening there. But Joshua, still young and inexperienced, understands the situation incorrectly.

1.7. MOSES DEPARTS, SO THAT THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH NATION CAN BEGIN

The history of a nation, like that of an individual, begins from the moment it becomes an independent entity capable of making its own decisions. The giving of the Torah at Sinai and the wanderings through the wilderness were only the prehistory of the Jewish people. Their true story begins with the conquest of the Land.

The generation that Moses led out of Egypt had to be managed by directive. Their movements were determined by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and Moses too gave them orders, so that they knew what to do. Even the giving of the Torah at the Sinai, according to the Midrash, happened under conditions of duress, and the Jews accepted the Torah only on that basis.

"And they took their places at the foot of the mountain" (19:17, but literally, "They stood on the underside of the mountain"). The Talmud expands on this: "Rabbi Abdimi b. Hama b. Hasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an inverted cask, and said to them, 'If ye accept the Torah, 'tis well; but if not, there shall be your burial.' " (Shabbat 88a)[1].

By the time the nation was about to cross the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership, the cloud and the pillar of fire were already departing, as was Moses too, and in a sense the people were now left to fend for themselves. We could say that at this point in history the Jewish people had finally completed their course of academic study (Mount Sinai and the Wilderness), and were leaving their cloistered existence to go out into the real world for the very first time, to begin a life of self-sufficiency and independence. Jewish history begins when the nation is finally in a position to decide its own fate, to make decisions and be responsible for its actions – by solving on its own the problems that it creates.

But in order for this new era to begin, Moses had to leave the scene.

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[1] For more on this topic, see our commentary later, on that verse.

CHAPTER 2
THE EXODUS AS THE "BOOK OF REVELATION"

2.1. THE NAMES OF THE FIVE BOOKS OF THE TORAH

We have already noted in our introduction to the book of Genesis that the European names of the books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are Jewish in origin. In ancient times each book of the Torah had two names, one based on the primary theme of the book, and the other taken from the book's opening words. The first of those (rendered first into Greek and Latin, and from them into other languages) became the norm in European culture, while the other is consistently used in Jewish terminology.

The second book of the Torah was in antiquity called *Sefer Yetzi'at Mizrayim* ("The Book of the Exodus from Egypt"), later translated and shortened as, simply, "Exodus".

Leviticus, the third book of the Torah, was called *Torat Ha-Kohanim* ("The Law of the Priesthood"), but the European translation replaced the Priests with the Levites as the more general term, hence "Leviticus."

The fourth book was known in antiquity as *Chumash Ha-Pekudim*, "the Book of the Census,"[1] which in the European tradition became "Numbers."

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[1] The Hebrew term chumash (from chamesh, "five") is used to refer either to the Five Books of the Torah collectively, or to any one of the five books individually.

The fifth book of the Torah was called *Mishneh Torah*, or literally, "The Repetition of the Torah", which then became "Deuteronomy," from the Greek, meaning "Second Law."

But the European name of the Torah's first book strayed furthest from the original. *Sefer Ha-Yesharim*, "The Book of the Upright" (i.e., the Patriarchs), became known as "Genesis, from the Greek word meaning "Birth," or "Beginning."

Finally, we note that the five books of the Torah are commonly known in European tradition as the Pentateuch, the Greek equivalent of "five books."

The modern Hebrew names of the books of the Torah (*Bereshit*, *Shemot*, etc.) are taken from the names of the first weekly portion of each book. (The weekly portions are named after one of their first few words.) To avoid confusion, in this commentary we refer to the books using their European names (Genesis, Exodus, etc.), while leaving the Hebrew equivalent terms to refer to their opening weekly portions.

2.2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

The book of Exodus can be divided thematically into three main parts.

A) The Exodus from Egypt and the birth of the Jewish people;

B) The making of God's Covenant;

C) The building of the Tabernacle (movable Temple) and hashra'at ha-shechinah, the resting of the Divine Presence upon the Jewish nation.

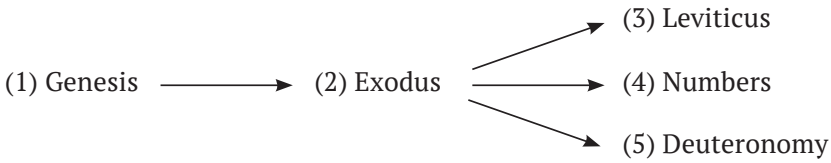
These three parts correspond to three aspects of holiness: the nation, the Covenant, and the Shechinah.

After Exodus, the next three books of the Pentateuch are further elaborations on these same three themes:

(3) Leviticus continues the theme of God's Sacred Presence among the people of Israel. It deals with the functioning of the Temple and the commandments associated with holiness.

(4) The fourth book, Numbers, continues the theme of general Jewish history, recounting the wanderings of the Jews through the wilderness.

(5) Deuteronomy continues the theme of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people, and speaks of the realization of that covenant in the Land of Israel.



The detailed structure of the Book of Exodus (like that of the Book of Genesis) can be more clearly seen when its weekly portions are grouped in pairs:

A) The Exodus from Egypt and the birth of the Jewish nation

(1) *Shemot* (1:1–6:1): Preparation for the Exodus, the internal aspect (Moses);

(2) *Va'era* (6:2–9:35): Preparation for the Exodus, the external aspect (Aaron);

(3) *Bo* (10:1–13:16): The Exodus, internal aspect (Moses);

(4) *Beshalach* (13:17–17:16): The Exodus, external aspect (Aaron)

B) The making of the Covenant

(5) *Yitro* (18:1–20:26): General principles of the covenant (Moses);

(6) *Mishpatim* (21:1–24:18): Detailed coverage of the covenant (Aaron)

C) The Tabernacle and *hashra'at ha-Shechinah*, the resting of God's Sacred Presence on the people of Israel:

(7) *Terumah* (25: 1–27:19): The command to build the Tabernacle (the "Moses" aspect);

(8) *Tetsaveh* (27:20–30:10): The command to build the Tabernacle (the "Aaron" aspect);

(9) *Ki Tissa* (30:11–34:35): Crisis (unpaired portion)

(10) *Vayakhel* (35: 1–38:20): Building the Tabernacle (the "Moses" aspect);

(11) Pekudei (38:21–40:38): Building the Tabernacle (the "Aaron" aspect);

2.3. MOSES' TORAH AND AARON'S TORAH

The eleven weekly portions of the book of Exodus can be grouped into pairs (except for the ninth portion, *Ki Tissa*, which deals with a national crisis). Thus, the theme of each such pair is considered from two different points of view. This understanding of the structure of the books of the Torah according to their weekly divisions[1] was elaborated by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook.

It is well known that our division of the Torah into weekly portions originated in Babylonia. In contrast, the inhabitants of the Land of Israel, in antiquity, used a different system for dividing the Torah into weekly *Shabbat* readings, because they completed the reading of the Torah only twice in seven years,[2] rather than once annually as we do today. The Babylonian system divided the Torah into fifty-four weekly portions, a number that approximates the number of weeks in a typical (average) Jewish year. It is the system of weekly divisions still in use today.

Although the division of the five books of the Torah into weekly portions is usually perceived as merely a technical matter, bearing no special meaning in and of itself, Rabbi Z. Y. Kook thought otherwise. He considered these divisions a part of the Babylonian Talmudic tradition and believed that *ipso facto* there must be a definite meaning to them.

In the Book of Exodus in particular (and later, in the Book of Leviticus as well), the pairing of the weekly portions represents the

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1 The book of Genesis is likewise composed of paired weekly portions, while the remaining books – Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – are constructed according to a different scheme, as we shall discuss in the Bible Dynamics commentary on these books later.

2 The purpose of that design was to allow the conclusion of one out of every two such cycles to coincide with the end of the Shemittah year, which itself repeats at seven-year intervals. The Torah prescribes (Deut. 31:10) that the commandment of *Hakhel* be performed on the festival of Sukkot following the conclusion of each Shemittah year. Because *Hakhel* (the word means "communal gathering") was observed by a public reading of the Torah in the Temple in Jerusalem, it was deemed appropriate that the weekly Torah-reading cycle in the Land of Israel should coincide likewise with the Shemittah cycle (albeit repeating twice as often as that the latter does).

counterpoint of Moses' and Aaron's perspectives. These differences, especially pronounced in relation to the Tabernacle, will be covered in detail below, when we compare portions (7) *Terumah*, and (8) *Tetsaveh*. But the same contrast is also noticeable in the earlier portions of this book of Exodus.

The "Moses" portion of each pair always refers to the "inner" side of what is happening, as they describe the inner essence of things and events. In contrast, the "Aaron" portion of each pair is more oriented to externals, that is, to the manner in which those same things and events find expression in the larger world. We will see this contrast below, in the comparison of portions (1) *Shemot*, and (2) *Va'era*; in (3) *Bo*, and (4) *Beshalach*; and then in (5) *Yitro*, and (6) *Mishpatim*.

Creation and Revelation are two fundamentally Divine actions. Creation of physical world is meant to conceal God, while the purpose of Revelation is to reveal Him. Genesis is the book of Creation – the creation of the world and the foundations of the future Jewish people. The Book of Exodus is the book of Revelation – revelation in the process of the Exodus from Egypt, revelation in the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and revelation through the Divine presence in the Tabernacle.

For many people, it is a simple matter to recognize Divine Creation in the world, but very difficult to recognize Revelation. Also, Revelation is more important for our religious life, because it demonstrates our personal connection with God and His direct involvement in the events happening around us. But in the act of Creation, God's concern for man is not manifested explicitly – He creates the world and sets it in motion, but then it just "takes its course," as it were. In the act of Revelation, however, God's care and personal connection come to the fore. In this sense, Revelation is more significant for us than Creation. Acknowledging Revelation is thus the next level of religious attainment, after recognition of Creation.

The Midrash notes that the Torah begins with the word *"Bereshit*," "In the beginning," whose first letter is *bet*, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The Midrash explains that *alef*, the first letter of the alphabet, had asked God to be the Torah's opening letter, but God declined, promising instead that the time would come for the phrase

Anochi HaShem Elohecha, "I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt", to appear (20:2, the opening words of the Ten Commandments). There, *alef* would occupy the opening position. In other words, bet represents Creation, and alef – Revelation.

Creation must begin with bet, the second letter, because in Creation there must be not only a single tendency, but a variety of different options for understanding. Since Creation must conceal God's presence, its realization must allow a person to choose whether he wants to feel a connection with God in his life, or to refuse that connection. This is because only when a person has free choice can he make his own decision.

But as concerns Revelation, the situation is different. Revelation is a direct connection with the Divine Essence that is being revealed with such absolute immediacy that it leaves no room whatsoever for doubt. This Unity and Oneness is expressed by alef, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Creation produces a world in which God is hidden. When we observe the universe or explore it solely from a scientific perspective, we cannot find meaning or purpose in it, for these cannot be inferred from objective study of the world around us. This missing element in the universe gives us Revelation, whose task is to demonstrate that there is meaning and purpose in the world.

It is no coincidence that the Book of Revelation is also called "Shemot," which means "names." We have already noted earlier that the Hebrew word shem, "name," denotes not just the essence of a thing, but its objective and purpose[1]. If the book of Genesis describes the structure of the world, then the Book of Names speaks of the purpose and meaning of the universe.

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[1] This point is very clearly demonstrated, for example, by the Hebrew term "*le shem*," which literally translated means "for the name of," but whose actual meaning is "for the sake of." E.g., *le-shem mitzvah*, "for the sake of [fulfilling] a commandment."

2.4. DIVINE REVELATION HAPPENS FIRST IN EGYPT, NOT ISRAEL

As we read the Book of Exodus, we learn that the first nation to whom God is revealed is not the Jews, but the Egyptians! At first this seems counterintuitive, but the Torah expresses in very plain terms that the Egyptian plagues are needed so that "the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord" (14:4). Not the Jews, but the Egyptians, shall know. God will later reveal himself to the Jewish nation on Mount Sinai, at the giving of the Torah. But the Ten Plagues is a revelation specifically for the Egyptians, and it happened before God revealed Himself to the Jews.

All of Western civilization has its roots in Ancient Egypt (by way of Greece and Rome)[1]. Thus, God's revelation to Egypt was potentially a revelation to all mankind.

God had to reveal Himself first, at the Exodus, to all the nations, and only then could He charge the Jews at Sinai with the task of bringing God's message to all humanity. The Jews could not have advanced the human race from its primitive, "natural" positions if God had not first set those positions in motion for all of humanity. This is just what He did through the Ten Plagues with which He smote the Egyptians.

Egyptian culture incorporates an unusually robust Divine principle, but Egypt's worship of nature suppresses that foundation. Egypt is first mentioned in the second chapter of Genesis, where the rivers that flow forth from the Garden of Eden are enumerated (Gen. 2:13)[2]. Thus, Egypt draws its spirituality directly from the Garden of Eden, but it applies that spirituality incorrectly. Egypt is described in Torah as the "house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2), i.e. the bondage constitutes its essence. Egypt turns its inhabitants into slaves of Pharaoh and the society into slaves of nature. Egypt incorporates the Jewish people into this system. And that is why Egypt must be destroyed.

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1 For a more detailed discussion of these points, see *Bible Dynamics*, Genesis §13.8.

2 See *Bible Dynamics* commentary to Gen. 2:13

God's Revelation in Egypt consists in destroying Egyptian self-confidence, in destroying its reliance on nature and on the cyclical aspect of nature and its determinism. With the dismantling of these attitudes, the Divine foundation of Egyptian civilization is set free, part of which the Jews must bring out of Egypt with them. This is the "stripping" of the Egyptians that accompanies the Exodus (3:22).

Unlike the book of Genesis, which tells of illustrious individuals, Exodus recounts the life of the nation as a whole. And although any individual of this nation, including even Moses himself, was of course spiritually lower than any of the Patriarchs, the essence of the Patriarchs was that they were "forefathers," parents, whose task was to give birth to a nation. The life of the nation therefore represents a more advanced stage of development as compared with that of the Patriarchs.

Therein lies a certain paradox in the spiritual element of the historical process, as Jewish tradition sees it. The greatness of Jewish leaders steadily "decreases." (The Patriarchs were greater than Moses, who was greater than the other prophets who followed him, who were greater than the sages of the Talmud, who were greater than the sages of the post-Talmudic era.) But at the same time, the spirituality of the world and of society generally is *increasing*. Apparently, the level of the great leaders is decreasing because most of the hard work has already been accomplished, with the leaders of each subsequent era standing on the shoulders of their predecessors. One who stands on the shoulders of giants sees further than they do, although he is himself shorter than they are[1].

Genesis is the story of individual holiness, while the book of Exodus speaks of the holiness of society, of an entire nation. God gave the Patriarchs His promise that they would give birth to a nation, because only a nation can re-educate humanity, which consists of other nations.

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[1] In Jewish tradition this process of "diminishing returns" among the leadership is known as *yeridat ha-dorot*, "the decline of the generations," which refers to the leaders specifically. This does not mean that every leader of any later era stands necessarily lower than the leaders of all prior eras. Rather, it means that the sum total of all the leaders of any later era will be less than that of the leaders of any earlier era.

As the human species progresses in its development, holiness must become the lot not only of individuals, but of society as a whole. It should extend not only to specifically religious areas of life (commandments, prayer, and so on), but to social life and the life of the state, to the economy, to the development of science, technology, and art, and to the entire social structure. All aspects of "secular" life must collectively participate in acquiring holiness. Individuals cannot attain that level, not even righteous individuals can. Only a nation is capable of that.

In the book of Exodus, therefore, the first step must be the creation of a nation – the future subject of holiness. Only then can that nation receive the Torah and take up residence in its own Land, building its life on a sacred foundation.

The holiness of the nation as a whole and the holiness of secular life are fundamental biblical concepts, but the Jewish people have even now not yet managed to convey their understanding of those concepts to humanity. The world accepted monotheism from the Jews, along with the idea that God exists and has given them His commandments, all of which are aspects of personal dialogue with God.

But the world has not yet adopted the ideas of national holiness and a national dialogue with God; these remain ideas whose time is yet to come. (According to the theory of religious Zionism as developed by Rabbi A. I. Kook, the peoples of the world will receive the ideas of "the sanctity of secular life" as a part of the historical, political, and spiritual development of the modern Israeli state.)

2.5. MOTHER EGYPT AND FATHER BABYLON

We have already noted[1] that the Jewish people, in its very structure and origins, is significantly different from ordinary peoples.

Among the peoples of the world there is a concept of "motherland," which means that a country is seen as giving birth to its inhabitants,

[1] See *Bible Dynamics* commentary to Genesis, chapter 13.

as being a parent to them. This idea is quite accurate for ordinary peoples, whose national consciousness takes form as a feature of their historical development. But it often happens that different components of a single ethnos take up residence in different geographical states, with the result that after a few centuries they become entirely different nations. And vice versa: If different clans live in the same country, and their common history progressively unites them, after a few hundred years they will become a single people. (The Gauls, Franks, and Provençal in France are an example of this.) In other words, nations are formed in the course of the history of states. A country really does "gives birth" to its people.

But in Jewish culture, the relationship of the nation to its state is completely different. In Jewish tradition, the Land of Israel is not the mother of the Jewish people at all, but their wife, and in the course of their history, the Jewish people will "marry" the Land of Israel. But as for their birth, the Jewish nation is born in a completely different place – in Egypt.

The history of the Jews in Egypt and their Exodus from there parallels the process of human conception and birth. When Jacob and his family leave Laban's home in Babylon and later come to Egypt, a "conception" occurs. And when the nation grows and develops in Egypt, we can call that the "pregnancy." When the time for the Exodus arrives, the throes of "labor" begin – the Ten Plagues that smote the Egyptians. Finally, the sea parted – "the water broke." And the nation was born.

At the next stage of human development, the child is sent off to school to study – the Jewish people go to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. Soon it is time to marry – the "bride" is the Land of Israel. But the Jewish people were still too young at that time – they were afraid of marriage (this does happen to young people, as we know), and were not yet ready to take on conquering the Land. The future "groom" was therefore allowed to continue his "studies" for another forty years of wanderings through the wilderness, which is plenty of time to "grow up." Finally, he is ready for "marriage" – he enters the Land of Israel and conquers it. The "marriage" to his beloved bride (the Land of Israel) is finally consummated.

Thus, the "marriage" of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is the creation of the Jewish state, and the "child" born to them is the Messiah, the king of the Jewish state, under whose guidance the Divine light spreads to all mankind, as the prophet Isaiah says: "For instruction shall come forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3). God's instruction and word will then be coming forth not for the Jewish people, who have already received all of that much earlier, at Sinai, at the onset of their "studies." Rather, Isaiah means that the Divine word will come forth for all humanity. And indeed, Divine Revelation came to the entire world (and in the future will likewise come) only from Zion; that is, from the Jewish state that has its capital in Jerusalem.

According to the Midrash, when God gave the Torah on Mount Sinai, He was prepared to teach it to all the nations, but they refused. Only the Jews agreed to accept the Torah and, as things turned out, only they were capable doing so[1]. The Torah given at Sinai is the Torah descended from Heaven. Only the Jewish people are able to "receive the Divine Word from Heaven." But the Jewish people receive the Torah not only for themselves, but for the entire world. They arrive in the land of Israel and possess it for the purpose of transmitting the Divine Teachings to all of humanity.

In the course of Jewish history in the Land of Israel, which is the story of the "marriage" of the Jewish people to their Land, the Torah is transformed into the Tanakh, and God's Heavenly teachings are transformed into their more earthly equivalent, something that all of humanity can understand. And then "instruction shall come forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Through the concept of the "marriage" of the Jewish people and their Land one can gain a unique understanding of the special nature of the connection between the Jews and the Land of Israel. A people that relocates to a different country will inevitably, after some time, forget its former "historical homeland." French-Canadians, for example, have no interest in returning to France, notwithstanding that they

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[1] We will deal with this question further in our discussion of the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

have not lost their appreciation of French as a language. And so it is with any other nation.

This is similar to how a child grows up and leaves his mother – he *takes leave* of her. He keeps in touch with her, writes her letters, and sometimes even comes back to visit, but he lives separately and independently, and has no plan to return in any real sense.

The Jewish people, however, in leaving their country have left not their mother but their wife. Or, more precisely, when the Jewish people began to behave badly, the Land of Israel booted them out. But when the Jewish people repented and mended their ways, she willingly accepted them back[1].

All the time the Jewish people were in exile, the Land did not "marry" anyone else. For almost the entire period of the Jewish exile, the Land of Israel was merely the abandoned province of other states, not an independent entity. No other people could come into existence on that territory, and those states that did arise in the Land of Israel were ephemeral and short-lived. The return of the Jewish people to their Land today is therefore a renewal of "marriage," in order to give birth to the *Mashiach*, to bring the Messianic light to the world. This is the purpose for which the current State of Israel was created. In times to come the world will begin to understand this.

Returning to the story of the birth of the Jewish people, which is the subject of our discussion in this Book of Exodus, we note that Egypt was the mother of the Jewish people, and its father was Babylon. In this sense, Jacob's departure with his family from Babylon is the inception of the nation's "birth" from the father's point of view, the "insemination." Later on, Jacob and his family move from Babylon to Egypt, and there the "conception" takes place.

Babylon and Egypt are special countries. As already noted, these two countries are mentioned in the Book of Genesis as an integral part of the Creation story. Babylon and Egypt are fed by the rivers that flow

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[1] Physically (i.e., technically) speaking, of course, the exile was effected by the Romans, while the Jews' return from that exile was realized through the Zionist movement. But all of that was in fact the realization of the Divine plan for the relationship of the Jewish people to their Land.

through the Garden of Eden; mankind's primordial spirituality is divided between them.

In the Jewish view, the unification of these two spiritualities, the Egyptian and the Babylonian, gave birth to a people, the Jews, who could transmit the Divine light to all of mankind. This is why Abraham's origins are in Babylon. He descends to Egypt and later leaves Egypt, but he thus integrates both Babylon and Egypt on a personal level.

At the next stage, Jacob goes to Babylon, marries, begets children, creates a family, and with them leaves Babylon and later descends to Egypt – realizing communication not on an individual, but on a familial level[1]. The next level, the national level, is the Exodus and "birth" from Egypt.

Because the Jewish nation was born in Egypt, it has a certain kindred relation to Egypt. Egypt was the greatest civilization of antiquity, the most highly developed – spiritually, scientifically, and technically. It is therefore no coincidence that the Jewish nation is born there. It could not have been born in a weak country, or a country of only secondary importance.

Abraham was himself keenly aware of this point – that the Jewish nation had to be born under Egypt's influence and retain its kindred relationship with Egypt. It is no coincidence that after arriving in the Land of Israel, Abraham went to Egypt. And later, even more compellingly, Abraham believed that Ishmael, his son from his Egyptian bondwoman Hagar[2], would become the heir to his life's work. Before he could acknowledge that only Isaac would continue his mission, Abraham had to experience a severe personal crisis.

Although the idea that the Jewish nation had to be born through Egypt was incorrect at Abraham's phase of Jewish history, it was in principle entirely correct. Abraham's only mistake was his belief that it would happen with him; he committed only a tactical error. He failed

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1 For an analysis of this aspect in the narratives of the lives of Abraham and Jacob, see *Bible Dynamics*, commentary to Genesis, chapter 13, and §36.13.

2 On Abraham's connection with Egypt, see Bible Dynamics, commentary to Genesis, §16.8.

to understand that first his son and grandson Isaac and Jacob had to be born, and that the latter would then go down to Egypt as a family unit, in order that a new nation, the Children of Israel, could be born from that civilization. Moses, the leader of the Exodus, clearly senses this connection of Jewish and Egyptian principles within his own personality. The story of weekly portion *Shemot* is centered around this fact.

WEEKLY
PORTION [1]

SHEMOT

CHAPTER 3

THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS: THE TRANSITION FROM A FAMILY TO A PEOPLE

3.1. PREPARATION FOR THE EXODUS – THE MOSES ASPECT

The first weekly portion of Exodus is *Shemot*, which means "names." As always, Jewish Tradition derives the name of the weekly portion from its opening words, which also mirrors the theme of the entire portion.

The *Shemot* portion recounts how the Jewish people in Egypt preserved their names, their inner character, and their purpose, and this is the underlying meaning of the portion. The opening passage lists the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob), reflecting the purpose and meaning of each tribe, in their unity and diversity. And at the end of the portion, God's name and the meaning of that name are discussed.

The first two weekly portions of the book of Exodus – *Shemot* and *Va'era* – both tell of the preparations for leaving Egypt, but from two different angles. Contemporaneously with the preparation for the Exodus, the manifestation of Divinity changes. In the Shemot portion the Divine Name appears in the future tense ("*Ehyeh*," see 3:14), while in Va'era it is in the present tense (the Tetragrammaton, "YHWH," see 6:3).

The *Shemot* portion mentions the Jewish people only briefly at the beginning (in connection with their servitude) and then again only briefly toward the end (after Moses' return to Egypt). Instead, the main content of the portion is almost entirely devoted to the personality of Moses.

As soon as Moses is born, his mother "saw how beautiful he was" (2:2) (but, literally, "she saw that he was good"). The word tov, which means "good, kind, beneficial," is Moses' most important quality. He so longs to see goodness in the world that he is prepared, if necessary, to exert pressure, and even to use violence, in order to make it happen.

Moses' personal identity and his sense of self exhibit two complementary tendencies. On the one hand, their origins are in the royal Egyptian palace, but on the other hand, Moses' roots are entirely Jewish. (He was nursed in infancy by his own mother, he never broke off ties with his family, and his brother Aaron, as we will shall see later, was the spiritual leader of the Jewish community of Egypt – "the local chief rabbi," as it were). The typical Jewish desire to intervene in every situation, coupled with the Egyptian self-image of a ruling dynasty wielding world power, together create in Moses an explosive personality that can change the world.

As we read the first three narratives of Moses' activism, we notice that each of them speaks of some conflict – first with the Egyptian overseer, then with two Jews involved in an altercation, and finally with the Midianite shepherds. Moses is a man of impressive physical strength who, even as a stranger in a foreign country, is not afraid of a confrontation. He has a great thirst for justice, and the self-awareness of a king, who is responsible for maintaining proper order in all of the surrounding world.

For the first half of his life Moses was disengaged from the Jewish people – physically, psychologically, and spiritually. But this separation was necessary for his own personal development. Having grown up in Pharaoh's palace, Moses understands how to build a state and manage it. Living with Jethro, he gains a broad perspective on the peoples and communities of the world, their history and interactions. Moses needs all this in order to be able to lead the Exodus, but after this "external preparation" Moses' connection with the people must be restored. However, it does not go very smoothly.

When God invites Moses to lead the Exodus from Egypt, Moses initially refuses the commission. The apparent reason, as noted earlier,[1] is Moses' disappointment with the Jewish people. Only after God pressures him to take up the task does Moses actually accept it.

Moses obeys, but at first only on a purely physical level, for he has not yet accepted the task in any spiritual sense. He believes that the legacy of the Patriarchs in Egypt is now all but dead, and that there is therefore no longer any point to align himself with it. (But Moses also believes that a completely new level of connection with God, the Sinai Revelation, will very soon come into existence, whose embodiment will be none other than the Jews now enslaved in Egypt.) That is why Moses does not circumcise his son, for he has no desire to introduce him into the covenant of Abraham. Instead, he wants to initiate his son into the new and renewed covenant – the covenant of Sinai[2].

God showed Moses that his approach was wrong: "At a night encampment on the way, the Lord encountered him and sought to kill him. So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched his legs with it, saying, 'You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me!' And when He let him alone, she added, 'A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision.' " (4:24–26). Zipporah's act of circumcision, which saved Moses' life, demonstrated that the Abrahamic covenant was still valid. It demonstrated that it is impossible to enter a covenant of commandments while bypassing the covenant of ideals, for there is more to life than legalities alone. Moses realized his error and corrected it. After first moving away from the people he now returns to them, in order to establish the Sinai covenant without abandoning the Patriarchal covenant.

3.2. THE DEATH OF JACOB'S FAMILY, AND THE BIRTH OF THE NATION (1:1-7)

א וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיְמָה אֵת יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ
בָּאוּ: ב רְאוּבֵן שִׁמְעוֹן לֵוִי וִיהוּדָה: ג יִשָּׂשכָר זְבוּלֻן וּבִנְיָמִן: ד דָּן
וְנַפְתָּלִי גָּד וְאָשֵׁר: ה וַיְהִי כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ יֹצְאֵי יֶרֶךְ־יַעֲקֹב שִׁבְעִים נָפֶשׁ
וְיוֹסֵף הָיָה בְּמִצְרָיִם: ו וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל־אֶחָיו וְכֹל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא: ז וּבְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׁרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעַצְמוּ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:

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1 See above, §1, "Moses as a Personality and the Dynamics of His Development."

2 For a more detailed discussion, see below, §6.3.

(1) **These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each coming with his household:**

(2) **Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah;**

(3) **Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin;**

(4) **Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.**

(5) **The total number of persons that were of Jacob's issue came to seventy, Joseph being already in Egypt.**

(6) **Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation.**

(7) **But the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them.**

(1) **These are the names**: These first verses of Exodus describe the transition from a family to a nation. The story of the Jewish nation begins with an overview of its roots, of which there are two complementary aspects: the twelve tribes, represented by Jacob's twelve sons, and the seventy souls who descended to Egypt, all of whom are Jacob's direct descendants.

The names of the sons of Israel: By enumerating the names of each of the twelve tribes, the Torah wishes to emphasize their uniqueness. The tribes are not just faceless slices of the population. Each tribe, a uniquely individual entity having its own character and personality, will make its own special contribution to the future life of the nation.

According to the Midrash, the Jews in Egypt had a number of special merits that made them worthy of redemption from slavery. One of those was that "they did not change their names." A person's name carries a clear element of purpose and meaning. When a person is mindful of where he came from, where he is headed, and why he is here in the first place, such thoughts can be extremely conducive to realizing his mission in the world. Despite all the burdens of slavery, the Jews remembered that they were descended from the Patriarchs, and they remembered the Land to which they were destined to return. (It is the same Land, which was mentioned to them by Joseph, Gen. 50:25, Exod. 13:19.)

It should be noted that in the first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter of Exodus, names are virtually absent (except for the

names of the sons of Jacob, all of whom have already died). The people are nameless, because their personalities are suppressed by slavery. The only exceptions to this are the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, and later Moses, because they assert themselves as individuals who dare to oppose the system.

The sons of Israel: In this verse "the sons of Israel" means, simply, the twelve sons of Jacob. But just a little later (v. 7) the same term becomes an ethnonym. Eventually, the name "Israel" will be the primary name of the Jewish people.

(5) **The total number of persons that were of Jacob's issue came to seventy**: Seventy in Judaism is a typological number, alluding to the seventy nations of the world[1]. Thus, the Jewish people is a microcosm, as it were, of all of humanity. Among the Jewish people there must be "representatives" of each of the other nations. In order to advance all of mankind, the Jews must be able to establish contact and mutual understanding with each of the nations of the world.

(6) **Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation**: The process of creating the new nation begins with the death of Jacob's sons. The Jewish people is created in two stages. First Abraham, Isaac and Jacob create a family. Only after this family dies can the actual nation gradually come into existence.

This is not only about physical death. (If such were the case the Torah would have no reason to mention it, since it is obvious that over time every generation inevitably dies.) Rather, it is the heritage of the Patriarchs that is dying here, their ideals and values; of them only a faint reflection remains, a memory (the Jews "did not change their names").

In order to create a new and viable nation, this reflection had to be turned into something more. We can compare the death of Jacob's sons to the process of conception, in which the seed of Israel was destroyed in Egypt, just as when a child is born, the father's seed is completely consumed inside the mother in the process of creating a child, and only

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[1] The tenth chapter of Genesis enumerates the seventy nations that descended from Noah. For a more detailed discussion, see *Bible Dynamics*, commentary on Genesis chapter 8, "Noah's Sons' Descendants," and Deut. 32:8.

genetic material remains to be taken from it. Joseph's generation dies in just this sense. The previous generational line has completely died out, and now a nation must be created in a totally new way.

(7) **So that the land was filled with them**: The Jews are gradually spreading from the land of Goshen to other parts of Egypt. The Jews in Egypt were still only a proto-nation. Although they had a certain national identity, there was no sense of the Jews as a separate and independent entity.

The Midrash offers us yet another approach to reading this verse. According to the Midrash, "The land was filled with them" means that circus arenas and amphitheaters were filled with Jews, who were now aligning themselves with Egypt's cultural stratum. The Jews were becoming assimilated into Egypt's general culture, and it would therefore become necessary not only to remove the Jews from Egypt, but also to "remove Egypt from the Jews."nt.

3.3. "A NEW KING AROSE OVER EGYPT" (1:8-14)

ח וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ־חָדָשׁ עַל־מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע אֶת־יוֹסֵף: ט וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל־עַמּוֹ הִנֵּה עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ: י הָבָה נִתְחַכְּמָה
לוֹ פֶּן־יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי־תִקְרֶאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף גַּם־הוּא עַל־שֹׂנְאֵינוּ
וְנִלְחַם־בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ: יא וַיָּשִׂימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן
עַנֹּתוֹ בְּסִבְלֹתָם וַיִּבֶן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפַרְעֹה אֶת־פִּתֹם וְאֶת־רַעַמְסֵס:
יב וְכַאֲשֶׁר יְעַנּוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיָּקֻצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
יג וַיַּעֲבִדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ: יד וַיְמָרְרוּ אֶת־חַיֵּיהֶם
בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בְּחֹמֶר וּבִלְבֵנִים וּבְכָל־עֲבֹדָה בַּשָּׂדֶה אֵת כָּל־עֲבֹדָתָם
אֲשֶׁר־עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּפָרֶךְ:

(8) **A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph.**

(9) **And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us.**

(10) **Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground."**

(11) So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses.

(12) But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites.

(13) The Egyptians ruthlessly imposed upon the Israelites

(14) the various labors that they made them perform. Ruthlessly they made life bitter for them with harsh labor at mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field.

(8) **A new king arose over Egypt**: This did not happen immediately. At least a century had passed since Joseph's death.

Who did not know Joseph: Needless to say, the new Pharaoh is familiar with the story of Joseph, but he does not *want* to know him. He does not want to acknowledge Joseph's merits, or even to hear about him. Jewish life in Egypt (and in the Diaspora, in general) is not an independent existence, but subject to the whims of each ruler; previous successes are no guarantee of security. Even if a given generation manages to succeed in the Diaspora, a new ruler will always arise, sooner or later, such that all previous attempts to assimilate into the dominant culture will necessarily be doomed to failure.

But it is important to note that the new Pharaoh is introduced only after "the land was filled with the Jews", that is, after the Jews had already integrated into the country and absorbed many of its achievements. It was now time to begin the process of severing them from it. In this regard, Pharaoh's refusal to "know" Joseph was a necessary prerequisite to separating the Jews from Egypt (Hebrew *yada'*, "knew", always indicates a very close connection between the knower and the person or thing known.) Thus, all the hardships that Israel endured as slaves to the Egyptians were necessary for the birth of the Jewish nation.

(9) **And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us**: If you wish to destroy someone, your first step must be to declare him an "enemy of the people" and set the masses against him.

The literal translation here is "the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we are." But that is not entirely clear. After all, there are undoubtedly far fewer Jews in Egypt than Egyptians. The rendering given by the translation here therefore seems more correct. "The Israelite people are much too numerous for us," i.e., we Egyptians cannot allow such a large and powerful people to live in such close proximity to us.

(10) **Let us deal shrewdly with them**: The Midrash believes that the birth of Miriam, Moses' older sister, coincided with the beginning of the Egyptian persecutions, and that her name "Miriam" is derived from the Hebrew word *mar*, "bitter."

So that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground: The literal, more common translation is: "... they will fight against us and ascend from the (i.e., our) land." But what danger do the Jews pose to Egypt? And since the Egyptians are prepared to destroy the Jews, what, then, is the urgency of preventing them from leaving the country? Apparently, the Egyptians, much as they dislike the Jews, are also averse to their departure, since the Jews are an important economic force in Egypt.

The phrase "and leave the land" has no explicit subject. Exactly who will leave the land? It is most natural of course to assume it refers to the Israelites. But we can also understand it in the opposite sense: "We, the Egyptians, will leave the land, for they will drive us out." The Egyptians fear that the Jews, in collusion with Egypt's enemies, will drive out (or perhaps enslave) the Egyptians themselves.

But there is yet a third possible reading: "They will lift up (something) from the land," that is, they will leave, and take the riches of our country with them. The Egyptians fear that the Jews, upon leaving, will strip Egypt of its content and meaning – they will devastate Egyptian civilization.

And this is exactly what happened in the end, with Pharaoh's own actions, more than anything else, contributing to that result. The aggressions perpetrated by the Egyptians against the Jews aroused in them the desire to leave Egypt.

(11) **So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses**: This is the first stage of enslavement. The Egyptians want to give the impression that their goals are entirely highly constructive, but in actuality their only objective is to benefit themselves.

(12) **But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out**: A weak nation when subjected to external pressure will be even further weakened, and gradually disappear. But for a strong nation the result is quite the opposite – it increases and advances.

So that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites: An alternate translation is "the Israelites became abhorrent to them." The Egyptians sense that they are psychologically weaker than the Jews, and are rather certain that were they to find themselves in the same situation, they would simply capitulate. This feeling of inferiority engenders hatred.

(14) **… the various labors that they made them perform. Ruthlessly they made life bitter for them with harsh labor at mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field**: This is the next stage of enslavement, and also the next stage of degradation for the Egyptians, which happens in parallel with the strengthening of the Jewish people. The Egyptians no longer have a constructive goal of building something for themselves. Their primary objective is simply to crush the Jews.

But the Midrash asks: Given that the Almighty has predetermined that the Jews would be subjected to Egyptian slavery, why, then, are the Egyptians held responsible for enslaving them? The Midrash answers: Indeed, it was predetermined by God that the Jews would be enslaved to the Egyptians, but it was the Egyptian's own decision to oppress the Jews with such extreme cruelty. That is why the Egyptians are punished.

3.4. THE MIDWIVES DISOBEY PHARAOH (1:15-22)

טו וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לַמְיַלְּדֹת הָעִבְרִיֹּת אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאַחַת שִׁפְרָה
וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה: טז וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיַלֶּדְכֶן אֶת־הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל־
הָאָבְנָיִם אִם־בֵּן הוּא וַהֲמִתֶּן אֹתוֹ וְאִם־בַּת הִוא וָחָיָה: יז וַתִּירֶאן
הַמְיַלְּדֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם
וַתְּחַיֶּין אֶת־הַיְלָדִים: יח וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם לַמְיַלְּדֹת וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן
מַדּוּעַ עֲשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַתְּחַיֶּין אֶת־הַיְלָדִים: יט וַתֹּאמַרְן הַמְיַלְּדֹת
אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי לֹא כַנָּשִׁים הַמִּצְרִיֹּת הָעִבְרִיֹּת כִּי־חָיוֹת הֵנָּה בְּטֶרֶם
תָּבוֹא אֲלֵהֶן הַמְיַלֶּדֶת וְיָלֵדוּ: כ וַיֵּיטֶב אֱלֹהִים לַמְיַלְּדֹת וַיֶּרֶב הָעָם
וַיַּעַצְמוּ מְאֹד: כא וַיְהִי כִּי־יָרְאוּ הַמְיַלְּדֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם
בָּתִּים: כב וַיְצַו פַּרְעֹה לְכָל־עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל־הַבֵּן הַיִּלּוֹד הַיְאֹרָה
תַּשְׁלִיכֻהוּ וְכָל־הַבַּת תְּחַיּוּן:

(15) The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,

(16) saying, "When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live."

(17) The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.

(18) So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?"

(19) The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth."

(20) And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly.

(21) And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them.

(22) Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

(15) **The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives**: Some of the commentators understand the expression "Hebrew midwives" to mean that the midwives were themselves Jewish. But if so, it seems strange that Pharaoh is not wary of giving them such an assignment, and that they, even if only in words, would accept it and agree to execute it. The alternate opinion therefore seems more logical – they are Egyptian midwives who were assisting the Jewish women in childbirth. (Thus, perhaps the translation here should be not "the Hebrew midwives" but "the midwives of the Hebrews".) But since the midwives are themselves Egyptian, not Jewish, we can infer that the growing oppression of the Jews has provoked opposition even among the general Egyptian population, and that a group of pro-Jewish Egyptians is now emerging.

One of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah: As noted earlier, except for the names of the sons of Jacob in the opening passage of the book there are practically no names in the first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter of the book of Exodus. The Jews in Egypt are nameless, having lost their identity as individuals, because they are beaten down by slavery. Only the midwives are named, because they proved themselves to be individuals willing to stand by their convictions in rebelling against the system.

(16) **Saying, "When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live"**: The Midrash explains that men most typically represent the dominant, active human aspect, while women, as mere subordinates, are the receivers. Pharaoh's decision to destroy the boys and save the girls means that he wants to preserve the Jews within the Egyptian system, but not to give them their independence. He wants the Jews' singular qualities that are so beneficial to Egypt (most notably, their skill at performing useful work) to remain there. But the danger posed by Jewish independence, as he sees it, must be eliminated.

(17) **The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live**: Fear of God is presented here as the basis for countering the systematic evil of the state.

(19-20) **The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the**

midwife can come to them, they have given birth." And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly: Here the Torah continues its theme of contrasting the physical and spiritual advancement of the Jews with the physical and moral degradation of the Egyptians.

(21) **And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them**: It would seem that the Almighty now openly intervenes in the goings on in Egypt. Those who side with the Jews and support them are themselves successful. A certain stereotype is forming, which in the future will drive the accession of a sizeable Egyptian element to the Jewish Exodus.

(22) **Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live"**: Because, Pharaoh's efforts in acting through the midwives (i.e., through furtive channels) have failed, he makes a public appeal to his people. It is no longer only state power persecuting the Jews; the entire nation is complicit. Thus, the blame for those persecutions now falls not only on the Egyptian authorities, but extends to all the Egyptians.

CHAPTER 4

MOSES' BIRTH AND FORMATIVE YEARS

4.1. THE BIRTH OF MOSES (2:1-10)

א וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בַּת־לֵוִי: ב וַתַּהַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן
וַתֵּרֶא אֹתוֹ כִּי־טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יְרָחִים: ג וְלֹא־יָכְלָה עוֹד
הַצְּפִינוֹ וַתִּקַּח־לוֹ תֵּבַת גֹּמֶא וַתַּחְמְרָה בַחֵמָר וּבַזָּפֶת וַתָּשֶׂם בָּהּ אֶת־
הַיֶּלֶד וַתָּשֶׂם בַּסּוּף עַל־שְׂפַת הַיְאֹר: ד וַתֵּתַצַּב אֲחֹתוֹ מֵרָחֹק לְדֵעָה
מַה־יֵּעָשֶׂה לוֹ: ה וַתֵּרֶד בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לִרְחֹץ עַל־הַיְאֹר וְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ הֹלְכֹת
עַל־יַד הַיְאֹר וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־הַתֵּבָה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אֲמָתָהּ
וַתִּקָּחֶהָ: ו וַתִּפְתַּח וַתִּרְאֵהוּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וְהִנֵּה־נַעַר בֹּכֶה וַתַּחְמֹל
עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר מִיַּלְדֵי הָעִבְרִים זֶה: ז וַתֹּאמֶר אֲחֹתוֹ אֶל־בַּת־פַּרְעֹה
הַאֵלֵךְ וְקָרָאתִי לָךְ אִשָּׁה מֵינֶקֶת מִן הָעִבְרִיֹּת וְתֵינִק לָךְ אֶת־הַיָּלֶד:
ח וַתֹּאמֶר־לָהּ בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לֵכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ הָעַלְמָה וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־אֵם הַיָּלֶד:
ט וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ בַּת־פַּרְעֹה הֵילִיכִי אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה וְהֵינִקִהוּ לִי וַאֲנִי
אֶתֵּן אֶת־שְׂכָרֵךְ וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּנִיקֵהוּ: י וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבִאֵהוּ
לְבַת־פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי־לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן־הַמַּיִם
מְשִׁיתִהוּ:

(1) **A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.**

(2) **The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months.**

(3) **When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the**

child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.

(4) **And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him.**

(5) **The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it.**

(6) When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, "This must be a Hebrew child."

(7) **Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?"**

(8) **And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother.**

(9) **And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it.**

(10) **When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."**

The Jewish people are born from Egypt itself, by integrating with it – and the same thing happens to Moses on a personal level. He is a Jew by birth but culturally an Egyptian. Suckled from birth by his own mother, Moses is at the same time the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, and a member of the ruling dynasty. This duality in Moses is very important for understanding the Exodus.

(1) **A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman**: Moses' father's name is not indicated here; only later from verse 6:20 do we learn that his name was Amram. All we are told here is that he is a member of the tribe of Levi. Although the Jews' personal names – and thus their self-identification – was erased and suppressed by enslavement, the Jews nonetheless preserved their national (tribal) names, i.e., their collective memory that they were descended from the sons of Jacob.

At the beginning of this book of Exodus, moreover, all individual activity is performed by women: the midwives, Moses' mother and sister, and Pharaoh's daughter. All of those, at great personal risk to themselves, act in opposition to the authorities, who seek to exterminate the Jewish people.

The Midrash reinforces this theme (Talmud, Sotah 12a):

It is written: "And there went a man of the house of Levi."

> Where did he go? R. Judah b. Zebina said that he went in the counsel of his daughter. A Tanna taught: Amram was the greatest man of his generation; when he saw that the wicked Pharaoh had decreed 'Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river', he said: In vain do we labor. He arose and divorced his wife. All [the Israelites] thereupon arose and divorced their wives. His daughter said to him, 'Father, thy decree is more severe than Pharaoh's; because Pharaoh decreed only against the males whereas thou hast decreed against the males and females. Pharaoh only decreed concerning this world whereas thou hast decreed concerning this world and the World to Come. In the case of the wicked Pharaoh there is a doubt whether his decree will be fulfilled or not, whereas in thy case, though thou art righteous, it is certain that thy decree will be fulfilled, as it is said: Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee!
>
> He arose and took his wife back; and they all arose and took their wives back.

Pharaoh commands to destroy only the males, who in Hebrew are called *zachar* – those responsible for preserving the *zecher*, "the memory," of the people. There was a certain logic to Pharaoh's plan: By erasing the national memory, Pharaoh would destroy the Jewish people's existence as an independent entity.

In response, the men abandoned their struggle for the perpetuation of the clan. To them, Pharaoh's decree meant the impossibility of passing on the *zachar* (masculinity, memory, traditions), and thus it meant for them the end of the nation's existence. Amram had therefore decided to completely withdraw, to stop having children before Pharaoh could actually destroy the Jewish nation.

Essentially, that decision indicated a loss of faith and, along with it, the vitality needed for carrying on with life. In this context the Midrash has Amram being challenged by none other than his own daughter; in other words, it is a confrontation of the past and the future. Miriam, despite here tender age, understands what her father Amram, an adult man and the leader of his generation, could not understand: Future life, however unfulfilling, is no less important than memory of the past, and one must fight for that life, come what may. Women belong to the future, which prevents them from losing faith. The present exists for the sake of the future; we must live, and we must fight, so that the future will arrive. We must not give up on life even in the most hopeless of situations.

(2) **The woman conceived and bore a son**: When the Torah mentions not only a birth, but specifically mentions the conception as well, this indicates the onset of a new stage of development. This birth is more than just an unremarkable link in the same generational chain.

And when she saw how beautiful he was: The literal translation is, "She saw that he was good." But doesn't every mother consider her newborn child "good"? This expression must mean something more than just "a good child."

The Midrash notes that the expression used here to describe Moses at birth mimics the almost identical one at the beginning of Creation (Gen. 1:4) when God created light: "God saw that the light was good (*ki tov*)."

Moses' most salient quality is that he strives to be the "light" of everything good, to spread that light, and to personify the intolerance of evil. Wherever and whenever Moses encounters evil, he feels an immediate need to challenge it.

She hid him for three months: The Torah is emphasizing that Moses spent the initial period of his infancy in the warmth of family surroundings.

(3) **When she could hide him no longer**: This means that the Egyptian persecution of the Jews was intensifying. According to the Midrash, Pharaoh's servants counted nine months from the moment the Jews returned to their wives, and then immediately began a generalized round-up of all newborn boys. Moses was born prematurely, after six months of pregnancy; his mother was thus able to hide him for three months, but no longer.

She got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile: The basket in which Moses was placed by his mother bears a connection to Noah's ark (Gen. 6:14; the Torah uses the same term, *teivah*, a word not commonly encountered, in both cases). The connection is not hard to see. Noah's ark saves him from the Deluge, after which a new stage in the world's development begins. And Moses is saved by the basket from the waters of the Nile, which likewise opens a new page of human history.

In light of this parallelism, we must also take note of the details and consider their differences. Noah's ark is coated only with tar, while Moses's basket is smeared with both tar and clay. Tar is associated with passive protection (from water), while clay is a primary element of active construction. Noah is saved, but he is passive. Moses, who repeatedly assumes the role of a savior, is active in the extreme.

She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile: As it later turns out, this placement of the basket was not accidental; it was at the shoreline frequented by Pharaoh's daughter. We have an impression that the entire event was staged in advance; perhaps there was even an agreement made from the start with Pharaoh's daughter.

(4) **And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him**: The Jewish people in the era of Egyptian slavery owe their salvation to the women of their generation. Taking responsibility for the preservation of family values is one of Miriam's characteristic features, and will continue to be evident in the brothers-and-sister triumvirate of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

(5) **The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile**: It is stressed that this location on the banks of the Nile was no ordinary place, for it was apparently reserved for royalty.

While her maidens walked along the Nile: But even so, they did not object to Miriam too being there.

She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it: In order for Moses to become a leader, it was important that he grow up among the Egyptian elite and be raised by them. A leader

of the people comes not from the lower echelons, but from the top. Because a Jewish leader will be needed for the future Exodus, the Almighty, in anticipation of that, sends a Jewish child to Pharaoh's palace. There he will receive a proper education, and assimilate essential concepts of his country's governmental structure, its achievements, and its culture. This knowledge will prove invaluable to him later for creating Jewish sovereignty.

(6) **When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it**: Ultimately, it is the child's crying that drives her decision to save him. In critical moments, human sensitivity is often far more helpful than brute strength.

And said, "This must be a Hebrew child": The Torah does not tell us how she arrives at this conclusion. Pharaoh's daughter realizes, apparently, that only a Jewish mother would leave her child in the Nile, because of the ongoing persecutions. This statement also expresses her indignation against her father's evil decrees.

(7) **Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter**: The members of Moses' family freely communicate with Pharaoh's daughter, which means that they are representatives of the "Jewish elite." Later, it will become clear that Aaron, Moses' brother, holds a position along the lines of "Chief Rabbi" of the Egyptian Jewish community. And we have already quoted the Midrash which informs us that Amram, Moses' father, was among the most prominent Jews of his generation.

(7-9) **"Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse …?" And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me…"**: Pharaoh's daughter relates very positively to Jews and Jewishness, which further confirms the presence of a pro-Jewish contingent among the Egyptians.

And I will pay your wages: Moses is now back in the arms of his very own mother. But even better, she now earns a fee for nursing him. At the same time, this emphasizes that from this moment on Moses belongs to both of those worlds, the Jewish and the Egyptian.

So the woman took the child and nursed it. (10) **When the child grew up she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter**: That is, Moses was

brought up in the Jewish community until he had reached an age of sufficient self-awareness that he would not break off ties with the Jewish people in the future.

She brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son: Moses thus received not just an ordinary Egyptian education, but specialized training befitting a future leader of state.

She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water": Grammatically, the Hebrew word *meshitihu* can mean either "I drew him out" or "you (fem.) drew him out." Who, then, is the "she" that named Moses? Who is talking here? Is it Pharaoh's daughter, or Moses' mother addressing herself to Pharaoh's daughter? The Torah does not specify.

Moreover, depending on which of the two women named Moses, we would expect the name to reflect either Egyptian or Hebrew etymology. But linguistic analysis has shown that the answer to that question as well can go either way. Associations for the name "Moshe" or "Moses" can be found in both the Hebrew and the Egyptian languages.

In ancient Egyptian, the name means, simply, "son." (The same word also forms part of the names of many of the Pharaohs – "Tutmos," for example.) In Hebrew the derivation of the name is as the text itself here states: from the verb *mashah*, "pull, or draw (from the water)." This duality of Moses' name itself corresponds to his dual (Jewish-Egyptian) identity, which allowed Moses to develop in different directions, giving him great freedom of choice.

4.2. MOSES CHOOSES A JEWISH IDENTITY (2:11-12)

יא וַיְהִי | בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל־אֶחָיו וַיַּרְא בְּסִבְלֹתָם
וַיַּרְא אִישׁ מִצְרִי מַכֶּה אִישׁ־עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו: יב וַיִּפֶן כֹּה וָכֹה וַיַּרְא כִּי
אֵין אִישׁ וַיַּךְ אֶת־הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַּחוֹל:

(11) **Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen.**

(12) He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

(11) **Moses had grown up**: This is the second time that Moses grows up (the first was in the previous verse, v. 10). This time he grows up psychologically, as he understands that he is a crown prince.

He went out to his kinsfolk: Literally, "He went out to his brothers." The words "his brothers" could refer to either the Egyptians or the Jews. Moses, nursed by his birth mother but brought up in Pharaoh's palace (i.e., he received both Jewish and Egyptian upbringings) must at some point choose with whom he identifies more strongly and wishes to be associated. Moses left the palace and "went out to his brothers" to finally find out which of them are his true brothers.

And witnessed their labors: Moses' awareness of social injustice was the first step toward his Jewish self-identification. There is nothing inherently unfair in that some people work and others manage them. But the fact that the Jews endure inordinately harsh exertions and are brutally compelled to do so was a clear violation of justice in Moses' eyes.

He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen: Seeing injustice accompanied by violence, Moses concludes decisively that it is the Jews who are his brothers.

(11-12) **He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew ... he struck down the Egyptian**: In this verse, the Torah uses the same Hebrew verb for "beating" and "struck down": *lehakot*, ("to beat, smite, kill"). In other words, Moses did to the Egyptian the very same that the latter had tried to do to the Jew. This too emphasizes the justice of Moses' actions.

(12) **He struck down the Egyptian**: As a member of the ruling class, Moses could simply have ordered the Egyptian overseer to cease and desist. But Moses decides instead that the Egyptian must be killed. What was behind this decision?

(12) **He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about**: Wherever the Torah uses the word *ish*, "man, person", it means a person of particular importance. And likewise, *ein ish*, "there is no one", means that there is "no worthy person" to be found. Moses, turning this way and that – scanning the entire governmental system that he

knows so well – sees that there is no one there to come to the defense of the oppressed. He decides then and there not only to intervene in this particular incident, but to renounce the entire Egyptian system of government.

Moses kills the Egyptian as a means of encouraging the Jews, of arousing their self-esteem and their aversion to tolerating Egyptian violence of any kind. (Much later, Samson will act similarly, deliberately lacerating the Philistines in order to raise the Jews' spirits. See Jud. 14:4.)

4.3. "THEN THE MATTER IS KNOWN!" (2:13-14)

יג וַיֵּצֵא בַּיָּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי וְהִנֵּה שְׁנֵי־אֲנָשִׁים עִבְרִים נִצִּים וַיֹּאמֶר לָרָשָׁע
לָמָּה תַכֶּה רֵעֶךָ׃ יד וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שָׂמְךָ לְאִישׁ שַׂר וְשֹׁפֵט עָלֵינוּ הַלְהָרְגֵנִי
אַתָּה אֹמֵר כַּאֲשֶׁר הָרַגְתָּ אֶת־הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּירָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמַר אָכֵן נוֹדַע
הַדָּבָר׃

(13) When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?"

(14) He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known!

(13) **When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?"**: Because Moses tries to achieve justice in every situation he encounters, he again intervenes in this second, new conflict. But this time it turns out that his efforts are to no avail. And the reason for this is to be found in the Jews themselves.

(14) **He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"**: Not only does he disobey Moses; he derisively rejects the very suggestion of establishing justice in this situation.

Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known!: This is usually understood to mean that it became known that Moses had killed the Egyptian overseer. But the word *noda'* can means both "known" and "understood." The Midrash therefore reads this verse differently. "It was now clear to Moses why the Jews deserved to be enslaved. They were morally depraved, brawlers and informers totally incapable of appreciating that someone had come to their aid." Thus, the Midrash believes that Moses, disillusioned with the Jewish people, now decided that it would be best to not have to deal with them at all.

Moses was frightened: Moses' earlier worldview ("the Jews are downtrodden, but they are all essentially very fine people who only need to be defended in order to rise and stand on their feet") has now begun to disintegrate, and his inner fears are aroused[1]. In Moses' plans for the advancement of mankind he must now find someone to rely on other than the Jewish people, who are not – as he previously believed – merely "disadvantaged by their enslavement." This crisis has led to a radical change in Moses' attitude.

4.4. MOSES FLEES TO MIDIAN (2:15-22)

טו וַיִּשְׁמַע פַּרְעֹה אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַיְבַקֵּשׁ לַהֲרֹג אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וַיִּבְרַח
מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־מִדְיָן וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הַבְּאֵר: טז וּלְכֹהֵן
מִדְיָן שֶׁבַע בָּנוֹת וַתָּבֹאנָה וַתִּדְלֶנָה וַתְּמַלֶּאנָה אֶת־הָרְהָטִים לְהַשְׁקוֹת
צֹאן אֲבִיהֶן: יז וַיָּבֹאוּ הָרֹעִים וַיְגָרְשׁוּם וַיָּקָם מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּשִׁעָן וַיַּשְׁקְ אֶת־
צֹאנָם: יח וַתָּבֹאנָה אֶל־רְעוּאֵל אֲבִיהֶן וַיֹּאמֶר מַדּוּעַ מְהַרְתֶּן בֹּא הַיּוֹם:
יט וַתֹּאמַרְן אִישׁ מִצְרִי הִצִּילָנוּ מִיַּד הָרֹעִים וְגַם־דָּלֹה דָלָה לָּנוּ וַיַּשְׁקְ
אֶת־הַצֹּאן: כ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־בְּנֹתָיו וְאַיֵּוֹ לָמָּה זֶּה עֲזַבְתֶּן אֶת־הָאִישׁ קְרָאֶן
לוֹ וְיֹאכַל לָחֶם: כא וַיּוֹאֶל מֹשֶׁה לָשֶׁבֶת אֶת־הָאִישׁ וַיִּתֶּן אֶת־צִפֹּרָה
בִּתּוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה: כב וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גֵּרְשֹׁם כִּי אָמַר גֵּר הָיִיתִי
בְּאֶרֶץ נָכְרִיָּה:

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[1] Similarly, Isaac was seized with terror (Genesis 27:33) when he learned that he had blessed Jacob instead of Esau. See *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §30.13.

(15) When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh. He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well.

(16) Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock;

(17) but shepherds came and drove them off. Moses rose to their defense, and he watered their flock.

(18) When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?"

(19) They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock."

(20) He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread."

(21) Moses consented to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as wife.

(22) She bore a son whom he named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."

(15) **When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh**: Pharaoh heard not only that Moses had killed the overseer, but also that the Jews refused to recognize Moses as "chief and ruler over us." This meant that Moses could be killed with impunity – no one would raise any objection.

There is nothing more for Moses to do in Egypt. He has rebelled against the Egyptian system, and is deeply disappointed in the Jews. The hopes and dreams of his youth have been shattered. Moses therefore flees Egypt.

He arrived in the land of Midian: Midian was located to the northeast of Elath (the modern city of Eilat). Moses had walked about four hundred kilometers along the trade route that traversed the Sinai Peninsula.

And sat down beside a well: The well is a traditional meeting place, and a place for choosing a wife[1]. Moses decides to find a wife in Midian,

[1] This can be seen in the story of Eliezer's choosing a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:11), and also Jacob's marriage (Gen. 29:2).

in the hope that a new chosen people would be created from him, and not from the Jews who were now degraded by Egyptian slavery.

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham from his second wife Keturah (Gen. 25:2), and also potential heirs to Abraham's eminence. Unlike the descendants of Ishmael and Esau who clashed with Isaac and Jacob, the descendants of Keturah have no history of conflict with the Children of Israel. It is therefore quite natural for Moses to attempt to find mutual understanding with the Midianites. Perhaps the autonomous Midianites can serve as the foundation for creating a new chosen people? Perhaps it was in Midian that a certain divine seed was preserved from Abraham, which can now be sprouted?

(16) **Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters**: The word kohen can denote an ecclesiastical priest as well as a patriarch (or prince).

They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. (17) **but shepherds came and drove them off**: There is an obvious discrepancy between the status of a father as a high-ranking patriarch-priest of the Midianites, and that his many daughters, besides having to water his sheep themselves, are also defenseless against the other shepherds. The Midrash therefore concludes that the priest of Midian refused to participate in idolatry and came into conflict with the other Midianites. That is why his daughters had not married, and why Moses' arrival so pleased him.

(17) **Moses rose to their defense, and he watered their flock**: Although he is alone, a defenseless stranger in a foreign country, Moses immediately enters the fray when he sees someone being abused. We have already noted that the Torah, at the beginning of Moses' story, tells of three types of conflict in which Moses intervenes: between a Jew and a non-Jew, between two Jews, and between non-Jews. Moses' predisposition to defending the oppressed is one of his most prominent qualities.

(18) **To their father Reuel: The Torah uses various names to refer to Moses' father-in-law**: Reuel, Jethro, Hobab. Some commentators believe that these are different people, and that Reuel is the girls' grandfather, and not their father; that is, he is Jethro's father. However, we often find in the Torah that one and the same person is called by several different names depending on the context.

He said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?": They would usually come home much later. His daughters were being constantly harassed by the other shepherds, and there was nothing the family could do about it.

(19) **They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us..."**: In his outward appearance and behavior Moses has the features of an Egyptian. And at this point he still actually is, to a certain extent, more Egyptian than Jewish.

An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock": That is, he has demonstrated truly extraordinary benevolence.

(20) **He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread"**: Jethro's generosity to a stranger he has never even met accords with Abraham's principle of hospitality[1]. Thus, Jethro and his family are not only Abraham's genealogical descendants, but his spiritual heirs as well.

The Torah clearly contrasts Jethro's response to Moses's actions with the behavior of the Jews in Egypt. When Moses kills the Egyptian who was tormenting Jews, he receives only a hostile response. But Jethro, seeing that Moses has defended his daughters, invites him into his home, shows him respect and gratitude, and even gives Moses his daughter's hand in marriage. Moses sees all this as a worthy moral foundation for progressing toward holiness. He therefore agrees to live with Jethro and to shepherd his flocks (in the literal but also figurative sense; that is, to be a spiritual leader to Jethro's followers). And Jethro in turn becomes a mentor to Moses.

The Midrash describes the situation as follows.

"In the twilight between the end of the sixth day of Creation and the onset of the first Sabbath, the Almighty created a special staff and gave it to Adam in the Garden of Eden. The staff then passed from Adam to Shem, Noah's son, who kept it with him in his father's ark. The staff was then transferred to Abraham, from him to Isaac and Jacob, and after them to Joseph.

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[1] On hospitality as one of the cardinal principles of Abraham's teachings, see *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §18.7.

After Joseph's death, Pharaoh appropriated the staff for his own personal use. Jethro, who had been one of Pharaoh's advisers, asked Pharaoh for the staff and carried it with him from Egypt. Upon arriving in Midian, he stuck it in the ground among the trees of his garden.

When, as it turned out, no one could extricate the staff from the ground, Jethro decided that he would marry off his daughter to the first man who could accomplish it. Moses eventually arrived, took up the challenge, and easily pulled the staff out of the ground. Jethro, who now understood that Moses was destined to become a great leader, gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage, and accepted him as a disciple."

The staff is a symbol of spiritual leadership. Transfer of the staff corresponds to transitions of leadership.

(21) **Moses consented to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as wife**: When Moses was mistaken for an Egyptian, at first he did not object. But now the situation is changing. The Midianites, descendants of Abraham from his second wife Keturah, are culturally *ivrim*, "Hebrews"[1]. The Egyptians will not eat together with such people ("for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians" Gen. 43:32). By agreeing to eat and live with Jethro, Moses in his behavior ceases to be an Egyptian, and reunites with the Hebrew line.

(22) **She bore a son whom he named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land"**: With the birth of a son, Moses is now settled for the long term in the country of his choice. After changing his citizenship and turning the page on his previous life, Moses is now determined to create a new chosen people from his own descendants. Life in Midian under Jethro's leadership thus becomes the next stage in the development of Moses' personality.

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[1] For the meaning of the term *Ivrim*, "Hebrews", as descendants of Eber, and the role of the "proto-Patriarchs" Noah, Shem, and Eber, see *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §9.3 and §12.2.

CHAPTER 5

THE BURNING BUSH: MOSES IS CHOSEN FOR HIS MISSION

5.1. "GOD REMEMBERED HIS COVENANT" (2:23 – 25)

כג וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעָקוּ וַתַּעַל שַׁוְעָתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה:
כד וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם
אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב: כה וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים:

(23) A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God.

(24) God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

(25) God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

(23) **The king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out**: At first the Jews held out hope that the oppression was the whim of just one particular Pharaoh. But as it turned out, nothing changed after the next Pharaoh assumed the throne.

The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God: They did not turn directly to God, for they no longer had any proper realization of the

Almighty. All they could was to moan and cry out to no one in particular. But the Almighty took into account also this aspect of their condition.

(24) **God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob**: "God remembered," means that He freed the Jews from Egyptian bondage earlier than originally scheduled.

According to the covenant with Abraham, the enslavement of Jews in Egypt was to last four centuries (Gen. 15:13). But in the end, God heard their moaning (that is, He took note of their predicament), remembered His covenant, and redeemed the Jews ahead of time.

According to the Midrash, only 210 years had passed, but those two centuries were counted as 430 years (for more on this point, see below §12.4). Because the Jews in Egypt are no longer able to endure the oppression and are on the verge of annihilation, God revises His previous plan.

The implications of this "premature Exodus" will be discussed in detail below. Meanwhile, the Torah proceeds to tell of God's decision to return Moses to Egypt, and to change Moses' attitude about leading the Jewish people.

(25) **God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them**: "God took notice" is here expressed in the Hebrew as *vayeda'*. The Hebrew verb *Y-D-'* means to know, to recognize, or to be intimately familiar with someone or something. The Midrash therefore translates this passage as "He turned His heart to the Israelites, and from then on would not take His eyes off them." That is, the Almighty has now adopted a different system of relating to the Jewish people. Instead of simply "launching a program that would drive itself," God now actively and directly decides the fate of the Jewish people, event by event.

5.2. "AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM IN A BLAZING FIRE" (3:1-5)

א וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן
אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים חֹרֵבָה: ב וַיֵּרָא מַלְאַךְ יְי אֵלָיו
בְּלַבַּת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסְּנֶה וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה הַסְּנֶה בֹּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ וְהַסְּנֶה אֵינֶנּוּ
אֻכָּל: ג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אָסֻרָה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הַמַּרְאֶה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה
מַדּוּעַ לֹא־יִבְעַר הַסְּנֶה: ד וַיַּרְא יְי כִּי סָר לִרְאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים
מִתּוֹךְ הַסְּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי: ה וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־תִּקְרַב
הֲלֹם שַׁל־נְעָלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו
אַדְמַת־קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:

(1) **Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.**

(2) **An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed.**

(3) **Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?"**

(4) **When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am."**

(5) **And He said, "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.**

(1) **Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro**: A shepherd (or pastor) is one who cares for his flock, advances and protects it. As we know from the book of Genesis, our Patriarchs and their families were shepherds. This "secular profession" of the founders of religion left an indelible imprint on future Jewish behavioral models.

His father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian: We detect some redundancy here, which we can explain as follows. Moses has long been his father-in-law's student and has already learned everything that Jethro can teach him. He therefore goes (or Jethro sends him) "into the

wilderness, to the mountain of God" to find a new revelation. Thus, Moses is ready to ascend to the next level of his development, precisely when God decides (in accordance with the preceding verses) that the time has come to bring the Jews out of Egypt.

He drove the flock into the wilderness: Literally, "beyond the wilderness," that is, to the extreme far edge of the wilderness. This cannot be a shepherd's regular job. Crossing the desert is usually done with a caravan of camels, not with a flock of sheep.

And came to Horeb, the mountain of God: Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai, where the nation will later receive the Torah, are one and the same. (The name "Sinai" itself derives from *sneh*, "bush," as in the *sneh* of the next verse that "was all aflame but was not consumed".)

(2) **An angel of the Lord appeared to him**: Initially only an angel appears to Moses (a lesser degree of Divine revelation).

In a blazing fire out of a bush: This bush was most probably the thorny blackthorn. Its prickly spines are symbolic of the then still imperfect Jewish people.

He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed: The bush that burns but is not consumed symbolizes the indestructibility of the Jewish people, even in the face of the fire of suffering and calamity. Moses understands the meaning of the vision and is astounded. He had believed until now that the flame of the Jewish people in Egypt had already burned out, that the hardships of slavery had destroyed the people. When God shows Moses a bush that remains intact even as it continues to burn, Moses understands that he was wrong, and he changes his outlook.

(3) **Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?"**: By expressing his desire to approach the bush (that is, to understand the meaning of the history of the Jewish people – their indestructibility), Moses has taken a decisive step toward taking up the mission and becoming the leader of the Exodus, even if he himself is not yet aware of this.

(4) **When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look**: Here we see the transition to a higher level of revelation. First an angel appeared to Moses, and then the Almighty Himself. God reveals Himself to man only after man has taken his own first step toward God.

God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!": As Moses has already begun to change, he acquires at this moment the double name "*Moshe*, *Moshe*". We find that God uses such double names when addressing Abraham, Jacob, and several other exceptional Bible personalities[1].

He answered, "Here I am.": As in God's conversation with Abraham (Gen. 22:1), this response demonstrates Moses' initial readiness to accept the mission. However, the intense, protracted dialogue between God and Moses that ensues, lasts several days[2]. This shows that Moses was able, only with very considerable difficulty, to bring himself to actually accept the Divine commission.

(5) **And He said: "Do not come closer"**: This illustrates the requirement of keeping one's distance when coming in contact with Divinity.

Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground: As shoes, which allow a person to go almost anywhere, are a symbol of independence, removing one's shoes demonstrates dependence and subordination. In holy places and situations requiring holiness (in the Temple, for example), wearing shoes is prohibited, for there one must obey the instructions from Above and self-directed activity[3] is prohibited.

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1 For more on this point, see *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §23.14.

2 Moses goes on to say: "Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant" (v. 10). The Midrash believes that Moses' dialogue with God as described here lasted a full week.

3 See, for example, Josh. 5:15. Likewise, the Midrash says that after selling Joseph for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28), the brothers bought new shoes from the proceeds, as a statement that they could now walk independently, without Joseph telling them where to go and what to do.

In this story of the Burning Bush, God will force Moses to accept a commission that Moses would much prefer to avoid. The requirement to remove his shoes prior to the conversation is an indication to Moses that, ultimately, he will have no choice but to obey.

5.3. MOSES IS AFRAID TO LOOK AT THE GOD OF THE PATRIARCHS (3:6-10)

ו וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
וַיַּסְתֵּר מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי יָרֵא מֵהַבִּיט אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים: ז וַיֹּאמֶר יְי רָאֹה
רָאִיתִי אֶת־עֳנִי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרָיִם וְאֶת־צַעֲקָתָם שָׁמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי נֹגְשָׁיו
כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־מַכְאֹבָיו: ח וָאֵרֵד לְהַצִּילוֹ | מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וְלְהַעֲלֹתוֹ
מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא אֶל־אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וּרְחָבָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבָשׁ
אֶל־מְקוֹם הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי: ט וְעַתָּה
הִנֵּה צַעֲקַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָה אֵלָי וְגַם־רָאִיתִי אֶת־הַלַּחַץ אֲשֶׁר
מִצְרַיִם לֹחֲצִים אֹתָם: י וְעַתָּה לְכָה וְאֶשְׁלָחֲךָ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא
אֶת־עַמִּי בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

(6) **I am," He said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

(7) **And the Lord continued, "I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings.**

(8) **I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.**

(9) **Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them.**

(10) **Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt."**

(6) **"I am," He said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God**: Moses did not hide his face out of ordinary human fear. We have already just seen that when God revealed Himself to him, Moses answered, "Here I am!", and he did not then cover his face.

But now, after the Almighty has identified Himself as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," Moses is afraid to look at God in this new aspect.

This can be explained as follows. Moses thought that he had severed his ties with the Jews of Egypt, distanced himself from the line of the Patriarchs, and already begun to implement his new program. But now he comes to learn that this is not possible. God informs Moses that the line of the Patriarchs will continue, and that Moses' plans to put the Patriarchs' descendants aside and give birth to a new chosen people from his marriage with Midian were all in vain. Moses is not pleased with the new approach, and so he covers his face, not wanting to look at the God of the Jewish nation.

(7) **And the Lord continued, "I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings"**: God clarifies the situation to Moses and emphasizes: "My people are none other than those now suffering in Egypt. You must not hope to create a new nation, nor should you think that the Jewish people are not worthy of the Exodus. Before you blame the Jews for not living up to your expectations, have you thought about their suffering? Having grown up in Pharaoh's house, you have different standards of measurement and different requirements. Did you really think that all the people needed was to be encouraged by the killing of a single Egyptian overseer, and they would immediately perk up? You obviously don't understand how difficult things are for the people, how depleted they are of their energies and hopes. You deserted them because they did not acknowledge you. But I will not desert them!"

(8) **I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land**

flowing with milk and honey: It is not enough just to deliver the Jewish people from oppression at the hands of the Egyptians. The nation must relocate from Egypt to the Land of Israel, because only there can it properly develop and realize its mission.

The region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: The Torah here enumerates the territories that will later be conquered by Israel.

At the conclusion of His covenant with Abraham, God says: "And they shall return here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16). At that time the nations did not yet deserve to be exiled. The Holy Land belongs to the Jews, of course, but they have no right to expel other nations from the Land until those nations are themselves guilty of committing inherently immoral acts. If the peoples of Canaan can be corrected (which includes rejecting idolatrous practices and accepting Jewish authority over the Land), then the Jewish people will have neither the right nor the need to expel them. If they would be amenable to correction, those nations could continue to live in the Holy Land under Jewish rule. But by refusing to be reformed, their "iniquity" becomes complete, and those nations ipso facto lose their right to the Land.

(9) **Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them**: This serves as justification for not postponing the Exodus to a later date. It must begin immediately.

(10) **Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt"**: God mentions here neither the Torah nor the covenant at Sinai. This is all about national values – leaving Egypt and taking possession of the Promised Land.

I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people: In times past, Moses was simultaneously both an Egyptian Jew and a prince in Pharaoh's house. In order to accomplish his new mission, Moses will need to bring both of these identities to bear.

5.4. MOSES' REFUSAL, AND THE PROMISE OF THE RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT (3:11-12)

יא וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אָנֹכִי כִּי אֵלֵךְ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְכִי אוֹצִיא
אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם: יב וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְזֶה־לְּךָ הָאוֹת כִּי
אָנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת־הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעַבְדוּן אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים
עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה:

(11) But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?"

(12) And He said, "I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."

(11) **But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?"**: Moses refuses the Divine mission because he does not understand who he is. He has severed his former ties, thus renouncing both his former identities. With what shall he now go to Pharaoh and to the Jews?

(12) **And He said, "I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, You shall worship God at this mountain"**: God does not grow angry with Moses for refusing the mission. On the contrary, God amends His earlier plan for the Exodus to include "worshipping God on this mountain"; that is, the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the place where this very dialogue between Moses and God is now taking place.

Here for the first time we encounter the idea of the Sinai Revelation, when the people will receive the Law, an expanded system of commandments. This is important not so much for the people as for Moses himself, since, having been raised in Egypt as a statesman, Moses considers the law to be the very foundation of national life.

God therefore tells Moses that although the Chosen People will be created from the Jewish nation that already exists, Moses' fears regarding the Jews' spiritual level in Egypt are not unfounded, and his ideas about the need to build a covenant on a new and different foundation, on the Law, are entirely valid. Thus, Moses's plan will be partially preserved and integrated into God's own plan.

(11) **But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?"**: This is a real question, not a rhetorical one. When Moses asks, "Who am I?", God answers his question with the words, "You shall worship God at this mountain." That is: "Since you have asked who you are, my answer to you is, that you, Moses, are the very personification of the Sinai covenant. That is who you are." Moses, by nature, symbolizes that covenant, and the task of bringing it to the world therefore devolves upon him.

5.5. THE MEANING OF GOD'S NAME (3:13-15)

יג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי בָא׳ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׳ וְאָמַרְתִּי
לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹותֵיכֶם שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ־לִי מַה־שְּׁמֹו מָה אֹמַר
אֲלֵהֶם: יד וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים׳ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה
תֹאמַר׳ לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם: טו וַיֹּאמֶר׳ עֹוד אֱלֹהִים
אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה־תֹאמַר׳ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׳ יי׳ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי
אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם זֶה־שְּׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה
זִכְרִי לְדֹר דֹּר:

(11) Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"

(14) And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'"

(15) And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, This My appellation for all eternity.

(13) **Moses said to Go**: Moses continues to offer arguments in support of his refusal.

"When I come to the Israelites and say to them 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?':

This weekly portion *Shemot*, which means "names," includes a discussion of the names of God. This passage itself contains a number of those names, all of them derived from the verb H-W-H, *howeh*, "to be," indicating that the Almighty is the very essence of being in all its various forms.

What shall I say to them?": This is not about some secret name, for if Moses does not know it, then neither do the Jews. But as we've already mentioned, in contrast to the Greek understanding of a name as "the essence of the person or thing so called," the Jewish concept is that a name represents the meaning and purpose of the person or thing named. When Moses initiates dialogue with the Jews to bring them God's message, they will ask, "What is His name," demanding that Moses explain God's objective; that is, the reason that God wants to bring them out of Egypt.

(14) And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh": The Torah here invokes the Divine Name *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*, "I will be that which I will be," a double future form, as it were, of the verb *howeh*, "to be."

This Divine name is often translated as "I am Who I am, "I Am the Essence, "I am He Who is existence itself, Whose being is eternal" (absolute, autonomous, etc.) and other similar renderings. But these translations ignore the fact that the verb *ehyeh* in this Name is in the future tense: Not "I am," but "I will be."

It would be more correct to translate this name as "I will be He Who I wish to be." The greatest power, the maximal opportunity, and the fullest self-realization is in our ability to become everything that we want to be, to advance according to our own individual aspirations[1].

This name of God is associated also with the concept of freedom. This is itself understood as the ability to move and develop in any

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[1] For this idea I would like to thank Prof. Boris Shapiro. In the language of the paradigmatic theory of his own devising, he has formulated this quality (and the Name *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*, 3:14) as "owning the full paradigm of oneself" – the ability to make of yourself whatever you want to be. This most important Divine property represents an unattainable ideal, but which a person must nonetheless strive to achieve to the greatest extent possible.

direction, to make decisions regarding oneself. But because only God has absolute freedom, only He establishes freedom as an ideal for all of humanity.

It is now clear what it means for a person to "know God's Name." That Name must reflect the Divine quality to which every human being, created in God's image and likeness, should strive. Which in this case, within the context of the Exodus story, suggests that the fullness of self-realization is precisely that Divine quality whose approximation is the goal of the Exodus.

He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.' " This one-word name, the simple future tense of the verb *howeh*, "to be," is a reduced and simplified form of the previous three-word name. It too connotes aspiration for future advancement, but without emphasizing the aspect of "becoming who one wants to become." Thus, after first revealing His Name to Moses at its very highest level, the Almighty then instructs Moses to present it to the people in a somewhat reduced form.

(15) **And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites":** In the end, however, calling the Almighty by His name "I will be" is not alone sufficient. The people must be given a more detailed elaboration.

The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: Here are a few of the Almighty's characteristics, since the people will need a more detailed explanation.

The Lord: The Tetragrammaton, *YHWH*, is the absolute form of the verb *howeh*, "to be," a combination, as it were, of all three tenses: past, present, and future. It is, in a sense, the timeless form of this verb: God as the ultimate Being of the entire universe.

The name Ehyeh, which looks to the future, must be supplemented with the Tetragrammaton, which speaks also of the present.

The God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: This addendum indicates that our connection with God lies not only in our faith and in rarefied theological conceptions, but, more fundamentally, in our very physical existence. That connection through birth is incomparably more powerful than the connec-

tion that exists only at the level of ideas. The Almighty is here presented as the "God of the Patriarchs," the progenitor and creator of the Jewish people.

The three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are respectively associated with three aspects of the manifestation of Divinity: *Chesed* (Mercy), *Gevurah* (Might or Judgment), and *Tiferet* (Splendor)[1]. Our dialogue with God and our self-realization must embody those three directions of Divine ideals. The Almighty revealed Himself differently to each of our three Patriarchs, with each Patriarch symbolizing a separate aspect of Divinity. The words "the God of" is therefore repeated here alongside the name of each Patriarch individually. But our understanding of God should be based on the unification of all those aspects.

This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity: Literally, "and this is my remembrance in each and every generation." How are name and remembrance to be contrasted? A name, directed toward the future, represents a goal. But memory turns to the past, to our experiences and the ideas that result from them.

Our understanding of God is connected with three Divine aspects: (1) the *Lord* – the Almighty's four-letter name; (2) the God of our ancestors generally; (3) the God of the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These are three levels of memory (i.e., remembrance).

God first tells Moses "This shall be My name forever," corresponding to the first of God's names just mentioned, "I will be, that which I will be," which sets the goal and direction. Following that, "this My appellation for all eternity" is the formulation of a more detailed representation (the "pedagogical aspect"), as contained in the words "The God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

It should be noted that the opening passage of the *Amidah*, the central prayer of Jewish liturgy, addresses God using that same construction.

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[1] See the scheme of the *Sefirot* at §1.4 above.

5.6. HOW GOD'S MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE DIFFERS FROM HIS MESSAGE TO PHARAOH (3:16-18)

טז לֵךְ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם יְ֞י אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם
נִרְאָה אֵלַי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר פָּקֹד פָּקַדְתִּי אֶתְכֶם
וְאֶת־הֶעָשׂוּי לָכֶם בְּמִצְרָיִם: יז וָאֹמַר אַעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם ׀ מֵעֳנִי מִצְרַיִם אֶל־
אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי אֶל־אֶרֶץ זָבַת
חָלָב וּדְבָשׁ: יח וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקֹלֶךָ וּבָאתָ אַתָּה וְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מֶלֶךְ
מִצְרַיִם וַאֲמַרְתֶּם אֵלָיו יְ֞י אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִיִּם נִקְרָה עָלֵינוּ וְעַתָּה נֵלְכָה־
נָּא דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְנִזְבְּחָה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

(16) "Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said, 'I have taken note of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt,

(17) and I have declared: I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'

(18) They will listen to you; then you shall go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt and you shall say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, manifested Himself to us. Now therefore, let us go a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God.'

(16) **Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them**: The elders must be persuaded first. While enslaved in Egypt no Jew could feel individual autonomy or independence. The chain of command was therefore of utmost importance to them – they obeyed their leadership.

We shall soon see that at the initial stage of the Exodus, the position of the Jewish "elders" poses a significant problem.

The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob appeared to me and said … (17) … I will take you out of the misery of Egypt: When Moses addresses the Children of Israel, he must speak of "nationalist" considerations, *viz.*, the Patriarchs, deliverance

from slavery, and returning to the Land to lead happy, productive lives. Here we see a deep personal connection with God ("The Lord, the God of your fathers, appeared to me"), but there is no mention of the rituals that are observed in serving God.

And said, 'I have taken note of you: These words, *pakod pakadti*, are an echo of the same words by which Joseph, before his death, foretold the future Exodus from Egypt (Genesis 50:24). Thus, this directive connects Moses with the national collective memory, and should help to persuade the elders.

(18) **They will listen to you; then you shall go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt and you shall say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, manifested Himself to us. Now therefore, let us go a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God.'**: However, when Moses goes to Pharaoh with the elders (that is, he goes not merely as an individual, but accompanied by the appointed representatives of the people), they will need to present their request to Pharaoh in completely different – thoroughly religious – terms, as if their avowed purpose is strictly "ritual-ecclesiastical" – to offer sacrifices to the Jewish God.

Moreover, contact with God is here indicated by the use of a different term: "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, manifested *(nikrah*) Himself to us," which speaks not of a personal connection, but of establishing one-time contact with higher worlds[1]. This alteration is intentional: Pharaoh can more readily consent to a demand framed in those terms, which have the "feel" of typical Egyptian witchcraft.

In fact, both objectives are equally valid: the wording as originally communicated to the Jewish people, and also as later reworded for Pharaoh's benefit. But we need to transmit to each receiver only that part of our message that he can hear and accept.

Pharaoh is unable to accept the nationalist message, but he accepts the religious message, namely, that everyone worships his own God, Who requires some semblance of services and rites. Pharaoh is prepared

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[1] A very similar verb is used twice in the story of God's conversation with Balaam (Num. 23:4,16).

to respect the religious peculiarities of minorities, so if this is about a religious need, then he will allow it. But if the request is motivated by nationalism, then he can only take it as a personal insult: A substantial segment of the Egyptian population wants to abandon its Egyptian homeland.

Conversely, as concerns the Jews themselves, the ecclesiastical-ritual objective is not something that a nation striving for life in its own Land can easily identify with. But it would be a mistake to think that that desire is not also significant from a religious point of view. On the contrary, that desire demonstrates a very deep connection with God, as we shall see.

5.7. "I WILL STRETCH OUT MY HAND AND SMITE EGYPT" (3:19-21)

יט וַאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי לֹא־יִתֵּן אֶתְכֶם מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לַהֲלֹךְ וְלֹא בְּיָד חֲזָקָה׃
כ וְשָׁלַחְתִּי אֶת־יָדִי וְהִכֵּיתִי אֶת־מִצְרַיִם בְּכֹל נִפְלְאֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה
בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יְשַׁלַּח אֶתְכֶם׃ כא וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־חֵן הָעָם־הַזֶּה בְּעֵינֵי
מִצְרָיִם וְהָיָה כִּי תֵלֵכוּן לֹא תֵלְכוּ רֵיקָם׃ כב וְשָׁאֲלָה אִשָּׁה מִשְּׁכֶנְתָּהּ
וּמִגָּרַת בֵּיתָהּ כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי זָהָב וּשְׂמָלֹת וְשַׂמְתֶּם עַל־בְּנֵיכֶם וְעַל־
בְּנֹתֵיכֶם וְנִצַּלְתֶּם אֶת־מִצְרָיִם׃

(19) **Yet I know that the king of Egypt will let you go only because of a greater might.**

(20) **So I will stretch out My hand and smite Egypt with various wonders which I will work upon them; after that he shall let you go.**

(21) **And I will dispose the Egyptians favorably toward this people, so that when you go, you will not go away empty-handed.**

(22) **Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold, and clothing, and you shall put these on your sons and daughters, thus stripping the Egyptians."**

(19) **Yet I know**: God continues to persuade Moses of the need to create a chosen people from those Jews who are now in Egypt, explaining to him that the process of the Exodus will elevate the Jews and allow them to advance spiritually. God does this as a means of countering Moses' doubts that the Jewish people in Egypt are at all capable of becoming the "chosen people."

(19-20) **Yet I know that the king of Egypt will let you go only because of a greater might. So I will stretch out My hand and smite Egypt**: The Egyptian plagues were an integral part of the Exodus. They were necessary in order to destroy the foundations of Egyptian idolatry and determinism, so that the world would be able to accept the Jewish light in the future. But the plagues also served the purpose of demolishing the idolatrous notions residing in the minds of the Jews themselves (to "take Egypt out of the Jews"), thus enabling them to receive the Torah. And the justice of this path lies in the fact that the Egyptians were punished for oppressing the Jews.

(21) **And I will dispose the Egyptians favorably toward this people**: They will give you their gold and silver not out of the goodness of their hearts, but because the Almighty will force them to do so.

(22) **So that when you go, you will not go away empty-handed. Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor … objects of silver and gold … thus stripping the Egyptians**: God promised Abraham that the Jews would leave Egypt "with great wealth" (Gen. 15:14), and this means "stripping" Egypt, both spiritually and materially.

On the spiritual side: Egypt was the most highly developed civilization of that era, with an abundance of cultural and other achievements that needed to be preserved. Those achievements – as assimilated by the Jews according to their characteristically Jewish understanding and appreciation of them – became the spiritual assets that the Jews took with them upon leaving Egypt.

And on the material side: The gold and silver that the Jews received from the Egyptians were fair compensation for two hundred years of

slave labor, and for the immovable property that the Jews left behind in Egypt[1].

The Jews were to leave Egypt not as indigent, downtrodden slaves, but as a wealthy, self-sufficient people. Because this transition demanded a completely revised worldview, it was very important for the psychological re-education of the Jews to acquire these material possessions.

(Note that a sense of material independence is important not only for a nation collectively, but also for its members individually. Torah law therefore requires that a Hebrew slave who goes free must be given a generous endowment upon his [or her] departure – Deut. 15:13-14.)

5.8. THE FIRST SIGN: THE STAFF THAT BECOMES A SERPENT (4:1-5)

א וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמַר וְהֵן לֹא־יַאֲמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקֹלִי כִּי יֹאמְרוּ
לֹא־נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ יְי: ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְי מזה (מַה־זֶּה) בְּיָדֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר
מַטֶּה: ג וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְׁלִיכֵהוּ אַרְצָה וַיַּשְׁלִכֵהוּ אַרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנָחָשׁ וַיָּנָס
מֹשֶׁה מִפָּנָיו: ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה שְׁלַח יָדְךָ וֶאֱחֹז בִּזְנָבוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ
וַיַּחֲזֶק בּוֹ וַיְהִי לְמַטֶּה בְּכַפּוֹ: ה לְמַעַן יַאֲמִינוּ כִּי־נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ יְי אֱלֹהֵי
אֲבֹתָם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב:

(1) **But Moses spoke up and said, "What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say: The Lord did not appear to you?"**

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[1] The Midrash relates the following dialogue on this subject. The Egyptians once decided to bring suit against the Jews in Alexander the Great's judicial court (that is, in the supreme court of international arbitration at that time), demanding: "Let the Jewish people return to us all the gold and silver that they "borrowed" (12:35) – ostensibly for only a certain period of time – from the Egyptian people." To this the Jews replied: "We have no problem with that, but only on the condition that the Egyptians will likewise pay the Jewish people for two centuries of slave labor (and for the real property they left behind in Egypt). When the Egyptians do so, we will immediately return to them all the gold and silver we took from them."

(2) **The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he replied, "A rod."**

(3) **He said, "Cast it on the ground." He cast it on the ground and it became a snake; and Moses recoiled from it.**

(4) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail" — he put out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand —**

(5) **"that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you.**

(1) **But Moses spoke up and said, "What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say**: The Lord did not appear to you?": But later, verse 31 states clearly that "the people were convinced" (literally, "the people believed"). Thus, Moses' fears here were exaggerated.

Moreover, when in the wilderness Moses smites the rock with his staff in order to extract water from it (rather than just speaking to the rock, as God had commanded him to do), the Torah relates (Num. 20:12): "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust Me enough' " (literally, "because you did not believe in Me"). To which the Midrash adds: "The Jews, who Moses before the Exodus had feared would not believe him, did in fact believe. But Moses himself lacked faith at the moment when he smote the rock."

In other words, the problem of insufficient faith lies with Moses, not with the people! We will examine more closely the issue of faith (and the lack thereof) in our commentary on the aforementioned verse of Numbers.

Moses expresses doubt that there is any hope of persuading the Jews, but in reality he cannot possibly predict what the people will say, and his repeated refusals are rooted in his own self-doubts regarding the mission proposed to him. The signs that the Almighty will now show Moses are therefore needed, first and foremost, not as a set of magical formulas for convincing the people, but for explicating the Exodus mission itself.

The purpose of the three signs that God is about to show Moses is to change, both for Moses and for the people to whom Moses will have to show these signs, the way they view the entire undertaking of the Exodus.

(2) **The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he replied, "A rod"**: The lesson begins with Moses acknowledging his own status as a leader. Although the staff in a practical sense is simply the sign of his work as a shepherd, it is now also a symbol of Moses' power and his leadership of the people.

(3-4) **He said, "Cast it on the ground." He cast it on the ground and it became a snake; and Moses recoiled from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail" – he put out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand**: The serpent is a prominent symbol in Egyptian culture. The Pharaohs placed on their foreheads a Uraeus, which is a figurine of a serpent. But a serpent coils itself into a round shape, while a staff is always straight.

In this sign, Moses first holds in his hand a straight object. So long as he keeps it in his hand it remains straight – it is subordinated to him. But when Moses casts it to the ground, it becomes round, and also deadly, such that Moses must even "recoil" (literally, "flee") from it. But then Moses finds that he is able to seize the snake by the tail, and it again becomes straight.

In the Kabbalah, roundness is understood as representing nature, which remains constant in every direction. That is, the laws of nature have no purpose or direction of their own (which is what the serpent symbolizes[1]).

But straightness, on the other hand, represents morality – Providence, Divine control of the world, which has a definite purpose and direction. Thus, the transformations here of staff to serpent and back again, between straightness and roundness, should be understood as the Almighty's commentary to Moses on the relationship of morality to nature.

Thrown to the ground, taken from the hand of man, from civilization, the staff (which represents control) returns to nature by becoming a snake. Moses then flees from it, from the natural world that is alien to him. Moses' space is the wilderness, in which there is little if any "animated life," where God's voice dominates. But the Almighty tells Moses that there is no need to flee from nature; that is, from Egypt in

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[1] This also applies to the serpent in the story of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3).

all its naturalness. Simply grab the snake by the tail, and it will again become a staff.

Moses yearns for the giving of the Torah, the gift of the Law from Above; not natural laws, but supernatural, transcendental teachings. But for the proper advancement of the world, unification of the Divine teachings with the natural world must occur. We should not be trying to escape from the natural world; rather, we must "grab the snake (nature) by its tail," so that nature becomes morality – a staff that guides the life of the people. The staff of morality is effective only when it arises from the serpent of nature seized by the tail.

(5) **That they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you**: This approach reinforces Moses' connection with the Patriarchs, because the Patriarchs built their Divine teachings based on converting nature to morality, and not on the idea of a transcendental Divine Law descended from Heaven (which is what Moses values most). Thus, by giving Moses this sign God is saying: "That they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you. If you yourself will feel it, then they too will believe you."

Moses' power over the serpent that he seizes will serve as evidence to the Jews that God has sent Moses to defeat Egypt.

5.9. THE SECOND SIGN: MOSES' SCALY HAND (4:6-7)

ו וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ לוֹ עוֹד הָבֵא־נָא יָדְךָ בְּחֵיקֶךָ וַיָּבֵא יָדוֹ בְּחֵיקוֹ וַיּוֹצִאָהּ
וְהִנֵּה יָדוֹ מְצֹרַעַת כַּשָּׁלֶג: ז וַיֹּאמֶר הָשֵׁב יָדְךָ אֶל־חֵיקֶךָ וַיָּשֶׁב יָדוֹ
אֶל־חֵיקוֹ וַיּוֹצִאָהּ מֵחֵיקוֹ וְהִנֵּה־שָׁבָה כִּבְשָׂרוֹ:

(6) The Lord said to him further, "Put your hand into your bosom." He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, his hand was encrusted with snowy scales!

(7) And He said, "Put your hand back into your bosom." – He put his hand back into his bosom; and when he took it out of his bosom, there it was again like the rest of his body.

(5) **His hand was encrusted with snowy scales! ... there it was again like the rest of his body**: Like the staff that became a serpent, the next sign, snowy scales ("leprosy") on Moses' hand, is directed both to Moses and to the Jews, to whom God here is instructing Moses to demonstrate these signs.

For Moses himself, leprosy might have been a punishment for speaking *leshon hara* – which means slander or malicious gossip[1]. Moses has clearly expressed his expectation that the Jews would not believe him, which can be seen as his having slandered the Jewish people. (Although the translation given at 4:1 is "What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say: The Lord did not appear to you?", the more literal rendering is the much more emphatic: "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say: The Lord did not appear to you.")

Be that as it may, the leprosy on Moses' hand is, at worst, localized and transitory – it quickly passes, because Moses' words do not actually constitute "malicious slander," for they are just an innocent mistake. Moses' fears that he would have difficulty establishing mutual understanding with the people were not completely groundless. But in the end, all the problems were resolved.

For the Jews, however, these signs symbolize Moses' status as an intermediary standing between God and the people.

Leprosy is a sign of separation, of living in isolation from people ("Being unclean, [the leper] shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp", Lev. 13:46). But separation can be either negatively or positively motivated. Kings, for example, live separately from the people. Moses, too, throughout his life, from childhood and through old age, is largely separated from the Jewish people. He grew up in Pharaoh's palace, then lived in Midian for an extended period, and remained distant from the people even after the Exodus. Moses will climb Mount Sinai while the people will have to wait below. Moreover, Moses' tent will stand apart from all others (33:7).

Thus there is always a divide between Moses and the people. We might even say that Moses is a "half-leper." (Half, because He

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[1] See, for example, the story of Miriam, Num. 12:10.

nevertheless remains always in control; that is, a certain amount of contact between Moses and the people is maintained, just as his hand can be either affected by leprosy or fully healed of it.)

Moses' isolation from the people is one of the reasons that the Jews do not immediately believe him. But the sign of the half-leprous hand is meant to show the Jews that this isolation is positively motivated. Moses does truly stand between the Divine and the human, between two worlds. He is the medium through which the Divine teachings are transmitted to the people.

5.10. THE THIRD SIGN: TURNING WATER INTO BLOOD (4:8-9)

ח וְהָיָה אִם־לֹא יַאֲמִינוּ לָךְ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ לְקֹל הָאֹת הָרִאשׁוֹן וְהֶאֱמִינוּ
לְקֹל הָאֹת הָאַחֲרוֹן: ט וְהָיָה אִם־לֹא יַאֲמִינוּ גַם לִשְׁנֵי הָאֹתוֹת הָאֵלֶּה
וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּן לְקֹלֶךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ מִמֵּימֵי הַיְאֹר וְשָׁפַכְתָּ הַיַּבָּשָׁה וְהָיוּ הַמַּיִם
אֲשֶׁר תִּקַּח מִן־הַיְאֹר וְהָיוּ לְדָם בַּיַּבָּשֶׁת:

(8) "And if they do not believe you or pay heed to the first sign, they will believe the second.

(9) And if they are not convinced by both these signs and still do not heed you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and it — the water that you take from the Nile — will turn to blood on the dry ground."

(8-9) "And if they do not believe you or pay heed to the first sign, they will believe the second. And if they are not convinced by both these signs … the water will turn to blood on the dry ground:

These signs have two purposes. Besides demonstrating to the People that Moses is sent to them from "Above," they are also supposed to stimulate the Jewish People to leave Egypt. Each one of these three signs is more compelling than the previous one in the degree that they motivate the Jewish nation to yearn for the Exodus. Belief in signs (and, in this case, reliance on Moses' leadership) depends to a large extent on psychological attitude and the level of one's desire to see a promise fulfilled.

For those Jews who are focused on leaving Egypt, the first sign is sufficient, in that it demonstrates that it is indeed possible to "seize the Egyptian snake by the tail."

For those who doubt whether it even pays to leave Egypt, the second sign demonstrates that without taking the proper precautions a person can contract leprosy.

Finally, for those who are determined to remain in Egypt, and therefore refuse to believe the first two signs of the Redemption, turning the water of the Nile to blood demonstrates that there is no more "water" in Egypt. Water is the source of life. Thus, remaining in Egypt is not just pointless but downright dangerous. This third sign, in the end, will convince even this last group.

But for Moses himself, the lesson here lies in the idea that blood represents the attribute of judgment. The meaning of this sign of water turning to blood is that Moses must be prepared to lead the Jewish people with hardheaded fierceness when necessary, as his position of commander-in-chief of the nation will sometimes demand. (Indeed, the story of the Exodus entailed not only the death of the Egyptian firstborns and of Pharaoh and his army, brought about by the Almighty; Moses too was later called upon to order the execution of the Jews who had worshipped the golden calf.)

5.11. "I AM SLOW OF SPEECH AND SLOW OF TONGUE" (4:10-12)

י וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְיָ בִּי אֲדֹנָי לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אָנֹכִי גַּם מִתְּמוֹל גַּם
מִשִּׁלְשֹׁם גַּם מֵאָז דַּבֶּרְךָ אֶל־עַבְדֶּךָ כִּי כְבַד־פֶּה וּכְבַד לָשׁוֹן אָנֹכִי:
יא וַיֹּאמֶר יְי אֵלָיו מִי שָׂם פֶּה לָאָדָם אוֹ מִי־יָשׂוּם אִלֵּם אוֹ חֵרֵשׁ
אוֹ פִקֵּחַ אוֹ עִוֵּר הֲלֹא אָנֹכִי יְי: יב וְעַתָּה לֵךְ וְאָנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם־פִּיךָ
וְהוֹרֵיתִיךָ אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר:

(10) **But Moses said to the Lord, "Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You**

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1 See, for example, the story of Miriam, Num. 12:10.

have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

(11) **And the Lord said to him, "Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?**

(12) **Now go, and I will be with you as you speak and will instruct you what to say."**

(10) **But Moses said to the Lord, "Please, O Lord"**: Even after so much intense give-and-take between God and himself, Moses steadfastly continues to refuse the mission.

I have never been a man of words ... I am slow of speech and slow of tongue: This does not mean, of course, that Moses is incapable of expressing himself clearly. The Torah quotes Moses again and again, and even records his lyric song on the shore of the Red Sea (15:1 ff.). Moreover, Moses at the very end of his life delivers an epic address, the entire book of Deuteronomy, whose name in Hebrew is *Devarim*, which means "Words." It is thus clear that Moses can be "a man of words" after all. We will discuss this issue in detail – including Moses' said transformation – in the introduction to our commentary on Deuteronomy.

Either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant: The literal translation is "Not only since yesterday, nor even the day before yesterday, nor even from the time that you first spoke to your servant." The Midrash explains that for seven straight days God exhorted Moses to accept the mission of going to Egypt, but Moses adamantly refused.

I am slow of speech and slow of tongue: Here we see that when Moses says he has "never been a man of words," there are actually two aspects to this: He is "slow of speech" (lips, mouth) and "slow of tongue." Language exists at two distinct levels:

• Language as internal content, an instrument for expressing concepts (this is *lashon*, which means "language," but also "tongue," the organ of the mouth).

• Language as an external form of expression (this is *safah*, another word for "language," which also means "lip").

(See *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, commentary to the story of the Tower of Babel [Gen 11:1 ff.] for further discussion.)

In this verse, Moses is saying that he has difficulty with both of these aspects.

Rav A. I. Kook explains that we sometimes encounter a problem of self-expression at a high level, such that a person understands higher ideas, but is unable to express those ideas in images that someone else can understand. That is, he is "slow of tongue."

A different problem occurs at a somewhat lower level, at which a non-verbal expression in a melody or image becomes possible, but words still fail, which means that the higher "slowness of tongue" has been overcome, but the person is still "slow of speech". Only at a lower level does it become possible for the person to express his understanding in words.

(11-12) **And the Lord said to him, "Who gives man speech? … I will be with you as you speak and will instruct you what to say"**: Moses' speech disorders are not a shortcoming, but a virtue. These impairments are necessary in order for the Torah to be faithfully transmitted through him. Under these circumstances, rather than embellishing God's words with his own ideas, Moses will transmit neither more nor less than what the Almighty actually commands him to say.

5.12. MOSES RECEIVES HIS BROTHER AARON AS A COLLABORATOR (4:13-17)

יג וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי שְׁלַח־נָא בְּיַד־תִּשְׁלָח׃ יד וַיִּחַר־אַף יי בְּמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר
הֲלֹא אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ הַלֵּוִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־דַבֵּר יְדַבֵּר הוּא וְגַם הִנֵּה־הוּא יֹצֵא
לִקְרָאתֶךָ וְרָאֲךָ וְשָׂמַח בְּלִבּוֹ׃ טו וְדִבַּרְתָּ אֵלָיו וְשַׂמְתָּ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים בְּפִיו
וְאָנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם־פִּיךָ וְעִם־פִּיהוּ וְהוֹרֵיתִי אֶתְכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן׃
טז וְדִבֶּר־הוּא לְךָ אֶל־הָעָם וְהָיָה הוּא יִהְיֶה־לְּךָ לְפֶה וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה־לּוֹ
לֵאלֹהִים׃ יז וְאֶת־הַמַּטֶּה הַזֶּה תִּקַּח בְּיָדֶךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה־בּוֹ אֶת־הָאֹתֹת׃

(13) **But he said, "Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent."**

(14) **The Lord became angry with Moses, and He said, "There is your brother Aaron the Levite. He, I know, speaks readily.**

Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he will be happy to see you.

(15) **You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth — I will be with you and with him as you speak, and tell both of you what to do —**

(16) **and he shall speak for you to the people. Thus he shall serve as your spokesman, with you playing the role of God to him,**

(17) **And take with you this rod, with which you shall perform the signs."**

(13) **But he said, "Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent"**: Once again Moses refuses the mission of leading the Exodus, but this time he offers no reason for his refusal. The point here is that the reasons Moses has given for his previous refusals, although they may have appeared reasonable, were essentially without merit. Rather, those refusals were due to Moses simply not wanting to lead the Jews out of Egypt.

(14) **The Lord became angry with Moses**: Until now, each time Moses refused the mission God would explain to him why he was wrong. But this time God uses a display of anger to impress upon Moses that an attitude adjustment is long overdue.

And He said, "There is your brother Aaron the Levite. He, I know, speaks readily": Here we meet Moses' brother Aaron for the first time, introduced from first mention as a prominent personality. He holds the position, as it were, of "Chief Rabbi of the Egyptian Jewish community".

Aaron, unlike Moses, remained close to the people throughout his entire life. He was not raised in Pharaoh's palace, nor did he spend many years in Midian. At the giving of the Torah, Aaron remained with the people at the foot of the mountain, and throughout the years in the wilderness he lived near the people. Aaron's virtues and also his shortcomings all derive from this point. Because of his closeness to the people, Aaron has good communication with them, and can serve as an effective instrument for conveying Moses' message to the people. But on the other hand, it is precisely Aaron's closeness to the people that brings him to create the golden calf, thereby demonstrating that he is unworthy of becoming a national leader.

Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he will be happy to see you: Aaron's most important quality is that he readily and willingly accepts Moses' leadership, notwithstanding that Moses is his younger brother. We will consider this in greater detail below.

(15) **You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth – I will be with you and with him as you speak, and tell both of you what to do**: Earlier (v. 12) God said to Moses, "I will be with you as you speak," but now "I will be with you and with him as you speak, and tell both of you what to do." At first it was assumed that Moses alone would lead the Exodus, but now the leadership will be divided between Moses and Aaron. This is a consequence of God's anger over Moses' repeated refusals.

(16) **And he shall speak for you to the people. Thus he shall serve as your spokesman**: Aaron does not stand on the same level as Moses. He is only an adjunct to Moses.

With you playing the role of God to him: Although the Hebrew word *Elohim* is one of God's primary names, it can also refer more generally to a variety of other agents of superior authority. In particular, the word *Elohim* can be grammatically declined (which demonstrates that its meaning is relative, not absolute) and can also mean judges, heavenly powers, false gods, and the like. But as applied to the Almighty, this term is descriptive and impersonal, representing Him as the universally sovereign God[1].

Seen in that context, no deification of Moses is happening here; instead, his elevated status is emphasized. But even so, we find that in some aspects Moses was actually a "God" to the people. When Moses fails to return at the expected time from his forty days with God at the summit of Mount Sinai, the people "make a god" for themselves (in the form of the golden calf) to replace Moses, as they see it. We will examine this issue in greater detail below.

(17) **And take with you this rod, with which you shall perform the signs**: Moses must "not let the staff out of his hands," he must main-

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[1] In contrast, the four-letter Divine Name (YHWH, the Tetragrammaton) is absolute. Grammatically it cannot be declined, and is used to refer to the Almighty exclusively, expressing the aspect of "the God of the covenant."

tain power, because without his leadership Aaron can easily be mistaken (which is what happened in the incident of the golden calf).

5.13. WHY DID GOD CHOOSE ONLY MOSES FOR THIS MISSION?

The Torah's account of how God goes to such lengths to persuade Moses to accept the mission of leading the Exodus demonstrates that no one could substitute for Moses, because no one else in that generation was so well suited to become a national leader. The reason is not only Moses' rare personal qualities (he is uncommonly righteous, humble, and actively committed), but also because only Moses had received the training that that mission required.

Moses combined three lines of self-identification: Jewish, Egyptian and Midianite. No other Jew of his generation had Moses' broad outlook. A leader must see the world through the eyes of a free man. He must be a man of the world, and not a man of any one particular place.

Aaron is not in a position to lead the Exodus. He is accustomed to living with the Jews in slavery and supporting them in difficult times, but he has no understanding of how Egypt functions as a state, nor (what is all the more important for a leader) how the peoples of the world relate to one another, and how human development progresses.

Moses, raised as a free man in Pharaoh's home, incorporates both Jewish and Egyptian perspectives. Through his years spent in Midian, observing the conflicts of states and of peoples from the sidelines, he acquired a new, universal outlook on the world. No other Jew of that era had that knowledge or understanding.

The leader who was to bring the Jews out of Egypt could not be just a slice of the people – he had to remain somewhat distant from them, in order to see into the future. Of all the Jews of that time, Moses was unique in having spent most of his life in the wider (i.e., non-Jewish) world, which afforded him a global perspective. Because the Exodus from Egypt is a world-class event, its leader must, on the one hand, be himself a representative element of the people, but on the other hand,

be able to understand how a state operates and how it is governed. And finally, he must have a panhumanistic, universal perspective on the meaning of current events.

In other words, a Jewish leader must be a person who lives in all possible worlds at once. Moses was just such a person, which is why only he, and no one else, could lead the Jews out of Egypt.

This also means that the wheels of the Exodus were set in motion from the moment that Providence sent Moses to be reared and educated in Pharaoh's palace, in preparation for his future role as the leader of a nation. Although every Jew considered Pharaoh's order to throw newborn infants into the Nile a senseless, monstrous atrocity, that decree was in reality a necessary precursor to the Exodus. (But this, needless to say, in no way negates or condones Pharaoh's criminal actions).

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We find a modern analogy to this idea – the establishment of the necessary conditions for the creation of a leader – in the historical need for the assimilated Jew, Theodor Herzl, to arrive on the international Jewish scene. Herzl became the founder of the political Zionist movement that ultimately led to the creation of the State of Israel – the "Exodus" of our era. Even before Herzl there were rabbis who spoke of the need to resettle the Land of Israel and to create a Jewish state, but none of them envisioned accomplishing it through international conferences, media coverage, negotiations with world powers, and so on. Activities of this kind were extraordinary and incomprehensible to them. Traditional Jews were therefore, in principle, incapable of creating an effective Zionist movement.

We also note that according to the approach of the Gaon of Vilna, on whose writings the concept of religious Zionism is based, the era of *Mashiach ben Yosef*, "Messiah son of Joseph" – the era of the creation of the first stage of the Jewish state in the Land of Israel – began in the late eighteenth century. The Gaon of Vilna considered the French Revolution just such a "launch" of the *Mashiach ben Yosef* "platform," because it brought the Jews out of isolation and made them full citizens of modern states, on the basis of which Zionism could gradually emerge, albeit only a full century later.

5.14. MOSES AND AARON AS EXEMPLARS OF BROTHERHOOD

Aaron's most important characteristic is that he rejoices that his younger brother has been chosen to lead the Exodus.

Fraternal relations are extremely complex. At the very dawn of human history, Cain murders his brother Abel. This tragedy was followed by repeated conflicts between brothers: Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers who sold him into slavery, and others. Throughout the history of mankind, fraternal relations have been one of the primary sources of conflict.

Conversely, it is brotherhood, ideally, that should become the foundation of human society, at the individual, national, and global levels. To achieve this, however, the human race, even now, has a very long way to go.

An older child usually finds it quite difficult to have a younger brother. For as long as he can remember he has been the sole object of his parents' devotion – the entire world revolved only around him. But a new personality suddenly appears on the scene, and he is now no longer the one and only, but merely "one of." In most cases an older child will experience considerable anxiety in relating to his younger brother.

The essential problem of brotherhood begins with just one simple but nagging question: "Why did you get more than I got?" Brothers also share a common inheritance, which is a major source of envy that can destroy a family, a society, and even a state.

Envy is a truly paradoxical phenomenon. While potentially extremely harmful, envy is at the same time the engine of progress. A man wants to have the same thing the other man has, because he envies him. This is a very powerful motivator. It depends only on us to decide whether we will direct that envy toward good or toward evil.

It is therefore impossible to solve the problem of brotherhood by completely rejecting this feeling of envy, and embracing "altruism" exclusively. Rather, the situation can be resolved only by redirecting the power of envy into constructive channels, by abandoning the drive for equality in favor of complementarity. There is no need to strive for sameness, no need to fret ("Why does he have what I don't have?").

Brothers must acknowledge that they are simply smaller components of a larger whole, and they must take pleasure and pride in their common achievements. True brotherhood can exist only when brothers feel that together they share a common heritage, and that they complement each other, each contributing to the brotherhood their own unique qualities.

The level of brotherhood just described is the one that Aaron was able to achieve. "He will be happy to see you," says God to Moses about Aaron. (Literally, "He will see you and rejoice in his heart.") A sense of complementarity is established between Moses and Aaron, rather than equality. Aaron is quite pleased with this arrangement and accepts Moses' superiority. Such is the greatness of Aaron. It is what makes it possible for Moses and Aaron to lead the Jews out of Egypt. By rising to the level of true brotherhood, Moses and Aaron have corrected the sin of Cain and Abel.

This feeling of fraternal complementarity derives primarily from a sense of a common mission. For Moses and Aaron, this was the most important thing in their relationship, and it became the foundation for building brotherhood among the entire nation, and later among all of humanity.

CHAPTER 6

ON THE ROAD TO EGYPT

6.1. MOSES LEAVES HIS FATHER-IN-LAW JETHRO (4:18)

יח וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיָּשָׁב | אֶל־יֶתֶר חֹתְנוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֵלְכָה נָּא וְאָשׁוּבָה
אֶל־אַחַי אֲשֶׁר־בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶרְאֶה הַעוֹדָם חַיִּים וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה
לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם:

(18) Moses went back to his father-in-law Jether and said to him, "Let me go back to my kinsmen in Egypt and see how they are faring." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

(18) **Moses went back to his father-in-law Jether and said to him**: Moses asks Jethro's permission to leave for Egypt, because his new mission requires that he revise all his previous plans, which were the reason that Moses had come to live with Jethro in the first place.

And see how they are faring: Literally, "And I will see whether they are still alive." Moses does not doubt that the Jews in Egypt are still physically alive, but he doubts whether they are still spiritually alive. Does there remain in them anything of actual value? Moses has now agreed that the Jews must be brought out of Egypt, and that the future should be built only from these people, rather than trying to create an entirely new nation. But Moses is not yet ready to admit that there is anything spiritually important in these Jews that must be maintained and further developed.

And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace": Jethro consents to Moses' change of plan for the sake of fulfilling his new mission, although it was

a major departure from Jethro's own original plans. As noted earlier (see 4.4), the expression "Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro" referred also to the "shepherding" of Jethro's disciples. Jethro regarded Moses as the heir to his life's work. By virtue of this concession, Jethro will later merit being a participant in the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

6.2. MOSES LEAVES MIDIAN (4:19-23)

יט וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְיָן לֵךְ שֻׁב מִצְרָיִם כִּי־מֵתוּ כָּל־הָאֲנָשִׁים
הַמְבַקְשִׁים אֶת־נַפְשֶׁךָ: כ וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו וַיַּרְכִּבֵם
עַל־הַחֲמֹר וַיָּשָׁב אַרְצָה מִצְרָיִם וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מַטֵּה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדוֹ:
כא וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּלֶכְתְּךָ לָשׁוּב מִצְרַיְמָה רְאֵה כָּל־הַמֹּפְתִים
אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי בְיָדֶךָ וַעֲשִׂיתָם לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַאֲנִי אֲחַזֵּק אֶת־לִבּוֹ וְלֹא
יְשַׁלַּח אֶת־הָעָם: כב וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כֹּה אָמַר יְיָ בְּנִי בְכֹרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
כג וָאֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ שַׁלַּח אֶת־בְּנִי וְיַעַבְדֵנִי וַתְּמָאֵן לְשַׁלְּחוֹ הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי הֹרֵג
אֶת־בִּנְךָ בְּכֹרֶךָ:

(19) The Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who sought to kill you are dead."

(20) So Moses took his wife and sons, mounted them on an ass, and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses took the rod of God with him.

(21) And the Lord said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the marvels that I have put within your power. I, however, will stiffen his heart so that he will not let the people go.

(22) Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: Israel is My first-born son.

(23) I have said to you, "Let My son go, that he may worship Me," yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your first-born son.'"

(19) **The Lord said to Moses in Midian**: In this passage Moses' departure from Midian is recounted anew, but from a completely different

perspective. At first it was told from the internal point of view – Moses' doubts and the problems he faced. But the description here is from the external point of view, as the surrounding world sees it.

"Go back to Egypt, for all the men who sought to kill you are dead.": From the outside it seems that Moses fled from Egypt because he was in grave danger for having killed the Egyptian overseer. And that he was always waiting for an opportunity to return there, just as soon as opportunity to do so would present itself.

(20) **So Moses took his wife and sons … and went back to the land of Egypt**: It would appear that Moses, after he had created a family in Midian, originally had no plans of remaining there.

And Moses took the rod of God with him: As seen from the outside, this gives the impression that immediately upon receiving God's instruction to assume the role of leader, Moses accepted the mission with no doubts or hesitation whatsoever.

(21) **And the Lord said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the marvels that I have put within your power**: There is no mention here of signs for the Jews, but only marvels for Pharaoh. That is, there is no trace of Moses' serious doubts concerning the Jews in Egypt and what they are prepared to believe.

I, however, will stiffen his heart so that he will not let the people go: Pharaoh's adamant, protracted refusal to allow the Exodus to happen was presented earlier (3:19) as a necessary step for destroying the Egyptian worldview by means of plagues, to "take Egypt out of the Jews." Indeed, that is the internal view of the goings-on. But from the outside it appears to be a pretext for punishing Pharaoh.

When God's stiffens Pharaoh's heart, this by no means deprives him of his freedom of choice. On the contrary, as the plagues progress he can avoid panicking, and continue to decide freely how to react.

(22) **Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord: Israel is My first-born son"**: The Exodus is essentially a struggle for the primacy of Israel vs. Egypt: Who will lead the future development of mankind? We will address this point in greater detail below.

Israel is My first-born son: The paternal aspect of God's relationship to man is inherent in Judaism from the very beginning. God, in relation to all people, is Creator, Lord, and Father. But this finds its absolute expression only in those individuals, nations, and cultures who themselves regard God as their father and behave toward Him like sons. In times to come, however, after all nations master the pure language of communication with God and recognize the Almighty, all people will become children of God in absolute form (Zeph. 3:9).

But even in that future era, Israel will remain "God's firstborn son," because it is Israel who first accepted God as their Heavenly Father. Even then, God's connection with Israel will be realized at a higher level than that of other nations. Although all sons share in their father's inheritance, the firstborn receives a double portion and enjoys a special status.

(23) **I have said to you, "Let My son go, that he may worship Me"**: The departure of the Jews is presented to Pharaoh as necessary for the performance of a religious ritual as required by God. There is no mention of the Patriarchs or the Promised Land.

Yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your first-born son: In the "external view," Pharaoh is seen as doomed from the very beginning. God himself hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he will not allow the Jews to leave, and then God punishes Pharaoh for that! Thus, the purpose of the entire exercise is to show the world that Pharaoh has forfeited his status as an independent world leader. That is, Egypt's leading role in world history is no more, and supremacy on the world stage now passes to Israel.

6.3. THE INCIDENT OF CIRCUMCISION AT THE NIGHT ENCAMPMENT (4:24-26)

כד וַיְהִי בַדֶּרֶךְ בַּמָּלוֹן וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ יְיָ וַיְבַקֵּשׁ הֲמִיתוֹ: כה וַתִּקַּח צִפֹּרָה צֹר
וַתִּכְרֹת אֶת־עָרְלַת בְּנָהּ וַתַּגַּע לְרַגְלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי חֲתַן־דָּמִים אַתָּה לִי:
כו וַיֶּרֶף מִמֶּנּוּ אָז אָמְרָה חֲתַן דָּמִים לַמּוּלֹת:

(24) At a night encampment on the way, the Lord encountered him and sought to kill him.

(25) So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched his legs with it, saying, "You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me!"

(26) And when He let him alone, she added, "A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision."

(24) **At a night encampment on the way**: This is a very difficult passage. We will offer just one of various options for understanding it.

The Lord encountered him and sought to kill him: Because no reason is given, it is natural to conclude that this is somehow related to the "night encampment" (literally, "inn"). The Midrash (see below) understands the Torah's explicit mention of the overnight as indicating some delay on Moses' part. When he stopped for the night, Moses could have performed his son's circumcision then and there, but he failed to do so. However, we can also understand the overnight stay on the road as meaning that the initial stage of God's elaborations to Moses is complete, and the Almighty therefore now proceeds to the second stage.

(25) **So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin**: We were informed earlier that Zipporah bore Moses a son, who was given the name "Gershom" (2:22). But here Moses and Zipporah already have two sons ("So Moses took his wife and sons," v. 20). And later we learn that the second son was named "Eliezer" (18:4).

According to the Midrash, Moses' second son was born just before Moses left Midian to return to Egypt. Moses had not circumcised his son because the stress of road travel poses a danger to an infant, and circumcision in such situations must therefore be postponed. But once Moses had stopped for the night ("At a night encampment on the way") his first duty was to circumcise his son, and this delay was the reason for the near-tragedy that ensued.

And touched his legs with it: Moses himself was unable to take any action, probably because he was near death at that point.

Saying, "You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me!": Zipporah's connection to Moses, previously due primarily to Moses' status as heir

to her father Jethro's spiritual legacy, is now transformed into a connection of blood; that is, a connection rooted in a physical reality.

(26) **And when He let him alone**: Moses is now recovering.

She added, "A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision": The conclusion we are to draw from this is that circumcision is one of the central foundations of all Jewish existence.

One of various options for understanding this passage is:

As mentioned earlier, the Midrash believes that the cause of these events was Moses' delay in circumcising his son. But the question then becomes: If Moses could neglect performing circumcision, a commandment of paramount importance in Judaism already for hundreds of years since Abraham's time, then what kind of national leader is Moses fit to become? But if, on the other hand, Moses was justified in postponing his son's circumcision, why, then, did God want to kill him?

As already noted above[1], this passage becomes clear when understood in the context of the ideas of Rabbi I. L. Ashkenazi (Manitou), which consider the dynamics of Moses's personality on two covenantal levels: the Abrahamic covenant (God's covenant with the Patriarchs), and the Sinai covenant between God and the nation of Israel that left Egypt.

The essence of Abraham's covenant is to unite the ideals of mercy and justice (Gen. 18:19)[2], and to see the Jewish people as a family that has a direct connection with God, through its existence as an autonomous nation living in its own Land. However, this covenant includes no formalized system of commandments.

The Sinai covenant, on the other hand, is a covenant of laws and commandments that regulate the life of the Jewish people as a society (and not merely a family). It is this kind of covenant that resonates with Moses' personal inclinations and character.

Circumcision is a component of both of those covenants, but its meaning is different in each. In the Sinai covenant, circumcision is, essentially, one of the Torah's many (613) commandments. But in Abra-

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1 See §1.3.

2 See *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §18.16.

ham's covenant, circumcision is a symbol of the covenant itself. (We note in passing that this is why the accepted Hebrew term for circumcision is Brit Milah, "The Covenant of Circumcision." No other commandment in the Torah has the word brit, "covenant", prefixed to its name.[1]

By assuming the role of leader of the Exodus, Moses has agreed to lead the descendants of the Patriarchs out of Egypt. But he is still not feeling or acknowledging the importance of the Abrahamic covenant. When Moses goes to Egypt to bring the Jewish people out, and to enter them into the Sinai covenant ("And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain," 3:12), he already feels himself a part of the new, Sinai covenant, and has no desire to enter his newborn son into Abraham's covenant.

This does not mean that Moses is actually neglecting the commandment of circumcision. He simply considers it one of the many Sinai commandments, and expects to circumcise his son simultaneously with the rest of the Jewish people as a strict prerequisite (12:48) to performing the first Passover sacrifice on the eve of the Exodus from Egypt.

In other words, Moses makes a clear distinction between the Sinai covenant and the covenant of the Patriarchs.

Moses considers the "covenant of ideals" weak and ineffective, and seeks to replace it with the "covenant of commandments," which establishes objective laws and explicit norms. Moses has already decided that the new covenant will supplant the former. This is not negligence or indifference on Moses' part, but merely the innocent mistake of a great man.

God tells Moses in response: "If that is how you feel, then you deserve to die. The Sinai covenant will complement the Abrahamic covenant, but cannot replace or abolish it. The ideals of the Patriarchs are primary. They are the goal, and the Sinai commandments are only a tool for implementing them. Without this connection, it makes no sense for you even to lead the Jews out of Egypt." And if so, then Moses' life also makes no sense, and he must die.

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[1] In Numbers 18:19 we find the expression "brit melach olam hi," "It shall be an everlasting covenant of salt." But in that case, the word "brit" is more a description of the commandment than its actual name.

Moses' wife Zipporah, who comes from Midian, maintains a connection with the heritage of Abraham, which enables her to act here in opposition to Moses and as a counterbalance to him. Thanks to Zipporah's background, she understands the problem and circumcises their son, thereby saving Moses' life[1].

The mistake of separating the commandments from the ideals they are intended to support, by falsely absolutizing those commandments, has been an important problem in Judaism for many centuries, and continues to be so even in our time. If Judaism is to live and develop in our generation, it is critical that we not repeat Moses' mistake.

In his two lessons to Moses – at the Burning Bush, and in the incident of his son's circumcision – God showed Moses that he would only be continuing Abraham's work, both physically and spiritually. Founding an entirely new nation was not at all a part of God's plan. Divine revelation did not begin at Sinai, it only continued there. The life of the Jewish people did not begin at Sinai. It began with Abraham.

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[1] Zipporah, through the circumcision of her son and the covenant of Abraham, is also connected with the Land of Israel. As the Abrahamic covenant is realized in that which is natural, immanent, and palpable from within, Zipporah also connects Moses with this covenant of naturalness. Separated from Zipporah (in the process of the giving the Torah), Moses transitions fully to the Divine Transcendental Revelation, and therefore cannot enter the Land of Israel, which requires the property of naturalness. Later (Num. 12:1 ff.), Miriam and Aaron want to reunite Moses and Zipporah precisely for that purpose – to restore the balance of transcendental and immanent Revelation within Moses, in order to enable him to enter the Land of Israel, and them with him. All this will be discussed in greater detail in our commentary on the given passage in Numbers.

CHAPTER 7

THE FIRST MEETING WITH PHARAOH

7.1. JEWS ARE READY TO RECOGNIZE MOSES AS THEIR REDEEMER (4: 27-31)

כז וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־אַהֲרֹ֑ן לֵ֚ךְ לִקְרַ֣את מֹשֶׁ֔ה הַמִּדְבָּ֖רָה וַיֵּ֑לֶךְ וַ֝יִּפְגְּשֵׁ֗הוּ
בְּהַ֣ר הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים וַיִּשַּׁק־לֹֽו׃ כח וַיַּגֵּ֣ד מֹשֶׁ֗ה לְאַהֲרֹ֤ן אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵ֣י יְהוָה֮ אֲשֶׁ֣ר
שְׁלָחֹו֒ וְאֵ֣ת כָּל־הָאֹתֹ֗ת אֲשֶׁ֤ר צִוָּֽהוּ׃ כט וַיֵּ֣לֶךְ מֹשֶׁ֣ה וְאַהֲרֹ֔ן וַיַּאַסְפ֥וּ
אֶת־כָּל־זִקְנֵ֖י בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ ל וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר אַהֲרֹ֗ן אֵ֤ת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר־דִּבֶּ֣ר
יְהוָ֔ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֖ה וַיַּ֣עַשׂ הָאֹתֹ֑ת לְעֵינֵ֖י הָעָֽם׃ לא וַ֝יַּאֲמֵ֗ן הָעָ֤ם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ֙ כִּֽי־פָקַ֣ד
יְהוָ֔ה אֶת־בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל וְכִֽי־רָ֣אָה אֶת־עָנְיָ֑ם וַיִּקְּדוּ֙ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲֽוּו׃

(27) The Lord said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." He went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him.

(28) Moses told Aaron about all the things that the Lord had committed to him and all the signs about which He had instructed him.

(29) Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites.

(30) Aaron repeated all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people,

(31) and the people were convinced. When they heard that the Lord had taken note of the Israelites and that He had seen their plight, they bowed low in homage.

(27) **The Lord said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." He went**: We see that Aaron is not himself enslaved, and can freely leave Egypt.

And met him at the mountain of God: The meeting takes place on Mount Horeb (Sinai), indicating not only that the giving of the Torah is of central importance in the Exodus process, but that Aaron will share in the mission entrusted to Moses by God at the Burning Bush.

And he kissed him: The prediction that Aaron would rejoice to know that his younger brother had been chosen to lead the Exodus is now confirmed.

(28) **Moses told Aaron about all the things that the Lord had committed to him and all the signs about which He had instructed him**: We see here once again that Moses has no actual problem expressing himself in words. When Moses describes himself as "slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10), he means something entirely different.

(29) **Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites**: Moses could not have gathered the elders himself. For this he needs to have Aaron with him, whose authority the elders acknowledge.

(30) **Aaron repeated all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people**: Moses no longer speaks. He only performs the signs, and Aaron speaks for him.

(30-31) **He performed the signs in the sight of the people, and the people were convinced**: There is a sudden transition from the elders to the people. It seems that the elders would not accept Moses' message, and Aaron and Moses were forced to address the people directly.

And the people were convinced: (Literally, "The people believed"). The Jews recognize Moses as the agent of their long-awaited deliverance, which means that Moses now has the status of a national leader.

We noted earlier (4:1) that Moses' fears that the Jews would not believe him were unfounded. The people believed. (But as concerns the signs that God gave Moses and Moses demonstrated to the people, the Torah does not tell us whether the people would have believed even without those signs).

(31) **When they heard that the Lord had taken note of the Israelites and that He had seen their plight, they bowed low in homage**: The Jews heard and took note, first of all, of the words about deliverance from suffering. Slavery is so difficult to endure that the Israelites were simply not able to focus on anything else. And therefore, as we shall note later, the first stage of the liberation, six months before the Exodus, was the cessation of slave labor and the hardships associated with it, which occurred on Rosh Hashanah – Jewish New Year.

7.2. THE FIRST AUDIENCE WITH PHARAOH (5:1-4)

א וְאַחַר בָּאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כֹּה־אָמַר יְ֠הוָה אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל שַׁלַּח אֶת־עַמִּי וְיָחֹגּוּ לִי בַּמִּדְבָּר: ב וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה מִי יְ֠הוָה אֲשֶׁר
אֶשְׁמַע בְּקֹלוֹ לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־יְ֠הוָה וְגַם אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
לֹא אֲשַׁלֵּחַ: ג וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים נִקְרָא עָלֵינוּ נֵלְכָה נָּא דֶּרֶךְ
שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְנִזְבְּחָה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ פֶּן־יִפְגָּעֵנוּ בַּדֶּבֶר אוֹ
בֶחָרֶב: ד וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לָמָּה מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן תַּפְרִיעוּ אֶת־
הָעָם מִמַּעֲשָׂיו לְכוּ לְסִבְלֹתֵיכֶם:

(1) **Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness."**

(2) **But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go."**

(3) **They answered, "The God of the Hebrews has manifested Himself to us. Let us go, we pray, a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He strike us with pestilence or sword."**

(4) **But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you distract the people from their tasks? Get to your labors!"**

(1) **Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh: Earlier (3:18) the Almighty had told Moses**: "Then you shall go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt," but here there is no mention of the elders. The elders were apparently afraid to go to Pharaoh with Moses and Aaron, and Pharaoh therefore saw Moses and Aaron merely as lone citizens having no real constituency among the people, which immediately undermined the cogency of their arguments and demands.

And said to Pharaoh: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness": Moses and Aaron couch their demand in terms of a ritual for fulfilling a religious obligation, rather than an exigency of national-political character. But on the other hand, they do mention that the celebration is on behalf of the "God of Israel," which nonetheless imparts to it a certain nationalist aspect.

(2) **But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go"**: When two unknowns presumptuously request an audience with Pharaoh, he does not have them arrested or summarily ejected, as we might expect, but instead asks them, "Why should I obey this God of yours, given that I have no idea who He is? If you have come with a demand, it is only right that you should justify it." It seems that Pharaoh is being honest here – he genuinely wants to understand the Jews' demands.

(3) **They answered, "The God of the Hebrews has manifested Himself to us. Let us go, we pray, a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God"**: Wishing to reach an understanding with Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron transition to a more understandable terminology: "The God of the *ivrim*, 'Hebrews', the descendants of Eber"[1]. This is a more familiar concept to Pharaoh than "The Lord, the God of Israel," as they referred to Him earlier. The *ivrim* are a recognized ethnic group. The "God of the Hebrews" is associated with a traditional, established religion, and should be respected. However, an

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[1] For the understanding of the *Ivrim*, "Hebrews", as descendants of Eber, and the role of the "Early Patriarchs" – Noah, Shem, and Eber, see *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §9.3 and §12.2.

appeal to Eber is still not a justification for leaving Egypt. The Jews can worship the "God of the Hebrews" right there in Egypt. There is no need for them to go out into the wilderness for that.

The Jews mission to the world operates at two distinct levels: The "national" mission, as formulated by the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (aka Israel), and the archetypal mission, as formulated by the "original Patriarchs" – Noah, Shem, and Eber. These two missions, the mission of the Children of Israel and the mission of the descendants of Eber (*ivrim*, Hebrews), respectively, are significantly different.

From the perspective of those "original Patriarchs," the Jewish mission consists in the descendants and followers of Eber, the Hebrews, being scattered among the nations of the world in order to bring them the message of monotheism. Abraham's later innovation was that his descendants (and those who joined them) would remain a separate people[1]. The statement "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel" is made at the national level, and it means: "We, Israel, are a foreign body with respect to Egypt."

Israel's religious cult is so obviously different from that of Egypt that it is impossible to properly implement it in Egypt – hence the Jews demand of Pharaoh, "Let us go, we pray, a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God." Pharaoh, however, is not prepared to accept this approach, because he does not know and does not recognize the "God of Israel."

When Moses tells Pharaoh, "Our service to God is the service of the descendants of Eber, which you cannot but know," Pharaoh answers: "Yes, indeed, of course I know all about the service of the descendants of Eber, and I recognize it as legitimate. But that service can be performed anywhere. It does not require that you leave Egypt."

Lest He strike us with pestilence or sword: This is a euphemistic turn of phrase, a more polite substitute for: "If you won't allow us to go, He will surely strike you with pestilence or sword." But even this could not bring the desired result.

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[1] "Extracting sparks of holiness from ordinary, everyday life" is a classic concept of Jewish mysticism, holistically treated in the Lurianic Kabbalah.

(4) **But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you distract the people from their tasks? Get to your labors!"**: Since the representatives of the people did not come with you, and you came alone, this means that the people do not really want to leave Egypt. Thus, you are only distracting them from their tasks. And since this is not even an actual demand of the people, but only your own attempt to incite a rebellion, stepping up the oppression is the surest way I know to make the Jews forget about any other unreasonable demands they might have.

7.3. THE JEWS SCATTER THROUGHOUT EGYPT (5:5-12)

ה וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה הֵן־רַבִּים עַתָּה עַם הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁבַּתֶּם אֹתָם מִסִּבְלֹתָם׃
ו וַיְצַו פַּרְעֹה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־הַנֹּגְשִׂים בָּעָם וְאֶת־שֹׁטְרָיו לֵאמֹר׃
ז לֹא תֹאסִפוּן לָתֵת תֶּבֶן לָעָם לִלְבֹּן הַלְּבֵנִים כִּתְמוֹל שִׁלְשֹׁם הֵם יֵלְכוּ
וְקִשְּׁשׁוּ לָהֶם תֶּבֶן׃ ח וְאֶת־מַתְכֹּנֶת הַלְּבֵנִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם עֹשִׂים תְּמוֹל
שִׁלְשֹׁם תָּשִׂימוּ עֲלֵיהֶם לֹא תִגְרְעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי־נִרְפִּים הֵם עַל־כֵּן הֵם
צֹעֲקִים לֵאמֹר נֵלְכָה נִזְבְּחָה לֵאלֹהֵינוּ׃ ט תִּכְבַּד הָעֲבֹדָה עַל־הָאֲנָשִׁים
וְיַעֲשׂוּ־בָהּ וְאַל־יִשְׁעוּ בְּדִבְרֵי־שָׁקֶר׃ י וַיֵּצְאוּ נֹגְשֵׁי הָעָם וְשֹׁטְרָיו
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־הָעָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר פַּרְעֹה אֵינֶנִּי נֹתֵן לָכֶם תֶּבֶן׃ יא
אַתֶּם לְכוּ קְחוּ לָכֶם תֶּבֶן מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָאוּ כִּי אֵין נִגְרָע מֵעֲבֹדַתְכֶם
דָּבָר׃ יב וַיָּפֶץ הָעָם בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְקֹשֵׁשׁ קַשׁ לַתֶּבֶן׃

(5) **And Pharaoh continued, "The people of the land are already so numerous, and you would have them cease from their labors!"**

(6) **That same day Pharaoh charged the taskmasters and foremen of the people, saying,**

(7) **"You shall no longer provide the people with straw for making bricks as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves.**

(8) **But impose upon them the same quota of bricks as they have been making heretofore; do not reduce it, for they are**

shirkers; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God!'

(9) **Let heavier work be laid upon the men; let them keep at it and not pay attention to deceitful promises."**

(10) **So the taskmasters and foremen of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh: I will not give you any straw.**

(11) **You must go and get the straw yourselves wherever you can find it; but there shall be no decrease whatever in your work."**

(12) **Then the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.**

(5) **And Pharaoh continued, "The people of the land are already so numerous, and you would have them cease from their labors!"**: Pharaoh sees the Jews as just a component of the larger Egyptian nation. And, apparently, this was also the self-perception of a large segment of the Jews themselves.

(6) **That same day Pharaoh charged the taskmasters and foremen: Pharaoh acts according to his own logic**: the ferment that has begun must be suppressed, best accomplished by overloading the people with work such that they will have no time or energy for anything else. Pharaoh rules Egypt autocratically. By all appearances he is in full control of the situation and his instructions are reasonable.

In reality, however, Pharaoh's actions occasion a completely unforeseen result: (1) The intensification of oppression dissuades even high-ranking, loyal Jews from their fealty to Egypt, and prepares the ground for just the right moment when all the people will be ready to break from Egypt psychologically, and to leave it physically; (2) The Jews are now widely scattered throughout all of Egypt, which is essential for imbuing them with an enhanced appreciation of the achievements of Egyptian civilization. This is an important element in preparing them for the Exodus (see §12.2).

The taskmasters and foremen of the people: The taskmasters are the Egyptian overseers, and the foremen are the Jewish superintendents, who occupy a supervisory position among the people.

This group is apparently associated with the "elders" mentioned earlier, who at the first stage refused to support Moses. From this we can infer that the Jewish elite in Egypt enjoyed a relatively privileged status, and at first had no interest whatsoever in the Exodus. This group was forced to change its attitude only when, as events turned out, the oppression began to affect them as well. All this served as a foundation for consolidating the people, a prerequisite for a successful Exodus.

(10) **So the taskmasters and foremen of the people went out and said to the people**: They did so after their meeting with Pharaoh. The fact that they had been invited to an exclusive audience with Pharaoh was a clear sign that he was seriously concerned.

(12) **Then the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt**: This was an important (and unplanned) consequence of the measures that Pharaoh had taken. Although the Torah told us previously that "the land was filled with them" (1:7), the bulk of the Jews continued to live in Egypt's "Pale of Settlement," in Goshen. The requirement that the Jews now collect their own straw led to their being scattered throughout Egypt. This step was a necessary prerequisite for the Exodus, because the Jews, before their departure, had to extract sparks of holiness[1] from all of Egypt, and not only from the land of Goshen.

If the objective in a given era is to preserve the Jewish people in exile, then it is better for them to live apart from the general population, away from the capital, in small towns. But for the purpose of "extracting worldly sparks from the exile" it is necessary that, on the contrary, the Jews will settle in all the big cities and actively participate in the life of their country. Paradoxically, then, the walls of the ghetto must collapse shortly before the Exodus in order that the Jews will spread throughout the country and assimilate its achievements for further application in their own lives.

Something similar happened during the creation of the modern State of Israel. For the nearly two thousand years of their exile, the Jews had lived apart from the surrounding nations. And then, only in the final century and a half, before the need for the Jews to leave Europe was ripe

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[1] "Extracting sparks of holiness from ordinary, everyday life" is a classic concept of Jewish mysticism, holistically treated in the Lurianic Kabbalah.

(and beginning with the French Revolution), the walls of the ghetto and the "Pale of Settlement" disintegrated everywhere, and the Jews began to participate in the life of their countries of residence.

This was an historical necessity for creating the future State of Israel. It was essential that the Jews would bring European culture – science, public administration skills, and so on – to the country they were about to resurrect. There is no way the Jews could have brought all that directly from their small villages and ghettos. Moreover, when a person is raised not on the periphery, but in the center of life, where everything seethes and is in constant motion, he sees the world in a completely different way[1].

The Jews in Egypt before the Exodus underwent a similar process. In order to ensure the Jews' preservation as a distinct group, it was originally important for them to be living in the land of Goshen, apart from the Egyptians. But when the time for the Exodus drew near, Providence arranged for the Jews to disperse throughout the country, because they had to master Egypt's achievements in order to be capable later of building their own state.

7.4. INTENSIFICATION OF THE OPPRESSION: THE ISRAELITE FOREMEN ARE BEATEN. (5:13-18)

יג וְהַנֹּגְשִׂים אָצִים לֵאמֹר כַּלּוּ מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם דְּבַר־יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר בֶּהְיוֹת
הַתֶּבֶן: יד וַיֻּכּוּ שֹׁטְרֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־שָׂמוּ עֲלֵהֶם נֹגְשֵׂי פַרְעֹה
לֵאמֹר מַדּוּעַ לֹא כִלִּיתֶם חָקְכֶם לִלְבֹן כִּתְמוֹל שִׁלְשֹׁם גַּם־תְּמוֹל גַּם־
הַיּוֹם: טו וַיָּבֹאוּ שֹׁטְרֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּצְעֲקוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר לָמָּה
תַעֲשֶׂה כֹּה לַעֲבָדֶיךָ: טז תֶּבֶן אֵין נִתָּן לַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּלְבֵנִים אֹמְרִים לָנוּ

[1] It is interesting to note that the Gaon of Vilna, whose Kabbalistic teachings serve as one of the foundation of contemporary religious Zionism, stated as early as the eighteenth century that "the era of Mashiach ben Yosef has already begun" (by which he meant the preparatory stage leading to the creation of the Jewish State).

עֲשׂוּ וְהִנֵּה עֲבָדֶיךָ מֻכִּים וְחָטָאת עַמֶּךָ׃ יז וַיֹּאמֶר נִרְפִּים אַתֶּם נִרְפִּים
עַל־כֵּן אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים נֵלְכָה נִזְבְּחָה לַיהוָה׃ יח וְעַתָּה לְכוּ עִבְדוּ וְתֶבֶן
לֹא־יִנָּתֵן לָכֶם וְתֹכֶן לְבֵנִים תִּתֵּנוּ׃

(13) **And the taskmasters pressed them, saying, "You must complete the same work assignment each day as when you had straw."**

(14) **And the foremen of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten. "Why," they were asked, "did you not complete the prescribed amount of bricks, either yesterday or today, as you did before?"**

(15) **Then the foremen of the Israelites came to Pharaoh and cried: "Why do you deal thus with your servants?**

(16) **No straw is issued to your servants, yet they demand of us: Make bricks! Thus your servants are being beaten, when the fault is with your own people."**

(17) **He replied, "You are shirkers, shirkers! That is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.'**

(18) **Be off now to your work! No straw shall be issued to you, but you must produce your quota of bricks!"**

(13-14) **And the taskmasters pressed them … And the foremen of the Israelites … were beaten**: A conflict now arises between the Egyptian taskmasters and the Jewish foremen. Until now (v. 10), those two groups together had been managing the Jewish work effort, and the foremen remained loyal to Egypt. These foremen, motivated more by class distinctions than by national self-identification, felt that they had more in common with the Egyptian oppressors than with the Jewish oppressed, although the latter were closer to them as a matter of national origin.

But in order to expedite the Exodus it was necessary for the Jewish elite to turn its back on Egypt and want to leave it. They, too, had to begin to feel that their national roots were stronger than their class ties. These most recent persecutions by Pharaoh served precisely this purpose – to distance the Jewish elite from the Egyptians.

(15-16) **Then the foremen of the Israelites came to Pharaoh and cried**: "Why do you deal thus with your servants? … Thus your servants are being beaten, when the fault is with your own people": The Jewish elite's loyalty to Egypt has been undermined, but not yet completely. They are still hoping that (as the saying goes) if the nobility has let them down, they can still count on the king (Pharaoh) himself.

(17-18) **He replied, "You are shirkers, shirkers! … Be off now to your work! No straw shall be issued to you, but you must produce your quota of bricks!"**: The Jewish elite were deceived in their expectations, for it now turns out that Pharaoh too is malevolent. This now inclines them even more to embracing the Exodus.

7.5. THE CRISIS OF MOSES AND THE FOREMEN (5:19 – 6:1)

יט וַיִּרְאֻ֨ שֹׁטְרֵ֜י בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֗ל אֹתָ֤ם בְּרָע֙ לֵאמֹ֔ר לֹא־תִגְרְעוּ֙ מִלִּבְנֵיכֶ֔ם
דְּבַר־יֹ֖ום בְּיֹומֹ֑ו׃ כ וַיִּפְגְּעוּ֙ אֶת־מֹשֶׁ֣ה וְאֶֽת־אַהֲרֹ֔ן נִצָּבִ֖ים לִקְרָאתָֽם
בְּצֵאתָ֥ם מֵאֵ֖ת פַּרְעֹֽה׃ כא וַיֹּאמְרוּ֙ אֲלֵהֶ֔ם יֵרֶ֥א יְ֖ו עֲלֵיכֶ֑ם וְיִשְׁפֹּ֔ט אֲשֶׁ֥ר
הִבְאַשְׁתֶּ֖ם אֶת־רֵיחֵ֣נו בְּעֵינֵ֣י פַרְעֹ֔ה וּבְעֵינֵ֥י עֲבָדָ֖יו לָ֣תֶת־חֶ֑רֶב בְּיָדָ֖ם
לְהָרְגֵֽנו׃ כב וַיָּ֣שָׁב מֹשֶׁ֔ה אֶל־יְ֖ו וַיֹּאמַ֑ר אֲדֹנָ֣י לָמָ֔ה הֲרֵעֹתָ֖ה לָעָ֣ם הַזֶּ֑ה
לָמָ֥ה זֶּ֖ה שְׁלַחְתָּֽנִי׃ כג וּמֵאָ֗ז בָּאתִי֙ אֶל־פַּרְעֹ֔ה לְדַבֵּ֖ר בִּשְׁמֶ֑ךָ הֵרַ֣ע לָעָ֔ם
הַזֶּ֖ה וְהַצֵּ֥ל לֹֽא־הִצַּ֖לְתָּ אֶת־עַמֶּֽךָ׃

א וַיֹּאמֶר֙ יְ֣ו אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֔ה עַתָּ֖ה תִּרְאֶ֑ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר אֶֽעֱשֶׂ֖ה לְפַרְעֹ֑ה כִּ֣י בְיָ֔ד
חֲזָקָ֥ה יְשַׁלְּחֵ֖ם וּבְיָ֣ד חֲזָקָ֔ה יְגָרְשֵׁ֖ם מֵאַרְצֹֽו׃

(19) Now the foremen of the Israelites found themselves in trouble because of the order, "You must not reduce your daily quantity of bricks."

(20) As they left Pharaoh's presence, they came upon Moses and Aaron standing in their path,

(21) and they said to them, "May the Lord look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers — putting a sword in their hands to slay us."

(22) Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me?

(23) Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people."

(6:1) Then the Lord said to Moses, "You shall soon see what I will do to Pharaoh: he shall let them go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land."

(19) **Now the foremen of the Israelites found themselves in trouble because of the order, "You must not reduce your daily quantity of bricks"**: Things have now quickly gone from bad to worse not just for the ordinary people, but for the foremen, high-ranking Jews, as well. As their eyes are opened to this reality, they too will want to leave Egypt.

(20) **As they left Pharaoh's presence, they came upon Moses and Aaron standing in their path**: To their thinking, Moses and Aaron were nothing more than adversaries "standing in their path." Moses and Aaron had demanded of Pharaoh that the Jews be allowed to leave, but the Jewish elite had no need for any such thing. And now the elite too is being oppressed for reasons that, at best, and as they see it, have nothing to do with them.

(21) **And they said to them, "May the Lord look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers – putting a sword in their hands to slay us"**: The foremen lay all the blame at the feet of Moses an Aaron, while they appear to find no fault at all with Pharaoh himself, nor with his deputies.

Putting a sword in their hands to slay us: The foremen here use expressions similar to those employed by the two quarreling Jews who accused Moses, when at the very beginning of his journey he tried to intervene in their altercation: "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (2:14). The situation here is quite similar: Moses tries to act for the benefit of the people, but for all his good intentions he receives only blame. This too is a test for Moses, who once before became so disillusioned with the Jews because of just such accusations that he fled to a new life in a different country.

(22-23) **Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, "O Lord"**: The commentators on this verse emphasize that Moses' choice of this particular Divine name ("O, Lord") expresses his utter bewilderment. A slave at a loss to understand his master's intentions will address the master in this way.

Why did You bring harm upon this people? … Pharaoh has dealt worse with this people … You have not delivered Your people": This time around Moses does not blame the Jews, as he did in his youth, nor does he blame those who have quarreled with him, not to mention finding fault with the entire Jewish nation. He now cares only about what is best for the people. This shows how much Moses has already changed, even at this stage.

(6:1) **Then the Lord said to Moses**: This is God's answer to Moses' question, why is it necessary that Pharaoh step up the oppression? The Almighty answers Moses: "It is necessary for your own education, and also for educating the people."

You shall soon see: Literally, "Now you shall see." The Midrash puts the stress on "now." It is precisely Moses' new and improved situation that will allow him to see. Moses needed once again to experience a crisis in his perception of the Jews, similar to the crisis he had faced in his youth, in order to understand that this time, in contrast to what had happened then, everything was developing quite correctly.

He shall let them go because of a greater might: That is, under duress. God will force Pharaoh to let the Jews go against his will.

Indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land: But at the same time, the Jews themselves will not just pick up and leave of their own free will. They, too, will be forced to leave, because Pharaoh and the Egyptians will drive them out.

Intensifying the oppression was a necessary step. The plagues that will begin are intended to influence not only Pharaoh, but the Jews as well, to make them want to leave Egypt and rebuild their lives. Crises and conflicts are indispensable for educating nations, just as extreme heat is necessary for smelting metal.

WEEKLY PORTION [2]

VA'ERA

CHAPTER 8

PREPARING FOR THE SHOWDOWN WITH EGYPT

8.1. PREPARING FOR THE EXODUS: THE "AARON" ASPECT

The *Va'era* portion continues the description of preparations for the Exodus. The *Shemot* portion was devoted to "internal" preparations – the story of Moses. And now this portion, *Va'era*, presents the Exodus as seen from Aaron's perspective, who is observing the preparations "from the outside."

In the previous portion, *Shemot*, God is not yet revealed to the world. He speaks there only with Moses himself. But in this portion, *Va'era*, the God is revealed to the outside world. This point is reflected in the very name of the portion, *Va'era*, which means "I (God) appeared," i.e., I manifested to the outside world.

Moses is responsible for the internals, for receiving the Divine word from Heaven. Aaron is responsible for the externals – the "interface" – transmitting the Divine word to a wider circle. God's revelation to Egypt, to which this *Va'era* portion is dedicated, is an "Aaronic," rather than a "Mosaic," theme.

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As already noted earlier, at the national level (the people as a whole) the Almighty revealed Himself first to the Egyptians, as expressed in the Ten Plagues. God's Revelation to the Jews occurred only much later, through the Ten Commandments, at Sinai.

The Midrash sees a connection between the Ten Plagues, the Ten Commandments, and the Ten Utterances by which God created the world (Mishnah, Ethics of the Fathers, 5:1). The trajectory of the world's development according the Midrash is as follows.

The effect of the Ten Utterances of Creation, as enumerated in the first chapter of Genesis, is to conceal God's presence. (The essence of all of Creation is concealment. God does not manifest clearly in the visible world, because He wants us to earn our self-sufficiency and independence in this world).

The time of Revelation arrives when in this world, which until now has concealed God's presence, an expression of God's unobscured presence suddenly arises, to be realized in two separate stages. In the case of the Exodus, God first sends the Ten Plagues, whose purpose is to demolish the dominant belief system. Following that, the second stage is the giving of the Ten Commandments, which creates an entirely new belief system. Thus, God's revelation to the Egyptians is a Revelation that destroys the antiquated, obsolete model of the universe.

Egypt was overly confident in the stability and regularity of life's natural processes. The Nile consistently overflows, there is always a crop, all phenomena in the world are subordinated and subjugated to one another. Freedom is entirely absent, and that sense of the lack of freedom in the world is then also projected onto Egyptian society. Egypt is the "house of bondage" (20:2), the land where all are slaves: Ordinary citizens are slaves to the nobility, the nobility are slaves to Pharaoh, Pharaoh is a slave to the gods, and the gods are slaves to nature.

The Ten Plagues ravaged this static order. The result was that a "mixed multitude" of Egyptians (12:38) joined the Jewish people and left Egypt with them. This was yetziat mitzrayim – not only, as conventionally translated, the "Exodus from Egypt," but, even more literally, the "exodus of Egypt." Egypt will itself abandon its former ideas and adopt the Jewish worldview. This "Exodus of Egypt" was not universal; only a small part of the Egyptian people participated in it, but it too was highly essential for realizing the goals of the Exodus.

The Ten Utterances by which God created the world are an instrument of Creation, but the Ten Commandments are an instrument of Revelation. Between Creation and Revelation stands Egypt, whose peo-

ple worship the laws of nature, which is purely physical, has no freedom, no individual identity, and no purpose.

The Egyptians will not allow the Jews to leave, because, in their perception, there is no such thing as freedom, and there must never be.

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On a different but related note, it bears pointing out that not one of the first nine plagues was brought to its actual conclusion. Since Pharaoh was prepared to make concessions, Moses arranged to halt each of those plagues before it came to that. The reason was that the Ten Plagues were not necessary for achieving a physical victory over Pharaoh. (Had that been the objective, God could have brought the Jews out of Egypt simply by destroying Pharaoh).

Rather, the objective was (as the Midrash puts it) "to liberate the Jewish people from their worship of Egyptian gods." The Jews of that generation were deeply entrenched in Egyptian culture. For their impending break with Egypt, they needed first to be convinced of the failure of the Egyptian system. Their connection with Egypt was so strong that this process of absolute disengagement from Egypt could not have been achieved with just one swift blow, however powerful. Thus, all ten plagues were needed for their gradual but cumulative effect.

8.2. A PROMISE TO THE PATRIARCHS IS REALIZED FOR THEIR DESCENDANTS (6:2-5)

ב וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְי׳: ג וָאֵרָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם
אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדָּי וּשְׁמִי יְי׳ לֹא נוֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם: ד וְגַם
הֵקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם לָתֵת לָהֶם אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶת אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֵיהֶם
אֲשֶׁר־גָּרוּ בָהּ: ה וְגַם | אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־נַאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר
מִצְרַיִם מַעֲבִדִים אֹתָם וָאֶזְכֹּר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי:

(2) **God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord.**

(3) **I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name "Lord."**

(4) I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners.

(5) I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.

(2) **God spoke to Moses**: Here the Almighty explains the current situation to Moses, and in the next passage he instructs Moses what to say to the people. This explanation is the answer to Moses' question: "O Lord, why did You bring harm upon this people?" (5:22). In the verse that followed that question, God first offered a short answer, and now He elaborates on that answer.

These words are meant as a criticism to Moses, who seems at a loss whenever problems arise. When God appeared to the Patriarchs and gave them promises, they accepted those promises on their own terms. But Moses, at the first sign of any difficulty, starts in with reproaches to God. We noted earlier[1] that Moses' claims are in fact entirely natural, which underscores a difference between the ancestors and their descendants. In the era of Patriarchs, the fulfillment of God's promises is fundamentally impossible; it is their destiny only for the future. The ancestors therefore live on the promises alone, confident that even if they cannot themselves realize their aspirations. their descendants will. And for this they are prepared to wait.

But in the era of the descendants the promises must be fulfilled, and they will soon experience a crisis if that fulfillment is delayed. It is therefore essential that the descendants see things in the proper perspective, so as not to grow despondent when promises are fulfilled more slowly than they had hoped.

God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord": It is essential here to note the contrast of "God" and "the Lord." In the original Hebrew these are *Elohim* and *HaShem* (the Tetragrammaton), which represent the attributes of Judgment and Mercy, respectively. God is saying to Moses: "I, the God of judgment, am also the Lord of mercy." That is, the manifestations of these two attributes are both aspects of the One God.

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[1] See §7.6.

This principle is among the most fundamental in Jewish monotheism. Those phenomena in the world that seem to manifest God's strict judgment actually derive from His desire for mercy. The universe is so designed that it is often necessary to act with severity in order for mercy to be realized. Thus, God's message here is that the recent intensification of the Egyptian oppression was a matter of historical necessity.

(3) **I appeared**: The Hebrew is *Va'era*, which is also the name of this entire weekly portion. It explains, the differences between the manner of God's appearance to the Patriarchs versus His appearance to the world at the Exodus.

To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: The essence of everything that is happening is contained in God's covenant with the Patriarchs.

As El Shaddai: The Divine name *El Shaddai*, "the All-Mighty" (literally, He Who never lacks sufficient [power]") indicates that the Divine promise will be fulfilled, even if for now it still remains only a promise.

But by My name "Lord": This is the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, the Divine name that represents the attribute of Mercy – fulfillment of the promise.

I did not make Myself known to them: The Patriarchs knew the Name "Lord," of course, but they never "knew" it the sense of actually *experiencing* it, because the Divine word in their era remained only a promise. The time for its fulfillment had to wait until now.

(4) I **also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners**: The first reason that the Egyptian oppression has been temporarily intensified was stated earlier, and now the second reason is given.

I also established My covenant with them: Because God's promise could not be fulfilled in the era of the Patriarchs, he "established the covenant," i.e., He vowed to fulfill the promise in its proper time.

To give them the land of Canaan: The essence of the covenant of the Patriarchs is that the nation would eventually acquire its own Land. It was therefore important to break the Jews' connection with Egypt, so that their connection to Canaan (i.e., the Land of Israel) could later be forged.

The land in which they lived as sojourners: The Patriarchs lived as sojourners – aliens – in the Land, and as such did not actually own it. That is how it was at the stage of the promise, but now, with the fulfillment of that promise, their descendants will own the Land.

(5) **I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant**: This is now the third reason for the intensification of oppression. The Egyptians so brutally subjugated the Israelites, that their very survival was in peril. In order to ensure the fulfillment of the covenant, the Almighty escalated and accelerated the entire process in order to bring the Jews out of Egypt ahead of schedule.

Thus, God's response to Moses question, "O Lord, why did You bring harm upon this people?," consists of three distinct aspects: (1) The attribute of Mercy ("the Lord") often takes the form of Judgment ("God") in its outward appearance; (2) The Jews' psychological connection to Egypt must be broken; (3) The people are not prepared for the Exodus, because it is happening sooner than originally planned. This is one of those times when God must act harshly in order to hasten events.

8.3. THE FIVE STAGES OF REDEMPTION (6:6-8)

ו לָכֵן אֱמֹר לִבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְיָ וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלֹת מִצְרַיִם
וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבֹדָתָם וְגָאַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בִּזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה וּבִשְׁפָטִים
גְּדֹלִים: ז וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי
אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת מִצְרָיִם: ח וְהֵבֵאתִי
אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָשָׂאתִי אֶת־יָדִי לָתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק
וּלְיַעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לָכֶם מוֹרָשָׁה אֲנִי יְיָ:

(6) Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the Lord. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements.

(7) And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God. And you shall know that I, the Lord, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians.

(8) I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I the Lord."

(6) **Say, therefore, to the Israelite people**: God now directs Moses to appeal not to the elders, but to the people directly.

I am the Lord: The time has come to fulfill My promise.

(6-7) **I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God**: These are the first four "expressions of Redemption," which correspond to the four stages of Divine revelation in the world. "I will free you" refers to the physical exodus, "and deliver you" means the spiritual and psychological exodus, "I will redeem you" means salvation from persecution, and "I will take you" is the people's transition to a direct connection with the Almighty.

The Midrash understands the words "And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God" as referring to the Giving of the Torah. Strictly speaking, however, there is no mention of the giving of the Torah in this passage. Everything here relates to the "nationalist aspect," corresponding to the covenant of the Patriarchs (not the covenant of Sinai).

During the Talmudic era, these four "expressions of Redemption" were incorporated into the Passover Haggadah as the central theme of the annual retelling of the Exodus at the seder on the first night of Passover (two nights in the Diaspora).

And you shall know that I, the Lord, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians: The result of all this will be that you will "know" – i.e., understand – that it is God Who leads you and Who determines the course of history.

(8) **I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I the Lord**: This is the fifth of the "expressions of Redemption," but it is set off from the first four. The first four implied no specific action on the part of the people, and set no conditions, but at the fifth stage,

preconditions are set. The Jewish nation can inherit their Land only if the people understand that it is God Who leads them and drives the course of history, and that the historical events all around them are happening only by God's command.

Seeing the ongoing history of the Jewish people as a dialogue between man and God is among Judaism's most essential concepts.

8.4. A NEW DIRECTIVE TO GO TO PHARAOH (6:9-13)

ט וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִקֹּצֶר רُוחַ
וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: י וַיְדַבֵּר יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: יא בֹּא דַבֵּר אֶל־פַּרְעֹה
מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם וְיׇשַׁלַּח אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאַרְצוֹ: יב וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי יְי
לֵּאמֹר הֵן בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא־שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמָעֵנִי פַרְעֹה וַאֲנִי עֲרַל
שְׂפָתָיִם: יג וַיְדַבֵּר יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְיִצַּוֵּם אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל־
פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

(9) But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage.

(10) The Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

(11) "Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites depart from his land."

(12) But Moses appealed to the Lord, saying, "The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Pharaoh heed me, a man of impeded speech!"

(13) So the Lord spoke to both Moses and Aaron in regard to the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, instructing them to deliver the Israelites from the land of Egypt.

(9) **But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage**: The Jews' faint-heartedness is due only to their their extraordinary exertions. It is not their natural state, and they will overcome it once they gain their freedom. It is important for Moses to recognize this connection.

When faced once before, in his youth, with Jews who were faint of heart, Moses then mistakenly concluded that they were hopeless, but now he must revise his outlook. Therefore, God once again requires Moses to deal with Jews who lack courage, so that Moses will understand that instead of abandoning the Jews on account of that weakness, he should be helping them to over-come it. Moses must be prepared to lead the Jews out of Egypt even if they are themselves not prepared for the Exodus.

(10-11) **The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites depart from his land"**: Moses should not be trying to persuade the Jews. Rather, he must go to Pharaoh. Moses' struggle with Pharaoh will itself be a positive influence on the Jews, strengthening them and preparing them for the Exodus.

(12) **But Moses appealed to the Lord, saying, "The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Pharaoh heed me"**: Moses expresses his misgivings about the course of action that God has just instructed him to undertake.

A man of impeded speech!: Moses is not talking here of slowness of tongue (in contrast to an earlier passage, 4:10), for he has already surmounted that obstacle. The "impeded speech" Moses invokes here refers to his difficulty in finding mutual understanding with the outside world. This still remains a problem for Moses.

(13) **So the Lord spoke to both Moses and Aaron in regard to the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, instructing them to deliver the Israelites from the land of Egypt**: The Almighty, in His dialogue with Moses at the Burning Bush, had already assured Moses that being "slow of speech and slow of tongue" is not at all an issue. But Moses is still concerned. Aaron's status is therefore on the rise. No longer is Aaron only Moses' "interpreter." God now sees Moses and Aaron as equals, and treats them accordingly.

8.5. THE LINEAGE OF THE LEVITE CLAN (6:14-27)

יד אֵלֶּה רָאשֵׁי בֵית־אֲבֹתָם בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲנוֹךְ וּפַלּוּא חֶצְרֹן
וְכַרְמִי אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפְּחֹת רְאוּבֵן: טו וּבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן יְמוּאֵל וְיָמִין וְאֹהַד וְיָכִין
וְצֹחַר וְשָׁאוּל בֶּן־הַכְּנַעֲנִית אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפְּחֹת שִׁמְעוֹן: טז וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת
בְּנֵי־לֵוִי לְתֹלְדֹתָם גֵּרְשׁוֹן וּקְהָת וּמְרָרִי וּשְׁנֵי חַיֵּי לֵוִי שֶׁבַע וּשְׁלֹשִׁים
וּמְאַת שָׁנָה: יז בְּנֵי גֵרְשׁוֹן לִבְנִי וְשִׁמְעִי לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם: יח וּבְנֵי קְהָת
עַמְרָם וְיִצְהָר וְחֶבְרוֹן וְעֻזִּיאֵל וּשְׁנֵי חַיֵּי קְהָת שָׁלֹשׁ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמְאַת
שָׁנָה: יט וּבְנֵי מְרָרִי מַחְלִי וּמוּשִׁי אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפְּחֹת הַלֵּוִי לְתֹלְדֹתָם:
כ וַיִּקַּח עַמְרָם אֶת־יוֹכֶבֶד דֹּדָתוֹ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־
מֹשֶׁה וּשְׁנֵי חַיֵּי עַמְרָם שֶׁבַע וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה: כא וּבְנֵי יִצְהָר קֹרַח
וָנֶפֶג וְזִכְרִי: כב וּבְנֵי עֻזִּיאֵל מִישָׁאֵל וְאֶלְצָפָן וְסִתְרִי: כג וַיִּקַּח אַהֲרֹן
אֶת־אֱלִישֶׁבַע בַּת־עַמִּינָדָב אֲחוֹת נַחְשׁוֹן לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ אֶת־נָדָב
וְאֶת־אֲבִיהוּא אֶת־אֶלְעָזָר וְאֶת־אִיתָמָר: כד וּבְנֵי קֹרַח אַסִּיר וְאֶלְקָנָה
וַאֲבִיאָסָף אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפְּחֹת הַקָּרְחִי: כה וְאֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן לָקַח־לוֹ מִבְּנוֹת
פּוּטִיאֵל לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ אֶת־פִּינְחָס אֵלֶּה רָאשֵׁי אֲבוֹת הַלְוִיִּם
לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם: כו הוּא אַהֲרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יי לָהֶם הוֹצִיאוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל־צִבְאֹתָם: כז הֵם הַמְדַבְּרִים אֶל־פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ־
מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם הוּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן:

(14) **The following are the heads of their respective clans. The sons of Reuben, Israel's first-born: Enoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; those are the families of Reuben.**

(15) **The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Saul the son of a Canaanite woman; those are the families of Simeon.**

(16) **These are the names of Levi's sons by their lineage: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari; and the span of Levi's life was 137 years.**

(17) **The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, by their families.**

(18) **The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel; and the span of Kohath's life was 133 years.**

(19) **The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their lineage.**

(20) Amram took to wife his father's sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the span of Amram's life was 137 years.

(21) The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri.

(22) The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri.

(23) Aaron took to wife Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

(24) The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. Those are the families of the Korahites.

(25) And Aaron's son Eleazar took to wife one of Putiel's daughters, and she bore him Phinehas. Those are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their families.

(26) It is the same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, "Bring forth the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop."

(27) It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to free the Israelites from the Egyptians; these are the same Moses and Aaron.

(14) **The following are the heads of their respective clans**: The narrative is suddenly interrupted by the genealogy of Moses and Aaron. It would seem that the proper place for elaborating the pedigree of the Levites is not here, but at the very beginning of this book of Exodus (2:1 ff.). But the treatment there was only a highly generalized account devoid of any mention of names at all: "A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son." This was meant to be symbolic of suppression of all individual identity, which is typical of an enslaved people. Here, however, all names are liberally supplied, indicating that self-awareness is increasing as the process of the Exodus begins.

(14-15) **The sons of Reuben, Israel's first-born ... The sons of Simeon**: The story line begins with Reuben and Simon, since the nation begins with them, and the Levites are important not in isolation, but as a part of the nation as whole. Beyond that, however, only the family of Moses and Aaron is covered in detail.

(16-19) **These are the names of Levi's sons by their lineage: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari ... The sons of Gershon ... The sons of Kohath ... The sons of Merari**: The Levite family tree is traced in detail, because of the importance it will have in the future. In the encampment of the Jews in the wilderness, the Levites will be divided into the same three sub-clans as they are here, and the status of the three Levite clans will be comparable to that of the individual tribes of Israel.

And the span of Levi's life was 137 years ... And the span of Kohath's life was 133 years ... And the span of Amram's life was 137 years: In the case of Moses' immediate ancestors the total lifespan of each is also indicated. The Midrash posits that the Torah mentions the total years of Levi's life because the time of his death corresponds to the moment that the enslavement of the Jews began. (That did not occur until all the sons of Jacob had died, and it is assumed that Levi was the last of them).

But more directly, we can see the enumeration of Moses' ancestors' lifespans as underscoring Moses' preeminence, in that he is included, as it were, among the "pillars of humanity." Early in the book of Genesis the Torah enumerates the lifespans of all the generations from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, and, later, the twelve sons of Jacob. That the same is done here for Moses shows that Moses' importance is no less than that of all of them.

(20) **Amram took to wife his father's sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses**: As noted earlier, no mention is made of Moses' parents' names in the story of his birth at the beginning of the book of Exodus. But Jewish individual identity is from this point on steadily increasing.

Took to wife his father's sister: Before the giving of the Torah there was no prohibition against marrying one's father's sister.

(21) **The sons of Izhar: Korah ... The sons of Korah ... Those are the families of the Korahites**: This is Korah who led the rebellion against Moses during the wilderness era (Num. 16). Korah's mention here demonstrates the special, elevated status that he enjoyed from very early on.

(22) **The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri**: They too will play an important role in the future (see Lev. 10:4).

(23) **Aaron took to wife Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon**: Amminadab and his son Nahshon were princes of the tribe of Judah. This marriage thus further influenced the special relationship of that tribe to the *Kohanim* (the Priestly clan).

And she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar: Aaron's four sons are the future *Kohanim*.

(25) **And Aaron's son Eleazar took to wife one of Putiel's daughters, and she bore him Phinehas**: Phinehas was born before Aaron and his sons became Priests. This fact will prove essential for understanding the story of Phinehas as told in the book of Numbers (ch. 25).

One of Putiel's daughters: The name "Putiel" bears a certain resemblance to the name of the Egyptian priest Potiphera (Gen. 41:45). The Midrash suggests that Putiel was an Egyptian who belonged to the priestly class. We can see this as demonstrating the close ties that existed between the Egyptian and Jewish elites (and Moses' family in particular), as already noted above.

(25-26) **Those are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their families. It is the same Aaron and Moses ...**: This genealogy, which establishes Moses' place within the Jewish nation, shows that his connection with the people is now steadily growing stronger. So long as Moses fails to realize his place within the Jewish nation, and the lineage of its tribes and clans, he cannot lead the people out of Egypt. Therefore, the purpose of enumerating Moses' genealogy and that of his family here is not so much to inform us of those facts themselves, as to stress that Moses himself is now aware of them.

(26) **It is the same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, "Bring forth the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop"**: During the Egyptian bondage, and even when God was already giving instructions about the upcoming Exodus, Aaron was the leader of the Jewish community. In recognition of that, in this verse Aaron is mentioned before Moses.

(27) **It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to free the Israelites from the Egyptians; these are the same Moses and Aaron**:

But as soon as the action begins, Moses becomes the leader (and is therefore now mentioned before Aaron).

8.6. A RETROSPECTIVE OF MOSES' MISSION (6:28-7:7)

כח וַיְהִי בְּיוֹם דִּבֶּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

כט וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר אֲנִי יְיָ דַּבֵּר אֶל־פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי דֹּבֵר אֵלֶיךָ׃ ל וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי יְיָ הֵן אֲנִי עֲרַל שְׂפָתַיִם וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמַע אֵלַי פַּרְעֹה׃

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רְאֵה נְתַתִּיךָ אֱלֹהִים לְפַרְעֹה וְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ יִהְיֶה נְבִיאֶךָ׃ ב אַתָּה תְדַבֵּר אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֲצַוֶּךָּ וְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ יְדַבֵּר אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְשִׁלַּח אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאַרְצוֹ׃ ג וַאֲנִי אַקְשֶׁה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶת־אֹתֹתַי וְאֶת־מֹפְתַי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ ד וְלֹא־יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵכֶם פַּרְעֹה וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־יָדִי בְּמִצְרָיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־צִבְאֹתַי אֶת־עַמִּי בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בִּשְׁפָטִים גְּדֹלִים׃ ה וְיָדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְיָ בִּנְטֹתִי אֶת־יָדִי עַל־מִצְרָיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתּוֹכָם׃ ו וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ אֹתָם כֵּן עָשׂוּ׃ ז וּמֹשֶׁה בֶּן־שְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וְאַהֲרֹן בֶּן־שָׁלֹשׁ וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה בְּדַבְּרָם אֶל־פַּרְעֹה׃

(28) **For when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt**

(29) **and the Lord said to Moses, "I am the Lord; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I will tell you,"**

(30) **Moses appealed to the Lord, saying, "See, I am of impeded speech; how then should Pharaoh heed me!"**

(7:1) **The Lord replied to Moses, "See, I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet.**

(2) **You shall repeat all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land.**

(3) **But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt.**

(4) When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt and deliver My ranks, My people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with extraordinary chastisements.

(5) And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand over Egypt and bring out the Israelites from their midst."

(6) This Moses and Aaron did; as the Lord commanded them, so they did.

(7) Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they made their demand on Pharaoh.

(28) **For when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt**: After enumerating the genealogy of Moses and Aaron, which reinforces their position within the Jewish nation, the text returns to the narrative of their mission. But it will be described not as it appeared from the "inside" (as in the previous chapter, 6:9-13) – fraught with a multitude of doubts and internal problems – but as it looked from the outside. The difference is quite striking.

(29) **And the Lord said to Moses, "I am the Lord; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I will tell you"**: This instruction concerns Pharaoh only. The internal problems of the Jews are not mentioned.

(7:1) **The Lord replied to Moses, "See, I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet"**: In a similar passage above (6:13), Moses' self-doubt had the effect of diminishing his status with respect to Aaron. But here it is presented as merely a technical problem. Moses' importance is magnified, while Aaron is included only for transmitting his messages to Pharaoh.

(2) **You shall repeat all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land**: Moreover, Moses will receive from God, as He puts it, "all that I command," which is much more than simply "Let my people go!" That is, Moses will receive from God much more than what Aaron will relay to Pharaoh. Here, Moses' status is raised yet further, as it were, as compared with that of Aaron.

(3) **But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt**: The "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart is necessary so that Pharaoh can withstand the plagues, and not crack under the strain, so that the plagues can be brought to completion. As explained earlier, hardening Pharaoh's heart does not deprive him of his freedom of choice. On the contrary, it allows him to avoid panicking during the plagues, while leaving him free to make his own, independent decisions.

(4) **When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt and deliver My ranks, My people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with extraordinary chastisements**: In order to make the necessary impression, the Egyptian plagues must be nothing less than "extraordinary." Otherwise, the Exodus itself will not create the needed impression, and its impact on the world will be likewise much weaker.

(5) **And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand over Egypt and bring out the Israelites from their midst**: The Torah is emphasizing here that it is the Egyptians, not the Jews, who will first experience the Divine revelation.

(6) **This Moses and Aaron did; as the Lord commanded them, so they did**: When viewed from the outside, everything seems to go smoothly. There is no mention of hesitations or doubts, or of Moses' refusals, or that the people are not ready for the Exodus. All we need to know is that God commanded, and Moses and Aaron did exactly as told.

(7) **Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they made their demand on Pharaoh**: By indicating the two brothers' exact ages, the Torah establishes the date of the Exodus in relation to Moses' birth and life story, as told earlier in this Book. We now also understand how long Moses was living apart from the Jewish people.

8.7. "MARVELS" FOR PERSUADING PHARAOH (7:8-13)

ח וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹ֑ן לֵאמֹֽר׃ ט כִּֽי־יְדַבֵּ֥ר אֲלֵכֶ֖ם פַּרְעֹ֑ה
לֵאמֹ֣ר תְּנ֗וּ לָכֶ֤ם מוֹפֵת֙ וְאָמַרְתָּ֣ אֶל־אַהֲרֹ֔ן קַ֚ח אֶת־מַטְּךָ֔ וְהַשְׁלֵךְ֙
לִפְנֵ֣י־פַרְעֹ֔ה יְהִ֥י לְתַנִּֽין׃ י וַיָּבֹ֣א מֹשֶׁ֗ה וְאַ֙הֲרֹ֙ן אֶל־פַּרְעֹ֔ה וַיַּעֲשׂ֥וּ כֵ֖ן
כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר צִוָּ֑ה יְ֗הוָה וַיַּשְׁלֵךְ֙ אַהֲרֹ֔ן אֶת־מַטֵּ֖הוּ לִפְנֵ֣י פַרְעֹ֑ה וְלִפְנֵ֣י עֲבָדָ֔יו
וַיְהִ֥י לְתַנִּֽין׃ יא וַיִּקְרָא֙ גַּם־פַּרְעֹ֔ה לַֽחֲכָמִ֖ים וְלַֽמְכַשְּׁפִ֑ים וַיַּעֲשׂ֥וּ גַם־הֵ֖ם
חַרְטֻמֵּ֣י מִצְרַ֔יִם בְּלָהֲטֵיהֶ֥ם כֵּֽן׃ יב וַיַּשְׁלִ֕יכוּ אִ֥ישׁ מַטֵּ֖הוּ וַיְהִ֣יוּ לְתַנִּינִ֑ם
וַיִּבְלַ֥ע מַטֵּה־אַהֲרֹ֖ן אֶת־מַטֹּתָֽם׃ יג וַיֶּחֱזַ֥ק לֵ֖ב פַּרְעֹ֑ה וְלֹֽא־שָׁמַ֥ע אֲלֵהֶ֖ם
כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר דִּבֶּ֔ר יְ֖הוָה׃

(8) The Lord said to Moses and Aaron,

(9) "When Pharaoh speaks to you and says, 'Produce your marvel,' you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh.' It shall turn into a serpent."

(10) So Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh and did just as the Lord had commanded: Aaron cast down his rod in the presence of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and it turned into a serpent.

(11) Then Pharaoh, for his part, summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and the Egyptian magicians, in turn, did the same with their spells;

(12) each cast down his rod, and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed their rods.

(13) Yet Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

(8) The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: Moses and Aaron receive God's instructions as one. So far as their inner qualities are concerned, Moses and Aaron are equals.

(9) When Pharaoh speaks to you and says, "Produce your marvel," you shall say to Aaron, "Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh." It shall turn into a serpent: But to Pharaoh and the Egyptians it must appear that of the two, Moses is primary, and Aaron only follows his lead.

(10) **So Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh and did just as the Lord had commanded**: Aaron cast down his rod in the presence of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and it turned into a serpent: This marvel, which was earlier intended to convince the Jews, is now directed to Pharaoh.

(11) **Then Pharaoh, for his part, summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and the Egyptian magicians, in turn, did the same with their spells**: Unlike the Jews, who believed this sign when Moses performed it, Pharaoh is more skeptical.

(12) **Each cast down his rod, and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed their rods**: So far, the contest is happening at the level of magic, and Aaron demonstrates greater skill in those arts than do Pharaoh's magicians.

(13) **Yet Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said**: Pharaoh's heart is stiff, which means that he is not motivated by fear and is able to think rationally. Pharaoh therefore makes a carefully measured decision: Expertise in magic, however exceptional, is not a basis for determining sound political action.

CHAPTER 9
THE TEN PLAGUES

9.1. THE FIRST PLAGUE: TURNING WATER INTO BLOOD (7:14-24)

The setup:

יד וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כָּבֵד לֵב פַּרְעֹה מֵאֵן לְשַׁלַּח הָעָם: טו לֵךְ אֶל־
פַּרְעֹה בַּבֹּקֶר הִנֵּה֙ יֹצֵ֣א הַמַּ֔יְמָה וְנִצַּבְתָּ֥ לִקְרָאתוֹ֖ עַל־שְׂפַ֣ת הַיְאֹ֑ר
וְהַמַּטֶּה֙ אֲשֶׁר־נֶהְפַּ֣ךְ לְנָחָ֔שׁ תִּקַּ֖ח בְּיָדֶֽךָ׃ טז וְאָמַרְתָּ֣ אֵלָ֗יו יְ֭הוָה אֱלֹהֵ֣י
הָֽעִבְרִ֑ים שְׁלָחַ֨נִי אֵלֶ֜יךָ לֵאמֹ֗ר שַׁלַּ֤ח אֶת־עַמִּי֙ וְיַעַבְדֻ֔נִי בַּמִּדְבָּ֖ר וְהִנֵּ֣ה
לֹֽא־שָׁמַ֑עְתָּ עַד־כֹּ֖ה׃ יז כֹּ֣ה אָמַ֣ר יְ֭הוָה בְּזֹ֣את תֵּדַ֗ע כִּ֤י אֲנִי֙ יְ֔הוָה הִנֵּ֣ה אָנֹכִ֔י
מַכֶּ֖ה | בַּמַּטֶּ֣ה אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדִ֑י עַל־הַמַּ֣יִם אֲשֶׁר֙ בַּיְאֹ֔ר וְנֶהְפְּכ֖וּ לְדָֽם׃
יח וְהַדָּגָ֣ה אֲשֶׁר־בַּיְאֹ֗ר תָּמ֤וּת וּבָאַ֙שׁ֙ הַיְאֹ֔ר וְנִלְאֻ֖ו מִצְרַ֑יִם לִשְׁתּ֥וֹת מַ֖יִם
מִן־הַיְאֹֽר׃

יט וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֱמֹ֣ר אֶֽל־אַהֲרֹ֗ן קַ֤ח מַטְּךָ֙ וּנְטֵֽה־יָדְךָ֔ עַל־מֵימֵ֥י
מִצְרַ֖יִם עַל־נַהֲרֹתָ֑ם | עַל־יְאֹרֵיהֶ֣ם וְעַל־אַגְמֵיהֶ֗ם וְעַ֤ל כָּל־מִקְוֵה֙
מֵימֵיהֶ֔ם וְיִהְיוּ־דָ֖ם וְהָיָ֣ה דָ֑ם בְּכָל־אֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם וּבָעֵצִ֥ים וּבָאֲבָנִֽים׃
כ וַיַּעֲשׂ֣וּ־כֵ֔ן מֹשֶׁ֥ה וְאַהֲרֹ֖ן כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר | צִוָּ֣ה יְ֭הוָה וַיָּ֣רֶם בַּמַּטֶּ֗ה וַיַּ֤ךְ אֶת־הַמַּ֙יִם֙
אֲשֶׁ֣ר בַּיְאֹ֔ר לְעֵינֵ֥י פַרְעֹ֖ה וּלְעֵינֵ֣י עֲבָדָ֑יו וַיֵּהָפְכ֤וּ כָל־הַמַּ֙יִם֙ אֲשֶׁר־בַּיְאֹ֔ר
לְדָ֖ם׃ כא וְהַדָּגָ֣ה אֲשֶׁר־בַּיְאֹ֗ר מֵ֤תָה֙ וַיִּבְאַ֣שׁ הַיְאֹ֔ר וְלֹא־יָכְל֥וּ מִצְרַ֖יִם
לִשְׁתּ֣וֹת מַ֑יִם מִן־הַיְאֹ֔ר וַיְהִ֥י הַדָּ֖ם בְּכָל־אֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרָֽיִם׃ כב וַיַּעֲשׂ֣וּ־כֵ֔ן
חַרְטֻמֵּ֥י מִצְרַ֖יִם בְּלָטֵיהֶ֑ם וַיֶּחֱזַ֣ק לֵב־פַּרְעֹ֗ה וְלֹא־שָׁמַ֤ע אֲלֵהֶם֙ כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר
דִּבֶּ֔ר יְ֖הוָה׃ כג וַיִּפֶן֙ פַּרְעֹ֔ה וַיָּבֹ֖א אֶל־בֵּית֑וֹ וְלֹא־שָׁ֥ת לִבּ֖וֹ גַּם־לָֽזֹאת׃
כד וַיַּחְפְּרוּ֙ כָּל־מִצְרַ֔יִם סְבִיבֹ֥ת הַיְאֹ֖ר מַ֑יִם לִשְׁתּ֣וֹת כִּֽי־לֹ֣א יָכְל֔וּ לִשְׁתּ֥וֹת
מִמֵּימֵ֖י הַיְאֹֽר׃

(14) And the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go.

(15) Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is coming out to the water, and station yourself before him at the edge of the Nile, taking with you the rod that turned into a snake.

(16) And say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let My people go that they may worship Me in the wilderness." But you have paid no heed until now.

(17) Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord." See, I shall strike the water in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand, and it will be turned into blood;

(18) and the fish in the Nile will die. The Nile will stink so that the Egyptians will find it impossible to drink the water of the Nile.'"

The actual plague:

(19) And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Take your rod and hold out your arm over the waters of Egypt — its rivers, its canals, its ponds, all its bodies of water — that they may turn to blood; there shall be blood throughout the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone."

(20) Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded: he lifted up the rod and struck the water in the Nile in the sight of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and all the water in the Nile was turned into blood

(21) and the fish in the Nile died. The Nile stank so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout the land of Egypt.

The Egyptian magicians respond:

(22) But when the Egyptian magicians did the same with their spells, Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them — as the Lord had spoken.

Pharaoh's reaction:

(23) Pharaoh turned and went into his palace, paying no regard even to this.

(24) And all the Egyptians had to dig round about the Nile for drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the Nile.

(14) **And the Lord said to Moses**: The first three plagues are aimed at undermining the authority of the Egyptian sorcerers and magicians. To accomplish this, these plagues are constructed such that the magicians are able to duplicate the first and the second (in order to draw them into the contest), but not the third – and they themselves admit defeat.

Pharaoh is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go: That is, everything is going according to Pharaoh's preconceived plan.

(15) **Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is coming out to the water, and station yourself before him at the edge of the Nile**: Turning the water of the Nile into blood corresponds to the third of the three signs that Moses performed for the Jews (4:9).

Taking with you the rod that turned into a snake: The staff was at first only a sign. But because of Pharaoh's resistance, signs now become plagues.

(16) **And say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let My people go that they may worship Me in the wilderness"**: In his meeting with Pharaoh, Moses still speaks of religious rituals, and not of the nationalist aspect of returning the Jews to their land.

"Let My people go that they may worship Me": This now-famous phrase is most often heard quoted not in full but only in part: "Let My people go!" But "that they may worship Me" is omitted, as if to suggest that the purpose of the Exodus was simply to liberate the Jews from slavery. From the Torah's perspective, however, freedom from slavery was for the Jews only a means to and end. The goal was to bring them to their Land in order to serve the Almighty.

But you have paid no heed until now: Thus, Pharaoh himself is to blame for the harsh measures that God must resort to in dealing with him.

(17) **Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord." See, I shall strike the water in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand, and it will be turned into blood**: Because you yourself said (5:2), "I do not know the Lord," it must be explained to you. By this you shall know!

(18) **And the fish in the Nile will die. The Nile will stink so that the Egyptians will find it impossible to drink the water of the Nile**: Egypt deifies nature, and are thus enslaved by it. But the Nile, most of all, is the primary force of nature and the source of all life in Egypt, symbolizing Egyptian stability. The plagues, and the reset of the Egyptian worldview, must therefore begin with the Nile.

(19) **And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Take your rod and hold out your arm over the waters of Egypt**: The first three plagues are targeted at destroying the illusion of Egypt's inviolability. Since those plagues represent a "competition" with the magicians as Pharaoh's representatives, Aaron executes them as Moses' representative.

(22) **But when the Egyptian magicians did the same with their spells, Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them — as the Lord had spoken**: This first plague, water turning into blood, is very much like Egyptian magic. There is nothing special about it, nor was it supposed to actually convince Pharaoh of anything. The purpose of this plague is simply to "stiffen Pharaoh's heart," which only reinforces his belief in Egypt's predominance.

(23) **Pharaoh turned and went into his palace, paying no regard even to this**: Notice that Pharaoh does not even ask for the plague to be lifted (as he will do in future plagues, as we shall see). The Egyptians have other water sources, which they can draw upon quite easily. There is thus no real crisis.

(24) **And all the Egyptians had to dig round about the Nile for drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the Nile**: The first plagues were deliberately kept somewhat mild, to allow the Egyptians to retain their freedom of choice.

9.2. THE SECOND PLAGUE: FROGS (7:25-8:11)

A brief respite:

כה וַיִּמָּלֵא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אַחֲרֵי הַכּוֹת־יְיָ אֶת־הַיְאֹר׃

(25) **When seven days had passed after the Lord struck the Nile,**

The setup:

כו וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְיָ שַׁלַּח אֶת־עַמִּי וְיַעַבְדֻנִי׃ כז וְאִם־מָאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלֵּחַ הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי נֹגֵף אֶת־כָּל־גְּבוּלְךָ בַּצְּפַרְדְּעִים׃ כח וְשָׁרַץ הַיְאֹר צְפַרְדְּעִים וְעָלוּ וּבָאוּ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבַחֲדַר מִשְׁכָּבְךָ וְעַל־מִטָּתֶךָ וּבְבֵית עֲבָדֶיךָ וּבְעַמֶּךָ וּבְתַנּוּרֶיךָ וּבְמִשְׁאֲרֹתֶיךָ׃ כט וּבְכָה וּבְעַמְּךָ וּבְכָל־עֲבָדֶיךָ יַעֲלוּ הַצְּפַרְדְּעִים׃

(26) **the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: Let My people go that they may worship Me.**

(27) **If you refuse to let them go, then I will plague your whole country with frogs.**

(28) **The Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall come up and enter your palace, your bedchamber and your bed, the houses of your courtiers and your people, and your ovens and your kneading bowls.**

(29) **The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your courtiers.'"**

The plague itself:

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֱמֹר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן נְטֵה אֶת־יָדְךָ בְּמַטֶּךָ עַל־הַנְּהָרֹת עַל־הַיְאֹרִים וְעַל־הָאֲגַמִּים וְהַעַל אֶת־הַצְּפַרְדְּעִים עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ ב וַיֵּט אַהֲרֹן אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל מֵימֵי מִצְרָיִם וַתַּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּעַ וַתְּכַס אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

(8:1) **And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Hold out your arm with the rod over the rivers, the canals, and the ponds, and bring up the frogs on the land of Egypt."**

(2) **Aaron held out his arm over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.**

The magicians respond:

ג וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן הַחַרְטֻמִּים בְּלָטֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־הַצְּפַרְדְּעִים עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

(3) But the magicians did the same with their spells, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh's reaction:

ד וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הַעְתִּירוּ אֶל־יְ֭הוָה וְיָסֵר הַצְּפַרְדְּעִים מִמֶּנִּי וּמֵעַמִּי וַאֲשַׁלְּחָה אֶת־הָעָם וְיִזְבְּחוּ לַיהוָה׃ ה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפַרְעֹה הִתְפָּאֵר עָלַי לְמָתַי | אַעְתִּיר לְךָ וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּלְעַמְּךָ לְהַכְרִית הַצְּפַרְדְּעִים מִמְּךָ וּמִבָּתֶּיךָ רַק בַּיְאֹר תִּשָּׁאַרְנָה׃ ו וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָחָר וַיֹּאמֶר כִּדְבָרְךָ לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי־אֵין כַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ׃ ז וְסָרוּ הַצְּפַרְדְּעִים מִמְּךָ וּמִבָּתֶּיךָ וּמֵעֲבָדֶיךָ וּמֵעַמֶּךָ רַק בַּיְאֹר תִּשָּׁאַרְנָה׃ ח וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן מֵעִם פַּרְעֹה וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְ֭הוָה עַל־דְּבַר הַצְּפַרְדְּעִים אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם לְפַרְעֹה׃ ט וַיַּעַשׂ יְ֭הוָה כִּדְבַר מֹשֶׁה וַיָּמֻתוּ הַצְּפַרְדְּעִים מִן־הַבָּתִּים מִן־הַחֲצֵרֹת וּמִן־הַשָּׂדֹת׃ י וַיִּצְבְּרוּ אֹתָם חֳמָרִם חֳמָרִם וַתִּבְאַשׁ הָאָרֶץ׃ יא וַיַּרְא פַּרְעֹה כִּי הָיְתָה הָרְוָחָה וְהַכְבֵּד אֶת־לִבּוֹ וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְ֭הוָה׃

(4) Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Plead with the Lord to remove the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."

(5) And Moses said to Pharaoh, "You may have this triumph over me: for what time shall I plead in behalf of you and your courtiers and your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses, to remain only in the Nile?"

(6) "For tomorrow," he replied. And [Moses] said, "As you say — that you may know that there is none like the Lord our God;

(7) the frogs shall retreat from you and your courtiers and your people; they shall remain only in the Nile."

(8) Then Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh's presence, and Moses cried out to the Lord in the matter of the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh.

(9) And the Lord did as Moses asked; the frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields.

(10) And they piled them up in heaps, till the land stank.

(11) But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he became stubborn and would not heed them, as the Lord had spoken.

(25) **When seven days had passed after the Lord struck the Nile**: Each of the Ten Plagues took about a month, including the lulls between them. The entire period of plagues thus lasted about a year, a period of reeducation for both the Egyptians and the Jews alike.

(28) **The Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall come up and enter your palace, your bedchamber and your bed, the houses of your courtiers and your people, and your ovens and your kneading bowls**: As with the first plague, which turned the Nile waters into blood, here too the frogs arise out of the Nile, and eventually fill every square inch of the Egyptians' living space.

(8:3) **But the magicians did the same with their spells, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt**: Although the magicians have the necessary skill to create frogs, they are not able to rid Egypt of them. Even frogs, diminutive and harmless creatures, overpower the Egyptian magicians, which is symbolic of the Egyptians' utter helplessness.

(4) **Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Plead with the Lord to remove the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord"**: During the first plague the Egyptians got access to water by digging new wells. But now they cannot rid themselves of the frogs, so Pharaoh capitulates to Moses' demands.

(5) **And Moses said to Pharaoh, "You may have this triumph over me: for what time shall I plead in behalf of you and your courtiers and your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses, to remain only in the Nile?"**: Moses wants to show Pharaoh that he, Moses, neither initiates the plagues nor halts them. Everything is in the hands of the Almighty, and all Moses can do is to relay Pharaoh's petitions to Him.

(6) **"For tomorrow," he replied**: Tomorrow, not today. Pharaoh is very strong-willed. He is willing to endure an oppressive situation simply to test Moses and verify the accuracy of his prognostications.

And [Moses] said, "As you say – that you may know that there is none like the Lord our God": That is, in order to convince you that these plagues are not magic.

(8) **Then Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh's presence, and Moses cried out to the Lord in the matter of the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh**: Moses "cried out" – he prayed fervently – because it was now important that the plague would end at the exact time indicated.

(9) **And the Lord did as Moses asked; the frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields**: The Almighty fulfills Moses' request with great precision.

(10) **And they piled them up in heaps, till the land stank**: The symbolism here is that notwith-standing all the external brilliance of Egyptian civilization, it is decaying from the inside out.

(11) **But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he became stubborn and would not heed them, as the Lord had spoken**: From this point on Pharaoh fails time and again to make good on his promises given openly and publicly. The effect is to destroy the last remnants of Jewish trust in the Egyptian system (and Egyptian trust as well).

9.3. THE THIRD PLAGUE: LICE (8:12-15)

The setup:

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֠הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה֙ אֱמֹ֣ר אֶֽל־אַהֲרֹ֔ן נְטֵ֥ה אֶת־מַטְּךָ֖ וְהַךְּ֣ אֶת־עֲפַ֑ר
הָאָ֗רֶץ וְֽהָיָ֤ה לְכִנִּים֙ בְּכָל־אֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרָֽיִם׃

(12) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Hold out your rod and strike the dust of the earth, and it shall turn to lice throughout the land of Egypt."**

The actual plague:

יג וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן וַיֵּט אַהֲרֹן אֶת־יָדוֹ בְּמַטֵּהוּ וַיַּךְ אֶת־עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ וַתְּהִי
הַכִּנָּם בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה כָּל־עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ הָיָה כִנִּים בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

(13) And they did so. Aaron held out his arm with the rod and struck the dust of the earth, and vermin came upon man and beast; all the dust of the earth turned to lice throughout the land of Egypt.

The magicians respond:

יד וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן הַחַרְטֻמִּים בְּלָטֵיהֶם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת־הַכִּנִּים וְלֹא יָכֹלוּ וַתְּהִי
הַכִּנָּם בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: טו וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחַרְטֻמִּם אֶל־פַּרְעֹה אֶצְבַּע
אֱלֹהִים הִוא

(14) The magicians did the like with their spells to produce lice, but they could not. The vermin remained upon man and beast;

(15) and the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God!"

Pharaoh's reaction:

וַיֶּחֱזַק לֵב־פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְי:

But Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he would not heed them, as the Lord had spoken.

(12) **Then the Lord said to Moses**: The purpose of the third plague is to utterly demolish the reputation of Pharaoh's magicians.

(13) **Aaron held out his arm with the rod**: Aaron executes the first three plagues.

And struck the dust of the earth, and vermin came upon man and beast; all the dust of the earth turned to lice throughout the land of Egypt: The earth (i.e., soil) itself turned into lice.

(14) **The magicians did the like with their spells to produce lice, but they could not**: Humiliating the magicians is an important step toward destroying the Egyptian ideology.

The vermin remained upon man and beast: The magicians could neither produce lice, nor protect themselves from them.

(15) **And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God!"**: The magicians acknowledge that they cannot reproduce this plague through witchcraft, which means that it comes from the Almighty.

But Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he would not heed them, as the Lord had spoken: Pharaoh no longer gives ear to the magicians, and this proves yet more detrimental to the Egyptian value system.

9.4. THE FOURTH PLAGUE: SWARMS OF INSECTS (8:16-28)

The setup:

ט׳ וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הַשְׁכֵּם בַּבֹּ֑קֶר וְהִתְיַצֵּ֥ב לִפְנֵי־פַרְעֹ֖ה הִנֵּ֣ה יוֹצֵ֑א
הַמָּ֣יְמָה וְאָמַרְתָּ֣ אֵלָ֔יו כֹּ֥ה אָמַ֖ר יְ֑הוָה שַׁלַּ֥ח עַמִּ֖י וְיַעַבְדֻֽנִי׃ יז כִּ֣י אִם־אֵינְךָ֗
מְשַׁלֵּ֤חַ אֶת־עַמִּי֙ הִנְנִ֣י מַשְׁלִ֔יחַ בְּךָ֖ וּבַעֲבָדֶ֑יךָ וּבְעַמְּךָ֙ וּבְבָתֶּ֔יךָ אֶת־
הֶעָרֹ֖ב וּמָלְאוּ֙ בָּתֵּ֣י מִצְרַ֔יִם אֶת־הֶעָרֹ֖ב וְגַ֥ם הָאֲדָמָ֖ה אֲשֶׁר־הֵ֥ם עָלֶֽיהָ׃
יח וְהִפְלֵיתִ֨י בַיּ֜וֹם הַה֗וּא אֶת־אֶ֤רֶץ גֹּשֶׁן֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר עַמִּ֔י עֹמֵ֖ד עָלֶ֑יהָ לְבִלְתִּ֤י
הֱיוֹת־שָׁם֙ עָרֹ֔ב לְמַ֥עַן תֵּדַ֖ע כִּ֣י אֲנִ֑י יְ֝הוָ֗ה בְּקֶ֥רֶב הָאָֽרֶץ׃ יט וְשַׂמְתִּ֥י פְדֻ֖ת
בֵּ֣ין עַמִּ֑י וּבֵ֣ין עַמֶּ֔ךָ לְמָחָ֥ר יִהְיֶ֖ה הָאֹ֥ת הַזֶּֽה׃

(16) **And the Lord said to Moses, "Early in the morning present yourself to Pharaoh, as he is coming out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: Let My people go that they may worship Me.**

(17) **For if you do not let My people go, I will let loose swarms of insects against you and your courtiers and your people and your houses; the houses of the Egyptians, and the very ground they stand on, shall be filled with swarms of insects.**

(18) **But on that day I will set apart the region of Goshen, where My people dwell, so that no swarms of insects shall be there, that you may know that I the Lord am in the midst of the land.**

(19) And I will make a distinction between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall come to pass.'"

The actual plague:

כ וַיַּעַשׂ יְ֭הוָה כֵּ֑ן וַיָּבֹא֩ עָרֹ֨ב כָּבֵ֜ד בֵּיתָ֗ה פַּרְעֹה֙ וּבֵ֣ית עֲבָדָ֔יו וּבְכָ֖ל־אֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרַ֑יִם תִּשָּׁחֵ֥ת הָאָ֖רֶץ מִפְּנֵ֥י הֶעָרֹֽב׃

(20) **And the Lord did so. Heavy swarms of insects invaded Pharaoh's palace and the houses of his courtiers; throughout the country of Egypt the land was ruined because of the swarms of insects.**

Pharaoh's reaction:

כא וַיִּקְרָ֤א פַרְעֹה֙ אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֣ה וְאֶֽל־אַהֲרֹ֔ן וַיֹּ֖אמֶר לְכ֑וּ זִבְח֥וּ לֵאלֹהֵיכֶ֖ם בָּאָֽרֶץ׃ כב וַיֹּ֣אמֶר מֹשֶׁ֗ה לֹ֤א נָכוֹן֙ לַֽעֲשׂ֔וֹת כִּ֥י תּוֹעֲבַ֖ת מִצְרַ֑יִם נִזְבַּ֣ח לַיהוָ֔ה אֱלֹהֵ֖ינוּ הֵ֣ן נִזְבַּ֗ח אֶת־תּוֹעֲבַ֤ת מִצְרַיִם֙ לְעֵינֵיהֶ֔ם וְלֹ֥א יִסְקְלֻֽנוּ׃ כג דֶּ֣רֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִ֗ים נֵלֵ֤ךְ בַּמִּדְבָּר֙ וְזָבַחְנוּ֙ לַיהוָ֔ה אֱלֹהֵ֖ינוּ כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר יֹאמַ֖ר אֵלֵֽינוּ׃ כד וַיֹּ֣אמֶר פַּרְעֹ֔ה אָנֹכִ֥י אֲשַׁלַּ֖ח אֶתְכֶ֑ם וּזְבַחְתֶּ֣ם לַיהוָ֔ה אֱלֹהֵיכֶ֖ם בַּמִּדְבָּ֑ר רַ֗ק הַרְחֵ֤ק לֹא־תַרְחִיקוּ֙ לָלֶ֔כֶת הַעְתִּ֖ירוּ בַּֽעֲדִֽי׃ כה וַיֹּ֣אמֶר מֹשֶׁ֗ה הִנֵּ֤ה אָנֹכִי֙ יוֹצֵ֣א מֵעִמָּ֔ךְ וְהַעְתַּרְתִּ֖י אֶל־יְ֑הוָה וְס֣ר הֶעָרֹ֗ב מִפַּרְעֹ֤ה מֵֽעֲבָדָיו֙ וּמֵֽעַמּ֔וֹ מָחָ֖ר רַ֑ק אַל־יֹסֵ֣ף פַּרְעֹ֗ה הָתֵ֤ל לְבִלְתִּי֙ שַׁלַּ֣ח אֶת־הָעָ֔ם לִזְבֹּ֖חַ לַיהוָֽה׃ כו וַיֵּצֵ֥א מֹשֶׁ֖ה מֵעִ֣ם פַּרְעֹ֑ה וַיֶּעְתַּ֖ר אֶל־יְהוָֽה׃ כז וַיַּ֣עַשׂ יְהוָ֔ה כִּדְבַ֖ר מֹשֶׁ֑ה וַיָּ֣סַר הֶעָרֹ֗ב מִפַּרְעֹה֙ מֵֽעֲבָדָ֔יו וּמֵֽעַמּ֖וֹ לֹא־נִשְׁאַ֥ר אֶחָֽד׃ כח וַיַּכְבֵּ֥ד פַּרְעֹ֖ה אֶת־לִבּ֑וֹ גַּ֥ם בַּפַּ֖עַם הַזֹּ֣את וְלֹא־שִׁלַּ֥ח אֶת־הָעָֽם׃

(21) **Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go and sacrifice to your God within the land."**

(22) **But Moses replied, "It would not be right to do this, for what we sacrifice to the Lord our God is untouchable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice that which is untouchable to the Egyptians before their very eyes, will they not stone us!**

(23) **So we must go a distance of three days into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He may command us."**

(24) **Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; but do not go very far. Plead, then, for me."**

(25) And Moses said, "When I leave your presence, I will plead with the Lord that the swarms of insects depart tomorrow from Pharaoh and his courtiers and his people; but let not Pharaoh again act deceitfully, not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."

(26) So Moses left Pharaoh's presence and pleaded with the Lord.

(27) And the Lord did as Moses asked: He removed the swarms of insects from Pharaoh, from his courtiers, and from his people; not one remained.

(28) But Pharaoh became stubborn this time also, and would not let the people go.

(16-18) **And the Lord said to Moses ... "I will let loose swarms of insects against you and your courtiers and your people and your houses ... swarms of insects ... But on that day I will set apart the region of Goshen, where My people dwell"**: The fourth through the sixth plagues comprise the second group of the ten, whose objective is to set Israel apart from Egypt. All along the Jews have been accustomed to seeing themselves as an integral part of Egyptian life, and it is difficult now for them to realize that they are not just one more subgroup within the Egyptian people, a caste of political untouchables, but a completely separate nation. The objective of these plagues was to create a sense of societal distinction among the Jews, and for the Egyptians too to acknowledge that.

(19) **And I will make a distinction between My people and your people**: Since the Jews are now scattered over all of Egypt, and not only in the land of Goshen, distinction will occur throughout the country.

(20) **And the Lord did so. Heavy swarms of insects invaded Pharaoh's palace and the houses of his courtiers; throughout the country of Egypt the land was ruined because of the swarms of insects**: This plague was significantly more difficult to bear than the previous ones.

(21) **Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go and sacrifice to your God within the land"**: Pharaoh has now begun

to relent, and is gradually acquiescing to an ever greater share of the demands.

(22) **But Moses replied, "It would not be right to do this, for what we sacrifice to the Lord our God is untouchable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice that which is untouchable to the Egyptians before their very eyes, will they not stone us!"**: The conflict between Moses and Pharaoh gives the outward appearance of a debate over religious rituals and sacrifices, not about liberating the Jews. But these topics are inextricably linked. Moses therefore says during the second series of plagues that all Jews will participate in the sacrifice – not only the men, but the women and children too – and they must also take all their livestock and property with them. Religious service is for the Jews not a magical ritual, for which a small group of priests would be sufficient, but a nationwide event that requires total participation, because its purpose is to educate the entire nation.

(23) **So we must go a distance of three days into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He may command us**: Only by distancing themselves from Egypt and feeling completely free can the Jews fully receive and accept the Divine word.

(24) **Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; but do not go very far. Plead, then, for me"**: Pharaoh is gradually becoming more amenable to making concessions. He is also increasingly aware of his own involvement in the service of the Almighty.

(25) **And Moses said, "When I leave your presence, I will plead with the Lord"**: Moses is loath even to pray in Pharaoh's presence.

That the swarms of insects depart tomorrow from Pharaoh: Once again Moses demonstrates the accuracy of the prophecy by scheduling it for the morrow.

But let not Pharaoh again act deceitfully, not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord: Moses now expresses himself more pointedly, which forces Pharaoh and all concerned to view the events differently.

(28) **But Pharaoh became stubborn this time also, and would not let the people go**: Because Pharaoh has now hardened his own heart, there is no need for the Almighty to intervene further. This demonstrates that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is happening by his own doing – God is only assisting him to that end.

9.5. THE FIFTH PLAGUE: PESTILENCE (9:1-7)

The setup:

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּ֣א אֶל־פַּרְעֹ֑ה וְדִבַּרְתָּ֣ אֵלָ֗יו כֹּה־אָמַ֤ר יְהוָה֙
אֱלֹהֵ֣י הָעִבְרִ֔ים שַׁלַּ֖ח אֶת־עַמִּ֑י וְיַעַבְדֻֽנִי׃ ב כִּֽי־אִ֣ם מָאֵ֔ן אַתָּ֖ה לְשַׁלֵּֽחַ
וְעֹדְךָ֥ מַחֲזִ֖יק בָּֽם׃ ג הִנֵּ֣ה יַד־יְהוָ֗ה הוֹיָה֙ בְּמִקְנְךָ֔ אֲשֶׁ֥ר בַּשָּׂדֶ֖ה בַּסּוּסִ֣ים
בַּחֲמֹרִ֑ים בַּגְּמַלִּ֖ים בַּבָּקָ֥ר וּבַצֹּ֛אן דֶּ֥בֶר כָּבֵ֖ד מְאֹֽד׃ ד וְהִפְלָ֣ה יְהוָ֔ה בֵּ֣ין
מִקְנֵ֣ה יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וּבֵ֥ין מִקְנֵ֖ה מִצְרָ֑יִם וְלֹא־יָמ֣וּת מִכָּל־לִבְנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל דָּבָֽר׃
ה וַיָּ֣שֶׂם יְהוָ֔ה מוֹעֵ֖ד לֵאמֹ֑ר מָחָ֣ר יַעֲשֶׂ֤ה יְהוָה֙ הַדָּבָ֣ר הַזֶּ֔ה בָּאָֽרֶץ׃

(1) **The Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go to worship Me.**

(2) **For if you refuse to let them go, and continue to hold them,**

(3) **then the hand of the Lord will strike your livestock in the fields — the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep — with a very severe pestilence.**

(4) **But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of the Egyptians, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites.**

(5) **The Lord has fixed the time: tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land.'"**

The actual plague:

ו וַיַּ֣עַשׂ יְהוָ֗ה אֶת־הַדָּבָ֤ר הַזֶּה֙ מִמָּחֳרָ֔ת וַיָּ֖מָת כָּל־מִקְנֵ֣ה מִצְרָ֑יִם וּמִמִּקְנֵ֥ה
בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל לֹא־מֵ֥ת אֶחָֽד׃

(6) **And the Lord did so the next day: all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the live-stock of the Israelites not a beast died.**

Pharaoh's reaction:

ז וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וְהִנֵּה לֹא־מֵת מִמִּקְנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד־אֶחָד וַיִּכְבַּד לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שִׁלַּח אֶת־הָעָם׃

(7) When Pharaoh inquired, he found that not a head of the livestock of Israel had died; yet Pharaoh remained stubborn, and he would not let the people go.

(4) **But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of the Egyptians, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites**: The distinction between Israel and Egypt is now evident not only with respect to the people themselves, but to their property as well.

(7) **When Pharaoh inquired, he found that not a head of the livestock of Israel had died**: Pharaoh is of course deeply troubled by the misfortunes that have beset his country. But he also truly wants to understand the underlying pattern of events, and to verify the accuracy of Moses' words.

9.6. THE SIXTH PLAGUE: BOILS (9:8-12)

The setup:

ח וַיֹּאמֶר יְ־ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן קְחוּ לָכֶם מְלֹא חָפְנֵיכֶם פֶּיחַ כִּבְשָׁן וּזְרָקוֹ מֹשֶׁה הַשָּׁמַיְמָה לְעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה׃ ט וְהָיָה לְאָבָק עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְהָיָה עַל־הָאָדָם וְעַל־הַבְּהֵמָה לִשְׁחִין פֹּרֵחַ אֲבַעְבֻּעֹת בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

(8) Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Each of you take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh.

(9) It shall become a fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and cause an inflammation breaking out in boils on man and beast throughout the land of Egypt."

The actual plague:

י וַיִּקְחוּ֙ אֶת־פִּ֣יחַ הַכִּבְשָׁ֔ן וַיַּעֲמְדוּ֖ לִפְנֵ֣י פַרְעֹ֑ה וַיִּזְרֹ֨ק אֹת֜וֹ מֹשֶׁ֗ה
הַשָּׁמָ֤יְמָה וַיְהִי֙ שְׁחִ֣ין אֲבַעְבֻּעֹ֔ת פֹּרֵ֥חַ בָּאָ֖דָם וּבַבְּהֵמָ֑ה: יא וְלֹֽא־יָכְל֣וּ
הַחַרְטֻמִּ֗ים לַעֲמֹ֤ד לִפְנֵי֙ מֹשֶׁ֔ה מִפְּנֵ֖י הַשְּׁחִ֑ין כִּֽי־הָיָ֤ה הַשְּׁחִין֙ בַּחַרְטֻמִּ֔ם
וּבְכָל־מִצְרָֽיִם:

(10) So they took soot of the kiln and appeared before Pharaoh; Moses threw it toward the sky, and it caused an inflammation breaking out in boils on man and beast.

(11) The magicians were unable to confront Moses because of the inflammation, for the inflammation afflicted the magicians as well as all the other Egyptians.

Pharaoh's reaction:

יב וַיְחַזֵּ֣ק יְ֭הוָה אֶת־לֵ֣ב פַּרְעֹ֑ה וְלֹ֣א שָׁמַ֗ע אֲלֵהֶם֙ כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר דִּבֶּ֣ר יְהוָ֔ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֖ה:

(12) But the Lord stiffened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not heed them, just as the Lord had told Moses.

(10) **So they took soot of the kiln and appeared before Pharaoh; Moses threw it toward the sky, and it caused an inflammation breaking out in boils on man and beast**: Although we read previously (9:6) that "all the livestock of the Egyptians died," we need not take that literally. It is possible, for example, that only the cattle that was out in the fields was killed, but not the animals that remained indoors.

(11) **The magicians were unable to confront Moses because of the inflammation**: Previously, the magicians failed to reproduce Aaron's results, but now they cannot even protect themselves from the ongoing calamity. This even further shatters the image of an inviolable Egypt.

For the inflammation afflicted the magicians as well as all the other Egyptians: There is no inflammation among the Jews, however. The distinction between the Jews and the Egyptians is now becoming even more pronounced.

(12) **But the Lord stiffened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not heed them, just as the Lord had told Moses**: First (8:28) "Pharaoh

became stubborn this time also," then (9:7) "Pharaoh remained stubborn," and now "the Lord stiffened the heart of Pharaoh." Throughout the earlier plagues Pharaoh had enough self-control to suppress his emotions and fears, and to remain stubborn. But by now he so lacks inner strength that God from above must "stiffen the heart of Pharaoh."

As already noted, this "stiffening" of Pharaoh's heart does not deprive him of his freedom of choice. On the contrary, the effect is that even the harshest plagues do not affect Pharaoh emotionally, nor possess him with fear. The "stiffening" restrained Pharaoh's emotional response, so as not to interfere with his adopting rational decisions (rational in Pharaoh's opinion, at least). It was therefore this stiffening of Pharaoh's heart that allowed him to act freely, and to choose without fear the path that he himself wished to tread.

9.7. THE SEVENTH PLAGUE: HAIL (9:13-35)

The setup:

יג וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הַשְׁכֵּם בַּבֹּ֑קֶר וְהִתְיַצֵּב לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹ֗ה וְאָמַרְתָּ֤
אֵלָיו֙ כֹּ֣ה־אָמַ֣ר יְ֔הוָה אֱלֹהֵ֥י הָעִבְרִ֖ים שַׁלַּ֣ח אֶת־עַמִּ֑י וַיַּעַבְדֻֽנִי׃ יד כִּ֣י |
בַפַּ֣עַם הַזֹּ֗את אֲנִ֤י שֹׁלֵ֙חַ֙ אֶת־כָּל־מַגֵּפֹתַ֔י אֶל־לִבְּךָ֖ וּבְעֲבָדֶ֑יךָ וּבְעַמֶּ֗ךָ
בַּֽעֲבוּר֙ תֵּדַ֔ע כִּ֥י אֵ֖ין כָּמֹ֑נִי בְּכָל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ טו כִּ֣י עַתָּ֗ה שָׁלַ֤חְתִּי אֶת־יָדִי֙
וָאַ֣ךְ אֹתְךָ֔ וְאֶת־עַמְּךָ֖ בַּדֶּ֑בֶר וַתִּכָּחֵ֥ד מִן־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ טז וְאוּלָ֖ם בַּֽעֲבוּר֑
זֹ֣את הֶֽעֱמַדְתִּ֔יךָ בַּֽעֲבוּר֙ הַרְאֹתְךָ֣ אֶת־כֹּחִ֔י וּלְמַ֥עַן סַפֵּ֖ר שְׁמִ֑י בְּכָל־
הָאָֽרֶץ׃ יז עֹדְךָ֣ מִסְתּוֹלֵ֔ל בְּעַמִּ֖י לְבִלְתִּ֥י שַׁלְּחָֽם׃ יח הִנְנִי֙ מַמְטִ֣יר
כָּעֵ֔ת מָח֥ר בָּרָ֖ד כָּבֵ֣ד מְאֹ֑ד אֲשֶׁ֤ר לֹֽא־הָיָה֙ כָּמֹ֣הוּ בְּמִצְרַ֔יִם לְמִן־הַיּ֖וֹם
הִוָּסְדָ֑הּ וְעַד־עָֽתָּה׃ יט וְעַתָּ֣ה שְׁלַ֔ח הָעֵז֙ אֶת־מִקְנְךָ֔ וְאֵ֥ת כָּל־אֲשֶׁ֖ר לְךָ֑
בַּשָּׂדֶ֗ה כָּל־הָאָדָ֤ם וְהַבְּהֵמָה֙ אֲשֶׁר־יִמָּצֵ֣א בַשָּׂדֶ֔ה וְלֹ֥א יֵאָסֵ֖ף הַבַּ֑יְתָה
וְיָרַ֥ד עֲלֵהֶ֖ם הַבָּרָ֑ד וָמֵ֥תוּ׃ כ הַיָּרֵא֩ אֶת־דְּבַ֨ר יְ֜הוָה מֵֽעַבְדֵ֣י פַרְעֹ֗ה הֵנִ֤יס
אֶת־עֲבָדָיו֙ וְאֶת־מִקְנֵ֔הוּ אֶל־הַבָּתִּ֖ים׃ כא וַאֲשֶׁ֣ר לֹא־שָׂ֔ם לִבּ֥וֹ אֶל־דְּבַ֖ר
יְ֑הוָה וַיַּעֲזֹ֥ב אֶת־עֲבָדָ֖יו וְאֶת־מִקְנֵ֥הוּ בַשָּׂדֶֽה׃

(13) **The Lord said to Moses, "Early in the morning present yourself to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go to worship Me.**

(14) For this time I will send all My plagues upon your person, and your courtiers, and your people, in order that you may know that there is none like Me in all the world.

(15) I could have stretched forth My hand and stricken you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been effaced from the earth.

(16) Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose: in order to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the world.

(17) Yet you continue to thwart My people, and do not let them go!

(18) This time tomorrow I will rain down a very heavy hail, such as has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.

(19) Therefore, order your livestock and everything you have in the open brought under shelter; every man and beast that is found outside, not having been brought indoors, shall perish when the hail comes down upon them!'"

(20) Those among Pharaoh's courtiers who feared the Lord's word brought their slaves and livestock indoors to safety;

(21) but those who paid no regard to the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the open.

(22) The Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm toward the sky that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, upon man and beast and all the grasses of the field in the land of Egypt."

The actual plague:

כב וַיֹּאמֶר יי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וִיהִי בָרָד בְּכָל־
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל־הָאָדָם וְעַל־הַבְּהֵמָה וְעֵל כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרָיִם: כג וַיֵּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מַטֵּהוּ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיהוָה נָתַן קֹלֹת וּבָרָד
וַתְּהַלֵּךְ אֵשׁ אַרְצָה וַיַּמְטֵר יי בָּרָד עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: כד וַיְהִי בָרָד וְאֵשׁ
מִתְלַקַּחַת בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּרָד כָּבֵד מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הָיָה כָמֹהוּ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם מֵאָז הָיְתָה לְגוֹי: כה וַיַּךְ הַבָּרָד בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֵת כָּל־
אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה מֵאָדָם וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה וְאֵת כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה הִכָּה הַבָּרָד
וְאֶת־כָּל־עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה שִׁבֵּר: כו רַק בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לֹא הָיָה בָרָד:

(22) The Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm toward the sky that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, upon man and beast and all the grasses of the field in the land of Egypt."

(23) So Moses held out his rod toward the sky, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire streamed down to the ground, as the Lord rained down hail upon the land of Egypt.

(24) The hail was very heavy — fire flashing in the midst of the hail — such as had not fallen on the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.

(25) Throughout the land of Egypt the hail struck down all that were in the open, both man and beast; the hail also struck down all the grasses of the field and shattered all the trees of the field.

(26) Only in the region of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail.

Pharaoh's reaction:

כז וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וְלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם חָטָאתִי
הַפָּעַם יְי הַצַּדִּיק וַאֲנִי וְעַמִּי הָרְשָׁעִים: כח הַעְתִּירוּ אֶל־יְי וְרַב מֵהְיֹת
קֹלֹת אֱלֹהִים וּבָרָד וַאֲשַׁלְּחָה אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא תֹסִפוּן לַעֲמֹד: כט וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו מֹשֶׁה כְּצֵאתִי אֶת־הָעִיר אֶפְרֹשׂ אֶת־כַּפַּי אֶל־יְי הַקֹּלוֹת יֶחְדָּלוּן
וְהַבָּרָד לֹא יִהְיֶה־עוֹד לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי לַיהוָה הָאָרֶץ: ל וְאַתָּה וַעֲבָדֶיךָ
יָדַעְתִּי כִּי טֶרֶם תִּירְאוּן מִפְּנֵי יְי אֱלֹהִים: לא וְהַפִּשְׁתָּה וְהַשְּׂעֹרָה נֻכָּתָה
כִּי הַשְּׂעֹרָה אָבִיב וְהַפִּשְׁתָּה גִּבְעֹל: לב וְהַחִטָּה וְהַכֻּסֶּמֶת לֹא נֻכּוּ
כִּי אֲפִילֹת הֵנָּה: לג וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה מֵעִם פַּרְעֹה אֶת־הָעִיר וַיִּפְרֹשׂ כַּפָּיו
אֶל־יְי וַיַּחְדְּלוּ הַקֹּלוֹת וְהַבָּרָד וּמָטָר לֹא־נִתַּךְ אָרְצָה: לד וַיַּרְא פַּרְעֹה
כִּי־חָדַל הַמָּטָר וְהַבָּרָד וְהַקֹּלֹת וַיֹּסֶף לַחֲטֹא וַיַּכְבֵּד לִבּוֹ הוּא וַעֲבָדָיו:
לה וַיֶּחֱזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שִׁלַּח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְי בְּיַד־
מֹשֶׁה:

(27) Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, "I stand guilty this time. The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.

(28) Plead with the Lord that there may be an end of God's thunder and of hail. I will let you go; you need stay no longer."

(29) Moses said to him, "As I go out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease and the hail will fall no more, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's.

(30) But I know that you and your courtiers do not yet fear the Lord God." —

(31) Now the flax and barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud;

(32) but the wheat and the emmer were not hurt, for they ripen late. —

(33) Leaving Pharaoh, Moses went outside the city and spread out his hands to the Lord: the thunder and the hail ceased, and no rain came pouring down upon the earth.

(34) But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he became stubborn and reverted to his guilty ways, as did his courtiers.

(35) So Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had foretold through Moses.

(13) **The Lord said to Moses**: The seventh through tenth plagues comprise the final group, which completes the set. These four plagues must impress upon all of Egypt not only that the Lord, God of Israel, is more powerful than all other forces, but that He is the Almighty. This realization must change the Egyptians' understanding of the relationship between God and nature.

Early in the morning present yourself to Pharaoh: Despite the intense conflict and rampant destruction throughout all of Egypt, Pharaoh still does not prevent Moses from "presenting himself early in the morning." This is evidence that Pharaoh operates at a high level of intellectual honesty.

And say to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go to worship Me": Each time Moses appears before Pharaoh, Pharaoh's courtiers, who are also present, later retell Moses'

words to the Egyptian people. It is therefore important for Moses to repeat this phrase before each and every plague.

(14) **For this time I will send all My plagues upon your person, and your courtiers, and your people, in order that you may know that there is none like Me in all the world**: The purpose of the plagues is not to punish, but to explain.

(15-16) **I could have stretched forth My hand and stricken you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been effaced from the earth. Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose**: in order to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the world: The essential purpose of the plagues is neither to punish Pharaoh nor to liberate the Jews from their enslavement, but to reeducate Egypt, and through it all of humanity, after enabling them to understand the Divine doctrine, as they will, thanks to the Jewish people. The plagues can be thought of as leveling the ground on which the Divine source of light for all humanity will be situated.

(17) **Yet you continue to thwart My people, and do not let them go!**: And this means that you must yourself bear the blame for the plagues.

(18) **This time tomorrow I will rain down a very heavy hail, such as has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now**: This seventh plague, the likes of which Egypt has never seen before, demonstrates the Almighty's absolute control over the natural order of the world.

(19) **Therefore, order your livestock and everything you have in the open brought under shelter; every man and beast that is found outside, not having been brought indoors, shall perish when the hail comes down upon them!' "**: Moses now turns not only to Pharaoh, but also to the Egyptians, and invites them to obey the Almighty's directives. This becomes for each individual citizen a problem of personal choice.

(20-21) **Those among Pharaoh's courtiers who feared the Lord's word brought their slaves and livestock indoors to safety; but those**

who paid no regard to the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the open: A faction is now growing among the Egyptians, whose members are now moving further and further from Pharaoh and obeying Moses instead. This is the same group that will subsequently join forces with the Jewish people and leave Egypt with them.

(24) **The hail was very heavy – fire flashing in the midst of the hail – such as had not fallen on the land of Egypt since it had become a nation**: The fire coexisted with the hail not merely alongside it and in close proximity to it (like lightning in a thunderstorm). Rather, fire and water were actually united within the interior of the hailstones. This phenomenon, which directly violates the laws of nature, had never happened before.

(25) **Throughout the land of Egypt the hail struck down all that were in the open, both man and beast; the hail also struck down all the grasses of the field and shattered all the trees of the field**: The Egyptians see firsthand that obeying Moses is the most prudent course of action.

(26) **Only in the region of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail**: The Land of Goshen once again serves the purpose of demonstrating the Jews' privileged status, not only to Pharaoh, but to all the Egyptians.

(27) **Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, "I stand guilty this time. The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong"**: Pharaoh is changing his tune – not only is he now ready to let the Jews leave, but he even confesses his guilt, and not just his own, but the guilt of all Egypt. So many Egyptians have decided during this plague to obey the Almighty, thus acknowledging Pharaoh's misdeeds, that Pharaoh himself must do likewise.

(28) **Plead with the Lord that there may be an end of God's thunder and of hail. I will let you go; you need stay no longer**: Pharaoh says that he is prepared to let the Jews leave. He will later change his position once again, but his readiness now so clearly expressed is increasingly undermining the Egyptians' faith in their own country.

(29) **Moses said to him, "As I go out of the city"**: At this point Moses is not willing to pray even in the same city where Pharaoh resides. That is, the Jews are now becoming ever further estranged psychologically from the Egyptians.

(29-30) **I shall spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease and the hail will fall no more, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's. But I know that you and your courtiers do not yet fear the Lord God**: The idea behind all the plagues is education. Moses this time (unlike similar incidents early in his career) relates calmly to Pharaoh's protestations.

(32) **But the wheat and the emmer were not hurt, for they ripen late**: That is, at that time they had not yet emerged from beneath the ground.

(34) **But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he became stubborn and reverted to his guilty ways, as did his courtiers**: The Egyptians are divided – some of them go over to the Jewish side, but the other part, whose "heart is weighed down," will not hear of making any concessions.

(35) **So Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the Lord had foretold through Moses**: Thus, the sequence of the plagues is as follows:

First, there are three plagues designed to destroy Egypt's confidence in its own stability. These three plagues are executed by Aaron, because their purpose is to serve as a contest between him and the magicians, and as the first stage of Moses' dialogue with Egypt.

The theme of the second group of plagues, the fourth through the sixth, is to sever the Jewish nation from Egypt, so that it will cease to see itself as just another ethnic minority in Egypt, and will recognize itself instead as a distinct people. This second group of plagues was intended to create a sense of national separateness among the Jews, and to influence the Egyptians likewise to acknowledge it.

With that goal achieved, the third group of plagues, the seventh through the tenth, is meant to impress upon Egypt that the Lord, God of Israel, is not just "more powerful than all other forces," but that He

is the Almighty. These final plagues alter the understanding of God's relationship with nature. At first it was shown that the God of the Jews is more powerful than the deities of Egypt's magicians. But now the Egyptians must recognize that the Almighty rules even over the most fundamental natural laws of the universe.

All of this exacerbates the internal crisis within Egyptian society itself. The Egyptian nation is now divided between those who support the Jews and those who oppose them.

WEEKLY PORTION [3]

BO

CHAPTER 10
THE TEN PLAGUES (CONCLUSION)

10.1. THE EXODUS AS VIEWED "FROM WITHIN"

The first two portions of the book of Exodus, (1) *Shemot* and (2) *Va'era*, spoke of the preparations for leaving Egypt, while the next two, (3) *Bo* and (4) *Beshalach*, will describe the Exodus as it actually occurred. At the same time, portion Bo considers the Exodus from an internal point of view (and in this sense it is "the Torah of Moses"), while *Beshalach* gives us an external perspective ("the Torah of Aaron").

The name of this portion, *Bo*, is taken from its opening words, "Then the Lord said to Moses: Go to Pharaoh." But the name also alludes to the idea that the Jewish people had to go down to Egypt in order to extract from it what would become a part of their own spiritual heritage, the Divine sparks that were contained there. Egypt, as already noted, was the most highly developed civilization of that time. The Exodus of the Jews therefore had to happen only there, at the epicenter of the world's civilizations, so that through the Jews the greatness of Egypt could become a foundation for the spiritual advancement of mankind.

The main theme of the *Bo* portion is the internal aspect of the Exodus – the Jews' awareness of themselves as a distinct people, now separated from Egypt. Among *Bo's* central themes are the change to a uniquely Jewish calendar, the Passover Seder, and the accession of a significant number of Egyptians to the Jewish Exodus. All of these – the calendar, the Passover Seder, and the process of *giyyur* (conversion to Judaism) – are fundamental concepts of Jewish identity.

The commandment to establish a calendar is the very first commandment that the Jewish people receive as a nation[1]. The calendar and holidays of every society reflect its basic value system, its "minimal catechism" that everyone is expected and assumed to know. And this is of course true of Jewish society as well. The arrangement of the Jewish *lunar-solar* calendar itself speaks of the Jewish mission in the world.

Egypt's calendar was solar. It was adopted first by the Greeks and Romans, followed by European Christian civilization. The ancient world of the east, as represented fundamentally by Babylon, originally had a lunar calendar; Islamic civilization, with its lunar calendar, is the heir to Babylon in that regard. In contrast, the Jews upon leaving Egypt received a *lunar-solar* calendar, which integrates the western and eastern features of the ancient "western" world.

The Jewish nation transitioned to its own calendar only two weeks before the Exodus: "The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you" (12:1-2). The month of Nisan had just begun, and that beginning had to be established according to the Jewish, not Egyptian, calendar. This had the immediate effect of further distancing the Jews from the Egyptian way of life. The new calendar oriented the Jewish nation not only to its freedom from Egypt, but also to realizing its uniquely universal role among the peoples of the world, by serving as the bridge between Babylon and Egypt.

Portion *Bo's* second topic is the Passover Seder. Passover celebrates the birth of the Jewish people, and sets the goal for all future Jewish life, namely: to bring humanity ever closer to the Almighty. In future times Passover and the Exodus would determine the trajectory of the world's development and epitomize the idea of progress in the worldview of all of Western civilization.

Time in idolatrous culture is cyclical: Birth, maturation, aging, dying, and new birth – all these comprise the immutable circle of life. But in Jewish culture, time is a vector that emerges when the entire world

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[1] A small number of commandments had been given earlier to the Patriarchs as individuals, but the commandment to establish a calendar is the first commandment given by God to the Jewish nation as a whole.

pursues a common goal. The Exodus from Egypt created this Jewish vector of time. The Exodus determines that the universe has a purpose, that time, rather than being cyclical, has direction. In this sense the Exodus changed not only Jewish history but the worldview of mankind as a whole. From Judaism, both Christianity and Islam inherited the vector of time, as well as the sense of purpose and meaning in history, and conveyed that sense to most of the world's population.

Finally, in the third topic of the *Bo* portion we learn that many foreigners joined the Jews upon their departure from Egypt, and became a part of the Jewish nation. This affiliation established the structure of our people for all time. The Jewish people are an open community that willingly receives new members. Any person from anywhere on earth who wishes to become a Jew can do so.

In this sense, the Jews are not a race. But, on the other hand, by no means does this imply that the Jewish people are to be considered a "congregation of proselytes" or a purely religious community. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the core of the Jewish people – proselytes join this already-existing nation. Although, according to the laws of Judaism, every boundary between those two is erased, which means that proselytes become full-fledged Jews, the ethnic core is nonetheless also preserved for all centuries to our time.

As a general rule, based on genetic research, we can say that two-thirds of the Jewish people today are descendants of the ancient Jewish nation, and one-third are those who have joined it later, or are their descendants. The Jewish people continue to retain their national identity and self-awareness, and to transmit their ancient Jewish heritage along lines of Jewish birth. But at the same time, Judaism and the Jewish nation are open to accession. This combination of tradition and openness, a hallmark of the Jewish people since their very creation, is one of their most important features.

10.2. THE PLAGUES BUILD MOMENTUM: PHARAOH'S ROLE ON THE WORLD STAGE

No person in history has undergone a program of persuasion so protracted and so intensive as Pharaoh did. But why was this necessary at all? Obviously, God could have brought the Jews out of Egypt completely against Pharaoh's wishes and without obtaining his consent. Why was Pharaoh opinion so important?

Pharaoh ruled Egypt in both the political and cultural senses: he was the leader of Egypt. In that era Egypt was the center of world civilization, and the crown of human development. Thus, the direction chosen by Egypt would determine the future path of world history, and since Pharaoh led Egypt, the future of mankind depended on him. The responsibility that Pharaoh shouldered was enormous, as was his potential for influencing the future history of mankind.

The pressure on Pharaoh builds up slowly and gradually during the process of the Exodus, so that Pharaoh will become convinced step by step of the fallacies of his position. God's objective is not to make Pharaoh obey, but to change Pharaoh's perception, and this in turn will affect the entire surrounding world.

The Exodus is not about Pharaoh's consent to emancipate the Jews; rather, it is – above all – a contest of whose history and culture will become the foundation for the further development of human civilization. Pharaoh believes that that foundation is Egypt, and Israel is secondary, but Moses takes the opposite stance.

In the upcoming, eighth plague, this dispute between Pharaoh and Moses reaches an entirely new level. Weekly portion *Va'era* ends after recounting the first seven plagues, and a new weekly portion begins: *Bo*, which recounts the three final plagues.

10.3. THE EIGHTH PLAGUE: LOCUSTS (10:1-20)

The objective:

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּ֣א אֶל־פַּרְעֹ֑ה כִּ֣י אֲנִ֗י הִכְבַּ֤דְתִּי אֶת־לִבּוֹ֙ וְאֶת־
לֵ֣ב עֲבָדָ֔יו לְמַ֥עַן שִׁתִּ֖י אֹתֹתַ֥י אֵ֑לֶּה בְּקִרְבּֽוֹ׃ ב וּלְמַ֣עַן תְּסַפֵּ֗ר בְּאָזְנֵ֤י בִנְךָ֙
וּבֶן־בִּנְךָ֔ אֵ֥ת אֲשֶׁ֖ר הִתְעַלַּ֣לְתִּי בְּמִצְרַ֑יִם וְאֶת־אֹתֹתַ֥י אֲשֶׁר־שַׂ֖מְתִּי בָ֣ם
וִֽידַעְתֶּ֥ם כִּי־אֲנִ֖י יְהוָֽה׃

(1) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers, in order that I may display these My signs among them,**

(2) **and that you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons' sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them — in order that you may know that I am the Lord."**

The setup:

ג וַיָּבֹ֣א מֹשֶׁ֔ה וְאַהֲרֹ֖ן אֶל־פַּרְעֹ֑ה וַיֹּאמְרוּ֙ אֵלָ֔יו כֹּה־אָמַ֥ר יְהוָ֖ה אֱלֹהֵ֣י
הָעִבְרִ֑ים עַד־מָתַ֣י מֵאַ֔נְתָּ לֵעָנֹ֥ת מִפָּנַ֖י שַׁלַּ֣ח עַמִּ֑י וְיַעַבְדֻֽנִי׃ ד כִּֽי אִם־
מָאֵ֣ן אַתָּ֔ה לְשַׁלֵּ֖חַ אֶת־עַמִּ֑י הִנְנִ֤י מֵבִיא֙ מָחָ֣ר אַרְבֶּ֔ה בִּגְבֻלֶֽךָ׃ ה וְכִסָּ֗ה
אֶת־עֵ֤ין הָאָ֙רֶץ֙ וְלֹ֣א יוּכַ֔ל לִרְאֹ֖ת אֶת־הָאָ֑רֶץ וְאָכַ֗ל | אֶת־יֶתֶר֙ הַפְּלֵטָ֔ה
הַנִּשְׁאֶ֖רֶת לָכֶ֑ם מִן־הַבָּ֣רָד וְאָכַל֙ אֶת־כָּל־הָעֵ֔ץ הַצֹּמֵ֥חַ לָכֶ֖ם מִן־הַשָּׂדֶֽה׃
ו וּמָלְאוּ֙ בָתֶּ֣יךָ וּבָתֵּ֔י כָּל־עֲבָדֶ֖יךָ וּבָתֵּ֣י כָל־מִצְרַ֑יִם אֲשֶׁ֣ר לֹא־רָ֗אוּ
אֲבֹתֶ֙יךָ֙ וַאֲבֹ֣ת אֲבֹתֶ֔יךָ מִיּ֥וֹם הֱיוֹתָ֖ם עַל־הָאֲדָמָ֑ה עַ֚ד הַיּ֣וֹם הַזֶּ֔ה וַיִּפֶן֙
וַיֵּצֵ֔א מֵעִ֖ם פַּרְעֹֽה׃

(3) **So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go that they may worship Me.**

(4) **For if you refuse to let My people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts on your territory.**

(5) **They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They shall devour the surviving remnant that was left to you after the hail; and they shall eat away all your trees that grow in the field.**

(6) Moreover, they shall fill your palaces and the houses of all your courtiers and of all the Egyptians — something that neither your fathers nor fathers' fathers have seen from the day they appeared on earth to this day.'" With that he turned and left Pharaoh's presence.

Pharaoh's hesitation:

ז וַיֹּאמְרוּ עֲבָדֵי פַרְעֹה אֵלָיו עַד־מָתַי יִהְיֶה זֶה לָּנוּ לְמוֹקֵשׁ שַׁלַּח
אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים וְיַעַבְדוּ אֶת־יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הֲטֶרֶם תֵּדַע כִּי אָבְדָה מִצְרָיִם:
ח וַיּוּשַׁב אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם לְכוּ עִבְדוּ
אֶת־יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִי וָמִי הַהֹלְכִים: ט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בִּנְעָרֵינוּ וּבִזְקֵנֵינוּ
נֵלֵךְ בְּבָנֵינוּ וּבְבִנֹתֵינוּ בְּצֹאנֵנוּ וּבִבְקָרֵנוּ נֵלֵךְ כִּי חַג־יְיָ לָנוּ: י וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵהֶם יְהִי כֵן יְיָ עִמָּכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁלַּח אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת־טַפְּכֶם רְאוּ כִּי
רָעָה נֶגֶד פְּנֵיכֶם: יא לֹא כֵן לְכוּ־נָא הַגְּבָרִים וְעִבְדוּ אֶת־יְיָ כִּי אֹתָהּ
אַתֶּם מְבַקְשִׁים וַיְגָרֶשׁ אֹתָם מֵאֵת פְּנֵי פַרְעֹה:

(7) Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, "How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship the Lord their God! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?"

(8) So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh and he said to them, "Go, worship the Lord your God! Who are the ones to go?"

(9) Moses replied, "We will all go, young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the Lord's festival."

(10) But he said to them, "The Lord be with you the same as I mean to let your children go with you! Clearly, you are bent on mischief.

(11) No! You menfolk go and worship the Lord, since that is what you want." And they were expelled from Pharaoh's presence.

The actual plague:

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה יָדְךָ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בָּאַרְבֶּה וְיַעַל
עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְיֹאכַל אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאָרֶץ אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁאִיר
הַבָּרָד: יג וַיֵּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מַטֵּהוּ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיהוָה נִהַג רוּחַ־

קָדִים בָּאָרֶץ כָּל־הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וְכָל־הַלַּיְלָה הַבֹּקֶר הָיָה וְרוּחַ הַקָּדִים
נָשָׂא אֶת־הָאַרְבֶּה: יד וַיַּעַל הָאַרְבֶּה עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּנַח בְּכָל
גְּבוּל מִצְרָיִם כָּבֵד מְאֹד לְפָנָיו לֹא־הָיָה כֵן אַרְבֶּה כָּמֹהוּ וְאַחֲרָיו לֹא
יִהְיֶה־כֵּן: טו וַיְכַס אֶת־עֵין כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וַתֶּחְשַׁךְ הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־כָּל־
עֵשֶׂב הָאָרֶץ וְאֵת כָּל־פְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר הוֹתִיר הַבָּרָד וְלֹא־נוֹתַר כָּל־
יֶרֶק בָּעֵץ וּבְעֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

(12) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat up all the grasses in the land, whatever the hail has left."**

(13) **So Moses held out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord drove an east wind over the land all that day and all night; and when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts.**

(14) **Locusts invaded all the land of Egypt and settled within all the territory of Egypt in a thick mass; never before had there been so many, nor will there ever be so many again.**

(15) **They hid all the land from view, and the land was darkened; and they ate up all the grasses of the field and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left, so that nothing green was left, of tree or grass of the field, in all the land of Egypt.**

Pharaoh's reaction:

טז וַיְמַהֵר פַּרְעֹה לִקְרֹא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר חָטָאתִי לַיהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלָכֶם: יז וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא חַטָּאתִי אַךְ הַפַּעַם וְהַעְתִּירוּ לַיהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְיָסֵר מֵעָלַי רַק אֶת־הַמָּוֶת הַזֶּה: יח וַיֵּצֵא מֵעִם פַּרְעֹה וַיֶּעְתַּר
אֶל־יי: יט וַיַּהֲפֹךְ יי רוּחַ־יָם חָזָק מְאֹד וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־הָאַרְבֶּה וַיִּתְקָעֵהוּ
יָמָּה סוּף לֹא נִשְׁאַר אַרְבֶּה אֶחָד בְּכָל גְּבוּל מִצְרָיִם: כ וַיְחַזֵּק יי אֶת־
לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שִׁלַּח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

(16) **Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "I stand guilty before the Lord your God and before you.**

(17) **Forgive my offense just this once, and plead with the Lord your God that He but remove this death from me."**

(18) **So he left Pharaoh's presence and pleaded with the Lord.**

(19) **The Lord caused a shift to a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and hurled them into the Sea of Reeds; not a single locust remained in all the territory of Egypt.**

(20) **But the Lord stiffened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.**

(1) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh"**: These words have become the name of this portion itself. Says the Midrash: "Divinity now resides in Pharaoh's house, and is revealed through him – through the plagues that have afflicted the Egyptians, and the punishments exacted from them. Go to Pharaoh, so that that Divinity will extend also to all of mankind."

For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers, in order that I may display these My signs among them: We have already noted that this "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart allows him to not succumb to his travails. Thus, this "hardening" does not deprive Pharaoh of his freedom of choice, but rather affords him the opportunity make his own free and independent decisions. This is necessary for realizing the purpose of the Exodus. God's objective is not victory but persuasion – to persuade Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

(2) **And that you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons' sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them — in order that you may know that I am the Lord**: In the future, the Ten Plagues that led up to the Exodus will become a foundation of Jewish self-identification, representing the Jews' direct connection to God.

(4-6) **I will bring locusts on your territory … Something that neither your fathers nor fathers' fathers have seen from the day they appeared on earth to this day**: A locust infestation of this magnitude does not occur in nature. Thus, it is not merely a rare occurrence, but a violation of the very laws of nature.

With that he turned and left Pharaoh's presence: This never happened during any of the previous plagues. It reflects the ever-widening rift between Israel and Egypt.

(7) **Pharaoh's courtiers said to him … "Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?"**: Egypt is dying not only a physical death, but also in the historical sense. It can no longer be a leading force in human history.

(8) **So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh**: Pharaoh is now showing less respect for Moses and Aaron. This is his response to the beginning of the breakdown in relations that Moses himself has initiated.

And he said to them, "Go, worship the Lord your God! Who are the ones to go?": Pharaoh backtracks and now capitulates to Moses' earlier demands.

(9) **Moses replied, "We will all go, young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the Lord's festival"**: As soon as Pharaoh is ready to let the Jews leave Egypt for offering sacrifices, Moses ups the ante and states openly that this is not just a shortterm religious event, but a total and final Exodus. But Pharaoh (and the Egyptians) are not yet ready for that, and the process of persuasion continues.

(10) **But he said to them, "The Lord be with you the same as I mean to let your children go with you! Clearly, you are bent on mischief"**: Pharaoh is outraged. It is now clear to him that staging a religious event is just an excuse, and the real Jewish goal is to bring evil upon Egypt!

(11) **No! You menfolk go and worship the Lord, since that is what you want."**: Rather than increasing your demands, you would do well simply to revert to your previous demands.

And they were expelled from Pharaoh's presence: Pharaoh has Moses and Aaron forcefully removed. He is furious, because he now sees that he had incorrectly understood the entire situation.

(15) **They hid all the land from view, and the land was darkened; and they ate up all the grasses of the field and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left, so that nothing green was left, of tree or grass of the field, in all the land of Egypt**: Egypt is now truly on the verge of death by starvation.

(16) **Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron**: Just a little earlier (v. 8), Moses and Aaron "were brought back" to Pharaoh – almost by force, but now they are respectfully asked to return. Now that the situation has become unbearable for Pharaoh, he immediately shows his respect to Moses and Aaron.

(16-17) **And said, "I stand guilty before the Lord your God and before you. Forgive my offense just this once, and plead with the Lord your God that He but remove this death from me"**: The very real prospect of death to Egypt works well to motivate Pharaoh. He not only asks to abolish the plague, but even acknowledges his moral improbity. Each subsequent plague advances Pharaoh's understanding of the world, and helps him to see and acknowledge his guilt.

(20) **But the Lord stiffened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go**: Pharaoh is frightened, but he is not yet convinced. It will be necessary to further harden Pharaoh's heart, in order to preserve his freedom of choice.

10.4. THE NINTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS (10:21-27)

The actual plague:

כא וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה יָדְךָ֣ עַל־הַשָּׁמַ֑יִם וְיִהִ֥י חֹ֖שֶׁךְ עַל־אֶ֣רֶץ
מִצְרָ֑יִם וְיָמֵ֥שׁ חֹֽשֶׁךְ׃ כב וַיֵּ֥ט מֹשֶׁ֖ה אֶת־יָד֑וֹ עַל־הַשָּׁמָ֖יִם וַיְהִ֣י חֹֽשֶׁךְ־
אֲפֵלָ֗ה בְּכָל־אֶ֤רֶץ מִצְרַ֙יִם֙ שְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת יָמִ֔ים׃ כג לֹֽא־רָא֥וּ אִ֖ישׁ אֶת־אָחִ֑יו
וְלֹֽא־קָ֣מוּ אִ֔ישׁ מִתַּחְתָּ֖יו שְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת יָמִ֑ים וּלְכָל־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל הָ֥יָה אֹ֖ור
בְּמֹושְׁבֹתָֽם׃

(21) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm toward the sky that there may be darkness upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be touched."**

(22) **Moses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days.**

(23) People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings.

Pharaoh's reaction:

כד וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת־יְיָ רַק צֹאנְכֶם
וּבְקַרְכֶם יֻצָּג גַּם־טַפְּכֶם יֵלֵךְ עִמָּכֶם: כה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה גַּם־אַתָּה תִּתֵּן
בְּיָדֵנוּ זְבָחִים וְעֹלֹת וְעָשִׂינוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ: כו וְגַם־מִקְנֵנוּ יֵלֵךְ עִמָּנוּ
לֹא תִשָּׁאֵר פַּרְסָה כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ נִקַּח לַעֲבֹד אֶת־יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַאֲנַחְנוּ לֹא־
נֵדַע מַה־נַּעֲבֹד אֶת־יְיָ עַד־בֹּאֵנוּ שָׁמָּה: כז וַיְחַזֵּק יְיָ אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא
אָבָה לְשַׁלְּחָם:

(24) Pharaoh then summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship the Lord! Only your flocks and your herds shall be left behind; even your children may go with you."

(25) But Moses said, "You yourself must provide us with sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to the Lord our God;

(26) our own livestock, too, shall go along with us — not a hoof shall remain behind: for we must select from it for the worship of the Lord our God; and we shall not know with what we are to worship the Lord until we arrive there."

(27) But the Lord stiffened Pharaoh's heart and he would not agree to let them go.

(21) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm toward the sky that there may be darkness upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be touched"**: There are no advance warnings this time, or any expectation of repentance from Pharaoh, because the educational aspect of this plague is different.

(22) **Moses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days**: A predetermined time limit is imposed on this darkness, because during this plague Pharaoh could not send for Moses, nor could Moses himself come to the palace. This plague finally sets the Jews completely apart from the Egyptians.

(23) **People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was**: It is a thick darkness that is not merely the absence of light, but a very dense, even solid fog that hinders mobility and in which any kindling of fire is impossible. Each person exists in total isolation, and can only think about himself.

After the previous storm of successive catastrophes that have struck Egypt, the Egyptians are now being given a respite, a period of forced silence. Over these three days each of them ponders his own path, and decides whether to remain with Egypt, or to side with the Jewish people.

But all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings: The sun is finally setting on Egypt. The light is now with Israel.

(24) **Pharaoh then summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship the Lord! Only your flocks and your herds shall be left behind; even your children may go with you"**: This is the first time that Pharaoh calls Moses and speaks to him even after the plague itself has ended, and not out of immediate need to end the disaster. Pharaoh assents almost completely to Moses' demands. He tries only to detain the Jews' livestock, hoping that this will force the people to return.

(25) **But Moses said, "You yourself must provide us with sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to the Lord our God"**: Pharaoh's reeducation will be so complete that he too will want to participate in worshipping the Almighty. This cannot fail to impress the Egyptians and the Jews alike.

(26) **Our own livestock, too, shall go along with us — not a hoof shall remain behind: for we must select from it for the worship of the Lord our God; and we shall not know with what we are to worship the Lord until we arrive there**: In putting forth his demand for the Jews' absolute departure, Moses nonetheless, for Pharaoh's convenience and to allow him "to save face," cloaks the demand in religious terms.

(27) **But the Lord stiffened Pharaoh's heart and he would not agree to let them go**: The unbearable stress of the situation now makes it difficult for Pharaoh to offer any resistance. The Almighty therefore hardens his heart so that Pharaoh can still make his decision freely, and not in the heat of passion.

10.5. MOSES' FINAL AUDIENCE WITH PHARAOH (10:28 – 11:10)

The opening exchange:

כח וַיֹּאמֶר־לוֹ פַּרְעֹה לֵךְ מֵעָלַי הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ אַל־תֹּסֶף רְאוֹת פָּנַי כִּי בְּיוֹם
רְאֹתְךָ פָנַי תָּמוּת: כט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן דִּבַּרְתָּ לֹא־אֹסִף עוֹד רְאוֹת
פָּנֶיךָ:

(28) Pharaoh said to him, "Be gone from me! Take care not to see me again, for the moment you look upon my face you shall die."

(29) And Moses replied, "You have spoken rightly. I shall not see your face again!"

God addresses Moses:

א וַיֹּאמֶר יי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עוֹד נֶגַע אֶחָד אָבִיא עַל־פַּרְעֹה וְעַל־מִצְרַיִם
אַחֲרֵי־כֵן יְשַׁלַּח אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה כְּשַׁלְּחוֹ כָּלָה גָּרֵשׁ יְגָרֵשׁ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה:
ב דַּבֶּר־נָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וְיִשְׁאֲלוּ אִישׁ | מֵאֵת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִשָּׁה מֵאֵת
רְעוּתָהּ כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי זָהָב: ג וַיִּתֶּן יי אֶת־חֵן הָעָם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרָיִם גַּם
| הָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה גָּדוֹל מְאֹד בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּעֵינֵי עַבְדֵי־פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי
הָעָם:

(11:1) And the Lord said to Moses, "I will bring but one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that he shall let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you out of here one and all.

(2) Tell the people to borrow, each man from his neighbor and each woman from hers, objects of silver and gold."

(3) The Lord disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people. Moreover, Moses himself was much esteemed in the land of Egypt, among Pharaoh's courtiers and among the people.

Moses further addresses Pharaoh:

ד וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֹּה אָמַר יי כַּחֲצֹת הַלַּיְלָה אֲנִי יוֹצֵא בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרָיִם:
ה וּמֵת כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכֹר פַּרְעֹה הַיֹּשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאוֹ עַד
בְּכֹר הַשִּׁפְחָה אֲשֶׁר אַחַר הָרֵחָיִם וְכָל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: ו וְהָיְתָה צְעָקָה
גְדֹלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר כָּמֹהוּ לֹא נִהְיָתָה וְכָמֹהוּ לֹא תֹסִף:

ז וּלְכֹ֖ל | בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל לֹ֣א יֶחֱרַ֗ץ־כֶּ֤לֶב לְשֹׁנוֹ֙ לְמֵאִ֣ישׁ וְעַד־בְּהֵמָ֔ה לְמַ֥עַן
תֵּדְעוּן֙ אֲשֶׁר֙ יַפְלֶ֣ה יְ֔הוָה בֵּ֥ין מִצְרַ֖יִם וּבֵ֥ין יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ ח וְיָרְד֣וּ כָל־עֲבָדֶ֣יךָ
אֵ֗לֶּה אֵלַ֤י וְהִשְׁתַּחֲווּ־לִי֙ לֵאמֹ֔ר צֵ֥א אַתָּ֖ה וְכָל־הָעָ֑ם אֲשֶׁ֥ר בְּרַגְלֶ֖יךָ
וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵ֥ן אֵצֵ֖א וַיֵּצֵ֣א מֵעִם־פַּרְעֹ֔ה בֶּ֥חָרִי־אָֽף׃

(4) **Moses said, "Thus says the Lord: Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians,**

(5) **and every first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the first-born of the cattle.**

(6) **And there shall be a loud cry in all the land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again;**

(7) **but not a dog shall snarl at any of the Israelites, at man or beast – in order that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.**

(8) **Then all these courtiers of yours shall come down to me and bow low to me, saying, 'Depart, you and all the people who follow you!' After that I will depart." And he left Pharaoh's presence in hot anger.**

The end result of the first nine plagues:

ט וַיֹּ֣אמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֑ה לֹֽא־יִשְׁמַ֥ע אֲלֵיכֶ֖ם פַּרְעֹ֑ה לְמַ֥עַן רְבוֹת֖ מוֹפְתַ֥י
בְּאֶֽרֶץ מִצְרָֽיִם׃ י וּמֹשֶׁ֣ה וְאַהֲרֹ֗ן עָשׂוּ֙ אֶת־כָּל־הַמֹּפְתִ֣ים הָאֵ֔לֶּה לִפְנֵ֥י
פַרְעֹ֖ה וַיְחַזֵּ֣ק יְ֭הוָה אֶת־לֵ֣ב פַּרְעֹ֑ה וְלֹֽא־שִׁלַּ֥ח אֶת־בְּנֵ֖י יִשְׂרָאֵ֥ל מֵאַרְצֹֽו׃

(9) **Now the Lord had said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not heed you, in order that My marvels may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."**

(10) **Moses and Aaron had performed all these marvels before Pharaoh, but the Lord had stiffened the heart of Pharaoh so that he would not let the Israelites go from his land.**

(28) **Pharaoh said to him, "Be gone from me! Take care not to see me again, for the moment you look upon my face you shall die"**: In the literal sense Pharaoh no longer wants to see Moses, because he is unable to withstand any additional pressure.

But there is also a different underlying meaning here. Moses' "looking upon Pharaoh's face," can be understood as a reference to the assimilation of elements of Egyptian culture by the Jews, in order to carry those elements out of Egypt, and later to integrate them properly into their future civilization. The meaning of Pharaoh's words, "for the moment you (i.e., the Jews) look upon my face you shall die" is that this process is now complete, and any further absorption of Egyptian culture by the Jews can only prove harmful to them. (Jacob and his family faced an analogous situation at the end of their twenty-year stay with Laban). It is this moment that precisely determines the need for the Jews, for their own internal well-being, to leave Egypt immediately.

(29) **And Moses replied, "You have spoken rightly. I shall not see your face again!"**: Moses acknowledges that the Jews have already completely absorbed any and all sparks of holiness that they should take with them from Egypt. And that, furthermore, any Egyptians who wished to join Israel have already done so. Thus, there is no need for any further meetings between Israel and Egypt.

(1) **And the Lord said to Moses, "I will bring but one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that he shall let you go from here**: Moses has not yet left Pharaoh's presence (which happens only in v. 8), but God interrupts Moses' conversation with Pharaoh in order to correct his position ("Indeed, when he lets you go, he will *drive you out…*").

Moreover, Moses must inform Pharaoh of the impending final plague. But since Moses can never see Pharaoh again once he leaves this last meeting, he must receive the prophecy of the last plague during this same conversation with Pharaoh that is already in progress. Thus, this is the first (and only) time that Moses receives a prophecy right there in Pharaoh's palace.

Indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you out of here one and all: Egypt will not only allow the Jews to go, but will actually expel them. The plague of the first-born will radically alter the attitude of Egyptian society toward the Jews.

(2) **Tell the people to borrow … objects of silver and gold**: Although the Jews have already learned a great deal from the Egyptians, and the migration of certain elements of the Egyptian population to the Jewish side has already been completed internally, this does not mean

that the release of sparks from Egypt is already complete. God stresses that the Jews must also take with them "sparks" of a different type – gold and silver – as they leave Egypt.

(3) **The Lord disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people**: The transfer of a substantial portion of Egypt's gold and silver to the Jews was not based on ordinary relations between the two peoples, but was the result of a special, ad hoc decision by the Almighty.

Moreover, Moses himself was much esteemed in the land of Egypt: Due to Moses' authority over the forces of nature in bringing the plagues, he has achieved prominence among the Egyptians, which greatly facilitates obtaining their gold and silver. Moses' "esteemed" position also motivated many Egyptians to join the departing Jews. On the other hand, since these people deified Moses as a personality, it was they who, during his extended absence (and assumed disappearance), demanded a replacement for him – the golden calf. And that is why God tells Moses, "Your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely" (32: 7).

The Egyptian wealth that the Jews brought out of Egypt was later subjected to "analysis and separation." A part of the Egyptian gold was used to create the golden calf (later destroyed by being burnt and ground to powder, 32:20), while the remaining part was needed to build the Tabernacle, the "portable Temple." This division of outcomes for the Egyptian gold likewise represents the proper Jewish attitude toward the spiritual wealth that the Jews brought with them from the Diaspora to the Land of Israel. A part of it was associated with idolatry and had to be destroyed, while the remaining part was used to build the Temple.

(4) **Moses said, "Thus says the Lord"**: When God is finished speaking to Moses, Moses returns to his conversation with Pharaoh, and informs him what he should expect in the near future, and how things will further develop.

Thus says the Lord: "Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians": This last plague, unlike the previous ones, is executed not by an angel, but by none other than the Almighty himself. This was the first time ever that an entire civilization *en masse* (i.e., Egypt) was deemed worthy of witnessing an historic Divine revelation. But because of Egypt's depraved moral condition, this revelation became a destructive force.

(5) **And every first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the first-born of the cattle**: God had mentioned the plague of the death of the firstborns at the very beginning of His first dialogue with Moses. "I have said to you, 'Let My son go, that he may worship Me,' yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your first-born son.' " (4:23). This was significant, because this final plague represents not only the death of certain individuals, the firstborn of each Egyptian family, but the death of Egypt itself as the firstborn – Egypt's fall from grace as the dominant world power. But the full extent of the impending devastation – total annihilation of all firstborns – it is only now becoming clear.

Rabbi A. I. Kook notes that Jews are here undergoing a process of liberation from the natural order, and this process happens in two stages.

The first stage is the raising of the Jewish firstborns over their Egyptian counterparts, by virtue of the plague of the death of the Egyptian firstborns, and the commandment that the Jews must redeem their firstborns (13:2,12).

The second stage is achieved when the Levites are replaced by the Jewish firstborns for performing the Temple service[1].

These two stages correspond to *Tohorah* (purification), and *Kedushah* (holiness), respectively. *Tohorah* takes place through the redemption of the firstborns, which purifies the natural order from the folly of Egyptian conceptions. And *Kedushah*, the transition to Jewish holiness specifically, is achieved by replacing the firstborns with the Levites. (All cultures recognize the special status of firstborns, but Levites exist only among the people of Israel).

Every first-born in the land of Egypt: This does not necessarily mean that literally every firstborn died. The Torah is describing here only the "overall situation" (just as we need not understand "all the livestock of the Egyptians died" in the plague of the pestilence [9:6] to mean that all livestock perished without exception). In particular, tradition relates that although Pharaoh himself was also a firstborn, he was not affected by this tenth plague, because it was God's plan for Pharaoh to

[1] This happened after the incident of the golden calf.

chase down the Jews and die in the Red Sea. And among those Egyptians who had already decided to join Israel, it would seem that their first-borns too remained alive, and left Egypt with Israel the next morning.

From the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the first-born of the cattle: Not only Pharaoh and his entourage, but the entire Egyptian nation was guilty of oppressing the Jews. The punishment therefore falls not only on the guilty. It is a catastrophe of widespread destruction and intimidation.

(8) **And he left Pharaoh's presence in hot anger**: Although the Torah does not tell us the actual reason for Moses' anger, we could suggest the following.

Moses, an Egyptian prince in his upbringing, still has some sympathy for Egypt as the center of world civilization. At the beginning of his conversation with Pharaoh, perhaps Moses still believed that the plagues had already ended, that the Jews had by now absorbed all the "sparks" they needed to take from Egypt, and they could now leave Egypt without further ado. But now it turns out that there will be yet another plague, a plague far more severe than any that preceded it.

Although God had already informed Moses that there would be one more plague (11:1), it is possible that Moses understood that only in the general sense, and he is now shocked and even enraged when he learns of the full extent of the impending catastrophe.

But it is also possible that Moses had been hoping for further dialogue with Pharaoh, in the belief that he could still persuade Pharaoh to mend his ways. But now that Pharaoh has categorically rejected the possibility of any further dialogue, Moses understands that the situation cannot be resolved peaceably, and that catastrophic death and destruction cannot be avoided. This is why Moses leaves Pharaoh's presence "in hot anger."

(9) **Now the Lord had said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not heed you, in order that My marvels may be multiplied in the land of Egypt"**: The multitude of plagues is necessary in order to reeducate both the Egyptians and the Jews. The Ten Plagues shook the very foundations of Egyptian civilization, its self-confidence and complacency, and opened the path for humanity to receive the Divine Message.

CHAPTER 11

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CALENDAR AND PESACH

11.1. THE COMMANDMENT TO ESTABLISH A CALENDAR (12:1-2)

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֠הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹ֨ן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַ֜יִם לֵּאמֹ֗ר: ב הַחֹ֤דֶשׁ הַזֶּה֙
לָכֶ֔ם רֹ֖אשׁ חֳדָשִׁ֑ים רִאשׁ֥וֹן הוּא֙ לָכֶ֔ם לְחָדְשֵׁ֖י הַשָּׁנָֽה׃

(1) **The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt:**

(2) **This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you.**

(1) **The Lord said**: God addresses Moses and Aaron on the first day of the month of Nisan, two weeks before the Exodus.

In every society the calendar and its system of holidays create a shared memory and a set of common values. They are thus a highly essential element of communal identity. Therefore, the very first commandments that the Jewish people receive as a nation are the commandments to establish a calendar and to celebrate Passover.

The shift from the Egyptian calendar to a new, Jewish one completes the Jews' transformation to a people entirely distinct from Egypt, and they can now see themselves as an entirely separate and independent people.

To Moses and Aaron: This revelation is addressed to Moses and Aaron together, because the new calendar is not established by fiat from

Above, but by mutual consent of God and the Jewish nation together. Moses and Aaron thus appear here as representatives of God and the people, respectively.

Every month God arranges for a new moon to occur, and the people decide (that is, the Sanhedrin on behalf of the people determines) on which day each new month begins, and in which years it is necessary to intercalate an additional, thirteenth month.

In the land of Egypt: The giving of the Torah and its commandments begins not at Sinai, but in Egypt, at the onset of the Exodus.

(2) **This month**: The word *zeh*, which means "this" (or "such"), always indicates something that is clearly evident and visible. Here too, it refers to the appearance of the thin crescent of the new moon that is visible on the first evening following each monthly lunation.

For you: Establishing the months of the calendar will to some extent be entrusted to you, the Sanhedrin, who are empowered to adjust the day on which each new month begins. The Jewish months (and thus, the festivals) are very different in this respect from the Sabbath and its observance, which are determined simply by an endless cycle of seven-day intervals that never depends on any human decision, proclamation, or action.

The beginning of the months: The months are determined by the moon. A new month begins when the crescent of the new moon first becomes visible, i.e., shortly after lunation[1].

It shall be the first of the months of the year for you: The Jewish year begins with Nisan, the month in which the Jews left Egypt, which occurs near the beginning of spring. Thus, the Jewish calendar shifts the beginning of the year from autumn, as was then customary in the entire Middle East, to springtime. This shift reflects a decidedly optimistic approach to life and to the world – the sense of a new beginning, the opening of a new path for humanity.

Of the months of the year: Jewish tradition understands "months of the year" (emphasis on "year") to mean that the cycle of the months

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[1] More precisely: After the Sanhedrin acknowledges having received reliable testimony that the lunation has occurred.

must always be kept aligned with the seasons. That is, although the months are determined by the moon, the annual solar cycle must also be observed,[1] such that the year always begins in the spring,[2] as determined by the sun.

Thus, the calendar that the Jews received before the Exodus differed in two essential points from the calendars of the surrounding nations: It is lunar-solar, and its years always begin in the spring. The lunar-solar structure of the Jewish calendar reflects the Jewish emphasis on unifying Egyptian and Babylonian spiritual values. And having the year always begin in springtime demonstrates the optimistic nature of the Jewish worldview.

11.2. THE COMMANDMENT TO SLAUGHTER AND EAT THE PASCHAL LAMB (12:3-13)

ג דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־כָּל־עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בֶּעָשֹׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וְיִקְחוּ לָהֶם
אִישׁ שֶׂה לְבֵית־אָבֹת שֶׂה לַבָּיִת: ד וְאִם־יִמְעַט הַבַּיִת מֵהְיוֹת מִשֶּׂה
וְלָקַח הוּא וּשְׁכֵנוֹ הַקָּרֹב אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ בְּמִכְסַת נְפָשֹׁת אִישׁ לְפִי אָכְלוֹ
תָּכְסוּ עַל־הַשֶּׂה: ה שֶׂה תָּמִים זָכָר בֶּן־שָׁנָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם מִן־הַכְּבָשִׂים
וּמִן־הָעִזִּים תִּקָּחוּ: ו וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת עַד אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם
לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וְשָׁחֲטוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל קְהַל עֲדַת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּין הָעַרְבָּיִם: ז

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1 The Jewish calendar thus differs significantly from a purely lunar calendar – the Islamic calen-dar, for example. A "year" in a purely lunar calendar consists, simply and invariably, of twelve lunar months. And because such a "year" is approximately 11 days shorter than a true solar year, and has no connection whatsoever with actual solar cycles, the new year in such a purely lunar calendar can begin at any time during any of the four seasons.

2 A year in the calendar of Tanakh always begins in springtime, and all chronology is either calculated from the year of the Exodus, or locally according to the years of tenure of the then reigning king, which are likewise numbered from Nisan (Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 1:1). The transition from that system to the system of Jewish chronology in use today occurred at the end of the Talmudic period. Under the current system, Jewish chronology numbers its years from the Creation, and, accordingly, the count of Jewish years increases by one with each passing Rosh Hashanah, which is always observed in the autumn.

וְלָקְחוּ מִן־הַדָּם וְנָתְנוּ עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזֹת וְעַל־הַמַּשְׁקוֹף עַל הַבָּתִּים
אֲשֶׁר־יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם: ח וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי־אֵשׁ
וּמַצּוֹת עַל־מְרֹרִים יֹאכְלֵהוּ: ט אַל־תֹּאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ נָא וּבָשֵׁל מְבֻשָּׁל
בַּמָּיִם כִּי אִם־צְלִי־אֵשׁ רֹאשׁוֹ עַל־כְּרָעָיו וְעַל־קִרְבּוֹ: י וְלֹא־תוֹתִירוּ
מִמֶּנּוּ עַד־בֹּקֶר וְהַנּוֹתָר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד־בֹּקֶר בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרֹפוּ: יא וְכָכָה תֹּאכְלוּ
אֹתוֹ מָתְנֵיכֶם חֲגֻרִים נַעֲלֵיכֶם בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם וּמַקֵּלְכֶם בְּיָדְכֶם וַאֲכַלְתֶּם
אֹתוֹ בְּחִפָּזוֹן פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה: יב וְעָבַרְתִּי בְאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם בַּלַּיְלָה
הַזֶּה וְהִכִּיתִי כָל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־אֱלֹהֵי
מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי יְי: יג וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם לְאֹת עַל הַבָּתִּים
אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם שָׁם וְרָאִיתִי אֶת־הַדָּם וּפָסַחְתִּי עֲלֵכֶם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה בָכֶם נֶגֶף
לְמַשְׁחִית בְּהַכֹּתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

(3) **Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.**

(4) **But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat.**

(5) **Your lamb shall be without blemish, a yearling male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.**

(6) **You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight.**

(7) **They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it.**

(8) **They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with un-leavened bread and with bitter herbs.**

(9) **Do not eat any of it raw, or cooked in any way with water, but roasted — head, legs, and entrails — over the fire.**

(10) **You shall not leave any of it over until morning; if any of it is left until morning, you shall burn it.**

(11) This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly: it is a passover offering to the Lord.

(12) For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I the Lord.

(13) And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

(3) **Speak to the whole community of Israel and say**: So long as the plagues were underway Moses did not address himself to the Jews. It was a period of internal transformation, when the Jews gradually came to see themselves as a distinct nation. But now the time has come to translate national self-awareness into action.

(3-6) **On the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household … You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month**: Keeping the lamb at home for four days was an important aspect of the Jews' education. That lamb was a deity to the Egyptians, who could not bear the thought that the Jews were going to slaughter the lamb and eat it. Such defiant indifference demonstrated openly that the Jews had no fear whatsoever of Egyptian gods.

Guarding the lamb for four days was only a one-time requirement for the very first Passover observance at the Exodus itself. It did not apply to Passover observances in any later time.

A lamb to a household: The bedrock of society is the family.

(4) **But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor**: Uniting neighboring families is important for creating a sense of national solidarity.

(5) **Your lamb shall be without blemish**: The lamb must have no imperfections or deformities.

Without blemish a yearling male: There is symbolism in these three aspects of the Passover sacrifice. "Without blemish" represents unity, "a yearling" is symbolic of concentration or compression, and "male" – of independence.

A lamb from the sheep or from the goats: Hebrew *seh* is a general term for "a young animal of smaller horned livestock," i.e., a sheep or a goat. In this commentary we follow the accepted translation, "lamb."

(6) **You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month**: That is, until the eve of the full moon, which occurs on the fifteenth of the lunar month. The moon, which symbolizes Israel, appears then in its full radiance. (In Jewish tradition the Moon is symbolic of Israel, because, like the moon, which only reflects the light of the sun, so do the people of Israel illuminate the world not with their own light, but with the light that they receive from God).

And all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight: Literally, "between the two evenings," i.e., between the two temporal boundaries that delineate the last part of the day: noon and sunset. The Passover lamb was to be slaughtered sometime during the interval between those two.

(7) **They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it**: Thus the Jews' declare that they are an independent nation that holds itself distinct from the Egyptians.

In later generations, the blood of the Passover sacrifice (and other sacrifices generally) was sprinkled upon the altar. Each Jewish house here functions as a Temple. The Jewish practice of affixing a *Mezuzah* to each doorpost, as required by the Torah (Deut. 6:9, 11:20), is, *inter alia*, a remembrance of the doorposts ("*mezuzot*") that featured prominently here in the Exodus story.

The Midrash adds that at that time (two weeks before the Exodus) the Jews also received the commandment of circumcision, because the uncircumcised are forbidden to eat the Passover sacrifice (see 13.3, commentary on v. 12:48). Thus, the blood on the doorposts is also associated with the blood of circumcision.

(8) **With unleavened bread**: Later we will learn that the obligation to eat matzah (unleavened bread) is connected with the swiftness of the Exodus. The Exodus happened so quickly and suddenly that the dough that had been prepared the day before to rise had no time to ferment (12:39). But this commandment was given even before the Exodus oc-

curred, which implies that the historical justification of matzah – that the dough did not have time to ferment – was all part of the original Divine plan, and not just an accident of the Exodus story.

With unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it: Matzah and bitter herbs are the symbols of freedom and slavery, respectively. The commandment to eat them together symbolizes acceptance of the unity of the Creator, Who is the author of both freedom and slavery.

(9) **Do not eat any of it raw, or cooked in any way with water, but roasted – head, legs, and entrails – over the fire**: When meat is cooked in water, it falls apart, but when roasted, it becomes more concentrated. These laws concerning the preparation of the Passover sacrifice, with its "head, legs, and entrails," further emphasize unity and concentration.

(10) **You shall not leave any of it over until morning; if any of it is left until morning, you shall burn it**: Here too we see in the Passover Seder the emphasis on the theme of concentration. First in concentration of time: "You shall not leave any of it over until morning," and later (v. 22) in concentration of place: "None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning"

(11) **This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand**: This demonstrates Israel's readiness for the Exodus, which must happen quickly and without delay.

And you shall eat it hurriedly: Haste is an essential theme of the Exodus, emphasizing that the entire Exodus is miraculous in nature. Natural processes need time for both their preparation and implementation, but miracles require neither. The haste of the Exodus underscores this point.

It is a passover offering to the Lord: In the Hebrew this is, simply, *Pesach hu la-Shem*, "It is a Passover for the Lord." The word "offering" (i.e., sacrifice) is implied.

As the Torah itself explains below (v. 27), when the Lord smote the Egyptians, He "passed over" – *pasach* – the Jewish houses, leaving their inhabitants unharmed. Hence the Hebrew word *Pesach*, "Passover," a noun derived from the verb *pasach*.

(12) **For that night I will go through the land of Egypt**: We noted earlier that the Exodus has the character of direct Divine intervention.

God directly intervened in history to perform the Exodus Himself, rather than having it done through angels, or other agents at His disposal. This demonstrates that the Exodus transcended the very the laws of nature. Angels must act within the confines of natural law, but direct Divine intervention by the Almighty Himself respects no such limitation.

And strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt … mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt: The effect of the plague of the firstborn was to defeat the Egyptian deities. Thus, with this plague Israel is finally and completely liberated from subjugation to Egypt and its gods.

(13) **And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you**: "A sign for *you*" – that is, for the Jews themselves, and not for God. In order to be saved, the Children of Israel had to acknowledge their Jewishness, their unique connection with God.

When I see the blood, I will pass over you: The blood smeared on the doorpost demonstrates that the house is a Jewish house, and its inhabitants identify with the Jewish people.

11.3. "SEVEN DAYS YOU SHALL EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD" (12:14-20)

יד וְהָיָה֩ הַיּ֨וֹם הַזֶּ֜ה לָכֶ֗ם לְזִכָּר֤וֹן וְחַגֹּתֶם֙ אֹת֣וֹ חַ֔ג לַיהוָ֖ה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶ֑ם
חֻקַּ֥ת עוֹלָ֖ם תְּחָגֻּֽהוּ׃ טו שִׁבְעַ֣ת יָמִ֗ים מַצּ֤וֹת תֹּאכֵלוּ֙ אַ֣ךְ בַּיּ֔וֹם הָרִאשׁ֖וֹן
תַּשְׁבִּיתוּ֣ שְׂאֹ֑ר מִבָּתֵּיכֶ֗ם כִּ֤י | כָל־אֹכֵ֙ל֙ חָמֵ֔ץ וְנִכְרְתָ֥ה הַנֶּ֖פֶשׁ הַהִוא֑
מִיִּשְׂרָאֵ֗ל מִיּ֤וֹם הָרִאשׁ֙וֹן֙ עַד־יֹ֣ום הַשְּׁבִיעִ֔י׃ טז וּבַיָּ֣וֹם הָרִאשׁ֔וֹן מִקְרָא־
קֹ֖דֶשׁ וּבַיּ֣וֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִ֑י מִקְרָא־קֹ֣דֶשׁ יִהְיֶ֣ה לָכֶ֗ם כָּל־מְלָאכָ֤ה לֹא־יֵעָשֶׂ֙ה
בָּהֶ֔ם אַ֚ךְ אֲשֶׁ֣ר יֵאָכֵ֔ל לְכָל־נֶ֖פֶשׁ הִ֣וא לְבַדּ֑וֹ יֵעָשֶׂ֥ה לָכֶֽם׃ יז וּשְׁמַרְתֶּ֣ם
אֶת־הַמַּצּ֔וֹת כִּ֣י בְּעֶ֔צֶם הַיּ֖וֹם הַזֶּ֑ה הוֹצֵ֣אתִי אֶת־צִבְאֹ֣תֵיכֶ֗ם מֵאֶ֤רֶץ
מִצְרַיִם֙ וּשְׁמַרְתֶּ֣ם אֶת־הַיּ֔וֹם הַזֶּ֥ה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶ֖ם חֻקַּ֥ת עוֹלָֽם׃ יח בָּרִאשֹׁ֣ן
בְּאַרְבָּעָ֣ה עָשָׂ֗ר יֹ֤ום לַחֹדֶשׁ֙ בָּעֶ֔רֶב תֹּאכְלֻ֣ו מַצֹּ֔ת עַ֚ד יֹ֣ום הָאֶחָ֔ד
וְעֶשְׂרִ֖ים לַחֹ֑דֶשׁ בָּעָֽרֶב׃ יט שִׁבְעַ֣ת יָמִ֔ים שְׂאֹ֥ר לֹ֖א יִמָּצֵ֣א בְּבָתֵּיכֶ֑ם כִּ֤י |
כָל־אֹכֵ֙ל מַחְמֶ֔צֶת וְנִכְרְתָ֥ה הַנֶּ֖פֶשׁ הַהִוא֑ מֵעֲדַ֤ת יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ בַּגֵּ֔ר וּבְאֶזְרַ֖ח
הָאָֽרֶץ׃ כ כָּל־מַחְמֶ֣צֶת לֹ֣א תֹאכֵ֔לוּ בְּכֹ֥ל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶ֖ם תֹּאכְלֻ֥ו מַצּֽוֹת׃

(14) **This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time.**

(15) **Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the very first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day to the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.**

(16) **You shall celebrate a sacred occasion on the first day, and a sacred occasion on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them; only what every person is to eat, that alone may be prepared for you.**

(17) **You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day throughout the ages as an institution for all time.**

(18) **In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat un-leavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.**

(19) **No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days. For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country.**

(20) **You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.**

(14) **This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord throughout the ages**: Here the text transitions from the specific requirements of "the Egyptian Passover" – taking the lamb in advance, smearing the lintel with blood, girding the loins, etc. – to a description of how "Passover for the generations" is to be observed.

You shall celebrate it as an institution for all time: Vivid narratives are a prerequisite for creating an enduring national consciousness. The Exodus would become one of many such stories in the future, and to that end, the plagues had to be colorful and develop gradually. The Passover festivities are unusually dramatic, and the Exodus itself was "hurried."

(15) **Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread**: The Passover celebration, which begins with sacrificing of the Paschal lamb on the eve of the holiday, and consuming it on the first night, then continues with eating matzah all seven days. Because matzah is eaten along with the Passover sacrifice (v. 8), continuing to eat matzah throughout all of Passover further creates an "aftertaste" to that sacrifice.

Whoever eats leavened bread – that person shall be cut off from Israel: Not only in the sense that the Almighty will cut him off from his people, for he is himself the cause of that excision as well. The Exodus establishes the purpose and meaning of the Jewish people's existence. A Jew who eats leaven on Passover denies this purpose and meaning, and therefore ceases to be part of the Jewish nation, and is exterminated from its midst.

(16) **You shall celebrate a sacred occasion on the first day, and a sacred occasion on the seventh day**: As it later turns out, the observance of the first day of Passover as a "sacred occasion" is a remembrance of the Exodus itself, while the last (seventh) day recalls the crossing of the Red Sea, which, according to tradition, occurred on the seventh day following the Exodus. But the Passover laws of this passage establish these "sacred occasions" in advance. That is, events as they will eventually develop are foreseen by the Torah even before they actually occur.

No work at all shall be done on them: To this extent, the Jewish festivals are like the *Shabbat* (Sabbath) that the Jews observe each and every Saturday.

Only what every person is to eat, that alone may be prepared for you: But the laws of the Jewish festivals are more lenient than those of *Shabbat*, in that it is permitted to cook on the festivals. There are two main reasons for this leniency:

- While the central theme of **Shabbat** is rest, the idea of the festivals is different – they are meant to afford enjoyment and pleasure. Tasty, freshly prepared food is important for achieving that.

- *Shabbat* commemorates the Creation (Gen. 2:3, Exod. 20:11, 31:17), in which humans did not participate, whereas Passover and the other festivals commemorate the Exodus and other

events in Jewish history, in which the Jewish people were directly involved. The observance of *Shabbat* therefore demands greater passivity, while the festivals allow, and indeed require, a certain level of activity.

(19) **No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days. For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country**: One of Egyptian civilization's outstanding achievements was the invention of leavened bread, which made it possible to create reserves of food for long-term storage[1]. Upon leaving Egypt, the Jewish nation declares a clean break with the civilization that gave rise to it, but at the same time, Israel inherits Egypt's achievements. The abstention from leavened bread, which demonstrates Jewish independence from Egyptian civilization, therefore lasts only one week, while during the rest of the year Israel may benefit from Egypt's achievements.

11.4. THE PASSOVER SACRIFICE, AND THE RETELLING OF THE PASSOVER STORY TO FOR THE GENERATIONS (12:21-28)

כא וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְכָל־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מָשְׁכוּ וּקְחוּ לָכֶם
צֹאן לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתֵיכֶם וְשַׁחֲטוּ הַפָּסַח: כב וּלְקַחְתֶּם אֲגֻדַּת אֵזוֹב וּטְבַלְתֶּם
בַּדָּם אֲשֶׁר־בַּסַּף וְהִגַּעְתֶּם אֶל־הַמַּשְׁקוֹף וְאֶל־שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזֹת מִן־הַדָּם
אֲשֶׁר בַּסַּף וְאַתֶּם לֹא תֵצְאוּ אִישׁ מִפֶּתַח־בֵּיתוֹ עַד־בֹּקֶר: כג וְעָבַר יְ
לִנְגֹּף אֶת־מִצְרַיִם וְרָאָה אֶת־הַדָּם עַל־הַמַּשְׁקוֹף וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזֹת
וּפָסַח יְ עַל־הַפֶּתַח וְלֹא יִתֵּן הַמַּשְׁחִית לָבֹא אֶל־בָּתֵּיכֶם לִנְגֹּף:

[1] Leavened bread allows us to make crackers – a ready-to-eat food that can be stored for the long term. Those cannot be made from unleavened dough, because the final product becomes inedible once it completely dries out. Modern, long-stored (thinly rolled) matzah was first produced only in the Middle Ages. Until then matzah looked like ordinary flat cakes, and was always baked shortly before being eaten (except on Shabbat, of course).

כד וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְחָק־לְךָ וּלְבָנֶיךָ עַד־עוֹלָם: כה וְהָיָה כִּי־
תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְיָ לָכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הָעֲבֹדָה
הַזֹּאת: כו וְהָיָה כִּי־יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם:
כז וַאֲמַרְתֶּם זֶבַח־פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל־בָּתֵּי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּנָגְפּוֹ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־בָּתֵּינוּ הִצִּיל וַיִּקֹּד הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:
כח וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן כֵּן עָשׂוּ:

(21) Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover offering.

(22) Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.

(23) For when the Lord goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the Lord will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home.

(24) "You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants.

(25) And when you enter the land that the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite.

(26) And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?'

(27) you shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.' " The people then bowed low in homage.

(28) And the Israelites went and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

(21) **Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel**: This is happening on the same day that God addressed Moses and Aaron, i.e., on the first day of the month of Nisan, two weeks before the Exodus.

Slaughter the passover offering: This means the Passover sacrifice, the Paschal Lamb.

(22) **Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts**: The point of the Passover sacrifice is not merely to slaughter it, but to proclaim its meaning to the entire world.

None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning: Every aspect of the Passover sacrifice and its observance emphasizes unity and isolation: No participant may leave the house all night, its bones must not be broken but left whole, it must be completely consumed in the course of a single night, and any part of it that remains until morning must be burned.

But what is the meaning of this unity and isolation? We would suggest that it is the following. If the Jewish people are to influence humanity, they must "go home and stay at home," concentrating first on themselves. That introspection is designed to clarify and strengthen the unique identity of the Jewish people. We must properly build our own lives before we can influence humanity. On the holiday commemorating the birth of the Jewish nation, Israel must therefore sit indoors, in the company of only their fellow Jews.

(23) **For when the Lord goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the Lord will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home**: Because the blood demonstrates trust in the Almighty's instructions, it therefore has the power to save.

(24) **"You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants**: The Passover celebration has a unique ability to bind the Jewish nation across the generations.

(25) **And when you enter the land that the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite**: Passover is inextricably linked with the Land of Israel and, in the Diaspora, with the desire to return there. (That is why, as we will shall see later, the "wilderness generation" – who by God's decree died off in the wilderness and could not enter the Land of Israel – stopped celebrating Passover from the moment of that decree).

(26) **And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite'?**: Jewish tradition always encourages us to ask questions, rather

than blindly accepting its assertions without discussion or critical assessment.

(27) **You shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.'**: The telling and retelling of Jewish history is an integral part of the Jewish religion.

The people then bowed low in homage: The people fully accept the "nationalist" but not the "religious" version of the Exodus. They rejoice at hearing that they will have their own land, the Land of Israel, and that they will have many generations of future descendants.

(28) **And the Israelites went and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did**: The Children of Israel made their preparations for Passover and for the Exodus precisely as Moses and Aaron had commanded them.

And yet, matzah is nowhere mentioned throughout this passage. It is not entirely clear from the text of the Torah whether the commandment "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" (v. 15) was then not yet established, and pertains only to the celebration of Passover in future times ("Passover for the generations"), or it was a requirement for this first Passover as well (the "Egyptian Passover").

In other words, when the Jews left Egypt, were they allowed to take leavened dough with them? Or could they bring with them matzah exclusively, and it was only the "mixed multitude" who, upon joining the Jews at the Exodus, brought raw dough with them out of Egypt? (See v. 38-39 below).

The Torah is intentionally ambiguous on this point, since both possibilities are equally essential to our understanding of further events.

CHAPTER 12

THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT

12.1. THE DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORNS (12:29-32)

כט וַיְהִי | בַּחֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה וַיהוָה הִכָּה כָל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכֹר
פַּרְעֹה הַיֹּשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשְּׁבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית הַבּוֹר וְכֹל
בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: ל וַיָּקָם פַּרְעֹה לַיְלָה הוּא וְכָל־עֲבָדָיו וְכָל־מִצְרַיִם וַתְּהִי
צְעָקָה גְדֹלָה בְּמִצְרָיִם כִּי־אֵין בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר אֵין־שָׁם מֵת: לא וַיִּקְרָא
לְמֹשֶׁה וְלְאַהֲרֹן לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי גַּם־אַתֶּם גַּם־בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת־יְי כְּדַבֶּרְכֶם: לב גַּם־צֹאנְכֶם גַּם־בְּקַרְכֶם קְחוּ
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּם וְלֵכוּ וּבֵרַכְתֶּם גַּם־אֹתִי:

(29) **In the middle of the night the Lord struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle.**

(30) **And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians — because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead.**

(31) **He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, "Up, depart from among my people, you and the Israelites with you! Go, worship the Lord as you said!**

(32) **Take also your flocks and your herds, as you said, and begone! And may you bring a blessing upon me also!"**

(29) **All the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh … to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle**: This was the destruction of the very essence of Egypt, which considered itself the firstborn of all mankind.

(30) **And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians – because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead**: In all the previous plagues only Pharaoh himself reacted; it was not the prerogative of the Egyptian people themselves to act. But now all of Egypt is in an uproar, and Pharaoh is only following their lead.

(31) **He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night**: Although Pharaoh's permission to leave was granted during night, the Jews left Egypt only in the morning. This point is especially significant in connection with the observance of the Passover commandments, as we shall discuss later.

And said, "Up, depart from among my people": Pharaoh finally acknowledges that the Jews have ceased to be a part of the Egyptian people.

(32-33) **Go, worship the Lord as you said! … And may you bring a blessing upon me also!**: Pharaoh is now asking the Jews for their blessings. This means that the leading place in history henceforth belongs to Israel, and not Egypt.

We must give Pharaoh a great deal of credit for managing his country with such tremendous composure under incredibly difficult conditions. And especially for not forgetting to ask Moses and Aaron to bless him (and through him all of Egypt), now that he sees and understands that all blessings henceforth come through Israel.

12.2. "THE EGYPTIANS URGED THE PEOPLE ON, IMPATIENT TO HAVE THEM LEAVE" (12:33-36)

לג וַתֶּחֱזַק מִצְרַיִם עַל־הָעָם לְמַהֵר לְשַׁלְּחָם מִן־הָאָרֶץ כִּי אָמְרוּ
כֻּלָּנוּ מֵתִים: לד וַיִּשָּׂא הָעָם אֶת־בְּצֵקוֹ טֶרֶם יֶחְמָץ מִשְׁאֲרֹתָם צְרֻרֹת
בְּשִׂמְלֹתָם עַל־שִׁכְמָם: לה וּבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כִּדְבַר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ
מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי זָהָב וּשְׂמָלֹת: לו וַיהוָה נָתַן אֶת־חֵן הָעָם
בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם וַיַּשְׁאִלוּם וַיְנַצְּלוּ אֶת־מִצְרָיִם:

(33) **The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country, for they said, "We shall all be dead."**

(34) **So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders.**

(35) **The Israelites had done Moses' bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing.**

(36) **And the Lord had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people, and they let them have their request; thus they stripped the Egyptians.**

(33-34) **The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country … So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks**: As noted earlier, this episode in the story of the Exodus has two possible interpretations.

According to the first interpretation, "the people" who took their unleavened dough are Jews, and the seven-day ban on leaven applies only to the future, to subsequent Passover celebrations (that is, to "Passover for the generations"), and has nothing to do with the Egyptian Passover. By this reading, the Jews left Egypt "with their kneading bowls," not yet knowing that they would bake matzah from this dough. Later that matzah became a symbol of the hurried Exodus.

In this case, the words "The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country" emphasize that, notwithstanding all the Divine directives, the Jews were not yet completely ready to leave Egypt, and the Egyptians had to force them out. (Recall by analogy how the angels had to lead Lot out of Sodom by force – Gen. 19:16).

The alternate reading, on the other hand, distinguishes between "the people" and "the Children of Israel," and suggests that "the people" who brought their unleavened dough with them are not Jews, but pro-Jewish Egyptians, the *eirev rav* ("mixed multitude"), who joined the Jews and left Egypt with them.

If so, the words "urged the people on" refer to these "pro-Jewish Egyptians" who, although they had already joined the Jews in the religious sense, were nonetheless not planning to leave Egypt, but the Egyptian masses forced them out after the death of the firstborns. It is clear, then, that these Egyptians did not have pre-prepared matzah; they only had the dough that they carried with them.

(35) **The Israelites had done Moses' bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing**: Moses has thus fulfilled God's special request (11:2), in accordance with God's promise to Abraham: "But I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free with great wealth" (Gen. 15:14).

The Jews took with them the wealth of Egypt, both materially and spiritually. From a material point of view, it was a fair payment for centuries of slave labor and for their abandoned houses and property. Moreover, for their proper self-respect moving forward it was important for the Jews to feel that they are no longer poor slaves, but a free and affluent people.

(Judaism also applied this principle to Jewish life in the future: "If a fellow Hebrew, man or woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall set him free. When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the Lord your God has blessed you. Bear in mind that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I enjoin this commandment upon you today."– Deut. 15:13)

In the spiritual sense, the Jews had to take with them "the gold and silver" (that is, the very best) of Egyptian culture and civilization, in order to integrate it later into Jewish tradition, and into their daily life in the land of Israel.

(36) **And the Lord had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people, and they let them have their request; thus they stripped the Egyptians**: If we distinguish between "the Children of Israel" and "the people," such that the former are Jews, and the latter are pro-Jewish Egyptians – the "mixed multitude" – then it was these Egyptians who stripped Egypt. They performed that "stripping" not only in the literal sense (since the Egyptians would obviously be more inclined to give gold and silver to other Egyptians than they would to share it with the Jews), but also in the spiritual sense, since they were the country's true spiritual elite, the "gold of Egypt," and their departure itself "stripped" (devastated) Egypt.

The Egyptian heritage of this "mixed multitude" subsequently became a positive influence within Judaism, thus creating a connection between the Jews and the peoples of the world.

12.3. THE LONG-AWAITED EXODUS, AND THE "MIXED MULTITUDE" (12:37-39)

לז וַיִּסְעוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵרַעְמְסֵס סֻכֹּתָה כְּשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רַגְלִי
הַגְּבָרִים לְבַד מִטָּף: לח וְגַם־עֵרֶב רַב עָלָה אִתָּם וְצֹאן וּבָקָר מִקְנֶה
כָּבֵד מְאֹד: לט וַיֹּאפוּ אֶת־הַבָּצֵק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עֻגֹת מַצּוֹת
כִּי לֹא חָמֵץ כִּי־גֹרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִתְמַהְמֵהַּ וְגַם־צֵדָה לֹא־
עָשׂוּ לָהֶם:

(37) **The Israelites journeyed from Raamses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children.**

(38) **Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.**

(39) **And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.**

(37) **From Raamses**: Raamses was one of the "garrison cities" that the Jews built for the Egyptians (1:11).

To Succoth: The geographical location of this place is uncertain. But since we read a little later (13:20), "They set out from Succoth, and encamped at Etham, at the edge of the wilderness," we can infer that Succoth is fairly close to the Egyptian border.

However, the fact that the identity of Succoth as an actual place is so unclear suggests that there might be a different, less literal way to understand this passage.

We note that in Lev. 23:42, when explaining the background for the festival of Succoth (Sukkot), the Torah says: "In order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in *succoth* (literally, "huts") when I brought them out of the land of Egypt."

Thus, we can also understand "from Raamses to Succoth" as expressing contrast. They left Raamses, a city of Egyptian wealth and abundance, and set out for the wilderness – barren, austere, and unpopulated.

About six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children: That is, there were that many adult men. If we consider also the women and children, the total number of Jews who left Egypt would be some three to four times greater, or as many as three million strong.

(38) **Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them**: This is the *eirev rav*, literally, "an enormous agglomeration," but traditionally rendered into English as it is here: a "mixed multitude." These were non-Jews who joined the Jewish people and left Egypt with them at the Exodus, and later became Jews.

The accession of proselytes to the Jewish people is extremely important in Judaism. As already mentioned, the Almighty's original plan was for all of Egypt to become a part of (or, as it were, annexed to) the Jewish nation, in order to effect a complete *yetzi'at mitzrayim* – "the exodus *of* Egypt" from idolatrous practices. Although this did not actually happen, the Egyptians who joined the Jewish nation can be seen as partially realizing that plan.

The mission of the Jewish people is to bring all of humanity closer to God. The accession of proselytes creates a bridge between the Jews and the nations of the world, and Jewish ideas are transmitted to all of mankind through this bridge.

Even so, the accession of proselytes is far from an easy process. Often, proselytes will at first fall short in their understanding of the Jewish

worldview. (In fact, the Torah speaks to this point when it suggests that it was the "mixed multitude" who were behind the creation of the golden calf). But under no circumstances should the *eirev rav* be perceived as superfluous. Quite the contrary, they are a vital component of the Jewish people, without whom the Jewish mission cannot be realized.

(39) **And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves**: As already noted, this verse can be read in two different ways, as referring either to the Jews, or to the "mixed multitude."

12.4. ISRAEL'S 430-YEAR STAY IN EGYPT (12:40-42)

מ וּמוֹשַׁב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרָיִם שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע
מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: מא וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיְהִי
בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יָצְאוּ כָּל־צִבְאוֹת יְי מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: מב לֵיל שִׁמֻּרִים
הוּא לַיהוָה לְהוֹצִיאָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם הוּא־הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה לַיהוָה שִׁמֻּרִים
לְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדֹרֹתָם:

(40) **The length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years;**

(41) **at the end of the four hundred and thirtieth year, to the very day, all the ranks of the Lord departed from the land of Egypt.**

(42) **That was for the Lord a night of vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt; that same night is the Lord's, one of vigil for all the children of Israel throughout the ages.**

(40) **The length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years**: If we make the calculation according to the chronology given above (6:18), we see that 430 years could not have elapsed from the moment Jacob's family came to Egypt until the Exodus. Kohath, Levi's son, was among those who came to Egypt

with Jacob (Gen. 46:11), and all the years of his life (133) and of his son Amram (137) and of Amram's son Moses until the Exodus (80) do not add up to 430 – especially since the years of their lives overlap, rather than being consecutive.

Jewish tradition tells us that the 430 years of Egyptian bondage begin from the "Covenant between the Parts" which God concluded with Abraham, telling him: "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years" (Gen. 15:13). Those four hundred years are calculated from the birth of Isaac, and the actual time that the Jews lived in Egypt was in fact no more than 210 years.

At the same time, and strictly speaking, it would seem that the Jews really should have remained in Egypt the full 430 years. But God reduced the period of Egyptian slavery, because the Jews found their plight so unbearable that they might have perished outright had God not brought the redemption when He did. The Almighty therefore brought the Jews out of Egypt after only 210 years, and He counted the 430 years of slavery of the original decree as having begun from the moment of the Covenant between the Parts (such that the 400 years indicated there begin with the birth of Isaac).

The idea that the Jews spent less time in Egypt than originally planned also explains why God led the Jews to the Land of Israel not directly, but in a roundabout path via Mount Sinai, where the giving of the Torah took place. See §14.1 below for details.

(41) **At the end of the four hundred and thirtieth year, to the very day, all the ranks of the Lord departed from the land of Egypt**: The Midrash comments on this verse: "The Almighty did not delay the redemption for even a moment. As soon as 430 years had passed from the time that God had concluded the covenant with Abraham, He brought the Jews out of Egypt on the exact day according to that calculation, which fell on the fifteenth day of the month of Nisan."

(42) **That was for the Lord a night of vigil**: *Leil shimurim*, literally, "the night of watchfulness." It is the night of God's special vigilance and protection, because on this night the Almighty Himself protected the Jews, not allowing death to enter their homes.

That same night is the Lord's: It is "the Lord's night" because He prepared it in advance. That is, from the very beginning God had scheduled the Exodus to take place on this exact *day* on the calendar. According to the Midrash, and as we have noted, the angels who visited Abraham (Gen. 19:1 ff.) came to him on the fifteenth of Nisan, to give him the news of Isaac's birth that would happen exactly one year later. Thus, the four hundred years of Egyptian slavery that culminated in the Exodus were calculated not only from the year of Isaac's birth, but from the day of his birth.

One of vigil for all the children of Israel throughout the ages: Recalling that the Almighty vigilantly guarded the Jews that night, the Jewish nation must in future vigilantly "keep this night," and celebrate it without fail each and every year.

CHAPTER 13

THE ACCESSION OF THE PROSELYTES. REMEMBERING THE EXODUS

13.1. THE LAWS OF PASSOVER, AND THE ACCESSION OF THE PROSELYTES (12:43-51)

מג וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹ֑ן זֹ֣את חֻקַּ֗ת הַפָּ֫סַ֥ח כָּל־בֶּן־נֵ֥כָר לֹא־יֹאכַ֖ל
בּוֹ׃ מד וְכָל־עֶ֥בֶד אִ֛ישׁ מִקְנַת־כֶּ֖סֶף וּמַלְתָּ֣ה אֹת֑וֹ אָ֣ז יֹאכַ֔ל בּֽוֹ׃ מה
תּוֹשָׁ֥ב וְשָׂכִ֖יר לֹא־יֹאכַ֥ל בּֽוֹ׃ מו בְּבַ֥יִת אֶ֖חָד יֵאָכֵ֑ל לֹא־תוֹצִ֥יא מִן־הַבַּ֖יִת
מִן־הַבָּשָׂ֣ר חֻ֔וצָה וְעֶ֥צֶם לֹ֖א תִּשְׁבְּרוּ־בֽוֹ׃ מז כָּל־עֲדַ֥ת יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל יַעֲשׂ֥וּ
אֹתֽוֹ׃ מח וְכִֽי־יָגוּר֩ אִתְּךָ֨ גֵּ֜ר וְעָשָׂ֤ה פֶ֙סַח֙ לַיהוָ֔ה הִמּ֖וֹל לוֹ֣ כָל־זָכָ֑ר וְאָז֙
יִקְרַ֣ב לַעֲשֹׂתֹ֔ו וְהָיָ֥ה כְּאֶזְרַ֖ח הָאָ֑רֶץ וְכָל־עָרֵ֖ל לֹא־יֹאכַ֥ל בּֽוֹ׃ מט תּוֹרָ֣ה
אַחַ֔ת יִהְיֶ֥ה לָאֶזְרָ֖ח וְלַגֵּ֣ר הַגָּ֑ר בְּתוֹכְכֶֽם׃ נ וַיַּעֲשׂ֕וּ כָּל־בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל
כַּאֲשֶׁ֣ר צִוָּ֣ה יְ֭הוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁ֣ה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹ֑ן כֵּ֥ן עָשֽׂוּ׃

נא וַיְהִ֣י בְּעֶ֔צֶם הַיֹּ֥ום הַזֶּ֖ה הוֹצִ֣יא יְ֭הוָה אֶת־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל מֵאֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם
עַל־צִבְאֹתָֽם׃

(43) **The Lord said to Moses and Aaron: This is the law of the passover offering: No foreigner shall eat of it.**

(44) **But any slave a man has bought may eat of it once he has been circumcised.**

(45) **No bound or hired laborer shall eat of it.**

(46) **It shall be eaten in one house: you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house; nor shall you break a bone of it.**

(47) The whole community of Israel shall offer it.

(48) If a stranger who dwells with you would offer the passover to the Lord, all his males must be circumcised; then he shall be admitted to offer it; he shall then be as a citizen of the country. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it.

(49) There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you.

(50) And all the Israelites did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

(51) That very day the Lord freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop.

(43) **The Lord said to Moses and Aaron**: The following laws, which include the accession of proselytes, were given to Moses and Aaron together, because proselytes combine two closely related aspects: attaching oneself to the Torah, and attaching oneself to the Jewish people, as represented by Moses and Aaron, respectively.

This is the law of the passover offering: No foreigner shall eat of it: The laws that govern how one joins the Jewish nation begin with highlighting the boundary between the Jewish people and all other nations. In order for the Jews to bring Divine light to all of mankind, they must first separate themselves from it.

(44) **But any slave a man has bought may eat of it once he has been circumcised**: Slaves in the Middle East were treated as members of the family. But the Torah emphasizes here that they attain that status only after fully accepting Jewish religious norms, as demonstrated by becoming circumcised.

(45) **No bound or hired laborer shall eat of it**: These are non-Jews who settle in Israel, or hired laborers, i.e., people having only an economic association with Judaism and Jewry. These are not considered family members.

(46) **It shall be eaten in one house**: you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house; nor shall you break a bone of it: As we noted earlier, all the Passover commandments are associated with the themes

of unity, integrity, and "concentration." Here, too, these principles are repeated in connection with the manner in which proselytes are accepted. Proselytes, rather than being allowed to become and remain isolated in distinct subethnicities, must along with their descendants be fully integrated in every respect into the one, unified Jewish nation.

(47) **The whole community of Israel shall offer it**: The commandment of participating in the the Passover sacrifice is obligatory for all Jews.

(48) **If a stranger who dwells with you would offer the passover to the Lord, all his males must be circumcised; then he shall be admitted to offer it**: Thus, we see two levels of "stranger": The uncircumcised stranger, who is not a Jew and is therefore forbidden to partake of the Passover sacrifice, and the circumcised stranger, who thereby becomes a full-fledged member of the Jewish nation, and participates in in the Passover sacrifice like any other Jew.

All his males must be circumcised; then he shall be admitted to offer it; he shall then be as a citizen of the country: The laws that prescribe how proselytes should be incorporated into the Jewish nation are given in the context of two Jewish commandments of paramount importance: circumcision, and the Passover sacrifice. These correspond, respectively, to the two essential covenants in Judaism – the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinai covenant.

Becoming circumcised means joining the Abrahamic covenant. A person who does not fully subscribe to the ideals for which the Jewish people exist cannot become a part of the Jewish people.

Passover means joining in the birth of the Jewish people and in the Sinai covenant. No one can join the Jewish people who does not share in the Sinai Covenant and the common national memory of the Exodus.

The commandments of circumcision and the Passover sacrifice are very tightly connected, in that no uncircumcised man can eat of the Passover sacrifice. This demonstrates the inextricable link between the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinai covenant.

(During the two-century Jewish exile in Egypt, only a portion of the people continued to observe the tradition of circumcision. Those who had not done so where circumcised shortly before the Exodus.

Circumcision is therefore not explicitly mentioned here with respect to the Jews, but only in connection with the accession of proselytes.[1])

(49) **There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger**: This again emphasizes that proselytes are completely absorbed into the Jewish people, and become full-fledged members of the nation in every respect.

(50) **And all the Israelites did so; as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did**: The Children of Israel circumcised the "mixed multitude," thus completing the process of their full inclusion in the Jewish fold.

(51) **That very day the Lord freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop**: This is the end result of all the preceding events. The "mixed multitude" and the Children of Israel now constitute a single, unified army.

13.2. CONSECRATION OF THE FIRSTBORNS (13:1-2)

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: ב קַדֶּשׁ־לִי כָל־בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל־רֶחֶם בִּבְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה לִי הוּא:

(1) **The Lord spoke further to Moses, saying,**

(2) **"Consecrate to Me every first-born; man and beast, the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine."**

(1) The Lord spoke further to Moses, saying: At the conclusion of the story of the Exodus from Egypt, a commandment is given to remember it.

(2) Consecrate to Me every first-born: The commandment to consecrate the firstborns is intended to serve as a reminder that the Jewish

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[1] The Book of Joshua, however, does state explicitly that "All the people who had come out of Egypt, all the males … had been circumcised, [but] none of the people born after the exodus, during the desert wanderings, had been circumcised" (5:4).

firstborns were spared during the tenth plague. It also emphasizes the idea of Israel's spiritual primacy: "Thus says the Lord: Israel is My first-born son" (4:22).

13.3. MOSES' CONCLUDING PASSOVER ADDRESS (13:3-16)

ג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם זָכוֹר אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יְצָאתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם
מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים כִּי בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיא יְ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה וְלֹא יֵאָכֵל חָמֵץ:
ד הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב: ה וְהָיָה כִי־יְבִיאֲךָ יְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ
הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ לָתֶת
לָךְ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבָשׁ וְעָבַדְתָּ אֶת־הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה:
ו שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצֹּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי חַג לַיהוָה: ז מַצּוֹת יֵאָכֵל
אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ חָמֵץ וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שְׂאֹר בְּכָל־
גְּבֻלֶךָ: ח וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְ לִי
בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם: ט וְהָיָה לְךָ לְאוֹת עַל־יָדְךָ וּלְזִכָּרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ לְמַעַן
תִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת יְ בְּפִיךָ כִּי בְּיָד חֲזָקָה הוֹצִאֲךָ יְ מִמִּצְרָיִם: י וְשָׁמַרְתָּ
אֶת־הַחֻקָּה הַזֹּאת לְמוֹעֲדָהּ מִיָּמִים יָמִימָה:

יא וְהָיָה כִּי־יְבִאֲךָ יְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְךָ וְלַאֲבֹתֶיךָ
וּנְתָנָהּ לָךְ: יב וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ כָל־פֶּטֶר־רָחֶם לַיהוָה וְכָל־פֶּטֶר | שֶׁגֶר בְּהֵמָה
אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לְךָ הַזְּכָרִים לַיהוָה: יג וְכָל־פֶּטֶר חֲמֹר תִּפְדֶּה בְשֶׂה וְאִם־
לֹא תִפְדֶּה וַעֲרַפְתּוֹ וְכֹל בְּכוֹר אָדָם בְּבָנֶיךָ תִּפְדֶּה: יד וְהָיָה כִי־יִשְׁאָלְךָ
בִנְךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מַה־זֹּאת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְ מִמִּצְרַיִם
מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: טו וַיְהִי כִּי־הִקְשָׁה פַרְעֹה לְשַׁלְּחֵנוּ וַיַּהֲרֹג יְ כָּל־בְּכוֹר
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכֹר אָדָם וְעַד־בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה עַל־כֵּן אֲנִי זֹבֵחַ לַיהוָה
כָּל־פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם הַזְּכָרִים וְכָל־בְּכוֹר בָּנַי אֶפְדֶּה: טז וְהָיָה לְאוֹת עַל־
יָדְכָה וּלְטוֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ כִּי בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְ מִמִּצְרָיִם:

(3) **And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, the house of bondage, how the Lord freed you from it with a mighty hand: no leavened bread shall be eaten.**

(4) **You go free on this day, in the month of Abib.**

(5) **So, when the Lord has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall observe in this month the following practice:**

(6) **"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival of the Lord.**

(7) **Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory.**

(8) **And you shall explain to your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.'**

(9) **"And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead – in order that the Teaching of the Lord may be in your mouth – that with a mighty hand the Lord freed you from Egypt.**

(10) **You shall keep this institution at its set time from year to year.**

(11) **"And when the Lord has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and has given it to you,**

(12) **you shall set apart for the Lord every first issue of the womb: every male firstling that your cattle drop shall be the Lord's.**

(13) **But every firstling ass you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. And you must redeem every first-born male among your children.**

(14) **And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage.**

(15) **When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, the first-born of both man and beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord every first male issue of the womb, but redeem every first-born among my sons.'**

(16) **"And so it shall be as a sign upon your hand and as a symbol on your forehead that with a mighty hand the Lord freed us from Egypt."**

(3) **And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, the house of bondage, how the Lord freed you from it with a mighty hand: no leavened bread shall be eaten**: While giving the people the commandment to consecrate every firstborn, Moses also unites it in a single complex with the commandments to eat matzah and to retell the story of the Exodus, and with the yearning for the Land of Israel. All this is essential for the full integration of proselytes into the Jewish people, which must be based on their total acceptance of Judaism's fundamental ideals and values.

How the Lord freed you from it with a mighty hand: no leavened bread shall be eaten: Matzah now becomes only a memory of the Exodus, a reminder that "they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened" (12:39).

(4) **You go free on this day, in the month of Abib**: Hebrew *Aviv* means "spring." The spring of nature always occurs in synchrony with the Jewish "spring" – a new start for all of humanity. In later times the month of Aviv came to be called "Nisan," which is how we know it today.

(5) **So, when the Lord has brought you into the land of the Canaanites … you shall observe in this month the following practice**: After the proselytes have joined the Jewish nation, it is important to emphasize once again the connection of Passover to the Exodus, and also to the Land of Israel, because the purpose of leaving Egypt was to come to *Eretz Yisrael,* "the Land of Israel." This point was not obvious to the proselytes. They were attracted to the personality of Moses and his new religious ideals, but initially felt no connection to the Land of Israel.

(7) **Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory**: This symbolizes that the Jews are being cleansed from the enslavement of Egyptian civilization. This complete ban on leaven (not only eating it, but even owning it) is added to the Passover laws after the accession of the Egyptian proselytes, for whom the cleansing from Egyptian attitudes must be yet deeper and more complete.

(8) **And you shall explain to your son on that day**: Explain it to your son, whether he asks or not. But if he asks (see below, v. 14), then explain it to him in even greater detail.

It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt: The purpose of the Exodus was not merely to give the Jews their freedom, but to connect them directly with the Almighty.

(9) **"And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead — in order that the Teaching of the Lord may be in your mouth — that with a mighty hand the Lord freed you from Egypt**: All your affairs, as well as your worldview, must derive from your perspective on the Exodus and your understanding of God's teachings.

Jewish Tradition sees this verse as referring to the commandment to don tefillin (phylacteries, leather boxes containing excerpts from the Torah). The tefillin, which are worn on the forehead, must be perfectly square. Their straight lines symbolize Divine Providence, and in this regard they are like Moses' staff (the Kabbalah calls these straight lines "rays"). The tefillin that are worn on the forehead, which are symbolic of Divine Providence, contrast with the image of the snake, the uraeus, which the Egyptian pharaohs wore on their foreheads[1]. In the terminology of the Kabbalah, circularity, as seen in a snake's coils, is symbolic of the cycle of nature, which, unlike Divine Providence, has no inherent purpose or direction.

It should be noted that the Torah presents the tefillin here not only as a strictly religious attribute, but as a national "sign" that symbolizes and commemorates the Jewish victory over Egypt.

(11) **And when the Lord has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and has given it to you**: Full realization of the Torah and its commandments is possible only in the Land of Israel.

(12-13) **You shall set apart for the Lord every first issue of the womb: every male firstling that your cattle drop … But every firstling ass you shall redeem with a sheep … You must redeem every first-born male**: The wording of the commandment as given by God to Moses (v. 2) was more terse: "Consecrate to Me every first-born; man

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[1] See §5.8.

and beast." But when Moses relays the same commandment to the Jews, he elaborates upon it. The firstborns of cattle are sacrificed upon the altar, the firstborns of unclean animals and human firstborns must be redeemed. The commandment to consecrate the firstborns is presented as a reminder of the Exodus, and emphasizes the importance of this commandment for driving one's actions and shaping one's worldview.

The counterpoint here of God's original instructions versus Moses' retelling of them very closely parallels the relationship of the Written Torah to the Oral Torah. The former presents only the most basic and essential principles of Jewish life, while the latter very greatly expands upon those principles, explaining how they are to be realized in actual practice.

(14) **And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?'**: For the son who asks no questions, a shorter statement of the meaning of the Exodus suffices, as given above (v. 8). But if the son asks, the father's answer must be more detailed, in order to give the child a better understanding of history and its contemporary relevance.

You shall say to him, 'It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage': This is the knowledge that the father is obliged to pass on to his more contemplative son: All of history is driven by the power of the Almighty's hand.

(15) **When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt**: For the present and the future, this means that with Divine assistance, all obstacles and hindrances will be overcome.

Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord every first male issue of the womb, but redeem every first-born among my sons: A Jew must explain to his son the meaning of the commandments. In this case, the consecration and redemption of every firstborn expresses gratitude to the Almighty.

(16) **And so it shall be as a sign upon your hand and as a symbol on your forehead that with a mighty hand the Lord freed us from Egypt**: In this verse the father continues to address his son: "This is how you are to see the world." (But also: "Understand the commandment of the tefillin as a daily remembrance of the Exodus").

WEEKLY
PORTION [4]

BESHALACH

CHAPTER 14
CROSSING THE SEA OF REEDS

14.1. THE EXODUS, AS SEEN "FROM OUTSIDE"

The Exodus from Egypt is recounted in two weekly portions: The preceding portion (3), *Bo*, the "Moses" portion – the Exodus from the "internal" point of view, i.e., as viewed from within the Jewish people). And this weekly portion (4), *Beshalach*, the "Aaron" portion – a recounting of the Exodus from the "external" point of view, i.e., as seen through the eyes of the world.

The story of the Exodus, portion *Bo* just concluded, placed the emphasis on the separation of the Jews from the Egyptians: the final plagues, the Passover seder, the Passover sacrifice so reviled by the Egyptians, the new lunar-solar calendar system, and the proselytes who realigned themselves with the Jewish position.

But if we look at the Exodus from the outside – as viewed by the peoples of the world – we get an entirely different impression, in which it seems that the crossing of the Sea of Reeds is the main event.

Those who look from outside care little about the Passover Seder, the Jewish calendar, or the proselytes. But the death of the preeminent Egyptian army at sea is for them a monumental event of international significance that has affected the entire course of world history.

For the nations of the world, what is important is not that a bunch slaves who longed for their freedom finally got it, but that Pharaoh and his entire army, chasing them in hot pursuit, were annihilated, and that the military power of the Egyptian state was utterly destroyed. That is how the Exodus is presented in this *Beshalach* portion.

When God intervened in the course of history and destroyed Israel's enemies, this left an indelible impression on the peoples of the world. The Song of the Sea emphasizes precisely this aspect of the Exodus: "Now are the clans of Edom dismayed; The tribes of Moab — trembling grips them; All the dwellers in Canaan are aghast. Terror and dread descend upon them; Through the might of Your arm they are still as stone — Till Your people cross over, O Lord, Till Your people cross whom You have ransomed." (15:14-16)

The book of Joshua, describing events that occurred forty years after the Exodus, records that the deep impression that the Exodus made on the surrounding nations helped the Jewish people conquer Canaan. "[Rahab] said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given the country to you, because dread of you has fallen upon us, and all the inhabitants of the land are quaking before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds for you when you left Egypt" (Josh. 2:8-10). This was the reason that during the conquest of Canaan by the grandchildren of the Jews who had left Egypt, the Canaanite kings received no assistance from Egypt in resisting the Jewish conquest (notwithstanding that Canaan was a province of Egypt, and the kings of ancient Canaan were vassals of Egypt). Moreover, for more than four hundred years thereafter Egypt would not intervene in anything that was happening in the Holy Land, allowing Jewish history to take its course unimpeded.

And yet, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds had no such effect on the Jewish people themselves. Yes, they saw in it a remarkable revelation, but almost immediately after that, at the very first sign of difficulties, they began to grumble and complain. At the crossing of the Sea of Reeds the Jews experienced a powerful emotional upset, but it was not visceral enough to be long-lasting. The real revelation to the Jews is the giving of the Torah at Sinai (which occurs in weekly portion *Yitro* immediately following this one).

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The name of the *Beshalach* portion ("when he let the people go") reveals its primary theme – Israel's relationship with Egypt from the moment the Jews are liberated and begin to experience freedom, and the behavior of the Jews themselves under those conditions of freedom.

The crossing of the sea is the completion of the Exodus, in the sense that it represents the complete and final separation of the Jews from the Egyptians. But at the same time, it was a test for the Jewish people themselves, because it is precisely at the onset of that freedom that internal problems begin to appear, and murmurs of discontent arise. Such problems are inevitable, because "the Exodus" is the normal but lengthy process of becoming a free people, which cannot possibly happen overnight.

In the relatively short journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai, several moments of crisis arise: the undrinkable bitter water, the incident of the manna from heaven, the story of drawing water from the rock, and the war with Amalek. The Jews had to encounter all these difficulties, so that by overcoming them, they could rise to that higher level of spiritual development that they needed in order to receive the Torah at Sinai.

14.2. THE EXODUS TAKES AN ALTERNATE ROUTE (13:17-18)

יז וַיְהִי בְּשַׁלַּח פַּרְעֹה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָחָם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים
כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי | אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פֶּן־יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בִּרְאֹתָם מִלְחָמָה
וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיְמָה: יח וַיַּסֵּב אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף
וַחֲמֻשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

(17) **Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, "The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt."**

(18) **So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds ...**

(17) **By way of the land of the Philistines**: That is, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Although it was nearer; for God said, "The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt": The Israelites, had they taken the shorter road, would have arrived in Canaan much sooner. But as they were still burdened by their own slave

mentality, they were not ready for war, and upon finding themselves in such a war with the residents of Canaan they might have quickly become dispirited and wanted to return to Egypt, where they had lived under oppression, but nevertheless protected by their masters.

Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them: The word *NaCHaM*, "lead them," echoes the word *yiNaCHeM*, "have a change of heart," that appears later in this verse. In terms of their respective grammatical roots these words are different. In the former case, the verbal root is *N-W-CH*, the final *M* being only a suffix (indicating the third-person plural direct object, "them"). But in the latter case, the root, *N-CH-M*, includes the final *M* itself.

Nonetheless, the commonality of the two words is sufficiently striking that we cannot deem their appearance here in such close proximity a mere coincidence. Rather, the Torah is deliberately drawing a connection that is to be understood as imparting an additional meaning to this verse. That is, the word *NaCHaM*, "lead them," acquires a shade of the meaning also of *N-CH-M*, the root of *yiNaCHeM*, "have a change of heart."

We have already analyzed in considerable detail the Hebrew root *N-CH-M* and its derivatives in our coverage of the story of the Flood, in which this concept plays a central role (see *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis. Ch. 7). As noted there, *N-CH-M* means to console oneself, to reconcile with reality and with the fact that reality is not as ideal as we would like, to revise one's prior plans and expectations.

In this case, with respect to God's actions after the Exodus, we understand this to mean that by leading the Jews along a different path because of their fear of war, God too "revised His previous plan."

For God said, "The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt": Thus, the close associative connection between *ve-lo nacham Elohim*, "God did not lead them," and *pen yinachem ha'am*, "the people may have a change of heart," emphasizes that God's actions are a direct and immediate consequence of the state of the Jewish people.

(18) **So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds**: He led them not directly, but in a roundabout

way – not directly to Canaan, but through the wilderness, where the Torah would be given.

Thus, the original plan was to lead the Jews directly to the Land of Israel, but that plan had to be revised, because the Jews were not yet ready to wage war, and so God led the Jews through the wilderness instead. However, the Jews received the Torah in the Sinai wilderness (19:1), and Tradition sees special meaning in that the Torah was given and received in the wilderness specifically. Thus, the journey through the wilderness, and the giving of the Torah there "in the form of legislation" was a decision made *post facto*, and only by force of circumstance.

As explained earlier, the original plan was for the Jews to remain enslaved in Egypt for 430 years, but because the people proved incapable of enduring such an ordeal, the interval was reduced by more than half, to 210 years. For that same reason *yetziat mizrayim* ("the Exodus from Egypt" – but literally, "the exodus *of* Egypt," meaning: Egypt's own exodus from spiritual slavery to freedom, and to a dialogue with God) did not take place on the grand scale on which it had been originally conceived. Only a relatively small group of Egyptians joined forces with the Jews and left Egypt with them, while the rest remained behind, and were not liberated from the "house of bondage."

The unpreparedness of the Jews to do battle with the Philistines can be attributed to this "incompleteness of the Exodus" – the relatively limited forces that left Egypt. Likewise, the change in God's plans as indicated in these verses can be seen as brought about by those same factors.

The Divine plan as originally conceived was to bring the Jews out of Egypt "with all of Egypt," i.e., with a sizeable and developmentally advanced segment of its population, and, moreover, to bring the Jews (and those who had joined with them) immediately to the Land of Israel, and not to Mount Sinai.

But because the Jews would never have survived the full 430 years of slavery as planned, the Exodus occurred "prematurely." The result was that they left Egypt in relatively small numbers, because they left the majority of the Egyptians behind. In view of this, they were not ready for war, and the plan had to be changed to lead them on a different, longer road. This is what we mean when we say that the giving of the Torah at

Mount Sinai occurred by force of circumstance, and was not an event actually planned as such.

That the Divine teachings had to be formulated as law (even if it was Divine law) was an outcome that fell well short of the ideal. The ideal was that the entire people would experience the Torah as something entirely natural and self-evident, just as the Patriarchs experienced it.

Had the Jews received the massive, full support of the entire Egyptian nation (which means that even before leaving Egypt they would have ceased to be slaves there, because all of Egypt would have already changed), then attaining the ideal just described would have been possible. But when slaves are liberated directly from slavery, there is no getting away from the need to impose on them strict (even harsh) laws[1]. The ideal of a "self-evident Torah" was neither annulled nor abolished; it was only postponed until the Messianic era. Meanwhile, there was no choice but for the Law to be given to the people, and for the people to receive the Law.

By all appearances, God's change of plan occurred not at the moment of the Exodus, but eighty years earlier, when He sent Moses to be raised in Pharaoh's place, in order to acquire and assimilate the principles of Egyptian political structure and government. By virtue of that upbringing, Moses understands that the life of the people must be regulated by legislation, which means that Moses' orientation closely corresponds to the ethos of the Sinai covenant (as we have previously discussed in considerable detail).

This by no means implies that the larger world has no need for the Torah, or that its laws were nothing more than the result of a circumstantial afterthought. The principles of the Torah are of course primordial in their origins; they are a sine qua non for the existence of the world, even to the extent that the Torah actually predates the existence of the world. (As the Midrash puts it, "God looked into the Torah and created the universe".)

Be that as it may, the Torah was framed at the Exodus into an ordered code of laws precisely because the exodus from Egypt took place too

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[1] In particular, the need to counter the Israelite slave mentality is one of the reasons that the Torah prescribes the death penalty so often, often for violations that seem incomprehensible to modern man.

early. The Jewish nation at that time was not capable (as, indeed, even today it is not capable) of comprehending "intuitively Divine teachings that are based on ideals," in the manner that the Patriarchs understood those teachings.

14.3. THE PROBLEM OF THE TORAH AS LAW

This concept, which sees the giving of the Torah as a compulsory measure, at first seems rather strange to Judaism. As a rule, in popular Jewish religious literature, the laws of the Torah are extolled as the ideal. But in fact, the anomic line of thought, which disparages the importance of the law, is not at all alien to Judaism, but, on the contrary, is deeply rooted in it. This approach emphasizes that the Torah was forced upon the Jews[1] at Sinai, and argues that in Messianic times the restrictive laws will be abolished, such that people will not need to teach each other. Every person will independently understand the Torah, by virtue of the Divine spark that he harbors within himself[2].

We wish to emphasize that the issue here is not that the Torah will be abolished in Messianic times, but that the commandments will cease to be "law" – their status will change. In Messianic times, the commandments of the Torah based on an ordered set of rules will become an internal guide to action. The Patriarchs of the Torah proceeded from this inner sensation – they were able to realize the commandments without being guided by formal laws. The commandments were natural values for the Patriarchs, which they understood from within – a much higher level of spiritual development than a system in which the commandments serve as legislative norms.

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1 According to the Midrash (to 19:17), immediately before the giving of Torah the Almighty held the mountain suspended above the Jews, and told them that if they would not accept the laws of the Torah, He would allow the mountain to fall, and Sinai would become their national gravesite.

2 This condition of the Messianic times is described by the prophet Jeremiah: "No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another, 'Heed the Lord'; for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me – declares the Lord" (31:34). That is, every person will have innate and intimate knowledge of God's Torah.

However, so long as the Jewish people, and all of humanity, have not yet risen to this level, the laws cannot be repealed. Judaism's Messianic goal is for all of society to be built on ideals and on love, not on laws and coercion. But any attempt to build such a society prematurely, to "repeal the law" before humanity is truly ready for such a transformation,[1] is a form of false Messianism.

Moreover, because the Jewish people accepted the laws of the Torah under duress, there are people in every generation who yearn to throw off the yoke of the law. In their souls they sense this law as a form of violence that has been inflicted on them, rather than an obligation that they accepted of their own free will. But they fail to realize that the world has not yet reached that level of spiritual development where the law can simply be replaced by values and ideals. The actions of these people are therefore destructive, even if we allow that their motives are not entirely without merit. But at the same time, while we understand that it would be utterly premature to repeal the law at this time, it is essential that we strive toward that goal, in order to ensure that in the future, values and ideals that will be internally motivated, but universally acknowledged, will replace the law as the foundation of human society.

We must therefore not idealize the Divine law. For their proper development, the Jewish people need not only the Sages who preserve the Law, but the defectors too, who from time to time lead their own rebellion against it. Although their intent is to defy and destroy, such destruction counters the blind worship of the law. And that too is important.

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[1] One of the indicators of humanity's readiness for the law to be declared superfluous will be the complete elimination of violence, as Isaiah famously prophesied: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war" (Isa. 2:4). Notwithstanding that those prophetic words are literally carved in stone at the entrance to the United Nations headquarters in New York City, it is obvious that humanity today is still very far from achieving that.

14.4. THE DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT (13:18-22)

יח וַיַּסֵּב אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף וַחֲמֻשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־
יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: יט וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי
הַשְׁבֵּעַ הִשְׁבִּיעַ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם
וְהַעֲלִיתֶם אֶת־עַצְמֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם: כ וַיִּסְעוּ מִסֻּכֹּת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְאֵתָם
בִּקְצֵה הַמִּדְבָּר: כא וַיהוָה הֹלֵךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לַנְחֹתָם
הַדֶּרֶךְ וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם לָלֶכֶת יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה: כב לֹא־
יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הֶעָנָן יוֹמָם וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ לָיְלָה לִפְנֵי הָעָם:

(18) So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt.

(19) And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had exacted an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will be sure to take notice of you: then you shall carry up my bones from here with you."

(20) They set out from Succoth, and encamped at Etham, at the edge of the wilderness.

(21) The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they might travel day and night.

(22) The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

(18) **So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds**: The term *yam suf*, "Sea of Reeds," in antiquity meant the entire region of the Red Sea (as it is known today), including the Gulf of Eilat[1] and the vicinity of the Isthmus of Suez and its lakes up to the Mediterranean sea[2]. Opinions differ as to where in the region of

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1 The Gulf of Eilat is called *Yam Suf* at 23:31, where the Torah states that it delineates the southern boundary of the Land of Israel: "I will set your borders from the Sea of Reeds to the Sea of Philistia," and also in the book of Kings (1 Kings 9:26), in connection with King Solomon.

2 In the region of the Isthmus of Suez there was a canal in ancient times that ran from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, traversing their lakes.

that isthmus the crossing of the Sea of Reeds actually took place, whether it was near our Red Sea, or near the Mediterranean Sea, or through a lake that lay somewhere between those two.

Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt: Although the word "*chamushim*" is translated here as "armed," it more generally denotes being prepared with whatever is needed (and not only in the military sense). The Jews' long stay in Egypt was much more than valuable time lost to slavery. Thanks to Egypt, the Jews gained the potential and the opportunity for further internal growth.

Grammatically, the word *chamushim*, "armed," is very close to *chamesh*, "five." The Midrash therefore offers a different interpretation here, understanding *chamushim*, as "reduced to one fifth"; that is, only one fifth of the Jews left Egypt. The remainder had no interest in the Exodus, nor had they any intent to leave Egypt, and they therefore died during the plague of darkness (the ninth plague). The meaning of this midrash (which, of course, should not be taken literally) is that the Exodus did not realize its full potential, for it was only "one fifth of a true Exodus," i.e., only a small part of the ideal, full "Exodus *of* Egypt," as discussed previously.

(19) **And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had exacted an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will be sure to take notice of you: then you shall carry up my bones from here with you"**: The concluding verses of Genesis (50:25) related that Joseph, toward the end of his life, repented of his deep attachment to Egypt, and enjoined the Jews under oath to take his bones with them at the Exodus. Here Moses fulfills that solemn obligation.

The Midrash finds a connection between Joseph's bones and the creation of the Golden calf. We will touch upon this later in weekly portion *Ki Tissa*.

(20) **They set out from Succoth, and encamped at Etham, at the edge of the wilderness**: The actual wilderness began immediately beyond the Egyptian border.

(21) **The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they might travel day and night**: Constant move-

ment without rest, day and night, reflects the people's accelerated transformation.

(22) **The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people**: The Jews were not left to their own devices. God walked beside them, "holding their hand," as it were, and would not allow Himself to leave them.

14.5. BAITING THE TRAP FOR PHARAOH (14:1-4)

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר׃ ב דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָשֻׁבוּ וְיַחֲנוּ לִפְנֵי
פִּי הַחִירֹת בֵּין מִגְדֹּל וּבֵין הַיָּם לִפְנֵי בַּעַל צְפֹן נִכְחוֹ תַּחֲנוּ עַל־הַיָּם׃ ג
וְאָמַר פַּרְעֹה לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נְבֻכִים הֵם בָּאָרֶץ סָגַר עֲלֵיהֶם הַמִּדְבָּר׃ ד
וְחִזַּקְתִּי אֶת־לֵב־פַּרְעֹה וְרָדַף אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאִכָּבְדָה בְּפַרְעֹה וּבְכָל־חֵילוֹ
וְיֵדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְ֭הוָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן׃

(1) **The Lord said to Moses:**

(2) **Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea.**

(3) **Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them."**

(4) **Then I will stiffen Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them, that I may gain glory through Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. And they did so.**

(2) **Tell the Israelites to turn back**: Had they just gone straight, the Israelites could have left Egypt and reached their destination entirely by land without ever crossing the sea. But because the Exodus would not have been complete without Pharaoh's death, the Jews had to "turn back" – to return and collect Pharaoh, as it were, in order to see him drowned.

And encamp before Pi-ha-hiroth: Literally, "the mouth of freedom." That is, a location from which they could get access to a "slavery-free zone."

Before Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea: *Baal-tzephon*, means "Lord of the North." A deity of the Canaanites, it was so-named because their territory was located to the north of Egypt. The Egyptians erected this deity on the Egyptian border, along the road leading to Canaan.

The Jews now find themselves, both geographically and psychologically, on the boundary between Egypt and the road leading to Canaan. It is here that they must finally define the relationship that they will have with Pharaoh and Egypt henceforth.

(3) **Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them"**: Pharaoh will reason that the Jews are stranded near the sea, because "the wilderness has closed in on them" (that is, they have lost their way), and because "they are astray in the land" – they have no idea why they left Egypt and where they are headed. This gives Pharaoh and the Egyptians hope that the Jews will agree to return to Egypt, to be once again under Egyptian control.

(4) **Then I will stiffen Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them, that I may gain glory through Pharaoh and all his host**: The Almighty now displays His true greatness. This is necessary for educating mankind, and first and foremost in this instance – to educate the Egyptians.

And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord: We have already noted two main reasons that God deemed it necessary for the Egyptians to "know that I am the Lord."

First, it was necessary not only to remove the Jews from Egypt, but "to remove Egypt from Jews" – to free the Jews from their worship of Egypt, and to destroy the Egyptian value system in the eyes of the Egyptians themselves, after which, as the natural consequence, it would be destroyed in the eyes of the Jews as well.

Second, it was necessary to intimidate the Egyptians to such an extent that they would not interfere with Israel's conquest of Canaan, and for several hundred years into the future would make no effort to intervene in what would be happening there. This afforded the Jewish people conditions conducive to gradually building their own state, and for the Torah to become the Tanakh, a necessary step for the subsequent spiritual development of all of humanity.

14.6. PHARAOH PURSUES THE ISRAELITES (14:5-9)

ה וַיֻּגַּד לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם וַיֵּהָפֵךְ לְבַב פַּרְעֹה וַעֲבָדָיו אֶל־
הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂינוּ כִּי־שִׁלַּחְנוּ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעָבְדֵנוּ:
ו וַיֶּאְסֹר אֶת־רִכְבּוֹ וְאֶת־עַמּוֹ לָקָח עִמּוֹ: ז וַיִּקַּח שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב
בָּחוּר וְכֹל רֶכֶב מִצְרָיִם וְשָׁלִשִׁם עַל־כֻּלּוֹ: ח וַיְחַזֵּק יְי אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה
מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּרְדֹּף אַחֲרֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יֹצְאִים בְּיָד רָמָה:
ט וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם אֲחֲרֵיהֶם וַיַּשִּׂיגוּ אוֹתָם חֹנִים עַל־הַיָּם כָּל־סוּס רֶכֶב
פַּרְעֹה וּפָרָשָׁיו וְחֵילוֹ עַל־פִּי הַחִירֹת לִפְנֵי בַּעַל צְפֹן:

(5) When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his courtiers had a change of heart about the people and said, "What is this we have done, releasing Israel from our service?"

(6) He ordered his chariot and took his men with him;

(7) he took six hundred of his picked chariots, and the rest of the chariots of Egypt, with officers in all of them.

(8) The Lord stiffened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he gave chase to the Israelites. As the Israelites were departing defiantly, boldly,

(9) the Egyptians gave chase to them, and all the chariot horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen, and his warriors overtook them encamped by the sea, near Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon.

(5) **When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled**: Only a few days earlier the Egyptians had driven the Jews out of Egypt by force. But now they see the situation as "the people had fled."

Pharaoh and his courtiers had a change of heart about the people and said, "What is this we have done, releasing Israel from our service?": The Egyptians have already forgotten the plagues, including the death of their firstborns. All they can think about now is the economic opportunities they have forfeited.

(6) **He ordered his chariot and took his men with him**: Literally, "He harnessed his chariot and took his people with him." The Midrash understands these words literally. Pharaoh harnesses his own chariot and

in this manner he "takes his people with him" – he raises the Egyptians' morale. Although the death of the firstborns was a very severe blow to the Egyptians, Pharaoh, by demonstrating his own preparedness for war, was able to mobilize them. Once again, we see that Pharaoh is a truly outstanding leader.

(7) **He took six hundred of his picked chariots, and the rest of the chariots of Egypt**: This shows that Egypt still has plenty of horses – that not all of them died in the plagues (see 9:6).

with officers in all of them: The Torah here uses the rather obscure word *shalish*, which grammatically is very close to *shalosh*, "three." Perhaps there were three men on each chariot, or each chariot was harnessed to a troika of three horses. Or the word might simply mean "infantry."

(8) **The Lord stiffened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he gave chase to the Israelites**: The previous plagues might have taught Pharaoh not to mess with the Jews. But now God stiffened Pharaoh's heart once again, and Pharaoh could not rein himself in.

As the Israelites were departing defiantly, boldly: Overtly, hiding nothing, thus luring Pharaoh on.

(9) **The Egyptians gave chase to them, and all the chariot horses of Pharaoh, his horsemen, and his warriors overtook them encamped by the sea, near Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon**: The showdown with Pharaoh occurs between Pi-hahiroth and Baal-zephon, on the boundary between the liberation from Egypt and the road leading to the Land of Canaan.

14.7. THE ISRAELITES ARE INITIALLY CONFOUNDED, BUT ULTIMATELY PREVAIL (14:10-18)

י וּפַרְעֹה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּה מִצְרַיִם | נֹסֵעַ
אֲחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירְאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְי׃ יא וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־
מֹשֶׁה הֲמִבְּלִי אֵין־קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לָמוּת בַּמִּדְבָּר מַה־זֹּאת
עָשִׂיתָ לָּנוּ לְהוֹצִיאֵנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם׃ יב הֲלֹא־זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ
בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חֲדַל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעַבְדָה אֶת־מִצְרָיִם כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עֲבֹד

אֶת־מִצְרַ֑יִם מִמֵּ֖תֶנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּ֑ר׃ יג וַיֹּ֣אמֶר מֹשֶׁ֔ה אֶל־הָעָ֖ם אַל־תִּירָ֑אוּ
הֵתְיַצְּבוּ֙ וּרְאוּ֔ אֶת־יְשׁוּעַ֥ת יְ֖י אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂ֣ה לָכֶ֑ם הַיּ֗וֹם כִּ֤י אֲשֶׁר֙ רְאִיתֶ֣ם
אֶת־מִצְרַ֔יִם הַיּ֖וֹם לֹ֣א תֹסִ֑פוּ לִרְאֹתָ֥ם עוֹד֙ עַד־עוֹלָ֔ם׃ יד יְ֖י יִלָּחֶ֣ם לָכֶ֑ם
וְאַתֶּ֥ם תַּחֲרִשֻֽׁן׃

טו וַיֹּ֣אמֶר יְ֭י אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֑ה מַה־תִּצְעַ֥ק אֵלָ֖י דַּבֵּ֣ר אֶל־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל וְיִסָּֽעוּ׃
טז וְאַתָּ֣ה הָרֵ֣ם אֶת־מַטְּךָ֗ וּנְטֵ֤ה אֶת־יָדְךָ֙ עַל־הַיָּ֔ם וּבְקָעֵ֖הוּ וְיָבְא֣וּ בְנֵֽי־
יִשְׂרָאֵ֥ל בְּתוֹךְ֙ הַיָּ֔ם בַּיַּבָּשָׁ֖ה׃ יז וַאֲנִ֞י הִנְנִ֣י מְחַזֵּ֗ק אֶת־לֵ֤ב מִצְרַ֙יִם֙ וְיָבֹ֣אוּ
אַחֲרֵיהֶ֔ם וְאִכָּבְדָ֥ה בְּפַרְעֹ֖ה וּבְכָל־חֵיל֑וֹ בְּרִכְבּ֖וֹ וּבְפָרָשָֽׁיו׃ יח וְיָדְע֣וּ
מִצְרַ֗יִם כִּ֤י אֲנִי֙ יְ֔י בְּהִכָּבְדִ֥י בְפַרְעֹ֖ה בְּרִכְבּ֑וֹ וּבְפָרָשָֽׁיו׃

(10) **As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the Lord.**

(11) **And they said to Moses, "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt?**

(12) **Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness'?"**

(13) **But Moses said to the people, "Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again.**

(14) **The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!"**

(15) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.**

(16) **And you lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the Israelites may march into the sea on dry ground.**

(17) **And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them; and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots and his horsemen.**

(18) **Let the Egyptians know that I am Lord, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."**

(10) **As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight**: Literally, "the Israelites lifted their eyes." As a general rule, this expression whenever used in Tanakh has a connotation of looking not afar but upward – toward Heaven. In other words, as the Jews turned their thoughts to the Almighty, they experienced a pronounced psychological and spiritual discomfort.

Caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them: Literally, "And, behold, Egypt is advancing upon them." In other words, not just the Egyptians, but Egypt itself wants to capture them and return them to her. Until only very recently the Jews had been slaves to Egypt, but they were suddenly freed, and now, besides being terrified by the very real danger they face, they are also stricken with pangs of guilt for having abandoned their "lawful masters." Even now the Jews believe that in the name of justice they should still be slaves in Egypt.

(10-11) **Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the Lord. And they said to Moses, "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness?** What begins as a cry unto the Lord very soon becomes a serious grievance leveled at Moses.

(12) **Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness'?** Even all the previous plagues have not yet convinced the people that God will protect them from Pharaoh. This ordeal of impending mortal danger and deliverance from it were also an essential aspect of Israel's education.

(13-14) **But Moses said to the people, "Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you … The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!"**: Because Moses is confident that a miraculous salvation is close at hand, he believes that there is no need to take independent action.

(15) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward"**: God now gives Moses a completely different instruction: Rather than standing idly by waiting for salvation, the Jews must advance on their own. This is a key moment of the Exodus. The people become capable of taking independent action, and thereby gain their inner freedom.

The Jews find themselves in an intermediate state. The Exodus has begun, but is not yet complete. Internally the Jews are still enslaved by Egypt due to their passivity. To complete the Exodus, they must demonstrate that they are capable of showing initiative. By surmounting their fears and actively entering the sea, the process of their transition to independence begins.

The difficulties that the Jews confront in the course of the Exodus serve the purpose of re-educating them, and allowing them to grow spiritually in the process of overcoming those challenges. God puts the Jews in a very tight spot to make them understand that problems do not solve themselves, and that one must learn to act.

(16) **And you lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the Israelites may march into the sea on dry ground**: Because God wants the Jews to trust Moses, the sea now parts as if under his authority.

(17) **And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them; and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots and his horsemen**: God's greatness does not consist in defeating the Egyptians, but in establishing justice. The Egyptians, who drowned Jewish children in the Nile, will themselves now be drowned in the sea.

(18) **Let the Egyptians know that I am Lord, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen**: As with all the plagues, the goal here is to force the Egyptians to see and recognize the Almighty. The Jews are still so deeply enslaved psychologically that they can perceive the Almighty only through Egypt's recognition of Him, i.e., through Egypt's final destruction.

14.8. CROSSING THE SEA OF REEDS (14:19-22)

יט וַיִּסַּע מַלְאַךְ הָאֱלֹהִים הַהֹלֵךְ לִפְנֵי מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּלֶךְ מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם
וַיִּסַּע עַמּוּד הֶעָנָן מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲמֹד מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם: כ וַיָּבֹא בֵּין | מַחֲנֵה
מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי הֶעָנָן וְהַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיָּאֶר אֶת־הַלָּיְלָה וְלֹא־
קָרַב זֶה אֶל־זֶה כָּל־הַלָּיְלָה: כא וַיֵּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיּוֹלֶךְ יְי |

אֶת־הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קָדִים עַזָּה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַיָּם לֶחָרָבָה וַיִּבָּקְעוּ
הַמָּיִם: כב וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבָּשָׁה וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חוֹמָה
מִיְּמִינָם וּמִשְּׂמֹאלָם:

(19) The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them; and the pillar of cloud shifted from in front of them and took up a place behind them,

(20) and it came between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel. Thus there was the cloud with the darkness, and it cast a spell upon the night, so that the one could not come near the other all through the night.

(21) Then Moses held out his arm over the sea and the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split,

(22) and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

(19) **The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them**: Normally, at sunset the pillar of cloud would be replaced by the pillar of fire, and at dawn vice versa, but here both pillars came together in order to keep the Egyptians away from Israel.

(20) **And it came between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel**: The two pillars were joined together, and therefore:

Thus there was the cloud with the darkness, and it cast a spell upon the night, so that the one could not come near the other all through the night: On the Egyptian side there was only darkness and gloom, because of the pillar of cloud, but on the Jewish side the pillar of fire lit up the night.

(21) **Then Moses held out his arm over the sea and the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split**: In order for the Jews to trust Moses, God had to make it seem to them that it was Moses who was performing this miracle.

(22) **And the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground**: The Midrash understands this verse as: "And the Israelites (first) went into the sea (and only then found that they were walking) on dry ground." That is, first they entered the sea, and only then did it part.

According to the Midrash, at first the sea would not part, and, despite Moses' exhortations to proceed, the people would not move. But then, Nahshon the son of Amminadab, the prince of the tribe of Judah (see 6:23, and Num. 1:7) entered the water, going deeper and deeper until the water had reached unto his nostrils, and only then the waters parted. The lesson to be learned here is that the miracle of salvation occurred only at the very last moment, and only when the Jews, rather than remaining entirely passive, did everything they could possibly do to show their initiative, and to demonstrate their trust in God that the salvation would come.

The waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left: In this description there remains a certain duality. God drove back the sea with a strong wind all night (which makes it seem like a natural event), but the waters formed a wall for them on their right and on their left (obviously a miraculous event). This reflects two different perceptions of those same events among the Jewish people. Some of them perceived the events as something entirely normal (the wind blew so hard that the bottom of the sea was exposed), while others saw what was happening as a something truly miraculous (God Himself had split the sea for them).

Such substantially divergent assessments of the very same events in our lives occur frequently, because God runs the world such that we can perceive events as either natural or miraculous, depending on our outlook[1].

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[1] For example, in the modern Jewish world some people choose to perceive the creation of the State of Israel as a natural event (it does not seem to violate any physical laws, after all), while others see it as an "open miracle" (since the return of a people to their land after two thousand years of exile runs contrary to all the laws of history and sociology).

14.9. THE EGYPTIANS PERISH IN THE SEA OF REEDS (14:23-31)

כג וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם כָּל סוּס פַּרְעֹה רִכְבּוֹ וּפָרָשָׁיו אֶל־
תּוֹךְ הַיָּם: כד וַיְהִי בְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת הַבֹּקֶר וַיַּשְׁקֵף יְ אֶל־מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם
בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ וְעָנָן וַיָּהָם אֶת מַחֲנֵה מִצְרָיִם: כה וַיָּסַר אֶת אֹפַן מַרְכְּבֹתָיו
וַיְנַהֲגֵהוּ בִּכְבֵדֻת וַיֹּאמֶר מִצְרַיִם אָנוּסָה מִפְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי יְ נִלְחָם
לָהֶם בְּמִצְרָיִם:

כו וַיֹּאמֶר יְ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַיָּם וְיָשֻׁבוּ הַמַּיִם עַל־מִצְרַיִם
עַל־רִכְבּוֹ וְעַל־פָּרָשָׁיו: כז וַיֵּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיָּשָׁב הַיָּם לִפְנוֹת
בֹּקֶר לְאֵיתָנוֹ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסִים לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיְנַעֲר יְ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם:
כח וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיְכַסּוּ אֶת־הָרֶכֶב וְאֶת־הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכֹל חֵיל פַּרְעֹה
הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לֹא־נִשְׁאַר בָּהֶם עַד־אֶחָד: כט וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
הָלְכוּ בַיִּבָּשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֹמָה מִימִינָם וּמִשְּׂמֹאלָם:
ל וַיּוֹשַׁע יְ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד מִצְרָיִם וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־
מִצְרַיִם מֵת עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם: לא וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר
עָשָׂה יְ בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּירְאוּ הָעָם אֶת־יְ וַיַּאֲמִינוּ בַּיהוָה וּבְמֹשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ:

(23) The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen.

(24) At the morning watch, the Lord looked down upon the Egyptian army from a pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into panic.

(25) He locked the wheels of their chariots so that they moved forward with difficulty. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."

(26) Then the Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians and upon their chariots and upon their horsemen."

(27) Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But the Lord hurled the Egyptians into the sea.

(28) The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen — Pharaoh's entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.

(29) But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

(30) Thus the Lord delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea.

(31) And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the Lord had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord; they had faith in the Lord and His servant Moses.

(23) **The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen**: Had the Egyptians found within themselves the strength to halt in their tracks, they would not have perished.

(24) **At the morning watch, the Lord looked down upon the Egyptian army**: Hebrew, *va-yashkef*, "He looked down strictly, condemningly." This is Divine judgment giving the Egyptians their deserts.

From a pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into panic: The bright light of the pillar of fire and the utter darkness of the pillar of cloud fell upon the Egyptians at the same time. This overwhelmed and confused them, and they became disoriented.

(25) **He locked the wheels of their chariots so that they moved forward with difficulty**: The chariot wheels were consumed in the heat of the pillar of fire (or the wheels simply fell off their axles), and the chariots dragged along.

And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt": At the very last moment the Egyptians are aware of what is happening, but it is too late for them to be able to change anything.

(26) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians and upon their**

chariots and upon their horsemen": The return of the waters also had to happen at Moses' direction, once again to increase and reinforce the trust that the Jews placed in Moses.

(27-29) **Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state … But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground**: While the Egyptians were drowning, the Jews continued to cross the sea. Although the natural order had already been restored where the Egyptians were, and the returning waters buried them under it, the miracle continued for the Jews at their location, and they were able to complete their crossing.

(30) **Thus the Lord delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea**: Literally, "Israel saw Egypt dead on the shore of the sea." Now finally and completely free of their enslavement and subjugation to Egypt, the Jews were now seeing not only the death of the Egyptians, but the death of Egypt itself. For the Jews, Egypt was now totally dead.

(31) **And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the Lord had wielded against the Egyptians: The Midrash describes it this way**: "A lowly maidservant at the Sea of Reeds saw things that, centuries later, even the great prophet Ezekiel would not see [when the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God and the celestial Chariot]" (see Ezek. ch. 1). The crossing of the sea was a monumental emotional experience, but, as we have noted, all that was only short-lived. Although a burst of emotion can spring the Jews out of Egyptian bondage, it does not yet make them a free people. This will happen only six weeks later, when they receive the Torah on Mount Sinai.

The people feared the Lord; they had faith in the Lord and His servant Moses: Because Moses had "performed" the miracles with his staff, the Jews believed that Moses was indeed the messenger of God.

14.10. THE SONG OF THE SEA (15:1-19)

א אָז יָשִׁיר־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ
לֵאמֹר אָשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאֹה גָּאָה סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם:

ב עָזִּי וְזִמְרָת יָהּ וַיְהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה זֶה אֵלִי וְאַנְוֵהוּ אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי
וַאֲרֹמְמֶנְהוּ:

ג יְי אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה יְי שְׁמוֹ:

ד מַרְכְּבֹת פַּרְעֹה וְחֵילוֹ יָרָה בַיָּם וּמִבְחַר שָׁלִשָׁיו טֻבְּעוּ בְיַם־סוּף:

ה תְּהֹמֹת יְכַסְיֻמוּ יָרְדוּ בִמְצוֹלֹת כְּמוֹ־אָבֶן:

ו יְמִינְךָ יְי נֶאְדָּרִי בַּכֹּחַ יְמִינְךָ יְי תִּרְעַץ אוֹיֵב:

ז וּבְרֹב גְּאוֹנְךָ תַּהֲרֹס קָמֶיךָ תְּשַׁלַּח חֲרֹנְךָ יְאֹכְלֵמוֹ כַּקַּשׁ:

ח וּבְרוּחַ אַפֶּיךָ נֶעֶרְמוּ מַיִם נִצְּבוּ כְמוֹ־נֵד נֹזְלִים קָפְאוּ תְהֹמֹת בְּלֶב־יָם:

ט אָמַר אוֹיֵב אֶרְדֹּף אַשִּׂיג אֲחַלֵּק שָׁלָל תִּמְלָאֵמוֹ נַפְשִׁי אָרִיק חַרְבִּי
תּוֹרִישֵׁמוֹ יָדִי:

י נָשַׁפְתָּ בְרוּחֲךָ כִּסָּמוֹ יָם צָלְלוּ כַּעוֹפֶרֶת בְּמַיִם אַדִּירִים:

יא מִי־כָמֹכָה בָּאֵלִם יְי מִי כָּמֹכָה נֶאְדָּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ נוֹרָא תְהִלֹּת עֹשֵׂה
פֶלֶא:

יב נָטִיתָ יְמִינְךָ תִּבְלָעֵמוֹ אָרֶץ:

יג נָחִיתָ בְחַסְדְּךָ עַם־זוּ גָּאָלְתָּ נֵהַלְתָּ בְעֻזְּךָ אֶל־נְוֵה קָדְשֶׁךָ:

יד שָׁמְעוּ עַמִּים יִרְגָּזוּן חִיל אָחַז יֹשְׁבֵי פְלֶשֶׁת:

טו אָז נִבְהֲלוּ אַלּוּפֵי אֱדוֹם אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יֹאחֲזֵמוֹ רָעַד נָמֹגוּ כֹּל יֹשְׁבֵי
כְנָעַן:

טז תִּפֹּל עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימָתָה וָפַחַד בִּגְדֹל זְרוֹעֲךָ יִדְּמוּ כָּאֶבֶן עַד־יַעֲבֹר
עַמְּךָ יְי עַד־יַעֲבֹר עַם־זוּ קָנִיתָ:

יז תְּבִאֵמוֹ וְתִטָּעֵמוֹ בְּהַר נַחֲלָתְךָ מָכוֹן לְשִׁבְתְּךָ פָּעַלְתָּ יְ מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנוּ יָדֶיךָ:

יח יְ | יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד:

יט כִּי בָא סוּס פַּרְעֹה בְּרִכְבּוֹ וּבְפָרָשָׁיו בַּיָּם וַיָּשֶׁב יְ עֲלֵהֶם אֶת־מֵי הַיָּם וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָלְכוּ בַיַּבָּשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם:

(1) **Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. They said: I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.**

(2) **The Lord is my strength and might; He is become my deliverance. This is my God and I will enshrine Him; The God of my father, and I will exalt Him.**

(3) **The Lord, the Warrior — Lord is His name!**

(4) **Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the pick of his officers Are drowned in the Sea of Reeds.**

(5) **The deeps covered them; They went down into the depths like a stone.**

(6) **Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the foe!**

(7) **In Your great triumph You break Your opponents; You send forth Your fury, it consumes them like straw.**

(8) **At the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up, The floods stood straight like a wall; The deeps froze in the heart of the sea.**

(9) **The foe said, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall have its fill of them. I will bare my sword — My hand shall subdue them."**

(10) **You made Your wind blow, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the majestic waters.**

(11) **Who is like You, O Lord, among the celestials; Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in splendor, working wonders!**

(12) **You put out Your right hand, The earth swallowed them.**

(13) **In Your love You lead the people You redeemed; In Your strength You guide them to Your holy abode.**

(14) **The peoples hear, they tremble; Agony grips the dwellers in Philistia.**

(15) **Now are the clans of Edom dismayed; The tribes of Moab — trembling grips them; All the dwellers in Canaan are aghast.**

(16) **Terror and dread descend upon them; Through the might of Your arm they are still as stone — Till Your people cross over, O Lord, Till Your people cross whom You have ransomed.**

(17) **You will bring them and plant them in Your own mountain, The place You made to dwell in, O Lord, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands established.**

(18) **The Lord will reign for ever and ever!**

(19) **For the horses of Pharaoh, with his chariots and horsemen, went into the sea; and the Lord turned back on them the waters of the sea; but the Israelites marched on dry ground in the midst of the sea.**

(1) **Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. They said**: A "song" is an expression on one's profound inner experience, of an emotional uplift and feelings of gratitude. Such expression is so important for every individual, and for society as a whole.

A song also expresses one's understanding of events that have taken place. The Song of the Sea as reported in the Torah serves also this purpose, giving us insight into how the Jewish people at that moment understood what they had experienced.

The deliverance at the Sea of Reeds could be explained either by natural causes (the wind drove the water away) or by miraculous intervention (the waters parted, forming a wall on either side). Having chosen, under Moses' direction, to sing a song of gratitude to the Almighty, the Jews clearly demonstrate their realization that what had happened was nothing less than a Divine miracle. This is evidence of a very significant advancement for the Jewish people along their path of spiritual development.

(15) **Now are the clans of Edom dismayed; The tribes of Moab — trembling grips them; All the dwellers in Canaan are aghast**: The

annihilation of the Egyptians made a deep impression on all the surrounding peoples. This was very important for the conquest of Canaan and for the future destiny of the Jewish nation.

(17) **You will bring them and plant them in Your own mountain, The place You made to dwell in, O Lord, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands established**: The entire Promised Land (God's "own mountain") is God's dwelling place, and His sanctuary, in which the Jewish people are to settle. The purpose of the Exodus is to conquer and take possession of the Land, and thus to forge a direct connection with God. The giving of the Torah at Sinai is not mentioned here.

14.11. THE WOMEN'S SONG (15:20-21)

כ וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֲחֹות אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַתֹּף בְּיָדָהּ וַתֵּצֵאנָ כָל־
הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתֻפִּים וּבִמְחֹלֹת: כא וַתַּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה
כִּי־גָאֹה גָּאָה סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם:

(20) **Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels.**

(21) **And Miriam chanted for them: Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.**

(20) **Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister**: The Torah emphasizes that Miriam is Aaron' sister, not Moses' sister, because Aaron and Miriam had been active as prophets even in Egypt. Also, Miriam's prophetic gift was on the level of Aaron's prophecy, but not on Moses' level.

Took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels: Two points distinguish this description of the women's song from the general Song of the Sea that preceded it, as sung by Moses and all of Israel: The women sing while dancing (round dances), and they sing with musical instruments (timbrels) in their hands.

All the women went out after her in dance with timbrels: Although the Jews left Egypt "hurriedly" and without an abundance of supplies, the women had taken their musical instruments with them, because Jewish life is impossible without music.

(21) **And Miriam chanted for them: Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea**: The women's song repeats the entire men's song that they have just heard. (Although the Torah quotes only the women's repetition of the first verse, the whole song is meant). But the women's song is different in that it includes dancing and musical accompaniment. A song (and this song in particular) is a metaphor for life itself. Thus, after receiving from the men a significant contribution toward an understanding of the world – the text of the song – the women give it its correct musical and dance form, thus making the song complete.

CHAPTER 15

FROM EGYPT TO SINAI

15.1. THE BITTER WATERS OF MARAH (15:22-26)

כב וַיַּסַּע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם־סוּף וַיֵּצְאוּ אֶל־מִדְבַּר־שׁוּר וַיֵּלְכוּ
שְׁלֹשֶׁת־יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְלֹא־מָצְאוּ מָיִם: כג וַיָּבֹאוּ מָרָתָה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ
לִשְׁתּוֹת מַיִם מִמָּרָה כִּי מָרִים הֵם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמָהּ מָרָה: כד וַיִּלֹּנוּ
הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה־נִּשְׁתֶּה: כה וַיִּצְעַק אֶל־יי וַיּוֹרֵהוּ יי עֵץ
וַיַּשְׁלֵךְ אֶל־הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמָּיִם שָׂם לוֹ חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם
נִסָּהוּ: כו וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל | יי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו
תַּעֲשֶׂה וְהַאֲזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָיו וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל־חֻקָּיו כָּל־הַמַּחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי
בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא־אָשִׂים עָלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי יי רֹפְאֶךָ:

(22) **Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water.**

(23) **They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah.**

(24) **And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"**

(25) **So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There He made for them a fixed rule, and there He put them to the test.**

(26) **He said, "If you will heed the Lord your God diligently, doing what is upright in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the Lord am your healer."**

(22) **Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds**: The Torah here uses a construction so unusual, that it is hardly even possible to capture the meaning in English at all, except with an obvious and awkward circumlocution: "Moses caused Israel to set out." We should have expected the far more typical, and simple: "Israel set out from the Sea of Reeds."

The Midrash therefore explains that in this case Moses had to lead Israel away with actual force, because the Jews, still feeling so uplifted and upbeat by the events they had just experienced, were hoping to delay their departure from there in order to collect the Egyptian treasures that the sea had cast ashore.

If this excitement could not be quenched, or at least contained within proper limits, nothing else of value could be built on it. Moreover, it was imperative that the Jews would not continue looking behind them with regret at how much more wealth had remained in Egypt, but would instead look ahead to blazing their own path.

They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water: Having torn themselves away from Egypt, the source of their former physical and spiritual sustenance, the Jews now find themselves entirely without water. They have no idea how they will survive.

(23) **They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah**: *Marah* is the feminine form of *mar*, "bitter." Living a self-sufficient, independent life has thus far proved quite painful. The innermost sentiments of the people, who are now bemoaning the loss of what they previously had in Egypt, are reflected in the bitterness of the water.

(24) **And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"**: The emotional high brought on by the deliverance at the

Sea of Reeds is already starting to wear off, and the complaints begin straightaway as soon as the first difficulties are encountered. In all fairness, those difficulties are real, not imagined, and that is why the people are not punished for grumbling. But they have still not learned how to approach their problems constructively.

(25) **So he cried out to the Lord**: Even Moses was completely at a loss for what he should do.

And the Lord showed him a piece of wood: "Wood" in Hebrew is *etz*, which also means "tree." Desalination of water with the aid of a tree symbolizes a connection with both the Garden of Eden – with its Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life – and the Torah, which is itself compared to the Tree of Life (Prov. 3:18).

He threw it into the water and the water became sweet: Thus, the people see clearly that this is no ordinary water. The point of this incident is its pedagogical effect: the Jews need to understand that the water (both physical and spiritual) that they will be drinking henceforth is very different from Egyptian water.

There He made for them a fixed rule: The literal translation is "There He made for them a statute and an ordinance." In Marah the people are first introduced to the laws of the Torah. Since we are not told just which laws were given there, this verse should be interpreted as indicating a general change of approach.

If until now, at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the Jews were granted mercy (*Chesed*), severity is now the order of the day. The Jews are given a crisis to deal with – they have no water. This harshness is necessary as the first stage of the nation's re-education and moral restructuring. It focuses them on law and justice (*Gevurah*), i.e., on life's rigidity and limitations, on the need to operate within a given framework of circumstances. Without this severity, the original *Chesed* cannot endure, and will simply dissipate.

And there He put them to the test: In Hebrew, *nisahu*, from the root *N S H*, whence also nisayon, which means "test" or "ordeal," but also "training" or "experience." (Similarly using *nisayon* in the sense of "The Trials of the Patriarchs," see Bible Dynamics on Genesis, 11.3 and 23.2.

See also below 15.3, commentary on verse 16: 4). Here, too, it would be correct to say that the people are not being tested in the conventional sense of verification, but are receiving training and gaining experience. As they encounter new problems and overcome crises, the Jewish people gradually gain experience in life, and rise to the level of maturity that the Torah, and life in the Land of Israel, will demand of them.

(26) **He said, "If you will heed the Lord your God diligently, doing what is upright in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I the Lord am your healer"**: God's approach here is one of intimidation: "Surely you saw that the water was initially too bitter for drinking, and only thanks to the tree that I showed Moses did that water become potable. Know therefore that without Me you simply will not survive. Only by obeying Me every step of the way can you depend on My help, and on remaining healthy."

This approach is intended to awaken in the people a "fear of God," which is still very far from loving God. But at this initial stage, when the Jews have only very recently left Egypt, it is still impossible to communicate with them in any other terms. In general, the lower the level of a student's development, the harder it is to deal with him. Only gradually, toward the end of their forty years of wanderings through the wilderness, will the people's spiritual growth have advanced to the point that God can speak to them in the language of love, as reflected in the Book of Deuteronomy.

15.2. IN ELIM: SPRINGS OF WATER AND PALM TREES (15:27)

כז וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילִמָה וְשָׁם שְׁתֵּים עֶשְׂרֵה עֵינֹת מַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים תְּמָרִים
וַיַּחֲנוּ־שָׁם עַל־הַמָּיִם׃

(27) **And they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they encamped there beside the water.**

(27) **And they came to Elim**: I.e., having successfully put the crisis behind them, they journey onward.

Where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they encamped there beside the water: They now have water even in great abundance, for in Elim there are "twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees." ("Palm trees" with no further qualification means date palms. The Torah is saying that the people now had water to drink and sweet, nourishing food to eat.)

The numbers 12 and 70 in juxtaposition connect us back to the beginning of Exodus (1:5), where these numbers are essential indicators for the Jacob family. (Jacob had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jacob's family that descended from Canaan to Egypt numbered seventy souls). Thus, upon leaving Egypt, the structure of Jacob's family who had come there originally is now restored.

Elim's twelve springs correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel, and the seventy date palms can alternatively represent the seventy nations of the world.[1] Thus, the Jewish people in all their diversity, as represented by the Twelve Tribes, are a source of life for the nations of the world.

15.3. GOD GIVES MANNA AND MEAT IN THE WILDERNESS (16:1-21)

א וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאֵילִם וַיָּבֹאוּ כָל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מִדְבַּר־סִין אֲשֶׁר
בֵּין־אֵילִם וּבֵין סִינָי בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרָיִם: ב וילינו (וַיִּלֹּונוּ) כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן
בַּמִּדְבָּר: ג וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי־יִתֵּן מוּתֵנוּ בְיַד־יְי בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתֵּנוּ עַל־סִיר הַבָּשָׂר בְּאָכְלֵנוּ לֶחֶם לָשֹׂבַע כִּי־הוֹצֵאתֶם
אֹתָנוּ אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית אֶת־כָּל־הַקָּהָל הַזֶּה בָּרָעָב:

ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הִנְנִי מַמְטִיר לָכֶם לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמָיִם וְיָצָא הָעָם
וְלָקְטוּ דְּבַר־יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ לְמַעַן אֲנַסֶּנּוּ הֲיֵלֵךְ בְּתוֹרָתִי אִם־לֹא: ה וְהָיָה
בַּיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי וְהֵכִינוּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יָבִיאוּ וְהָיָה מִשְׁנֶה עַל אֲשֶׁר־יִלְקְטוּ
יוֹם | יוֹם: ו וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל־כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֶרֶב וִידַעְתֶּם
כִּי יְי הוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: ז וּבֹקֶר וּרְאִיתֶם אֶת־כְּבוֹד יְי

[1] See above, §3.1.

בְּשָׁמְעוֹ אֶת־תְּלֻנֹּתֵיכֶם עַל־יְיָ וְנַחְנוּ מָה כִּי תלונו (תַלִינוּ) עָלֵינוּ:
ח וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּתֵת יְיָ לָכֶם בָּעֶרֶב בָּשָׂר לֶאֱכֹל וְלֶחֶם בַּבֹּקֶר לִשְׂבֹּעַ
בִּשְׁמֹעַ יְיָ אֶת־תְּלֻנֹּתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם מַלִּינִם עָלָיו וְנַחְנוּ מָה לֹא־עָלֵינוּ
תְּלֻנֹּתֵיכֶם כִּי עַל־יְיָ: ט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אֱמֹר אֶל־כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל קִרְבוּ לִפְנֵי יְיָ כִּי שָׁמַע אֶת תְּלֻנֹּתֵיכֶם: י וַיְהִי כְּדַבֵּר אַהֲרֹן אֶל־
כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּפְנוּ אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר וְהִנֵּה כְּבוֹד יְיָ נִרְאָה בֶּעָנָן:

יא וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: יב שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־תְּלוּנֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
דַּבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם לֵאמֹר בֵּין הָעַרְבַּיִם תֹּאכְלוּ בָשָׂר וּבַבֹּקֶר תִּשְׂבְּעוּ־לָחֶם
וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: יג וַיְהִי בָעֶרֶב וַתַּעַל הַשְּׂלָו וַתְּכַס אֶת־
הַמַּחֲנֶה וּבַבֹּקֶר הָיְתָה שִׁכְבַת הַטַּל סָבִיב לַמַּחֲנֶה: יד וַתַּעַל שִׁכְבַת
הַטַּל וְהִנֵּה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמִּדְבָּר דַּק מְחֵסְפָּס דַּק כַּכְּפֹר עַל־הָאָרֶץ:
טו וַיִּרְאוּ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו מָן הוּא כִּי לֹא יָדְעוּ
מַה־הוּא וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם הוּא הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְיָ לָכֶם לְאָכְלָה:
טז זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ לִקְטוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִישׁ לְפִי אָכְלוֹ עֹמֶר לַגֻּלְגֹּלֶת
מִסְפַּר נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם אִישׁ לַאֲשֶׁר בְּאָהֳלוֹ תִּקָּחוּ: יז וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַיִּלְקְטוּ הַמַּרְבֶּה וְהַמַּמְעִיט: יח וַיְמַדּוּ בָעֹמֶר וְלֹא הֶעְדִּיף הַמַּרְבֶּה
וְהַמַּמְעִיט לֹא הֶחְסִיר אִישׁ לְפִי־אָכְלוֹ לָקָטוּ: יט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם
אִישׁ אַל־יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד־בֹּקֶר: כ וְלֹא־שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹתִרוּ אֲנָשִׁים
מִמֶּנּוּ עַד־בֹּקֶר וַיָּרֶם תּוֹלָעִים וַיִּבְאַשׁ וַיִּקְצֹף עֲלֵהֶם מֹשֶׁה: כא וַיִּלְקְטוּ
אֹתוֹ בַּבֹּקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר אִישׁ כְּפִי אָכְלוֹ וְחַם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְנָמָס:

(1) **Setting out from Elim, the whole Israelite community came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.**

(2) **In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.**

(3) **The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death."**

(4) And the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather

each day that day's portion — that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not.

(5) **But on the sixth day, when they apportion what they have brought in, it shall prove to be double the amount they gather each day."**

(6) **So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "By evening you shall know it was the Lord who brought you out from the land of Egypt;**

(7) **and in the morning you shall behold the Presence of the Lord, because He has heard your grumblings against the Lord. For who are we that you should grumble against us?**

(8) **Since it is the Lord," Moses continued, "who will give you flesh to eat in the evening and bread in the morning to the full, because the Lord has heard the grumblings you utter against Him, what is our part? Your grumbling is not against us, but against the Lord!"**

(9) **Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole Israelite community: Advance toward the Lord, for He has heard your grumbling."**

(10) **And as Aaron spoke to the whole Israelite community, they turned toward the wilderness, and there, in a cloud, appeared the Presence of the Lord.**

(11) **The Lord spoke to Moses:**

(12) **"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Speak to them and say: By evening you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; and you shall know that I the Lord am your God."**

(13) **In the evening quail appeared and covered the camp; in the morning there was a fall of dew about the camp.**

(14) **When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground.**

(15) When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" — for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "That is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.

(16) This is what the Lord has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an omer to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent."

(17) The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little.

(18) But when they measured it by the omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency: they had gathered as much as they needed to eat.

(19) And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning."

(20) But they paid no attention to Moses; some of them left of it until morning, and it became infested with maggots and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

(21) So they gathered it every morning, each as much as he needed to eat; for when the sun grew hot, it would melt.

(1) **Setting out from Elim**: Each new leg of the journey brings a new lesson from the Almighty.

The whole Israelite community came: The people are gradually coming to realize and understand that they constitute a single, united community.

To the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai: They continue to advance toward Sinai; that is, to the giving of the Torah.

On the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt: They had left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month, which means that exactly a month has passed since the Exodus. The emphasis during this first month was on obedience training.

But from the second month onward, the Jews are given more and more opportunity to assert their independence.

(2) **In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron**: Earlier, when the issue was water, the Jews directed their resentment only toward Moses, but now they spare neither Moses nor Aaron.

The first wave of discontent concerned only water, the most essential of all human needs. (Water is an absolute necessity of life, thus symbolizing the barest essence). The people's discontent was therefore directed toward Moses alone. But now this is not only about hunger, but about all the necessities and amenities of life.

The people seem to have completely forgotten the hardships of slavery, and now idealize the virtues of Egypt. Their latest grumblings are therefore directed also against Aaron, who had been living all along with the people in Egypt, and is thus intimately familiar with the conditions of life there, such as they were.

(3) **The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread!"** Only one month after the liberation, tales of the Jews as well-nourished Egyptian slaves have already begun to surface.

They begin to complain of hunger because by this time all the bread (matzah) that they brought out with them from Egypt has already been eaten. Thus, for the past month the Jews have still not freed themselves from Egypt, because they continued to eat Egyptian wheat, and were psychologically still dependent on Egypt. But it is now time for them to become self-sufficient.

For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death: The slave generation does not believe that it was God Who brought them out of Egypt. They consider the Exodus a joint expedient by Moses and Aaron, and impute to them malevolent motives.

(4) **And the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread for you from the sky"**: Although the grumbling is in the main unseemly, God's objective is not to punish, but to educate. He therefore wants to teach the Jews that all their food comes from heaven.

And the people shall go out and gather each day that day's portion — that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not: Hebrew *anaseh*, "I may thus test them," is used here not in the sense of "checking," but in the sense of "giving a lesson, giving experience." (See also above 15.1, commentary on verse 15:25).

People had to see from their own experience that the world functions in accordance with the words of God, and also gain experience in keeping the commandments – not collecting manna on Shabbat.

(5) **But on the sixth day, when they apportion what they have brought in, it shall prove to be double the amount they gather each day**: When they discover that they have collected a double portion of manna – this will help them see that God rules the world.

(6) **So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "By evening you shall know it was the Lord who brought you out from the land of Egypt"**: The people believe that it was Moses and Aaron who brought them out of Egypt, and they therefore level their complaints against them. The bread that will fall from heaven, and also the meat they will receive, will counter this belief, by demonstrating to the people that the Exodus is happening by the will of the Almighty.

(7) **And in the morning you shall behold the Presence of the Lord**: Manna not only satiated the people, but also served to educate them, because they all experienced Divine grace on a daily basis. On weekdays each person collected exactly one *omer* (approximately 2,2 liters) of manna, all of which had to be eaten the same day – none could be left for the morrow. But on the sixth day of the week, the day preceding Shabbat, each person collected two *omers*, half of which was to be left for the next day, because on Shabbat no manna fell.

(8) **Since it is the Lord," Moses continued, "who will give you flesh to eat in the evening and bread in the morning to the full, because the Lord has heard the grumblings you utter"**: The Lord has heard your complaints, and because this time He considers them justified, He has decided to limit Himself to educational measures exclusively. But later we will see that God begins to punish those who complain for no reason.

(9) **Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole Israelite community**: 'Advance toward the Lord, for He has heard your grumbling' ": Moses is unable to explain the problem to the people himself, and is forced to speak through Aaron.

(10) **And as Aaron spoke to the whole Israelite community, they turned toward the wilderness**: They received an answer, and their food too, only by turning toward the wilderness – that is, by turning away from Egypt, with whom they had again begun to associate themselves ("If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread!," v. 3).

And there, in a cloud, appeared the Presence of the Lord: The Divine Presence appears through the cloud, which travels ahead of the camp and sets the people's direction of movement. The Jews need to understand that they will solve their problems only by moving toward the future, and not by returning to the past.

(11) **The Lord spoke to Mose**s: The Almighty converses with Moses here in full view of the entire community of the Children of Israel, which serves as a lesson to them.

(12) **"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Speak to them and say: By evening you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread**: The Midrash explains: Their request for bread was proper, for they really did need it, therefore they will continue to receive bread every morning. But they asked for meat in an unworthy manner, for they had much cattle, and moreover, they could have made do without meat. God therefore gave them their meat at an inconvenient time of day, in the evening. But when in the future the Jews will again demand meat in this same way, they will be punished – they will die from eating that meat (Num. ch. 11).

And you shall know that I the Lord am your God: And then you will no longer level complaints or claims against Moses.

(13) **In the evening quail appeared and covered the camp; in the morning there was a fall of dew about the camp**: The text that follows discusses the manna in great detail, but there is no further mention of

the quail. Apparently, once they received the meat the Jews lost all interest in it, because they really had no need for it to begin with.

(14) **When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground**: The manna falls together with the dew. When the dew has evaporated, on the ground only the manna remains.

(15) **When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it" — for they did not know what it was**: The manna thus takes its name from that question: *Man hu?*, "What is it?" But those words can also have a declarative meaning: "It is man!" (Or "manna," as it later became known in western translation).

Expecting in the morning to find bread (as Moses had said, v. 4), they could not understand what this stuff was that had actually fallen.

The Midrash adds that the taste of the manna and even its very essence both remained "undefined," thus further reinforcing the "What is it?" idea. The manna could acquire almost any taste whatsoever, nor did its essential nature remain constant. Ordinary manna rotted overnight, but on Shabbat it remained edible for the entire following day. But far more remarkable still, the manna that God later commanded to collect and retain as a keepsake ("to be kept throughout the ages" – see v. 33-34 below) could be stored for an indefinite period of time. Therefore, the question "What is it?" remained such a prominent feature of the manna that it became the name of the thing itself.

And Moses said to them, "That is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat": Because this will be your primary food, you should treat it accordingly.

(16) **This is what the Lord has commanded**: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an omer to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent: Collect as much manna as necessary, as determined by the number of persons who need to be immediately fed. But you must make no attempt to stockpile it.

(17) **The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little**: Each to the best of his ability. For some, the process of collecting the manna took longer, while others were able to collect it more quickly.

(18) **But when they measured it by the omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency**: "Gathered much" and "gathered little" refer to the actual time spent collecting the manna. Regardless of how much time was expended, it was impossible to collect any more nor any less than exactly one omer of manna for each family member.

They had gathered as much as they needed to eat: For the duration of their entire forty-year journey through the wilderness, the Jews received bread from heaven in rations of exactly one one-day serving per person per day. (This was true of Shabbat as well, except that they always received their manna for Shabbat as part of a double ration that fell the day before).

(19) **And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning"**: It was impossible to store up manna – by the next day it would always spoil. Unable to keep food in reserve, the Jews developed a feeling of dependence on Heaven, putting their constant hopes in God. It taught them to put their constant trust in Him.

(20) **But they paid no attention to Moses**; some of them left of it until morning, and it became infested with maggots and stank: It is very difficult for a person to live with the constant worry of not knowing what he will eat tomorrow. But such was the daily experience of the Jews with respect to their food during their entire stay in the wilderness.

And Moses was angry with them: Moses was angry because what those people had done demonstrated a lack of faith. But in fact, we could say that the real reason for this anger was that Moses himself, so long ago in his dialogue with God at the burning bush, likewise did not immediately believe the Almighty.

(21) **So they gathered it every morning, each as much as he needed to eat**: Gathering the manna each morning became the norm fairly soon. The people no longer tried to store it overnight.

For when the sun grew hot, it would melt: Once the dew had evaporated, the manna had to be collected rather quickly, because by the middle of the day it would melt. This underscored for the Jews the ephemeral nature of all their food.

15.4. THE MANNA AND THE SHABBAT (16:22-36)

כב וַיְהִי | בַּיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי לָקְטוּ לֶחֶם מִשְׁנֶה שְׁנֵי הָעֹמֶר לָאֶחָד וַיָּבֹאוּ
כָּל־נְשִׂיאֵי הָעֵדָה וַיַּגִּידוּ לְמֹשֶׁה: כג וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְ
שַׁבָּתוֹן שַׁבַּת־קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה מָחָר אֶת אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאפוּ אֹפוּ וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־
תְּבַשְּׁלוּ בַּשֵּׁלוּ וְאֵת כָּל־הָעֹדֵף הַנִּיחוּ לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת עַד־הַבֹּקֶר:
כד וַיַּנִּיחוּ אֹתוֹ עַד־הַבֹּקֶר כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה וְלֹא הִבְאִישׁ וְרִמָּה לֹא־
הָיְתָה בּוֹ: כה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אִכְלֻהוּ הַיּוֹם כִּי־שַׁבָּת הַיּוֹם לַיהוָה הַיּוֹם
לֹא תִמְצָאֻהוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה: כו שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תִּלְקְטֻהוּ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת
לֹא יִהְיֶה־בּוֹ: כז וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יָצְאוּ מִן־הָעָם לִלְקֹט וְלֹא מָצָאוּ:

כח וַיֹּאמֶר יְ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עַד־אָנָה מֵאַנְתֶּם לִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וְתֹרֹתָי:
כט רְאוּ כִּי־יְיָ נָתַן לָכֶם הַשַּׁבָּת עַל־כֵּן הוּא נֹתֵן לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי
לֶחֶם יוֹמָיִם שְׁבוּ | אִישׁ תַּחְתָּיו אַל־יֵצֵא אִישׁ מִמְּקֹמוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי:
ל וַיִּשְׁבְּתוּ הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי: לא וַיִּקְרְאוּ בֵית־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־שְׁמוֹ מָן
וְהוּא כְּזֶרַע גַּד לָבָן וְטַעְמוֹ כְּצַפִּיחֵת בִּדְבָשׁ: לב וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה זֶה
הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְ מְלֹא הָעֹמֶר מִמֶּנּוּ לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם לְמַעַן |
יִרְאוּ אֶת־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר הֶאֱכַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּהוֹצִיאִי אֶתְכֶם
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: לג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן קַח צִנְצֶנֶת אַחַת וְתֵן־
שָׁמָּה מְלֹא־הָעֹמֶר מָן וְהַנַּח אֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי יְ לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:
לד כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיַּנִּיחֵהוּ אַהֲרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדֻת לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת:
לה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָכְלוּ אֶת־הַמָּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה עַד־בֹּאָם אֶל־אֶרֶץ
נוֹשָׁבֶת אֶת־הַמָּן אָכְלוּ עַד־בֹּאָם אֶל־קְצֵה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: לו וְהָעֹמֶר
עֲשִׂרִית הָאֵיפָה הוּא:

(22) **On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two omers for each; and when all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses,**

(23) **he said to them, "This is what the Lord meant: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy Shabbat of the Lord. Bake what you would bake and boil what you would boil; and all that is left put aside to be kept until morning."**

(24) **So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered; and it did not turn foul, and there were no maggots in it.**

(25) **Then Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Shabbat of the Lord; you will not find it today on the plain.**

(26) **Six days you shall gather it; on the seventh day, the Shabbat, there will be none."**

(27) **Yet some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found nothing.**

(28) **And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you men refuse to obey My commandments and My teachings?**

(29) **Mark that the Lord has given you the Shabbat; therefore He gives you two days' food on the sixth day. Let everyone remain where he is: let no one leave his place on the seventh day."**

(30) **So the people remained inactive on the seventh day.**

(31) **The house of Israel named it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and it tasted like wafers in honey.**

(32) **Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: Let one omer of it be kept throughout the ages, in order that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out from the land of Egypt."**

(33) **And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, put one omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout the ages."**

(34) **As the Lord had commanded Moses, Aaron placed it before the Pact, to be kept.**

(35) **And the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a settled land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.**

(36) **The omer is a tenth of an ephah.**

(22) **On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two omers for each**: The time they spent collecting the manna was the same as usual, but with twice the result. This is the blessing of the Shabbat.

And when all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses: Although God had informed Moses in advance that the Shabbat portion of manna would fall on the sixth day (16:5), Moses did not inform the people at that time of this unusual situation.

(23) **He said to them, "This is what the Lord meant: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy Shabbat of the Lord"**: This is the very first time that the people are charged with observing a special Divine law of this kind.

Immediately after the Exodus, as Israel began their journey through the wilderness, the commandment to observe the Shabbat was clearly communicated from Above, and became an abiding reality. Ever since that time, the Jews and all of humanity have faithfully kept count of the days of the week. Thus, the manna synchronized the "human Shabbat" and "the Shabbat of Creation."

Bake what you would bake and boil what you would boil: Bake and cook whatever you wish. But you must do so today, before the onset of the Shabbat.

And all that is left put aside to be kept until morning: You may also put aside manna for tomorrow, but then you will no longer be allowed to bake and cook.

(24) **So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered; and it did not turn foul, and there were no maggots in it**: Thus they understood the special status of the Shabbat that had been demonstrated clearly from Above.

(25) **Then Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Shabbat of the Lord; you will not find it today on the plain"**: The Midrash adds: They were alarmed, fearing that perhaps the manna had ceased, and would never fall again. So Moses told them: "You will not find it today." That is, today you will not find it, but tomorrow you will find manna again.

(26) **Six days you shall gather it; on the seventh day, the Shabbat, there will be none**: The commandment concerning the Sabbath appears before the people for the first time as a consecration that distinguishes it from ordinary days: the manna does not fall on Shabbat.

(27) **Yet some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found nothing**: They went out not because they didn't have enough food on that day, Shabbat, but because they felt generally insecure, as people normally will when they have no supply of food stored up for the ongoing future.

(28) **And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you men refuse to obey My commandments and My teachings?"** No actual sanctions are applied at this stage. The goal of this censure is simply to educate, by dishonoring those who disobey.

(29) **Mark that the Lord has given you the Shabbat; therefore He gives you two days' food on the sixth day**: There is a transition here, from the previous verse, where God is speaking in the first person ("My commandments and My teachings") to this verse, which refers to God in the third person ("the Lord has given"). This is Moses now speaking. He is elaborating the "commandments" and "teachings" of which God spoke in the previous verse.

Let everyone remain where he is: let no one leave his place on the seventh day: The prohibition of walking far beyond the boundaries of human habitation on Shabbat is derived from this verse.

(30) **So the people remained inactive on the seventh day**: The people of Israel are gradually assimilating the Divine commandments and principles. By remaining inactive on the Shabbat, the people demonstrate their recognition that both the manna and the Shabbat are the Almighty's gifts to them.

(31) The house of Israel named it manna: This bread, "manna from heaven, the perfect Jewish food" bears the name "man," meaning "What is it?" In other words, the question "What is it?" – the interest that a person shows in understanding the universe – is the very essence of this food. That question, which has sustained the Jewish people in every age,

is the Jewish "bread" that is the foundation of their existence and spiritual growth.

Expanding on the theme that the desire to know and the ability to ask "What is it?" is the "bread" that sustains the Jewish people, the Torah offers a more detailed description of the manna, in order to clarify the nature of that question and how it should be asked. It must be detailed, open, and very tasty.

It was like coriander seed: Like coriander, which consists of many tiny seeds, the question should be as detailed as possible (reduced to its smallest possible components).

White: The color white represents a blank page. The question as asked should be open, which means that the questioner should be unblinkered, having no preconceived notions about what kind of answer to expect, and ready to receive even the most multifarious response.

And it tasted like wafers in honey: The question should be "very tasty." That is, a person should be capable of deriving actual pleasure from an intellectual perception of the world.

(32) **Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: Let one omer of it be kept throughout the ages, in order that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out from the land of Egypt."**: The intent of this instruction is to emphasize for the Jews once again the miraculous nature of the manna. The manna would normally rot by the next day, and even for Shabbat it would keep for two days at most. But when preserved in this vessel, it will remain intact for many generations to come.

(33) **And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, put one omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout the ages"**: This instruction was given later, after the Tabernacle had been built (later in this book of Exodus).

(34) **As the Lord had commanded Moses, Aaron placed it before the Pact, to be kept**: Literally, "before the Testimony." This refers to the Two Tablets of the Law that were stored in the Holy Ark within the Tabernacle (see 25:21), and are called "the two tablets of the Testimony," or "Pact" (32:15).

(35) **And the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a settled land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan**: Moses inserted this passage even much later than that – at the end of the forty years of wanderings in the wilderness. There is a well-known Talmudic principle that "there is no chronological order (lit., 'there is no earlier and later') in the Torah." The chapters and verses of the Torah do not necessarily appear in strict chronological sequence, particularly when there is a need to reveal a certain topic at a particular point, or create semantic or associative connections.

(36) **The omer is a tenth of an ephah**: These are measurements of the volume of pourable solids. An *omer* is approximately 2.2 liters, and an **ephah** is thus about 22 liters. The Torah makes this ratio explicit in order to connect the manna with the sacrifices, since the sizes of meal offerings mandated by the Torah are indicated in units called "tenths" (e.g., 29:40), which means tenths of an *ephah* (Num. 28:5). Thus, the laws of the sacrifices to be given later will be associated with the memory of the manna.

15.5. MOSES STRIKES THE ROCK AT GOD'S COMMAND TO EXTRACT WATER FROM IT (17:1-7)

א וַיִּסְעוּ כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּדְבַּר־סִין לְמַסְעֵיהֶם עַל־פִּי יְ
וַיַּחֲנוּ בִּרְפִידִים וְאֵין מַיִם לִשְׁתּוֹת הָעָם: ב וַיָּרֶב הָעָם עִם־מֹשֶׁה
וַיֹּאמְרוּ תְּנוּ־לָנוּ מַיִם וְנִשְׁתֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה מַה־תְּרִיבוּן עִמָּדִי
מַה־תְּנַסּוּן אֶת־יְי: ג וַיִּצְמָא שָׁם הָעָם לַמַּיִם וַיָּלֶן הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה
וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶּה הֶעֱלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהָמִית אֹתִי וְאֶת־בָּנַי וְאֶת־מִקְנַי
בַּצָּמָא: ד וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְי לֵאמֹר מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה לָעָם הַזֶּה עוֹד מְעַט
וּסְקָלֻנִי: ה וַיֹּאמֶר יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲבֹר לִפְנֵי הָעָם וְקַח אִתְּךָ מִזִּקְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמַטְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הִכִּיתָ בּוֹ אֶת־הַיְאֹר קַח בְּיָדְךָ וְהָלָכְתָּ: ו הִנְנִי
עֹמֵד לְפָנֶיךָ שָׁם | עַל־הַצּוּר בְּחֹרֵב וְהִכִּיתָ בַּצּוּר וְיָצְאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מָיִם
וְשָׁתָה הָעָם וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ז וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם
מַסָּה וּמְרִיבָה עַל־רִיב | בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל נַסֹּתָם אֶת־יְי לֵאמֹר הֲיֵשׁ
יְי בְּקִרְבֵּנוּ אִם־אָיִן:

(1) **From the wilderness of Sin the whole Israelite community continued by stages as the Lord would command. They encamped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink.**

(2) **The people quarreled with Moses. "Give us water to drink," they said; and Moses replied to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you try the Lord?"**

(3) **But the people thirsted there for water; and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"**

(4) **Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do with this people? Before long they will be stoning me!"**

(5) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pass before the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel, and take along the rod with which you struck the Nile, and set out.**

(6) **I will be standing there before you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock and water will issue from it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.**

(7) **The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and because they tried the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord present among us or not?"**

(1) **From the wilderness of Sin the whole Israelite community continued by stages as the Lord would command**: The people continue to journey through the wilderness, gradually coming to the realization that they are not merely "leaving Egypt," but advancing at the direction of the Almighty to a very specific destination (both literally and figuratively).

They encamped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink: When the problem of lack of water for drinking was

encountered the first time (15:23), it was solved by ostensibly natural means (throwing a piece of wood into the water). But this time the same problem will be solved by an actual miracle – extracting water from a rock. The people are forced to transition from feeling that the world is governed solely by the laws of nature to acknowledging supernatural, Divine control. This is an important step in preparing the Jews to receive the Torah.

(2) T**he people quarreled with Moses. "Give us water to drink," they said; and Moses replied to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you try the Lord?"**: There is nothing wrong with asking for water, but Moses himself senses no problem, and to him it seems that the people are grumbling without any real cause.

(3) **But the people thirsted there for water; and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"**: The situation now worsens, as the people accuse Moses of a wanton desire to see them die of thirst. Such accusations are of course groundless, but the people feel that Moses is insufficiently attentive to their problems, and this is their reaction.

(4) **Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do with this people? Before long they will be stoning me!"**: Although Moses understands that his approach is not working, he is bewildered, and at a loss to know how to deal with the situation.

(5) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pass before the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel**: We will soon see that the elders are needed as witnesses, so that everything will happen "before their very eyes." That is, in order for the elders to confirm that there was no source of water in the rock previously, and that water flowed from the rock simply as the result of the blow from Moses' staff.

And take along the rod with which you struck the Nile, and set out: But doesn't Moses know which rod is meant? Why must God specify "the rod with which you struck the Nile"?

The point is that there is a parallel here between the Jewish people and the Egyptians. God is saying to Moses: "Just as in Egypt you had

to strike the river with your rod in order to perform miracles for the education of the Egyptians, here too you will need to strike the rock with your rod in order to educate the Jews."

(6) **I will be standing there before you on the rock at Horeb**: Horeb and Mount Sinai are one and the same. The image of "water flowing from the rock" precedes even the giving of the Torah. (Water is in fact a metaphor for the Torah; see, e.g., "Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water," Isa. 55:1).

Strike the rock and water will issue from it, and the people will drink: Although the Jews had left Egypt some time before, psychologically they were still slaves, with a mindset of unwaveringly following every command with immediate and complete obedience, as represented by a physical blow and its tangible result. Forty years later, however, Moses will be dealing with an entirely new generation that will require a completely different lesson (which was to be achieved in that case not by striking the rock, but by speaking to it). Moses' failure to understand that change of circumstances led to tragic consequences. (See Num. 20:7–13).

And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel: The elders testified to the occurrence of a miracle.

(7) **The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled, and because they tried the Lord**: The literal meaning of Massah-u-Merivah is "trial (i.e., ordeal) and strife."

And because they tried the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord present among us or not?": Despite all the miracles they had witnessed, they still failed to sense God's presence among them. Another display of God's direct participation in their lives is therefore needed, which now follows immediately, in the form of the war with Amalek.

15.6. THE WAR WITH AMALEK (17:8-13)

ח וַיָּבֹא עֲמָלֵק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּרְפִידִם: ט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר־לָנוּ אֲנָשִׁים וְצֵא הִלָּחֶם בַּעֲמָלֵק מָחָר אָנֹכִי נִצָּב עַל־
רֹאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה וּמַטֵּה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדִי: י וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ
מֹשֶׁה לְהִלָּחֵם בַּעֲמָלֵק וּמֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְחוּר עָלוּ רֹאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה: יא וְהָיָה
כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגָבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַאֲשֶׁר יָנִיחַ יָדוֹ וְגָבַר עֲמָלֵק:
יב וִידֵי מֹשֶׁה כְּבֵדִים וַיִּקְחוּ־אֶבֶן וַיָּשִׂימוּ תַחְתָּיו וַיֵּשֶׁב עָלֶיהָ וְאַהֲרֹן
וְחוּר תָּמְכוּ בְיָדָיו מִזֶּה אֶחָד וּמִזֶּה אֶחָד וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֱמוּנָה עַד־בֹּא
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: יג וַיַּחֲלֹשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת־עֲמָלֵק וְאֶת־עַמּוֹ לְפִי־חָרֶב:

(8) **Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.**

(9) **Moses said to Joshua, "Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand."**

(10) **Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.**

(11) **Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.**

(12) **But Moses' hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set.**

(13) **And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword.**

(8) **Amalek came**: How could Amalek undertake a war with Israel, when all other surrounding nations were left trembling in the wake of the annihilation of Pharaoh's army?

Amalek is Esau's grandson (Gen. 36:12). Thus, as a descendant of Abraham Amalek claims that he too is an heir to Abraham's "chosenness"

(albeit its negative aspects). He is a great opponent of the Jews: Balaam in his prophecy describes Amalek as "a leading nation" (Num. 24:20). Because Amalek is the antithesis of everything that Israel represents, Amalek cannot but attack the Israelites when they leave Egypt to take their place in history.

Amalek's attacks on Israel continue to occur throughout Jewish history. But we shall postpone our analysis of this topic until we examine the passage in Deuteronomy (25:19) where God commands that Amalek must be obliterated.

And fought with Israel at Rephidim: The Midrash sees this war as the result of the Jewish people's failure to feel gratitude to the Almighty, and to recognize His presence. The Midrash describes this situation with the following parable:

"A man raises his young son onto his shoulders, and they set off for a stroll. The son notices some object on the ground and says, "Give it to me, father." The father picks it up and gives it to his son. And so a second time and a third. When soon they meet a passerby, the son asks him, "Have you seen my father?" Says the father to his son, "So, do you really have no idea where your father is?" He throws his son to the ground, where he is soon bitten by a dog."

The above Midrash notwithstanding, a nation that does not know how to fight, or is unable to fight, can never be a nation in the full sense of the word. It was therefore necessary that God's "program" for raising the Jewish people to responsible, independent "adulthood" would include the ordeal of battling their enemies.

(9) **Moses said to Joshua**: Later we will learn that Joshua was one of the leaders of the tribe of Ephraim. His name was originally "Hosea," which was only later changed to "Joshua" (Num. 13:16). And yet he is here already called "Joshua." The Torah will often refer to people and places using the names by which they will come to be known at some future time, which might happen only in a later generation. (For more about Joshua, see below.)

"Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek: During the clash with the Egyptians at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, Moses tells the people, "The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!"

But here he gives the order to fight. At the first stage of the Exodus, the people of Israel were not yet ready for war, and were not capable of fighting for themselves. But now God is educating them as a free people, and therefore demands that they take responsibility for their own destiny.

Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand: From the outset of the war, Moses believes that the Jews will emerge victorious by virtue of a miracle.

(10) **Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill**: Rather than going alone, Moses proactively takes Aaron and Hur with him as his "support group."

Hur: Hur was a son of Miriam, who was married to Caleb, a leader of the tribe of Judah, and one of the twelve scouts sent to spy out the land of Canaan (Num. 13:6). Hur's grandson was Bezalel, the chief architect of God's Tabernacle (Exod. 31:1 ff.).

(11) **Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed: The Talmud adds**: "But did Moses' hands actually wage war or crush the enemy? Not so. The text only signifies that so long as Israel turned their thoughts upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in heaven, they prevailed, but otherwise they fell" (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah, 3:8). Thus, Moses' hands served as a kind of banner. When the Israelites cast their eyes upon Moses' raised hands, they turned their thoughts to Heaven, and sensed that they belonged to the Almighty, which led to victory. But when Moses' lowered his hands, the people turned their eyes toward the ground, which led them to lose sight of their destiny and thus to suffer defeat.

The perspective of the Torah text itself, however, is somewhat different. There is an organic interconnection between Moses and Israel that operates in both directions. The position of Moses' hands reflects Israel's frame of mind. Just as Moses' raised hands support the faith of the people, so does their faith strengthen Moses' hands. When the people lose faith, Moses finds it difficult to keep his hands uplifted.

(12) **But Moses' hands grew heavy**: It is quite difficult to hold one's hands uplifted for any significant length of time. At some point,

the people's faith weakens to such a degree that Moses has no more strength.

So they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it: When in a crisis situation Moses sits down, his "stature" (and with it, the level of Jewish faith) is reduced. But this is necessary so that Moses can find the support he needs.

While Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands: In a difficult moment, Moses needs Aaron and Hur. A little later we shall discuss an approach to understanding this passage within the historical context of the development of monotheistic faith.

Thus his hands remained steady until the sun set: The word *emunah* here indicates steadiness or stability, but the word's far more common meaning is, simply, "faith." We can thus understand this verse as saying that Moses' hands served as a symbol of faith.

Until the sun set: The battle lasted the entire day. But the future war with Amalek will continue throughout human history, "until the sun sets."

(13) **And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword**: The literal meaning of *vaychalosh* is "weakened." Amalek was weakened in this battle, but not destroyed, for it had to survive in order to continue its war against Israel.

15.7. JOSHUA AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMED FORCES

There was no mention whatsoever of Joshua before the war with Amalek, but suddenly we meet him here as a thoroughly competent military leader. This is not entirely consistent with the conditions of slavery that the Jews had endured in Egypt.

The Midrash believes that Joshua (and some of Joseph's other descendants, possibly even a substantial segment of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh) were not slaves in Egypt, nor did they live in Goshen, but were close to Egyptian royalty, and even owned small estates in Canaan, which at that time was a vassal state of Egypt. In particular, the Midrash says that Joshua was born in Jerusalem, and served as a

mercenary in Pharaoh's army, which is why Moses (who was also raised in the Egyptian palace) appoints him here as commander in chief.

The Torah text itself tells us nothing of this, and the question remains open whether it was really so. But we can assume that there are, in general, many details that the Torah does not mention, because its major focus is on providing information at the national level, by relating the history of the people as a whole. Given that approach, this is not the place for the Torah to elaborate on Joshua's special status, or that of certain segments of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. These are seen as only tangential details with respect to what the Torah deems truly essential for us to know.

15.8. AARON AND HUR IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

When Moses' hands – and the people's faith – are flagging, Aaron and Hur, Moses' brother and nephew, support him. But what is the underlying meaning of this story?

It seems that Scripture here is being intentionally obscure, only hinting at what it is actually trying to convey. In essence, the Torah is saying that something is missing in what Moses represents, that more people are needed to support Moses' faith on either side of him. Thus, two other spiritual forces, a brother and a nephew, must support Jewish faith during the war with Amalek. From an historical perspective, it is clear that these forces were Christianity and Islam. Aaron symbolizes Christianity, and Hur – Islam.

Maimonides notes that God has given Islam and Christianity exceptional capacity for spreading the ideas of Judaism throughout the world. And that the affinity of those religions to Judaism also created conditions that were especially conducive to the survival of the Jews in exile, allowing them to live among their own "religious family," as it were,

Indeed, we see that, in the long run, the Jews as a people survived in the diaspora only in Christian and Islamic countries. To be sure, the Jews' relationship with those other two religions was a source of severe tension

for many long centuries, and created enormous problems. But those relationships were ultimately what saved the Jewish people, and made it possible for them to earn and retain the extraordinary prominence that is now acknowledged and respected virtually everywhere in the world[1].

Life in the Jews' own state likewise poses problems on a very large scale – a national scale. This is why Jewish faith in the Land of Israel is characterized by *gadlut*, "greatness." When the Jews go into exile (that is, when Moses leaves the central battleground to ascend the hill), those problems assume a smaller scale, reduced to the level of the individual and the community. At that point Judaism has the status of *katnut*, "smallness" (Moses sitting on a stone). In such times, Christianity and Islam actually provide important support for the Jewish faith.

15.9. MOSES' GREATNESS AS AN OBSTACLE TO VICTORY OVER THE AMALEKITES

Rabbi A. I. Kook offers a different interpretation of these events. He says that Moses cannot himself wage war with Amalek, because Moses, the greatest of all prophets for all time, sees the course of history in its full eternal context for all generations to come. Moses therefore understands that every "force of evil" – even, and especially, the egregiously pernicious Amalek – has its own unique function in the world. Specifically, the world needs Amalek to serve as an antipodal opposition to the Jewish people, the adversary with whom they are in eternal conflict. The Jewish nation needs that never-ending conflict for their own proper development.

Because Moses understands so well the positive role of Amalek, he cannot destroy Amalek, and, in truth, he cannot even enter the fray with the Amalekites. This is a known problem with over-developed thinkers,

[1] Small communities of Jews existed in other countries – India, for example – but played no significant role in Jewish history. And in China, where the Jews experienced no conflict or issues with the surrounding population and culture, they completely assimilated and, practically speaking, almost entirely disappeared.

who, because they see the positive aspects of the enemy so clearly, find it difficult to fight the enemy.

And so, instead of fighting Amalek himself, Moses appoints Joshua, who wages the war at a considerably lower level, and is thus able to defeat Amalek.

But still for the same reason, Moses, even up on the hill, is fully aware of Amalek's historical importance, and cannot keep his arms raised. To defeat Amalek now, he must "lower his stature" by sitting on a stone, so that the nearby forces – who represent not all the generations of eternity, but only the pragmatic exigencies of the present moment – will come to support his hands. And this is the only way the Jews can have the victory.

The Jews' faith here is thus much weaker than it could be. (Moses' hands are held up for him on either side, because he has no strength to hold them up himself). With only that limited faith, Joshua cannot completely destroy Amalek, and only "weakens" him.

15.10. BLOTTING OUT THE MEMORY OF AMALEK (17:14-16)

יד וַיֹּאמֶר יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב זֹאת זִכָּרוֹן בַּסֵּפֶר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
כִּי־מָחֹה אֶמְחֶה אֶת־זֵכֶר עֲמָלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם: טו וַיִּבֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּחַ
וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יְי | נִסִּי: טז וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כֵּס יָהּ מִלְחָמָה לַיהוָה
בַּעֲמָלֵק מִדֹּר דֹּר:

(14) Then the Lord said to Moses, "Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!"

(15) And Moses built an altar and named it Adonai-nissi.

(16) He said, "It means, 'Hand upon the throne of the Lord!' The Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages."

(14) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Inscribe this in a document as a reminder"**: This is the first time in the Torah that we encounter an instruction to preserve memory by committing it to writing, instead of simple oral transmission. It is a document whose purpose is to pre-

serve memory. Because the war with Amalek will last for many generations, a written record of it is needed to serve as a guide for the future.

And read it aloud to Joshua: Because Joshua is now commander in chief, it is essential for him to understand the meaning of this directive. The Midrash sees in this an allusion to the succession of leadership in the Jewish nation, which after Moses' death, will pass to Joshua.

I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven! Joshua has only weakened Amalek. But God now confirms that this was just the beginning of the task, to be completed in due time, that will ultimately end with a total annihilation of Amalek.

I will utterly blot out: Later, in Deuteronomy, erasing the memory of Amalek is expressed as a solemn commandment that is binding on the entire Jewish nation. "When the Lord your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you ... you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (Deut. 25:19)

Here, however, God says, "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!" For now, God Himself assumes responsibility for this task.

I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek: This is not about blotting out all memory of Amalek in the conventional sense. On the contrary, by being recorded in the Torah, this memory will remain forever. Rather, the "memory of Amalek" refers to the people who are living reminders of Amalek – his heirs, and the successors to his work. Those people must be destroyed.

From under heaven: In this world as we know it, the world that is "under heaven," there is be no place for Amalek, the quintessential bearer of evil. But above heaven, in higher worlds, there is a place for everything, because there even evil plays a positive creative role.

(15) **And Moses built an altar**: As a means of reinforcing in the minds of the people a correct understanding of the events that have just taken place, Moses builds an altar of gratitude. Amalek "came" (17:8) because the Jews did not feel a connection with God. To correct this failing, Moses builds an altar and proclaims, "The Lord is my banner," in order to give the people a stronger sense of God's eternal pres-

ence, which is the basis for victory over Amalek. Whenever the Jewish nation falls short in their awareness of God's presence among them, Amalek attacks.

And named it Adonai-nissi: "The Lord is my banner." Only by turning to Heaven can the Jewish people be victorious. Moses' hands are symbolic of this. His hands, raised to heaven in the heat of the battle, served as a banner for the Jewish people.

(16) **He said, "It means, 'Hand upon the throne of the Lord!'**: This wording is a typical formulation of an oath.

The Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages: The nature of this war will be further revealed in Deuteronomy (25:17 ff.), where we will examine it in greater detail.

WEEKLY PORTION [5]

YITRO

CHAPTER 16

THE SINAI COVENANT AS THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

16.1. THE SINAI COVENANT: *YITRO* AND *MISHPATIM*

The central part of the book of Exodus, the next two weekly portions, *Yitro* and *Mishpatim* (portions 5 and 6, respectively), describe the Sinai Covenant.

The Ten Commandments – the most general principles of how humans are expected to relate to God – are presented in the *Yitro* portion, while the *Mishpatim* portion is a legal code of laws and regulations. The relationship of these two portions is therefore usually described as "the general outline followed by its detailed elaboration."

We would certainly not deny the validity of that approach. But following the premise of "Moses' Torah" and "Aaron's Torah" for adjacent pairs of Torah portions, as we have previously explained, we would propose that the relationship of these two portions can be understood some-what differently. I.e., each of these portions has its own unique outlook on the world in general, and humankind in particular.

Yitro, the "Moses" portion, puts the emphasis on ideals, chosenness, and achieving greatness. Moses believes that man is pure by nature, and always seeks a path to the Almighty. Man only needs help and to be shown the way, which is what the giving of the Torah is meant to accomplish.

But in Aaron's portion, *Mishpatim*, the emphasis is instead on correcting human shortcomings and atoning for sins. Because man is inherently prone to sin, the main task of religious guidance, according to this view, is to help a person overcome his sinful temptations, and, if possible, when he does succumb, to cleanse him of the consequences. The *Mishpatim* portion therefore focuses on laws, and on the penalties that must be paid for committing crimes. It begins with the laws that punish murder, violence, and human trafficking.

These two approaches complement each other. Initially, in the *Yitro* and *Mishpatim* portions, as well as in the seventh and eighth portions, the *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh* pair, the two paths diverge. The gap between them keeps widening, leading to the crisis of the golden calf. But then, in the process of resolving that crisis, the two approaches become integrated. We will discuss all this in greater detail below.

16.2. A TORAH FOR THE JEWS AND A TORAH FOR ALL OF HUMANITY

In order to clarify what the giving of the Torah actually means, we must first seriously consider, through the eyes of the Torah, the nature of the relationship of the Jewish people to the nations of the world.

At the onset of Jewish history, when God first chose Abraham for his singular mission, the Torah states that the Almighty told him, "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you" (Genesis 12:3). It was for this that God chose Abraham, and, in fact, the other two Patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, as well, whose chosenness God explained similarly. Thus, God's purpose in choosing the Patriarchs and their descendants, the Jewish people, was to advance all of humanity. The Jews are chosen only to facilitate the advancement all the other nations of the world.

The Midrash relates that the Almighty before the giving of the Torah had wanted to give the Torah to all of humanity, and He offered

it to each nation on earth in turn, but none would agree to accept it, because the demands of the Torah did not coincide with their own ethical and religious principles such as they were. Ultimately, only the Jews agreed to accept the Torah. In other words, at the Revelation at Sinai the Jewish people were chosen simply because they were the only ones who would agree to be chosen.

In a future era, however, the Torah will be transmitted to all mankind. The prophet Isaiah famously predicted (2:3): "And the many peoples shall go and say: 'Come, let us go up to the Mount of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; that He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.' for instruction shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The Jewish people themselves do not need the Torah to come forth from Zion, nor the word of the Lord from Jerusalem – the Jews received the Torah long ago at Sinai. But then the Jews carried it with them from there to Canaan, to Zion, and to Jerusalem. The Jewish people have tested the Divine teachings on themselves by making it an integral part of their lives. This involved also adding the books of the Prophets and the Ketuvim to the Torah, such that the Torah is now the Tanakh – the twenty-four books of the Jewish scriptures. The Torah has thus become accessible to all peoples, making Zion and Jerusalem the place from which the Torah emanates for all of humanity.

The reason that the other nations refused to accept the Torah at Sinai was that the "Torah of the Sinai" is too heavenly, too transcendental, far removed from ordinary, natural life – incomprehensible and therefore inaccessible. However, after the Torah has passed through Zion, through Jerusalem, and through the life history of the Jewish people, the Divine teachings are no longer only the "Torah of Heaven," for they are now embodied in the Tanakh in its entirety, which is completely rooted on the earth. At that point, all the nations of the world can then begin to receive the Divine light.

Indeed, only after the Torah had been transformed into the Tanakh did the nations of the world become interested in it. Besides translating it so that all peoples could read it in their own language, the nations based their religious belief systems completely on the Tanakh. In other words, all the nations perceive that the Divine light

comes to them not directly from Heaven, but must first traverse all of Jewish history, and only then can humanity receive that Divine light. That is why the nations call Jewish history "sacred," and why it occupies such a prominent position in the history of the entire human race.

Zion (i.e., Jewish history) is an immanent Divine revelation that is inherent in everyday life, supplementing the transcendental Divine revelation that came from Heaven at Sinai. This supplementing of the transcendental with the immanent, which occurs throughout the course of Jewish history, is needed in order for the Revelation to be accepted, not only by the Jewish people, but eventually by all of humanity.

Thus, one nation is not the ultimate destination of Divine revelation, but only a single link in its transmission. At Sinai the Jews brought down the Torah from heaven, proceeded to Zion, processed the Torah into a more "humanly accessible" Tanakh, and then passed it on to all the peoples of the world, thus transmitting the Divine light to all of humanity. In this does the Jewish mission consist.

The Book of Deuteronomy formulates the status of this Divine doctrine as follows: "Moses charged us with the Teaching as the heritage of the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4). But this does not mean that the Torah is given only to the community of Jacob. The Torah is given to all of mankind, but it is in the "spiritual possession" of the Jews only, in the sense that they are the "professionals" who explain the Torah to all other peoples.

We can draw an analogy to this from how we generally perceive fiction. An author writes a book for all readers, and its published text then becomes available for comment and discussion by all who are capable of understanding that text. But only the author owns the book as his "intellectual property." Among the most important rights conferred by that ownership is the fundamental right to interpret the meaning of the words of the text. Readers of the book may find in it additional meanings and associations with their own lives and other things in the world, but that is only a supplemental understanding. The foundational interpretation – the understanding of what is

meant by any given phrase of the text – is the exclusive prerogative of the author.

It is in this sense that the Torah calls itself "the heritage of the congregation of Jacob." The Jewish people are not the Torah's authors, for it was given to them by the Almighty. The Jewish people are His co-author.

The idea of the Jewish people as "co-authors of the Torah together with God" finds expression in a significant part of the Five Books. For example, almost the entire book of Deuteronomy is essentially a speech delivered by Moses, which becomes part of Torah text. Not only Moses, however, but the entire Jewish people took an active part in the writing of the Torah, and not merely with words, but mainly with their actions that were recorded in the Torah. And this is all the more true of the Tanakh, which is an inseparable element of Jewish history.

Because the "congregation of Jacob" has co-authored the Torah together with the Almighty, the Torah, and the rest of Tanakh even more so, are the "heritage of the congregation of Jacob," which means that only the Jewish people and Jewish tradition can correctly interpret it.

Of course, none of this prevents anyone else from offering further comments and suggesting additional understanding and interpretation. On the contrary, such contributions reveal new aspects of Divine revelation to the world, and are therefore vitally important. But these new aspects can never supersede the foundational Jewish commentary; they can only complement it.

When the Almighty, the primary author of the Torah, transmitted it from Heaven, He communicated to the Jewish people, his co-authors, an in-depth understanding of the Torah, and conferred on them the right to interpret its text. From then onward, the understanding of the Torah and the Tanakh are inseparable from this tradition, maintained and developed by the Jewish people over millennia. Thus, while the Torah is intended to benefit all of humanity, it is the inheritance of the Jewish people alone – their possession and legacy.

However, throughout history there have been two opposing models for understanding the Divine light of Judaism.

The first model – incorrect from the Jewish standpoint – perceives the light of Tanakh, but only while severing it from the Jews themselves. Classical Christianity has followed this path, declaring, "We have your text, and you are now superfluous to us. Moreover, we have our own additions to the text, and our own teachers to interpret it. Therefore, we accept the ancient Jewish heritage, but we reject modern Judaism."

In the terminology of the Jewish tradition itself, this approach is seen as the bifurcation of Aaron and Moses, which resulted in the creation of the golden calf – "attaching" to God an earthly image. The result of this attachment was to replace a direct understanding of Divinity with *Shituf*, "companionism." (See below for details).

The second model, which is the Jewish one, sees the peoples of the world as participating in the Tanakh only within the context of Jewish tradition, and not in isolation from it (as per the Christian view). This path is the one adopted and followed by the *Bnei Noah* movement – "the Descendants of Noah", "the Noahides." (Their commitment to interpreting the Torah faithfully, according to Jewish tradition, also includes upholding and fulfilling the Seven Noahide commandments, that according to Jewish Law are incumbent upon all of mankind).

There were few such people (Noahides) in previous generations, but in our time, with the return of the Jewish nation to the Land of Israel and strengthening of Jewish influence on the world, this movement is gradually seeing a resurgence, as it becomes a "universal Judaism" for all of humanity.

CHAPTER 17

JETHRO'S ROLE IN THE TORAH

17.1. JETHRO AND HIS CONNECTION TO THE GIVING OF TORAH

Yitro, the Torah portion that recounts the events of the giving of the Torah, begins with the words, "Jethro ... heard..." This construction, extremely common in Biblical Hebrew, requires the verb to precede the subject; thus, the portion begins with *vayishma*, "And he heard," which might also have become the name of the portion itself. (Quite often, a weekly portion will receive its name from its very first word).

However, when the Sages of the era of the Babylonian Talmud divided the Torah into weekly portions, and chose names for those portions, they named this one for the non-Jew Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. This implies that something very profound connects Jethro with the giving of the Torah.

One interpretation of this connection is as follows. So long as among the nations of the world there is no person like Jethro ready to hear and receive the Torah, even the Jewish people will not be able to receive it. The Torah can be given to the Jews only when people sufficiently mature to understand it have begun to appear even among the general world population.

As the Exodus is unfolding, there are already two groups of non-Jews who are ready to accept the Torah. These are the *eirev rav* ("the

mixed multitude" who left Egypt with the Jews), and Jethro and his entourage. Although both groups joined the Jews, they did so in different ways, thus creating two models of connecting the world's Jews and non-Jews.

The *eirev rav* is fully integrated into Jewish society, becoming full members of the Jewish nation in every sense[1].

Jethro, on the other hand, is attracted by religious and philosophical considerations, and by the idea of holiness, but he does not want to lose his own national identity, and he is not interested in becoming a Jew. Nonetheless, his insistence on such "national separation" is not at all a flaw – on the contrary, thanks to this he brings Divine Revelation to his people, and formulates a scheme for transmitting the principles of the Jewish religion to all of humanity.

Just as the idea of holiness advanced by Abraham could appear only after the idea of justice formulated by the laws of Hammurabi[2] appeared in the world, so Moses could undertake to fulfill his mission only after Jethro appeared.

The moral and ethical development of civilization is a necessary condition for the emergence of the Jewish people and their transition to further stages of development. This is because the calling of the Jewish people is to promote all of humanity, and not only itself. The Jews are an instrument through which God influences humanity, and an instrument can be used only when the people who are to benefit from its use are at least minimally prepared for that.

17.2. JETHRO COMES TO MOSES (18:1-12)

א וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹהֵן מִדְיָן חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים
לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ כִּי־הוֹצִיא יְיָ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם: ב וַיִּקַּח
יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־צִפֹּרָה אֵשֶׁת מֹשֶׁה אַחַר שִׁלּוּחֶיהָ: ג וְאֵת שְׁנֵי

1 See §12.3.
2 See *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §16.6.

בָּנֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאֶחָד גֵּרְשֹׁם כִּי אָמַר גֵּר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ נָכְרִיָּה׃
ד וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר כִּי־אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי בְּעֶזְרִי וַיַּצִּלֵנִי מֵחֶרֶב פַּרְעֹה׃
ה וַיָּבֹא יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר אֲשֶׁר־
הוּא חֹנֶה שָׁם הַר הָאֱלֹהִים׃ ו וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲנִי חֹתְנְךָ יִתְרוֹ בָּא
אֵלֶיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ עִמָּהּ׃ ז וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לִקְרַאת חֹתְנוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ
וַיִּשַּׁק־לוֹ וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ אִישׁ־לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֹהֱלָה׃ ח וַיְסַפֵּר מֹשֶׁה
לְחֹתְנוֹ אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְ לְפַרְעֹה וּלְמִצְרַיִם עַל אודֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֵת כָּל־הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מְצָאָתַם בַּדֶּרֶךְ וַיַּצִּלֵם יְ׃ ט וַיֶּחַדְּ יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל־
הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יְ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הִצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרָיִם׃ י וַיֹּאמֶר
יִתְרוֹ בָּרוּךְ יְ אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פַּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר
הִצִּיל אֶת־הָעָם מִתַּחַת יַד־מִצְרָיִם׃ יא עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־גָדוֹל יְ מִכָּל־
הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי בַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם׃ יב וַיִּקַּח יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה עֹלָה
וּזְבָחִים לֵאלֹהִים וַיָּבֹא אַהֲרֹן וְכָל | זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֶאֱכָל־לֶחֶם עִם־חֹתֵן
מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים׃

(1) **Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the Lord had brought Israel out from Egypt.**

(2) **So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after she had been sent home,**

(3) **and her two sons — of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land";**

(4) **and the other was named Eliezer, meaning, "The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."**

(5) **Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' sons and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God.**

(6) **He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons."**

(7) **Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent.**

(8) Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them.

(9) And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that the Lord had shown Israel when He delivered them from the Egyptians.

(10) "Blessed be the Lord," Jethro said, "who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.

(11) Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people]."

(12) And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law.

(1-6) **Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law … Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah … Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' sons … He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro …"**: The phrase "Jethro, Moses' father-in-law" is repeated four times in this passage. This is not necessary merely to convey information – for that, just once would suffice – but to emphasize the importance of Moses' and Jethro's relationship.

We've already mentioned earlier[1] that Jethro considers himself Moses' teacher. We cited the Midrash which told of Adam's staff that stood in Jethro's courtyard, after having been owned and used in the interim by Noah, Abraham, and Jacob – i.e., it is the tradition of humanity's spiritual leadership, which passed through Jethro to Moses. Thus, the tradition harking back to the Patriarchs reached Moses through Jethro specifically, and the verse "Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro…" (3:1) is understood to mean that Moses was the eldest of Jethro's disciples, and Jethro therefore appointed Moses as a mentor to the others.

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[1] See §4.4.

Jethro, then, is a thoroughly worthy and wise, spiritually advanced individual who sees Moses as his disciple. Now that his student has achieved outstanding success, as the leader of the Jewish people who has brought them out of Egypt, Jethro makes his way to Moses. He wishes better to understand the outcome of his student's activities, and, possibly, to share with Moses some important suggestions and advice of his own.

There is also a Midrashic tradition that Jethro, Balaam and Job had all attained such an advanced level of spiritual development that the Torah could potentially have been given through them. The differences of approach between Moses and Jethro, to be discussed later, are thus essential for understanding why the Torah was nevertheless given only through Moses, and not through Jethro.

(2) **So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after she had been sent home**: The Torah stated earlier that when God ordered Moses to leave Midian for Egypt, Moses took his wife and his sons with him (4:19). But nothing further is said about them until this verse. The Midrash believes that when Aaron went out to greet Moses in the wilderness, and met him at the mountain of God (4:27), he persuaded Moses at that time to not take his wife and children with him to Egypt. And Moses sent them back to Jethro before the Exodus from Egypt.

(3-4) **And her two sons — of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land"; and the other was named Eliezer, meaning, "The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"**: Earlier, when Gershom was born (2:2), the Torah recorded his name, but only here does the Torah report the name of Moses' second son. However, the Torah will make no further mention of either of Moses' sons, who play no role whatsoever in future events – unlike Aaron's sons, who will be mentioned very prominently again and again in their role as priests.

There are two possible explanations for this: (1) Moses' sons were far from the people at critical moments in Jewish history: the Egyptian plagues, the death of the firstborns, the Exodus, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, and the crises of the water shortage and the manna.

They therefore could not forge an inextricable internal link between themselves and the Jewish nation, and could not play an important role in it. (2) After descending from Mount Sinai, Moses separated from his wife (as we shall explain in greater detail in our commentary on Num. 12:1 and Deut. 5:27). Because Moses did not properly participate in raising his children, they did not grow up to be leaders.

(5) **Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' sons and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God**: Moses and the people are already stationed near Mount Sinai, in preparation for receiving the Torah.

(6) **He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons"**: Jethro comes not only as a father-in-law, in recognition of the past, but also as a guarantee of the future: "I, Jethro, am coming to you with your sons." Jethro will continue to play a significant role in Moses' life.

(7) **Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent**: By going out to meet Jethro, Moses shows the entire nation that he acknowledges Jethro as one of his teachers.

(8) **Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them: Above (v. 1) we read**: "Jethro … heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the Lord had brought Israel out from Egypt." Before coming to Moses, Jethro had heard the "positive" side of the Exodus story. Now, Moses tells Jethro also about the problems, the "negative" aspects: the punishments visited on Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and Moses' difficulties with Israel.

(9-10) **And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that the Lord had shown Israel when He delivered them from the Egyptians. "Blessed be the Lord," Jethro said, "who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians**: Jethro continues to assimilate only the positive elements of the situation. This itself demonstrates Jethro's

lofty spiritual attainments. He focuses on life's positive aspects, not on its problems.

(11) **Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people]"**: Jethro understands even the punishment of the Egyptians in an exclusively positive sense.

(12) **And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God:** Bringing sacrifices is an expression of gratitude.

And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law: The Torah would have no reason to mention the simple partaking of a meal, unless it wanted to attach to it some special importance, or to make a particular point.

The emphasis here is on the Almighty as the "God of life." Even the simple but life-affirming act of "eating a meal" is integral to the process of strengthening one's connection with God, Who only wants us to live (and not to die). This concept, expressed repeatedly throughout the Tanakh, stands in stark contrast to the idea of the "inevitability of death when meeting with the Divine" that is so prevalent in the larger world.

We have examined this issue in detail in our commentary on the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. ch. 22).[1]

17.3. APPOINTING JUDICIAL OFFICERS FOR THE NATION (18:13-27)

יג וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לִשְׁפֹּט אֶת־הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֹד הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה
מִן־הַבֹּקֶר עַד־הָעָרֶב: יד וַיַּרְא חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה
לָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מָה־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה לָעָם מַדּוּעַ אַתָּה
יוֹשֵׁב לְבַדֶּךָ וְכָל־הָעָם נִצָּב עָלֶיךָ מִן־בֹּקֶר עַד־עָרֶב: טו וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה
לְחֹתְנוֹ כִּי־יָבֹא אֵלַי הָעָם לִדְרֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים: טז כִּי־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם דָּבָר

[1] See *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §23.9.

בָּא אֵלַי וְשָׁפַטְתִּי בֵּין אִישׁ וּבֵין רֵעֵהוּ וְהוֹדַעְתִּי אֶת־חֻקֵּי הָאֱלֹהִים
וְאֶת־תּוֹרֹתָיו: יז וַיֹּאמֶר חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו לֹא־טוֹב הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה
עֹשֶׂה: יח נָבֹל תִּבֹּל גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ כִּי־כָבֵד
מִמְּךָ הַדָּבָר לֹא־תוּכַל עֲשֹׂהוּ לְבַדֶּךָ: יט עַתָּה שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי אִיעָצְךָ
וִיהִי אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ הֱיֵה אַתָּה לָעָם מוּל הָאֱלֹהִים וְהֵבֵאתָ אַתָּה אֶת־
הַדְּבָרִים אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים: כ וְהִזְהַרְתָּה אֶתְהֶם אֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַתּוֹרֹת
וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ יֵלְכוּ בָהּ וְאֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּן:
כא וְאַתָּה תֶחֱזֶה מִכָּל־הָעָם אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל יִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים אַנְשֵׁי אֱמֶת
שֹׂנְאֵי בָצַע וְשַׂמְתָּ עֲלֵהֶם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים
וְשָׂרֵי עֲשָׂרֹת: כב וְשָׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעָם בְּכָל־עֵת וְהָיָה כָּל־הַדָּבָר הַגָּדֹל
יָבִיאוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְכָל־הַדָּבָר הַקָּטֹן יִשְׁפְּטוּ־הֵם וְהָקֵל מֵעָלֶיךָ וְנָשְׂאוּ אִתָּךְ:
כג אִם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה תַּעֲשֶׂה וְצִוְּךָ אֱלֹהִים וְיָכָלְתָּ עֲמֹד וְגַם כָּל־
הָעָם הַזֶּה עַל־מְקֹמוֹ יָבֹא בְשָׁלוֹם: כד וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה לְקוֹל חֹתְנוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אָמָר: כה וַיִּבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל מִכָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם
רָאשִׁים עַל־הָעָם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֲשָׂרֹת:
כו וְשָׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעָם בְּכָל־עֵת אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַקָּשֶׁה יְבִיאוּן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
וְכָל־הַדָּבָר הַקָּטֹן יִשְׁפּוּטוּ הֵם: כז וַיְשַׁלַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־חֹתְנוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ לוֹ
אֶל־אַרְצוֹ:

(13) **Next day, Moses sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening.**

(14) **But when Moses' father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?"**

(15) **Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God.**

(16) **When they have a dispute, it comes before me, and I decide between one person and another, and I make known the laws and teachings of God."**

(17) **But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right;**

(18) you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.

(19) Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You represent the people before God: you bring the disputes before God,

(20) and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow.

(21) You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trust-worthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and

(22) let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you.

(23) If you do this — and God so commands you — you will be able to bear up; and all these people too will go home unwearied."

(24) Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he had said.

(25) Moses chose capable men out of all Israel, and appointed them heads over the people — chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens;

(26) and they judged the people at all times: the difficult matters they would bring to Moses, and all the minor matters they would decide themselves.

(27) Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land.

(13) **Next day**: There are varying opinions as to which particular day is meant. According to one of those, it is the day after Jethro's arrival, which means that this incident of the creation of the judicial system occurred before the giving of the Torah.

But by another reading, this was the day after Moses came down from the mountain with the second tablets (see 34:1,29). Moses could not have been adjudicating cases for the people unless the laws of the Torah had already been given. According to this view, the order of these events as reported in the Torah is different from the order in which they actually occurred.

There is a well-known principle in Jewish tradition that "there is no earlier and later in the Torah." That is, the sequence of the chapters in the Torah is not always chronologically determined. The Torah may disregard chronological order by reporting particular episodes in a different sequence from how they actually occurred, in order to ensure the integrity and consistency of the story or of the discussion of a particular topic.

Given that premise, we should see this chapter as designed to include everything that is important for understanding the interactions with Jethro. And we can thus conclude that, in essence (even if chronologically it was perhaps not so), Moses judges the people before the giving of the Torah, and Jethro also returns home before the giving of the Torah. We must understand the ideas of the Torah according to the logic of the narrative itself, regardless of chronology.

Moses judges the people even before the giving of the Torah, because the advancement of the people in matters of justice must precede the attainment of any level of holiness. One of the most important institutions of social justice is a correctly functioning judicial system. (According to Jewish tradition, establishing such a system is one of the "Seven Noahide Commandments" that are obligatory not only for Jews, but for all of humanity).

The first order of business is to normalize human relations by achieving justice and honesty among all people in their daily affairs. Only after achieving those goals will it be possible for them to further advance toward holiness through a direct dialogue with God, which is the primary objective of the giving of the Torah.

The principle that justice must come first, and only then can there be holiness, finds expression in many places in the Torah. We first encountered it, most notably, in the story of Abraham, and here it applied to the Jewish people as a whole.

Moses sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening: Having been raised in Pharaoh's palace, Moses of course understands that a judicial system must be hierarchical. It is generally obvious that one individual cannot judge an entire nation, and must therefore have assistants who can address the more straightforward issues. Nonetheless, Moses initially gives each complainant the opportunity to turn to him directly.

(15-16) **Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes before me, and I decide between one person and another, and I make known the laws and teachings of God"**: Moses does not say, "I make known who is right and who is wrong" or "I make known who is guilty and who is innocent." Rather, he says, "and I make known the laws and teachings of God." Moses wants to teach the people the ways of God as they apply to scrutinizing and resolving the real disputes and conflicts that occur in their own daily lives.

Moses tries to give each person the opportunity to request Divine teachings directly. The goal of his court is not to offer instantaneous solutions to specific legal problems, but to teach the people to welcome God as an active participant in their lives. Ideally, the Jewish judiciary should always be guided by this approach exclusively. But in actual practice it is virtually impossible to implement.

People are able understand and assimilate Divine principles and instructions much more effectively in the context of actual legal proceedings that involve them directly, as opposed to mere abstractions that have little bearing on their day-to-day lives. Moses wants to educate the people in the ways of the Almighty, rather than simply adjudicating their mundane quarrels and disputes.

(17) **But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right"**: But Jethro advocates a different approach. For Jethro, achieving social justice is the highest priority. Moses judges alone, which is impractical, and therefore, from Jethro's point of view, misguided. In Jethro's conception, the essence of the Torah, which means "a body of teachings," consists in equitable relationships

between people, and in establishing moral and ethical standards in society. Moses, however, sees the Torah as embracing a broader range of priorities and values.

(23) **If you do this — and God so commands you — you will be able to bear up; and all these people too will go home unwearied**: Jethro believes that maintaining peace within the Jewish nation is the first priority. Moses too considers such peace important, but he does not accord it first place. Moses ranks spiritual growth yet higher in importance than simply keeping the peace.

Because Jethro sees Moses' relationship with the people as a kind of power structure, essentially, he proposes the principle of decentralized government, without which the system cannot work. But Moses believes that his primary task is to advance the people spiritually, and it is obviously better to learn spirituality from the masters directly than from their disciples. Both of these systems are found in real life, very often operating simultaneously. But getting them to work together in proper coordination is never easy.

(24) **Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he had said**: Moses waited for Jethro's advice – advice that was all but self-evident! – and only then began to build a hierarchical judicial system. The purpose of the wait was to demonstrate to the people that this course of action was not ideal, and he was taking it only because he had no choice. Given that the ideal is unattainable, practically speaking, it would be wrong to stand one's ground and insist on its observance, come what may. But it is vital that we at least start with the ideal as the basic premise, so that it may become a beacon for further advancement, and retain its place in the hierarchy of values.

No earlier example of this principle can be cited than that of Adam and Eve, who could not remain in the Garden of Eden for long and were necessarily expelled, but the image of the Garden of Eden has continued to accompany humanity ever since.

Likewise, the kingdom of David and his son Solomon could not long endure, but together they created for all time the image of a "proper" Jewish king.

Even a very brief encounter with the ideal (brief from the perspective of the span of human history) is often sufficient to establish it in the

soul of the nation and of humanity. It remains as a firm foundation for the possibility of achieving that ideal someday once again, by virtue of our own efforts.

(25) **Moses chose capable men out of all Israel, and appointed them heads over the people — chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens**: The system described here is presented to us as designed to confer judicial power. Instead of Moses, who judged alone, the collective authority to judge now lies with the hierarchical chiefs.

But legal proceedings in no way require dividing a people into groups of tens, hundreds, and thousands of people. For the military organization of society, however, that is in fact absolutely necessary, because military units must be all approximately equal in size to assure their most effective operation. Thus, dividing a society into groups of tens and hundreds, and appointing chiefs of tens and hundreds over them, is more suitable for conquering a country than for addressing purely judicial needs.

In this sense, we can suggest that it is not so much a judicial system that is being described here (that is, for the resolution of the conflicts that arise in society), as a system of governance and power. Because the Jewish people are being sent to conquer the Land of Canaan, they must be organized as an army. Moreover, whenever the term *shofet*, "a judge," appears later in the Torah in similar contexts, the sense is more military-administrative than strictly legal. (It is in this sense that the term is used also later in the book of Judges, including the name of the book itself, *Shofetim*, the plural of *shofet*, "a judge").

Chiefs of thousands: And yet, there are no "chiefs of ten thousands" as we might have expected. But six hundred thousand adults – the size of the Israelite nation that left Egypt (12:37) – will require six hundred "chiefs of thousands," a rather large number, which, at least in theory, should have a further hierarchical structure imposed upon it.

We note, however, that from this point onward in the Torah practically all census figures for the Jewish people are calculated and recorded per tribe, and not for the nation as a whole. This leads us to conclude that it was the prince of each tribe who managed the "chiefs of thousands" of his respective tribe, of which there would now be fifty per tribe, on average, a much more reasonable number in management terms.

Moreover, from the Torah's other descriptions of the nation's structure (at the beginning of the book of Numbers, for example) we see that within each tribe the social structure does not follow a scheme of simple numeric division into groups of hundreds and thousands, but is instead based on relationships of lineage. The tribe is divided into subtribes, each subtribe has its own leader, and is further divided into families, which are further divided into subfamilies and then into clans, and then into yet smaller, more closely related family groups. It is obvious that this organic structure, established by birth, does not correspond to numeric divisions and subdivisions, because in different tribes, families, and clans different numbers of children are born.

Thus we see that the natural lineal structure that should prevail in peacetime, as it corresponds to the organic organization of society, is replaced here by a paramilitary structure. In this structure, the number of units is paramount, while, at the lower level, tribal relations are less important. All that really matters is that each unit or group of units belongs to the same tribe, thus affording all the members of that tribe a sense of cohesion and unity. (In that era the sense of unity at the tribal level was very close to how we today perceive unity at the national level).

Both of these systems, the lineal-organic and military-numeric, are somehow integrated within each tribe, since the prince of each tribe heads both of those hierarchies. This dual principle was the foundation of the dominant social structure.

Chiefs of … hundreds, fifties, and tens: The divisions of the chiefs are in decimal increments (tens, hundreds, and thousands), except that there are "chiefs of fifties" as well. Perhaps it was done this way because the increment from tens directly to hundreds would be too steep – the "chiefs of tens" are chiefs over people, but the "chiefs of hundreds" are chiefs over other chiefs.

A hierarchical command structure is fundamentally different from one that is flat and direct; therefore, an intermediate position of "chiefs of fifties" is needed as a transitional stage between the chiefs of the tens and of the hundreds. Conversely, making the next higher transition, from hundreds to thousands, is easier psychologically, because the "chief of hundreds" has already learned to manage indirectly through the chiefs who are subordinate to him.

(26) **And they judged the people at all times: the difficult matters they would bring to Moses, and all the minor matters they would decide themselves**: A society should be self-governing to the greatest extent possible.

All of the above notwithstanding, the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy presents the hierarchical structure of governance (tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands) in a completely different way. We will analyze the differences in our comments there.

(27) **Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land**: The moment when Jethro actually "goes his way to his own land" is not specified here. Moreover, the Torah much later (Num. 10:29) records a conversation between Moses and Jethro (or possibly Jethro's son). But if Jethro has now departed, how and when does that conversation take place?

As noted earlier, the sequence of events reported in the Torah is sometimes not chronological but associative. Thus, when the Torah says here that Jethro has departed, this can be understood as fundamentally accurate, even if not chronologically precise. That is, now that the matter of structuring the judicial system has been settled, Jethro has "in principle" already left to return to his country, even if physically he will still remain in the Jewish camp for some time.

The mention here of Jethro's departure, before the giving of the Torah as described in the following chapter, would seem to indicate that Jethro does not enter into the Sinai covenant. This would mean that Jethro and his family do not establish for themselves a direct and independent channel of communication with God, and that they maintain that connection only indirectly, through their association with the Jewish people.

CHAPTER 18

THE GIVING OF THE TORAH

18.1. NEGOTIATING THE CONDITIONS FOR THE GIVING OF THE TORAH (19:1-6)

א בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ
מִדְבַּר סִינָי: ב וַיִּסְעוּ מֵרְפִידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיִּחַן־
שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר: ג וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יי
מִן־הָהָר לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְתַגִּיד לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ד אַתֶּם
רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרָיִם וָאֶשָּׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל־כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים וָאָבִא
אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי: ה וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי
וְהְיִיתֶם לִי סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ: ו וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־
לִי מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל:

(1) **On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai.**

(2) **Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain,**

(3) **and Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel:**

(4) 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me.

(5) Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine,

(6) but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."

(1) **On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai**: Since they left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month (first new moon) and then traveled the second half of the first month and the entire second month, until the first day of the third month; thus a month and a half passed since the Exodus.

(2) **Having journeyed from Rephidim**: The onset of the war with Amalek occurred in Rephidim (17:8). The Jews now journey from there to Mount Sinai. That is, only after emerging victorious from the war with Amalek can they become a nation in the full sense, and be capable of receiving the Torah, which they could not have before.

They entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain: While it is not apparent from the English translation, there is a stark contrast in the Hebrew between "They entered … and encamped" and "Israel encamped there," which in the original Hebrew text are, respectively, vayachanu (plural) and vayichan (singular). Why this difference?

It means that the Jewish people embody, simultaneously, the plurality of their encampment in the wilderness, and the unity of their (very same) encampment opposite Mount Sinai.

This is symbolic of the nature of the nation who will soon receive and continue to preserve the Torah. They must be externally united, but at the same time also internally diverse, having a variety of points of view and approaches to life.

(3) **And Moses went up to God**: Here we are told that Moses has already ascended the mountain to God. But don't we see clearly from verse 7 onward that Moses continues to interact with the people up until

the time of the actual Revelation event, which occurs only in the next chapter?

We should therefore understand this verse to mean that Moses partially ascended and descended the mountain not just once, but even several times. Or we can take the ascent mentioned here as saying that Moses "went up to God" in a prophetic vision, without actually moving physically from his place.

The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: God is negotiating, as it were, with the people. Before concluding the actual agreement (i.e., the Covenant), it is necessary to discuss its basic principles and obtain the people's consent. The Almighty communicates the basic principles of Jewish chosenness and mission, and Moses acts as the mediator in these negotiations.

Although at this preliminary stage, the acceptance of the Torah is described as free – later, at the giving of the Torah, there is also an element of coercion (see verse 17 and commentary below).

(4) **You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me**: This is a summary of the first stage of the Exodus, which established justice, opening the path to the second stage, advancement toward holiness.

I bore you on eagles' wings: This metaphor expresses God's protection of Israel against attack by their enemies. An eagle protects its chicks by placing them on her wings, because she flies higher than the predatory birds that are a threat to them.

(5) **Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant**: There are two levels of relating to God: Obeying Him (in the normal course of life by adhering to His ideals and principles) and keeping the Covenant (observing God's commandments and laws). Both of these are critical, but the ideals must always precede the commandments.

You shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine: God cares for all of humanity, and all people are important to Him. But precisely because He wants all of mankind to advance to a new, higher stage of development, God has appointed the Jews, His chosen people, as His "assistant" in that undertaking. The

purpose of Jewish chosenness, i.e., the mission that the Jews received on Mount Sinai, is to advance humanity toward the Divine light.

(6) **But you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests**: A priest works not for himself, but for the people he serves, showing them their path to God. And likewise, the Jewish people exist not for themselves, but for humanity.

A kingdom of priests: The Jewish people can realize their mission only as an independent national entity, which is the "kingdom." They can serve as the "priests of mankind" only as a complete and unified organism, and not as that kingdom's individual representatives.

And a holy nation: The goal of the Jewish mission is realized not only in the elevated spirituality of individuals, but in achieving holiness among all the peoples of the world collectively as one unified "nation." And since only a nation can advance a nation – individuals are not capable of that – the implementation of the universal Jewish mission is directly related to the existence of the Jews as an independent national and political entity.

Even when the Jewish people are scattered beyond the borders of their Land, they can still prepare for implementing the Jewish mission. But the actual realization of that mission is possible only from within the Land of Israel.

18.2. THE PEOPLE PREPARE FOR THE GIVING OF THE TORAH (19:7-15)

ז וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְרָא לְזִקְנֵי הָעָם וַיָּשֶׂם לִפְנֵיהֶם אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ יְי׳: ח וַיַּעֲנוּ כָל־הָעָם יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר
יְי׳ נַעֲשֶׂה וַיָּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הָעָם אֶל־יְי׳: ט וַיֹּאמֶר יְי׳ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי בָּא אֵלֶיךָ בְּעַב הֶעָנָן בַּעֲבוּר יִשְׁמַע הָעָם בְּדַבְּרִי עִמָּךְ
וְגַם־בְּךָ יַאֲמִינוּ לְעוֹלָם וַיַּגֵּד מֹשֶׁה אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הָעָם אֶל־יְי׳: י וַיֹּאמֶר
יְי׳ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵךְ אֶל־הָעָם וְקִדַּשְׁתָּם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר וְכִבְּסוּ שִׂמְלֹתָם:
יא וְהָיוּ נְכֹנִים לַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי | בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יֵרֵד יְי׳ לְעֵינֵי כָל־
הָעָם עַל־הַר סִינָי: יב וְהִגְבַּלְתָּ אֶת־הָעָם סָבִיב לֵאמֹר הִשָּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם
עֲלוֹת בָּהָר וּנְגֹעַ בְּקָצֵהוּ כָּל־הַנֹּגֵעַ בָּהָר מוֹת יוּמָת: יג לֹא־תִגַּע בּוֹ יָד

כִּי־סָקֹול יִסָּקֵל אֹו־יָרֹה יִיָּרֶה אִם־בְּהֵמָה אִם־אִישׁ לֹא יִחְיֶה בִּמְשֹׁךְ
הַיֹּבֵל הֵמָּה יַעֲלוּ בָהָר: יד וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה מִן־הָהָר אֶל־הָעָם וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת־
הָעָם וַיְכַבְּסוּ שִׂמְלֹתָם: טו וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָעָם הֱיוּ נְכֹנִים לִשְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים
אַל־תִּגְּשׁוּ אֶל־אִשָּׁה:

(7) Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that the Lord had commanded him.

(8) All the people answered as one, saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the people's words to the Lord.

(9) And the Lord said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after." Then Moses reported the people's words to the Lord,

(10) and the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes.

(11) Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai.

(12) You shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Beware of going up the mountain or touching the border of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death:

(13) no hand shall touch him, but he shall be either stoned or shot; beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain."

(14) Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes.

(15) And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman."

(7) **Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that the Lord had commanded him**: These new ideas now take the people completely by surprise. They thought they were just returning to their Land, but now it turns out that there is a special

Divine doctrine involved, and also a unique mission for them to fulfill with respect to the rest of humanity.

Moses is afraid to make such a radical proposal to the entire nation, so he turns to the elders first to enlist their support.

(8) **All the people answered as one, saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!"**: It is not the elders, however, who answer Moses, but all the people. In a situation that entails a drastic change in long-held ideas and beliefs, the common people show that they are more ready to go along with that than even the elite of the previous era were.

And yet, although their words appear to indicate full consent, they also have a condition that they wish to stipulate, as we shall see in the very next verse.

(9) **And the Lord said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud"**: The Divine light is so intense that it is impossible to perceive it directly, just as it is impossible to look directly at the sun without going blind. To receive that light, one needs a dimming filter. The thick cloud serves just this purpose.

In order that the people may hear when I speak with you: After the people are given the opportunity to hear directly what God will say to Moses, they will feel convinced that Moses really does receive his instructions from God.

And so trust you ever after: We can infer from the words "and so trust you ever after" that until now the Jews did not fully trust Moses. Thus, their affirmation "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (v. 8) should not be understood as a generalized promise ("Just tell us what to do, and we will do it, whatever it is"), but only in a restricted sense: "We will fulfill everything that the Lord says, but not what *you* say in His name, because it is impossible to know whether these are really God's words, or just your own ideas." For that reason, later God will have to address the entire nation directly.

The Jewish idea that the entire nation as one witnessed the Revelation is unique in the religious history of mankind. In Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and other religious systems, at first only one person receives the ultimate truth, or a divine revelation, and he then teaches that truth to everyone else. In contrast, the giving of the Torah was addressed

directly to one and all, which means that the entire nation rose at that moment to the level of prophecy. This is a very important distinction between the tenets of Judaism and the conceptions of other world religions.

The Torah presents the revelation at Sinai in these terms, i.e., that God revealed Himself (and gave the Torah) to the entire nation as a whole, precisely because the Jews are a stubborn and incredulous people, and would not agree to receive the Torah through Moses. God chose as his emissaries to humanity not people who are ready to believe with no hesitation whatsoever, but a skeptical, stubborn, incredulous people.

(10) **And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes**: The people need three days of preparation by which to approach God with measured steps; a hasty, unprepared ascent will only be destructive. The path to God must be gradual, so that a person who ascends to holiness always retains his full independence during the entire process.

(11) **Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai**: This will not be an individual event, but a Revelation for the entire nation.

(12) **You shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Beware of going up the mountain or touching the border of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death**: In preparing for holiness a person must set boundaries for himself even in the matter of the goal of the holiness itself. At each stage he must limit his mystical desire to advance to the Almighty, until he is sufficiently prepared to take the next step.

(13) No hand shall touch him: There is a certain symbolism here. A person who violates God's instructions by touching the mountain will be killed without anyone's hand touching him.

But he shall be either stoned or shot; beast or man, he shall not live: The generation that left Egypt after a long period of slavery must be intimidated and threatened with severe punishment. Otherwise, they will not have the mental acuity to fully comprehend the gravity of what is happening.

When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain: After the preparations are complete, ascending the mountain will be allowed. This "preliminary restriction" is akin to the restriction that was placed on Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, forbidding them at first to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. In this sense, observing a three-day separation from Mount Sinai is, as it were, a correction of Adam's haste.

(14) **Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes**: The washing of the clothes too was the fulfillment of a Divine instruction (v. 10).

(15) **And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day**: do not go near a woman": It is clear that the meaning of this restriction is that a person must renounce the passions and ordinary concerns of the material world when preparing for prophecy. But God's instructions above (v. 10-13) placed no restriction on the people regarding physical contact with their wives. This verse gives the impression that this additional restriction was Moses' own addition. The aspect of separation from one's wife for communicating with God is especially important to Moses.

In our commentary to Numbers (ch. 12) we will discuss the matter of Moses' separation from his wife in greater detail.

18.3. MOSES LEADS THE PEOPLE OUT OF THE CAMP TOWARD GOD (19:16-25)

טז וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בִּהְיֹת הַבֹּקֶר וַיְהִי קֹלֹת וּבְרָקִים וְעָנָן כָּבֵד עַל־
הָהָר וְקֹל שֹׁפָר חָזָק מְאֹד וַיֶּחֱרַד כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה: יז וַיּוֹצֵא
מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ בְּתַחְתִּית
הָהָר: יח וְהַר סִינַי עָשַׁן כֻּלּוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו יְי בָּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עֲשָׁנוֹ
כְּעֵשֶׁן הַכִּבְשָׁן וַיֶּחֱרַד כָּל־הָהָר מְאֹד: יט וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחָזֵק
מְאֹד מֹשֶׁה יְדַבֵּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְקוֹל: כ וַיֵּרֶד יְי עַל־הַר סִינַי אֶל־
רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיִּקְרָא יְי לְמֹשֶׁה אֶל־רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה: כא וַיֹּאמֶר
יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רֵד הָעֵד בָּעָם פֶּן־יֶהֶרְסוּ אֶל־יְי לִרְאוֹת וְנָפַל מִמֶּנּוּ רֶב:
כב וְגַם הַכֹּהֲנִים הַנִּגָּשִׁים אֶל־יְי יִתְקַדָּשׁוּ פֶּן־יִפְרֹץ בָּהֶם יְי: כג וַיֹּאמֶר

מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְיָ לֹא־יוּכַל הָעָם לַעֲלֹת אֶל־הַר סִינָי כִּי־אַתָּה הַעֵדֹתָה בָּנוּ׳
לֵאמֹר הַגְבֵּל אֶת־הָהָר וְקִדַּשְׁתּוֹ׃ כד וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְיָ לֶךְ־רֵד וְעָלִיתָ
אַתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן עִמָּךְ וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהָעָם אַל־יֶהֱרְסוּ לַעֲלֹת אֶל־יְיָ פֶּן־יִפְרָץ־
בָּם׃ כה וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם׃

(16) **On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn; and all the people who were in the camp trembled.**

(17) **Moses led the people out of the camp toward God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain.**

(18) **Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently.**

(19) **The blare of the horn grew louder and louder. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder.**

(20) **The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up.**

(21) **The Lord said to Moses, "Go down, warn the people not to break through to the Lord to gaze, lest many of them perish.**

(22) **The priests also, who come near the Lord, must stay pure, lest the Lord break out against them."**

(23) **But Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and sanctify it.'"**

(24) **So the Lord said to him, "Go down, and come back together with Aaron; but let not the priests or the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them."**

(25) **And Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.**

(16) **On the third day**: The third day of the people's "separation" is the sixth day of the third month since the Exodus, or fifty days after leaving Egypt.

(16-19) **On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn … Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke … and the whole mountain trembled violently. The blare of the horn grew louder and louder**: In the story of the prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb, which Tradition sees as reprising the giving of the Torah, the Almighty's presence is described as follows:

> "Come out," He called, "and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And lo, the Lord passed by.
> There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind.
> After the wind — an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake — fire; but the Lord was not in the fire.
> And after the fire — a soft murmuring sound.
> (1 Kings 19:11-12)

Based on this passage, the Midrash states that the words of the Revelation at Sinai, the Ten Commandments, were uttered in silence.

The heralds trumpet deafeningly before the arrival of the king, but when the king finally arrives, everything quiesces. And so it is here: The crescendo of the shofar creates a contrast between the din of the preparations and the "soft murmuring sound" of the actual Revelation.

(17) **Moses led the people out of the camp toward God**: In order to come close to God, one must leave the "camp."

And they took their places at the foot of the mountain: A very literal rendering of *be-tachtit ha-har* would be "on the underside of the mountain." The Midrash, which understands this as meaning that they were actually standing under the mountain, describes it this way: "The Almighty suspended the mountain precariously over them, and told them: If you accept the Torah, everything will be fine. But if not, Sinai will become your gravesite." So the giving of the Torah at Sinai was achieved by coercion.

This midrash should not be taken literally, of course. This coercion was not a simple physical coercion. When such great Revelation occurred,

the power of the Disclosure of Divinity was so strong and so obvious that all those present were deprived of their freedom of choice and accepted the Torah. It was simply impossible to deny the obvious.

Yet it was still coercion, and it was not ideal that giving of Torah was achieved by pressure. Our midrash continues, referring to the days of Mordechai and Esther, that after deliverance in the Purim story, the Jews once again accepted the Torah, but this time by their own free will.

This midrash intends to link the completion of the giving of the Torah with the completion of the writing of the Tanakh. The book of Esther is logically considered the last book of the Tanakh. It makes no mention of God, nor recounts miraculous events, for which reasons, inter alia, the book of Esther can be seen as a bridge to the post-Tanakh (post-biblical) era. Thus, the statement that "they again accepted the Torah in the days of Mordechai and Esther" really means "at the very end of the Tanakh era." The idea here is that a full national acceptance of the Divine teachings, impossible at the level of the Five Books of the Moses (the Torah) alone, can happen only with the acceptance of the entire Tanakh.

Because the Torah from Heaven, bestowed at Sinai, is too far removed from the thinking and disposition of ordinary human beings, its acceptance at the national level is initially possible only through some measure of coercion. Naturally, coercion creates resistance, but among the Jewish people this was countered by their willingness to accept the Torah in the manner originally expressed by the Patriarchs.

But the Torah is intended not only for the Jews, but for all mankind, and the peoples of the world did not give this initial consent. The Torah's supernal and unapproachable nature, and the resistance to its teachings, were obstacles to its adoption.

However, as the Torah progressed through Jewish history, the Tanakh was created, integrating the heavenly Revelation with the flow of human history here on earth. That fusion of the Divine and the human was much easier to accept. At that point, the Jews could accept even such a Torah without coercion, which is the reason for its full adoption "in the days of Mordechai and Esther."

Following their example, the nations of the world too could then accept the Tanakh, notwith-standing that they could not do so originally

when the Torah was first given. This is what actually happened in the subsequent history of mankind.

(18) **Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire**: At the giving of the Torah, water (cloud), which symbolizes *Chesed* ("mercy") and fire, symbolizing *Gevurah* ("severity, judgment") were united. The combination of disparate elements, water and fire, is symbolic of the unification of *Chesed* and *Gevurah* as the Torah's primary ethical objective. This concept, which originated with Abraham,[1] now finds its expression in the giving of the Torah.

(19) **The blare of the horn grew louder and louder**: The Midrash explains: "The loudness gradually increased, because, as a person's perception develops, he can hear more and more."

As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder: The literal translation is "God answered him in a voice." According to the Midrash, God answered Moses by strengthening Moses' own voice.

(20-21) **The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up. The Lord said to Moses, "Go down, warn the people"**: All this is still only the preparation for the Revelation. Although the whole nation is now experiencing a state of prophecy, they must maintain distance, continuing to be themselves as distinct human entities, not succumbing to the temptation to become one with Divinity.

Not to break through to the Lord to gaze, lest many of them perish: The desire to "see God" is destructive.

(22) **The priests also, who come near the Lord, must stay pure, lest the Lord break out against them:** The "priests" here are the firstborns. Before the incident of the golden calf, it was they who served as priests.

(23) **But Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and sanctify it.' "**: Moses believes that the people have accepted the prohibition.

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[1] See Genesis. 18:19, and *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §18.16.

(24) **So the Lord said to him, "Go down, and come back together with Aaron; but let not the priests or the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them."**: The Almighty expresses doubt that Moses is correct, and says that the warning must be repeated.

Go down, and come back together with Aaron: This is a clarification of earlier instructions. During the actual giving of the Torah Moses must remain below, together with the people, in order to receive the Torah along with them. But after that, Moses and Aaron are allowed to ascend.

From the Torah's account which follows, however, we know that after the giving of the Torah, only Moses ascended the mountain, while Aaron remained below with the people. Perhaps this exactly what led to the incident of the golden calf.

But let not the priests or the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them: Moses and Aaron are able to apprehend the Almighty's presence on the mountain, but the firstborns and all the rest of the people cannot, which means it will only be destructive for them.

(25) **And Moses went down to the people and spoke to them**: He warned them yet again.

18.4. THE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments clearly occupy a unique place in the Torah, for the following reasons.

- Although the Jews received the Torah as a whole indirectly through Moses, the Ten Commandments were the revelation that the entire people received directly from the Almighty.

    - There are varying opinions in the Midrash as to which part of the Ten Commandments the entire nation received directly.

According to one interpretation, all of the Ten Commandments were communicated directly by God to the people.

A second opinion states that this applies to the first two commandments exclusively. (This view is based on the fact that in the first two commandments God speaks in the first person, which is understood as direct Revelation, whereas the third and following commandments refer to God in the third person).

A third opinion believes that the entire nation heard only the very first word *Anochi*, "I," or perhaps even just the initial letter *aleph* of this word. All the rest they received through Moses.

However, a simple reading of the text of the Torah would seem to indicate that the entire Ten Commandments were received by the people directly from God.

• Besides being communicated orally, the Ten Commandments were also written by the Almighty Himself onto two stone tablets.

o The Torah as a whole was recorded in writing by Moses, but the Ten Commandments were written directly by God.

• The daily service in the Temple began each morning with the reading of the Shema and the Ten Commandments (Mishnah Tamid 5:1).

o This daily reading of the Ten Commandments was not, however, incorporated into the standardized Jewish liturgy. The apparent reason is that precisely because of their supreme importance, there was a danger that placing special emphasis on the Ten Commandments could lead to neglect of the Torah's other commandments (see below).

• The cantillation system that is used for the text of the Ten Commandments is different from that of the rest of the Torah (see below).

The purpose of the Ten Commandments is not to teach the Jews the foundations of morality. Even before receiving the Ten Commandments the Jews were well aware that it was forbidden to kill, to commit adultery, to steal, and so on. (The ethical systems of other civilizations have similar precepts).

Rather, the meaning of the Ten Commandments is the making of a covenant with God based on those selfsame principles.

The Torah itself (34:28) calls the Ten Commandments *aseret ha-dibrot*, "the ten sayings" (not "commandments"). This creates a certain parallel with the Ten Utterances by which God created the world (Gen. Ch. 1; Mishnah Avot 5:1). Thus, the making of the Sinai covenant with the Jewish people is comparable in its importance to the creation of the entire universe.

Even so, there are two opposing points of view in classical Jewish literature on the status of the Ten Commandments: 1. The Ten Commandments occupy a uniquely elevated position in the Torah. (We have already explained the rationale for this position). 2. The Ten Commandments, and the level of their Revelation, are not a whit higher nor lower than all the rest of the Torah. Any other verse in the Torah is exactly equal in value and in weight to the Ten Commandments.

In light of these two opposite viewpoints, local customs vary concerning the reading of the Ten Commandments in the synagogue (within the regular annual cycle of Torah readings, and also on the festival of Shavuot).

In deference to the first of the two opinions just mentioned, it is customary in many communities to stand when the Ten Commandments are read publicly from the Torah, in recognition of their special status (notwithstanding that, in general, there is no requirement to stand during the reading of the Torah).

But according to the second opinion above, one should conduct himself during the public readings of the Ten Commandments exactly the same as he would during any other Torah reading. In particular, one need not – indeed should not – rise for the reading of the Ten Commandments, so as not to give the impression that the Ten Commandments are in any way more important than the rest of the Torah.

The second of those two viewpoints, which emphasizes that all the words of the Torah have equal weight, wants to disabuse us of any notion that the Ten Commandments are the main attraction, and the rest of the Torah is less important.

The approach that stresses the singularity of the Ten Commandments is often found in Christianity, in its popular, prosaic form, at least. But it actually arose much earlier.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 99b) relates that King Manasseh, as early as the seventh century BCE, questioned the relevance of the verse "and Lotan's sister was Timna" (Gen. 36:22) and other verses of similar character. That is, Manasseh advocated an approach to the Torah text that seeks to distinguish between passages that are pivotal and those that are "merely tangentially informational." To prevent such an approach to the Torah from gaining traction among the population, and to affirm the sanctity and divinity of all parts of the Torah without exception, the Sages took the emphatic position that the entire Torah is everywhere exactly uniform in its level of Revelation, and that, in particular, the Ten Commandments are on even footing with the rest of the Torah text.

It is crucial that we learn to integrate both of these approaches. We must understand that the entire Torah is equally sacred, and that no part of the Torah text is by any measure extraneous, even those verses that would seem, at first glance, ancillary. We must be aware of the importance of every letter and every word of the Torah. (It is not by mere happenstance that the Sages attribute the neglect of individual verses of the Torah to King Manasseh, a confirmed and renowned idolater).

But at the same time, we must also not overlook that each passage of the Torah has its own unique meaning, and its special influence that it exerts on the world. It is here that the difference between passages comes to the fore. It is obvious that the influence of the Ten Commandments as the central institutions of the Torah is enormous, in light of their unquestionable significance for all of Western civilization.

18.5. THE TEXT OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (20:1-14)

א וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר׃

ב אָנֹכִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים לֹא־
יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פָּנָי׃ ג לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה
אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וַאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת וַאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת
לָאָרֶץ׃ ד לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תָעָבְדֵם כִּי אָנֹכִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל
קַנָּא פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבֹת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים לְשֹׂנְאָי׃ ה
וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד לַאֲלָפִים לְאֹהֲבַי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָי׃

ו לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַשָּׁוְא כִּי לֹא יְנַקֶּה יְיָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא
אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לַשָּׁוְא׃

ז זָכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ׃ ח שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־
מְלַאכְתֶּךָ׃ ט וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָל־
מְלָאכָה אַתָּה | וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר
בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ׃ י כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְיָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם
וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְיָ אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת
וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ׃

יא כַּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמֶּךָ לְמַעַן יַאֲרִכוּן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְיָ
אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ׃

יב לֹא תִרְצָח

לֹא תִנְאָף

לֹא תִגְנֹב

לֹא־תַעֲנֶה בְרֵעֲךָ עֵד שָׁקֶר׃

יד לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ

לֹא־תַחְמֹד אֵשֶׁת רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וַאֲמָתוֹ וְשׁוֹרוֹ וַחֲמֹרוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ׃

[In the following English translation, the angle brackets <...> indicate the division of the text into the Ten Commandments according to Jewish tradition.

(1) **God spoke all these words, saying:**

<1>

(2) **I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage:**

<2>

(3) **You shall have no other gods besides Me.**

(4) **You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth.**

(5) **You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me,**

(6) **but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.**

<3>

(7) **You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.**

<4>

(8) **Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.**

(9) **Six days you shall labor and do all your work,**

(10) **but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work — you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements.**

(11) **For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.**

<5>

(12) **Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you.**

<6>

(13) **You shall not murder.**

<7>

You shall not commit adultery.

<8>

You shall not steal.

<9>

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<10>

(14) **You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.**

(1) **God spoke all these words, saying**: The Ten Commandments appear twice in the Torah: here, in the book of Exodus, and again in Deuteronomy (5:6 ff.). The two texts differ in certain details. We will examine these differences in our commentary on Deuteronomy.

The generally accepted versification of the text of the Ten Commandments into thirteen verses (2-14) does not correspond, quite obviously, to the division of the text into ten commandments. This is because the longer commandments consist of several verses each, while, conversely, several of the shortest commandments (6, 7, and 8) are grouped together in a single verse.

It is important to note that the text of the Ten Commandments differs from the rest of the Torah also with respect to its cantillation symbols (and thus the melody used to chant them in public readings).

Unlike the rest of the Torah, in which one and the same cantillation system is consistently applied, the Ten Commandments employ two alternate systems of cantillation, known as the *ta'am ha-tachton* (the "lower cantillation") and the *ta'am ha-elyon* (the "upper cantillation"). These two cantillation systems are used, respectively, for reading of the Ten Commandments within the normal weekly Torah-reading cycle, and for reading them on the festival of Shavuot (which commemorates the giving of the Torah).

Now, both of those systems include *sof pasuq*, "end of verse," as one of the cantillation symbols, which in turn determines where one verse ends and the next one begins. Thus, one of the important differences between the Ten Commandments' two cantillation systems is that the "lower cantillation" follows the accepted versification of the text, which, as already mentioned, does not divide the text evenly into ten commandments. But the "upper cantillation," on the other hand, does in fact divide the text into exactly ten verses, such that each commandment occupies a single verse, and each verse contains a single commandment.

Because of that dichotomy, the numbering of the verses also differs between the two systems, and that difference continues until the end of the chapter. This is why the numbering of the verses in certain translations does not coincide with the versification of the Hebrew text, even when a given printed edition of the Torah presents those two texts of the Ten Commandments – the original Hebrew, and the given translation – in parallel.

Because the Ten Commandments are explained in great detail in a large number of available works, including English-language publications,[1] our commentary that follows will note only the most essential points.

(2) **I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage**: It was less than obvious to the Jewish people that it was God Who had brought them out of Egypt. Perhaps Moses himself had accomplished that, or other favorable circumstances had allowed it to happen. The first of the Ten Commandments therefore teaches us to see and believe that God intervenes in the course of history.

The first of the Ten Commandments also incorporates the ideal of freedom, while condemning the institution of slavery. Without freedom, both individual and national, spiritual progress is impossible.

(4-5) **You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness … You shall not bow down to them or serve them**: It is

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[1] See, for example: *Aseres Hadibros / The Ten Commandments: A new translation with a com-mentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*, Artscroll/ Mesorah Pub-lications, New York, 2010, ISBN-13: 978-0899061801.

forbidden to create images for worship. But creating visual art for its own sake is not prohibited.

For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God: The more literal translation is "a jealous God." The divine quality of "jealousy," which is manifested with respect to the prohibition of idolatry, means that God does not tolerate religious syncretism (widely accepted in the Ancient World), and requires humans to worship only Him, the Almighty.

Nachmanides points out that God's "jealousy" applies only to the people of Israel. Although idolatry is forbidden to all humankind (as one of the Seven Noahide Laws that are mandatory for Jews and non-Jews alike), the Almighty judges the Jewish people for transgressing that prohibition far more strictly, because it is the Jewish mission to transmit the Divine light to the rest of humanity.

Visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me: Literally, "of those who hate me." However, this refers not to people who only harbor a "psychological feeling of hatred" toward God, but to those who actualize that hatred by putting it into practice.

As for visiting the sin of a father's hatred upon his children, the Talmud explains: If the father hates the Almighty, and his son continues in the same path (he too hates God), then the son is punished for his own misdeeds and also for those of his father. But if the son does not share in his father's hatred, and does not perpetuate that evil, then none of the father's guilt will be visited upon him.

<2-3> (6-7) **But showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me … You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name**: The first two commandments are formulated in the first person ("I," "me"), but from the third commandment onward, in the third person ("You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God").

Some commentators explain this to mean that the Almighty spoke only the first two commandments directly to the entire people. This is because the people had no more strength to listen (see below), and they therefore received the eight subsequent commandments indirectly from God, as retold to them by Moses.

But other commentators assert that the Ten Commandments' introductory wording "God spoke all these words, saying" indicates that the people heard all Ten Commandments directly from God.

A third possibility is that first the people heard God Himself speak all the Ten Commandments, but they understood only the first two, and Moses then had to repeat the remaining commandments in language comprehensible to them.

(8) **Remember the Sabbath day**: In the other version of the Ten Commandments (when they are repeated in Deuteronomy), this Sabbath commandment is worded not as "Remember the Sabbath day," but as "Observe the Sabbath day" (Deut. 5:12). Remembering the Shabbat and observing it are two different but complimentary aspects of this commandment.

One *remembers* the Sabbath by rejoicing on it, by recognizing the Seventh Day as special and making it a celebration, by lighting the Sabbath candles (before sunset on Friday), and by honoring the Sabbath with meals that include the best food and drink one can afford.

Observing the Sabbath means not violating the Sabbath – that is, refraining from all manner of constructive labor and work that is prohibited on this day.

(10) **But the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God**: you shall not do any work: Precisely what "work" is forbidden on the Sabbath is not here specified. But kindling fire (35:3) and engaging in agricultural activity (34:21) are in fact later specifically prohibited. Also, the instructions given earlier (16:23,29) for collecting the manna indicate a ban on carrying items in a public domain, cooking, and walking beyond the limits of one's immediate vicinity on Shabbat.

Later Jewish tradition, basing itself on the Oral Law received by Moses from God, expands on the above short list with a more general ban on thirty-nine general categories of constructive activity that are forbidden on Shabbat, representing all the fundamental categories of restructuring the world in the service of human needs. (See Mishnah Shabbat 7:2).

(11) **For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day**: Here we see

that the cosmic foundation of the Shabbat is the creation of the world, and that it is therefore relevant to all of humanity. But in the Ten Commandments of Deuteronomy the rationale given for the Shabbat is social: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (5:15). All of the latter obviously relates only to the Jews, whom God redeemed from Egyptian bondage. Thus, the command here in Exodus to *remember* the Sabbath applies to all of humanity, but Deuteronomy's commandment to observe the Sabbath (to abide by its prohibitions) applies only to Jews.

(12) **Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you**: Honoring one's parents is one of the few Torah commandments for which the reward is explicitly stated. We will examine this issue more closely in our commentary on Deuteronomy (22:6).

(13) **You shall not murder**: In Hebrew (as in most other languages, including English) there are two distinct verbs for the concept of taking a life: *R TZ CH* ("to murder," i.e., to kill with criminal intent) and *H R G* ("to kill," i.e., killing in general, irrespective of circumstances).

This sixth commandment of the ten is phrased as *lo tirtzach*, "You shall not murder," and not as lo taharog, "You shall not kill." Thus, this commandment does not prohibit killing an enemy in a situation of self-defense, whether individual or national (i.e., in war).

You shall not commit adultery: *Lo tin'af.* Strictly, *ni'uf* in Hebrew means adultery – a married woman engaging in sexual relations with any man other than her husband. In the broader context, however, this seventh commandment encompasses any of the most serious sexual relationships, especially those between close family members (i.e., incest).

18.6. THE PEOPLE APPEAL TO MOSES TO MEDIATE BETWEEN THEM AND GOD (20:15-18)

טו וְכָל־הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת־הַלַּפִּידִם וְאֵת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר
וְאֶת־הָהָר עָשֵׁן וַיַּרְא הָעָם וַיָּנֻעוּ וַיַּעַמְדוּ מֵרָחֹק: טז וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־
מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר־אַתָּה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאַל־יְדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים פֶּן־נָמוּת:
יז וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם אַל־תִּירָאוּ כִּי לְבַעֲבוּר נַסּוֹת אֶתְכֶם בָּא
הָאֱלֹהִים וּבַעֲבוּר תִּהְיֶה יִרְאָתוֹ עַל־פְּנֵיכֶם לְבִלְתִּי תֶחֱטָאוּ: יח וַיַּעֲמֹד
הָעָם מֵרָחֹק וּמֹשֶׁה נִגַּשׁ אֶל־הָעֲרָפֶל אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם הָאֱלֹהִים:

(15) All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance.

(16) "You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."

(17) Moses answered the people, "Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray."

(18) So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

(15) As noted earlier, a discrepancy arises in some printed editions of the Torah in the numbering of the verses in this passage through the end of the chapter, because of differences in versification (dividing the text into verses) between alternate cantillation systems in use for the Ten Commandments. In this book, however, for the reader's convenience and for the sake of clarity we consistently follow the versification of the "lower cantillation" – in the Hebrew original, the English translation, and our commentary.

(15) The people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance: Instead of "they fell back," an alternate translation of *va-yanu'u* is "they trembled." The Revelation has not caused jubilation among the people. Quite the contrary, the people are afraid, and ask that an intermediary be appointed. The people are not yet ready to realize their mission as "a

kingdom of priests." Apparently, this is a consequence of God's having "rushed" to bring the Jews out of slavery ahead of time[1].

(16) **"You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die"**: When God communicates with a human being, it is natural for that person to experience a premonition of death.

We find a clear example of this when an angel of God appeared to Manoah and his wife, Samson's parents. "Manoah said to his wife, 'We shall surely die, for we have seen a divine being.' " (Jud. 13:22). The alluring sweetness of the higher worlds attracts a person and draws him into himself. Mysticism is inseparable from the thirst for self-destruction, and for dissolution in the Absolute.

But the Torah and Jewish mysticism are "the teachings of life," not death[2]. From the Jewish viewpoint, all of human history is preparation for the possibility of "seeing God and remaining alive." This Messianic level of contact with God has now been revealed to the people during the giving of the Torah at Sinai, but they are not yet ready for it. They therefore ask Moses to serve as mediator between them and God.

(17) **For God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray**: As we have explained previously, the Hebrew root *N S H* can mean either to test, or to elevate (lit., to raise as a banner). In this verse too, an alternate translation is "For God has come only in order to elevate you."

When a person achieves a new level of spiritual elevation, his understanding of the greatness of the Almighty increases, with the result that his awe of God and his fear of doing wrong also increase. This is the meaning of our verse: "For God has come only in order to elevate you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray" (lit., "so that you will not sin").

(18) **Moses approached the thick cloud where God was:** Divinity is always obscured in haze.

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1 See §12.4.

2 See §17.2, and *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §23.9.

18.7. THE CONCLUSION OF THE REVELATION AT SINAI (20:19-23)

יט וַיֹּאמֶר יי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם כִּי
מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם דִּבַּרְתִּי עִמָּכֶם: כ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן אִתִּי אֱלֹהֵי כֶסֶף וֵאלֹהֵי זָהָב
לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם: כא מִזְבַּח אֲדָמָה תַּעֲשֶׂה־לִּי וְזָבַחְתָּ עָלָיו אֶת־עֹלֹתֶיךָ
וְאֶת־שְׁלָמֶיךָ אֶת־צֹאנְךָ וְאֶת־בְּקָרֶךָ בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַזְכִּיר אֶת־
שְׁמִי אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ וּבֵרַכְתִּיךָ: כב וְאִם־מִזְבַּח אֲבָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה־לִּי לֹא־
תִבְנֶה אֶתְהֶן גָּזִית כִּי חַרְבְּךָ הֵנַפְתָּ עָלֶיהָ וַתְּחַלְּלֶהָ: כג וְלֹא־תַעֲלֶה
בְמַעֲלֹת עַל־מִזְבְּחִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגָּלֶה עֶרְוָתְךָ עָלָיו:

(19) **The Lord said to Moses: Thus shall you say to the Israelites: You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens:**

(20) **With Me, therefore, you shall not make any gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold.**

(21) **Make for Me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you.**

(22) **And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them.**

(23) **Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it.**

(19) **The Lord said to Moses**: As the giving of the Torah is now essentially complete, God gives the people additional commandments designed to preserve the Torah among the Jewish people. These include a clarification of the prohibition of idolatry, the need to establish an organized religious cult (commandments concerning the altar), and maintaining a sense of modesty.

Thus shall you say to the Israelites: You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens: It is the transcendental nature

of the gift of the Torah that is being emphasized here. The Torah comes "from the very heavens." It is not inherent in ordinary life on earth.

Divinity manifests itself in our world through two channels: transcendentally, through the Torah given from Sinai, and immanently, through nature and the natural course of events and our inner religious intuition. It is important to see both of these manifestations of God in the world, and to maintain a balance in our perception of these two paths.

(20) **With Me, therefore, you shall not make any gods of silver**: In this verse, the *etnachta* (a primary cantillation symbol that divides the verse into two distinct, albeit related, parts) is on the word *itti*, "Me." In English, this would be equivalent to putting a semicolon after the words "With Me, therefore, you shall not make." In other words, this is a prohibition "to place something along with Him" – "to attach something else to the Almighty."

When other religions do so, i.e., they attach some other image to God, as participating together with Him in His Divinity, Judaism calls this *Shituf*, "companionism." (Christianity, which attaches to God the image of Jesus, is a classic example of a religion based on *Shituf*).

This prohibition of *Shituf*, "With Me, therefore, you shall not make," applies only to Jews – *Shituf* is not forbidden for non-Jews (for them it is a form of monotheism). The nations of the world are required to observe only the prohibition of absolute idolatry; *Shituf* is not for them a violation of that prohibition. But the Torah puts more stringent demands on the Jews than on other nations, and *Shituf* is therefore forbidden to Jews. For them it is fully equivalent to idolatry.

(20) **Any gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold**: Silver and gold represent the material and the spiritual (moral), respectively. The Torah here prohibits deification of material success, as well as deification of human creative spiritual success. Because Divinity is transcendental ("I spoke to you from the very heavens"), nothing earthly – neither images (*Shituf*), nor any material or spiritual-moral values ("silver and gold") – is permitted to be identified with Him.

(21) **Make for Me an altar**: It is important to note that the commandment of constructing an altar was given immediately after the giving of the Torah. It is not, as sometimes alleged, a later reaction to the

creation of the golden calf, supposedly needed in order to channel the thirst for sacrifice in a positive direction.

Your sacrifices of well-being: The various types of sacrifices will be discussed in more detail in the opening passages of the book of Leviticus.

Make for Me an altar of earth: The altar was hollow, made of wood, and encased in copper. Its verticals were filled with earth. (See 27:1-8).

We note the contrast here. God spoke from Heaven, in a transcendental Revelation. And in response, humans construct an altar from earth, i.e., they transform the world according to Divine ideals.

(22) **And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones**: Our natural life, and not our "hewn" life, are to become the altar of the Almighty.

For by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them: The literal meaning of *charbecha* is "your sword." Although metal (and iron in particular) was in ancient times used to make tools, and for other peaceful and constructive purposes, nonetheless one of its primary applications was weaponry. The Torah here prohibits using metal in the making of the altar, because religious life cannot be built on the basis of violence.

(23) **Do not ascend My altar by steps**: Instead of stairs, you must ascend the altar with the aid of a gently sloping ramp. Like a natural human gait, spiritual progress occurs gradually.

That your nakedness may not be exposed upon it: The simple meaning is that even in the service of the Almighty, the laws of modesty must always remain a priority. But figuratively: If instead of ascending the altar gradually you try to jump abruptly from one level of spirituality to the next, you are in danger of "exposing your nakedness," that is, it will become apparent to all that you are not yet ready to ascend to that level.

WEEKLY
PORTION [6]

MISHPATIM

CHAPTER 19
FOUNDATIONS OF JEWISH JURISPRUDENCE

12.1. THE DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORNS (12:29-32)

The previous portion, *Yitro*, presented the general principles of the covenant with God. This included, most prominently, the Ten Commandments, and the special status of the Jewish people as a "kingdom of priests" for all of humanity. Portion *Yitro* was thus the "Moses" portion – the inner essence of the covenant.

In this portion now beginning, whose name is *Mishpatim*, "Rules," the same covenant will now be elaborated in detail, showing how the general principles are to be applied in actual practice; that is, what they look like when applied to daily life. In that sense, then, this portion is the "Aaron" portion.

* * *

Legislation, both civil and criminal, is an essential part of the teachings of the Torah. In Judaism there is no division into secular and religious, worldly and spiritual. Absolutely everything – social laws, economic relations, civil and criminal codes – belongs to the field of religion, and everything is part of one's connection with God. The laws exist not only to normalize life within human society, but to uphold the covenant with God.

Both civil and criminal law are covered primarily in the *Mishpatim* portion, but also in other portions of the Torah. These commandments

and laws are not systematized by topic, but are presented in their various portions associatively. However, to clarify the halachah it is necessary to connect them together. Such a systematization was an essential part of the work of the Talmud and codifiers of the halachah. Many commentaries on the Torah put a special emphasis on clarifying the relationship between the Torah text and the halachah.

We will not, however, discuss the halachic application of the laws of the Torah. The purpose of our commentary is to draw philosophical conclusions from the text of the Torah, not to subject it to legislative or halachic analysis. We therefore strive to examine each passage in the context of its overall theme, in order to arrive at an understanding of the lesson that it is coming to teach us.

* * *

We have already noted that many of the Torah's laws in the social domain accord with the legal system that was adopted in the ancient Near East, primarily the Code of Hammurabi[1]. The Torah amends and corrects that system, while not requiring immediate transition to the ideal.

Another point related to this is that – to cite this case of slavery as a representative example – the Torah speaks here not of a society so well organized that slavery will not exist at all, but about correcting and improving life's realities such as they are. Therefore, as both humanity in general and the Jewish people in particular advanced, both culturally and spiritually, the Torah sages later declared some of these laws to be no longer applicable.

This does not mean that these laws have essentially lost all their meaning. Studying these laws in order to understand the ideas they embody will always remain decisively important. But they are no longer applicable in practice, because of humanity's advancement in solving the problems that these laws were originally meant to address.

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[1] See *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §16.6.

19.2. LAWS CONCERNING SLAVERY (21:1-11)

א וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תָּשִׂים לִפְנֵיהֶם׃ ב כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עִבְרִי שֵׁשׁ
שָׁנִים יַעֲבֹד וּבַשְּׁבִיעִת יֵצֵא לַחָפְשִׁי חִנָּם׃ ג אִם־בְּגַפּוֹ יָבֹא בְּגַפּוֹ יֵצֵא
אִם־בַּעַל אִשָּׁה הוּא וְיָצְאָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עִמּוֹ׃ ד אִם־אֲדֹנָיו יִתֶּן־לוֹ אִשָּׁה
וְיָלְדָה־לוֹ בָנִים אוֹ בָנוֹת הָאִשָּׁה וְיַלְדֶיהָ תִּהְיֶה לַאדֹנֶיהָ וְהוּא יֵצֵא
בְגַפּוֹ׃ ה וְאִם־אָמֹר יֹאמַר הָעֶבֶד אָהַבְתִּי אֶת־אֲדֹנִי אֶת־אִשְׁתִּי וְאֶת־
בָּנָי לֹא אֵצֵא חָפְשִׁי׃ ו וְהִגִּישׁוֹ אֲדֹנָיו אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִגִּישׁוֹ אֶל־הַדֶּלֶת
אוֹ אֶל־הַמְּזוּזָה וְרָצַע אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־אָזְנוֹ בַּמַּרְצֵעַ וַעֲבָדוֹ לְעֹלָם׃

ז וְכִי־יִמְכֹּר אִישׁ אֶת־בִּתּוֹ לְאָמָה לֹא תֵצֵא כְּצֵאת הָעֲבָדִים׃ ח אִם־
רָעָה בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר־לֹא (לוֹ) יְעָדָהּ וְהֶפְדָּהּ לְעַם נָכְרִי לֹא־יִמְשֹׁל
לִמְכָרָהּ בְּבִגְדוֹ־בָהּ׃ ט וְאִם־לִבְנוֹ יְיַעֲדֶנָּה כְּמִשְׁפַּט הַבָּנוֹת יַעֲשֶׂה־
לָּהּ׃ י אִם־אַחֶרֶת יִקַּח־לוֹ שְׁאֵרָהּ כְּסוּתָהּ וְעֹנָתָהּ לֹא יִגְרָע׃ יא וְאִם־
שְׁלֹשׁ־אֵלֶּה לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה לָהּ וְיָצְאָה חִנָּם אֵין כָּסֶף׃

(1) **These are the rules that you shall set before them:**

(2) **When you acquire a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years; in the seventh year he shall go free, without payment.**

(3) **If he came single, he shall leave single; if he had a wife, his wife shall leave with him.**

(4) **If his master gave him a wife, and she has borne him children, the wife and her children shall belong to the master, and he shall leave alone.**

(5) **But if the slave declares, "I love my master, and my wife and children: I do not wish to go free,"**

(6) **his master shall take him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall then remain his slave for life.**

(7) **When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be freed as male slaves are.**

(8) If she proves to be displeasing to her master, who designated her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders, since he broke faith with her.

(9) And if he designated her for his son, he shall deal with her as is the practice with free maidens.

(10) If he marries another, he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.

(11) If he fails her in these three ways, she shall go free, without payment.

(1) **These are the rules**: Detailing the laws goes in descending order of the overall seriousness of the situation. First, laws governing slavery, then murder (vv. 21:12-14), then causing physical harm to another person (21:25-36), and then damage to property (21:37 – 22:14). Thus, Torah considers that the worst thing that can ever happen to a person is to become a slave. To die is less frightening, followed by physical harm, robbery, and other forms of thievery.

That you shall set before them: The practical implementation of the laws of the Torah is largely the prerogative of the people, albeit with the Torah sages acting on their behalf. Therefore, after the Jews have received the general principles "in their final form from heaven" in the Yitro portion, the details of those laws are "set before them" here in the *Mishpatim* portion.

(2) **When you acquire a Hebrew slave**: The Torah's coverage of those details begins at the very bottom of the social ladder. A human being is being sold as a slave in order to pay for a theft he has committed, or because poverty forces a father to sell his minor daughter as a maid-servant, in order that he might save her, at least, from the ravages of poverty. In both cases, the intent of the Torah's laws is not to upend the entire situation itself, but to set acceptable boundaries, so that the basic rights of the slave or maidservant are protected.

The Torah seeks to correct reality not by imposing edicts that attempt to radically alter human behavior immediately, but, instead, through

practical steps for improving life under prevailing conditions, until the natural historical process leads to more ideal human relationships. Once humanity has surmounted these obstacles (slavery, in this case), the original laws of the Torah concerning them no longer apply in any literal sense. However, they nonetheless remain important for our understanding of how the Torah views the general framework of life.

He shall serve six years; in the seventh year he shall go free, without payment: The discussion of the laws of slavery does not begin with the rules for acquiring a slave, as we would reasonably expect from a legal code, but with limits on the duration of slavery, and the right of the slave to go free when it finally ends. Ultimately, the objective of the Torah is not to create a legal code for its own sake, but to establish the moral foundations of everyday life.

It is useful to note that the Ten Commandments, in the previous portion, *Yitro*, began with God as the supreme architect of personal freedom: "I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage" (20:2), while the concrete laws of this *Mishpatim* portion begin with the topic of slavery – the very antithesis of personal freedom.

This is the difference between an approach based on ideals (Moses) and an approach based on reality (Aaron). At the time of the giving of the Torah, slavery was a fact of human existence and the actual makeup of the world. It would only have been counterproductive to try to pretend that the problem did not exist, or to attempt to abolish slavery before humanity had advanced on its own to the point of being ready for that. The Torah can condemn and limit slavery, but it is up to humans to overcome and abolish it through their own efforts.

By Torah law, a Jew can be sold into slavery only for stealing. (Selling a Jew into slavery simply in order to pay off his ordinary debts is forbidden by the Torah[1].) Thus, buying a Jewish slave means buying a convicted criminal – a situation that obviously comes with its own set of problems. Many people today will expressly avoid hiring an employee

[1] Situations of individuals being sold into slavery for payment of debts are mentioned in Tanakh (e.g., 2 Kings, ch. 4, and elsewhere), but they are presented there expressly as violations of Torah law.

or a day-laborer with a criminal history, even if he has already repented and completely redeemed himself. But the man who purchases a slave purchases a "thief for correction." He brings him into his home, and on top if it all also assumes responsibility for his care.

However, the Torah entrusts society with the re-education of such a thief. Rather than sitting in prison, he will now remain among normal people. He will live with a family who will teach him to become a responsible and respectable member of society.

The purchaser of this thief-slave has paid a handsome price for him (which has gone to compensate the victim of the crime), in exchange for which he has now gotten himself an employee. Only a strong and wealthy man could afford such a purchase – a man standing firmly on his feet, burdened with the demands of a sizeable and demanding homestead, and badly in need of working hands. Thus, an unprincipled Jew has fallen into the right place – an environment where a strong personality dominates.

(3) **If he came single, he shall leave single; if he had a wife, his wife shall leave with him**: One who acquires a Jewish slave must also assume the responsibility of caring for his wife and children for the duration of the indenture. But when the slave goes free, his wife leaves with him, thus relieving the owner of that obligation.

(4) **If his master gave him a wife, and she has borne him children, the wife and her children shall belong to the master, and he shall leave alone**: The owner could marry the Jewish slave even to a non-Jewish slave girl (notwithstanding that such a marriage is forbidden to a Jewish freeman or freedman). But in this case, upon the slave's release there is no change in the status of his wife and children so far as the master is concerned.

(5) **But if the slave declares, "I love my master, and my wife and children"**: Note the order here – it is very significant. First and foremost, the slave loves his master and living with his master; his love of his wife and children are only secondary. This is because his wife and children came to him not by his own choice, but by his master's decision. Thus, the slave views his wife and children as mere extensions of his slave existence.

I do not wish to go free: It should be noted that in Jewish society there existed the institution of socalled "patriarchal slavery," an arrangement by which a slave was considered, as it were, a junior member of the family (in contrast to the "industrial" slavery that was rampant in Egypt, Greece and Rome). The "family slave" performed his duties under entirely reasonable and normal conditions, and was guaranteed food and clothes, and a roof over his head. A person who enjoys that kind of life has no need for freedom, which, in truth, would only get in his way.

Be that as it may, even that type of slave is expected to understand that a desire to live a life of slavery in any form is itself despicable, and nothing to be proud of. For this reason, the Torah prescribes that a slave who declines to go free, even in order to maintain a status quo that quite suits him, must undergo the piercing of his ear.

(6) **His master shall take him before God**: Hebrew *Elohim* most often means "God," as translated here. But it can also simply mean "judges" (which is in fact how the halachah understands this verse).

If we interpret this verse in the first sense ("before God"), the owner of the slave is declaring: "May the Almighty be a witness, that this person, of his own free will, wishes to remain a slave, rather than taking advantage of the gift of freedom that God has bestowed on every human being."

But in the second sense ("his master shall take him before the judges"), the idea is that this slave, six years earlier, came before the court, who authorized his sale as a common thief. And now, the procedure that allows the slave to refuse his freedom and remain enslaved, must also take place with the Jewish judges presiding.

For the understanding of the term *Elohim* as variously referring either to the Almighty, or to human judges or other public officials, or to alien deities (celestial angels worshipped by humans), see *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §5.4.

He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost: This is seen as an allusion to the Exodus from Egypt, "the house of bondage" (20:2). At that time, God commanded that the lintel and the two doorposts of every Jewish home be smeared with the blood of the Passover sacrifice (12:22). Remembering that event here serves as a rebuke to the slave who now, of his own volition, is renouncing his freedom.

And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl: This recalls the giving of the Torah. At the Revelation at Sinai, this slave heard with his own ears the first of the Ten Commandments: "I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage." And yet, he still wants to remain a slave.

Pierce his ear: This means his earlobe.

And he shall then remain his slave for life: The literal translation is "his slave forever." In practice, however, such extended slavery lasted only until the next occurrence of the Jubilee year in its fifty-year cycle. The Torah prescribes (Lev. 25:8-13) that in each such Jubilee year a "reset" takes place in the Land of Israel: property and persons revert to their original ownership and social status. Patrimonial land that had at some point been sold would automatically return to its original owner, and Jewish "slaves for life" went free even against their will. (See our commentary on the given passage in Leviticus for further details).

(7) **When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be freed as male slaves are**: When the slave is a woman, the rules for her release from slavery are completely different.

A man could sell his own young daughter as a maidservant, but only in a situation where, due to indigence, he had no hope of ever marrying off his daughter in the normal manner, and he wished to set her up with a more prosperous family in advance.

This was possible only for the father of a young girl, up to age twelve. By Torah law, a girl becomes an adult at age twelve, from which time there is no provision for a father or anyone else to sell any woman into servitude.

(8-9) **If she proves to be displeasing to her master, who designated her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders, since he broke faith with her. And if he designated her for his son, he shall deal with her as is the practice with free maidens**: The girl had to serve until she reached adulthood, and the master or his son was then expected to marry her, but they had no right to resell her to a third party. Moreover, the presumption was that entering into the marriage would be to her advantage, and that she herself would therefore opt in favor of it. If, however, the

maidservant herself, upon reaching the age of twelve, decided to decline marriage either to the master or to his son, or if the marriage did not happen for any other reason, she was free to leave.

He shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders: The Hebrew for "outsiders" is here *le-am nochri*; literally, "to a foreign people." And indeed, since *am* most typically means "nation," some translations do render this verse as "he shall not have the right to sell her to a foreign nation."

But that rendering is indefensible, since it is forbidden to sell a Jewish girl to a "foreign nation" under any circumstances whatsoever, and not only when her master (or his son) will not be marrying her upon her reaching adulthood. Thus, the Torah would have had no reason to forbid it specifically in this case.

Actually, the word *am* has yet another meaning: "relatives" or "family," which is the sense in which the word *am* is used here; that is, the master is prohibited from passing the girl on to anyone in any other family except his own family, i.e., himself or his son. (We do not find the Hebrew word *am* used in this sense anywhere else in Tanakh, although that meaning is in fact preserved in the Arabic language).

(10) **If he marries another, he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights**: While not encouraging polygamy, the Torah does permit it. But it defends the right of every wife – no matter how many other wives her husband has – to food, clothing, and satisfaction of her sexual needs.

(11) **If he fails her in these three ways, she shall go free, without payment**: The "three ways" are not referring to the previous verse (food, clothing, and cohabitation), but to the earlier verses.

That is, if the master who had bought this maidservant as a young girl failed to fulfill any of the three conditions – to marry her himself, to marry her to his son, or to reduce her ransom (according to the number of years she had already lived with him) – then he had to release her free and clear.

19.3. LAWS OF MURDER AND KIDNAPPING (21:12-36)

יב מַכֵּה אִישׁ וָמֵת מוֹת יוּמָת׃ יג וַאֲשֶׁר לֹא צָדָה וְהָאֱלֹהִים אִנָּה לְיָדוֹ
וְשַׂמְתִּי לְךָ מָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יָנוּס שָׁמָּה׃

יד וְכִי־יָזִד אִישׁ עַל־רֵעֵהוּ לְהָרְגוֹ בְּעָרְמָה מֵעִם מִזְבְּחִי תִּקָּחֶנּוּ לָמוּת׃

טו וּמַכֵּה אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ מוֹת יוּמָת׃

טז וְגֹנֵב אִישׁ וּמְכָרוֹ וְנִמְצָא בְיָדוֹ מוֹת יוּמָת׃

יז וּמְקַלֵּל אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ מוֹת יוּמָת׃

יח וְכִי־יְרִיבֻן אֲנָשִׁים וְהִכָּה־אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ בְּאֶבֶן אוֹ בְאֶגְרֹף וְלֹא
יָמוּת וְנָפַל לְמִשְׁכָּב׃ יט אִם־יָקוּם וְהִתְהַלֵּךְ בַּחוּץ עַל־מִשְׁעַנְתּוֹ וְנִקָּה
הַמַּכֶּה רַק שִׁבְתּוֹ יִתֵּן וְרַפֹּא יְרַפֵּא׃

כ וְכִי־יַכֶּה אִישׁ אֶת־עַבְדּוֹ אוֹ אֶת־אֲמָתוֹ בַּשֵּׁבֶט וּמֵת תַּחַת יָדוֹ נָקֹם
יִנָּקֵם׃ כא אַךְ אִם־יוֹם אוֹ יוֹמַיִם יַעֲמֹד לֹא יֻקַּם כִּי כַסְפּוֹ הוּא׃

כב וְכִי־יִנָּצוּ אֲנָשִׁים וְנָגְפוּ אִשָּׁה הָרָה וְיָצְאוּ יְלָדֶיהָ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה אָסוֹן
עָנוֹשׁ יֵעָנֵשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר יָשִׁית עָלָיו בַּעַל הָאִשָּׁה וְנָתַן בִּפְלִלִים׃ כג וְאִם־
אָסוֹן יִהְיֶה וְנָתַתָּה נֶפֶשׁ תַּחַת נָפֶשׁ׃ כד עַיִן תַּחַת עַיִן שֵׁן תַּחַת שֵׁן
יָד תַּחַת יָד רֶגֶל תַּחַת רָגֶל׃ כה כְּוִיָּה תַּחַת כְּוִיָּה פֶּצַע תַּחַת פֶּצַע
חַבּוּרָה תַּחַת חַבּוּרָה׃

כו וְכִי־יַכֶּה אִישׁ אֶת־עֵין עַבְדּוֹ אוֹ־אֶת־עֵין אֲמָתוֹ וְשִׁחֲתָהּ לַחָפְשִׁי
יְשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ תַּחַת עֵינוֹ׃ כז וְאִם־שֵׁן עַבְדּוֹ אוֹ־שֵׁן אֲמָתוֹ יַפִּיל לַחָפְשִׁי
יְשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ תַּחַת שִׁנּוֹ׃

כח וְכִי־יִגַּח שׁוֹר אֶת־אִישׁ אוֹ אֶת־אִשָּׁה וָמֵת סָקוֹל יִסָּקֵל הַשּׁוֹר וְלֹא
יֵאָכֵל אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ וּבַעַל הַשּׁוֹר נָקִי׃ כט וְאִם שׁוֹר נַגָּח הוּא מִתְּמֹל
שִׁלְשֹׁם וְהוּעַד בִּבְעָלָיו וְלֹא יִשְׁמְרֶנּוּ וְהֵמִית אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה הַשּׁוֹר
יִסָּקֵל וְגַם־בְּעָלָיו יוּמָת׃ ל אִם־כֹּפֶר יוּשַׁת עָלָיו וְנָתַן פִּדְיֹן נַפְשׁוֹ כְּכֹל
אֲשֶׁר־יוּשַׁת עָלָיו׃ לא אוֹ־בֵן יִגַּח אוֹ־בַת יִגַּח כַּמִּשְׁפָּט הַזֶּה יֵעָשֶׂה לּוֹ׃

לב אִם־עֶבֶד יִגַּח הַשּׁוֹר אוֹ אָמָה כֶּסֶף | שְׁלֹשִׁים שְׁקָלִים יִתֵּן לַאדֹנָיו וְהַשּׁוֹר יִסָּקֵל׃

לג וְכִי־יִפְתַּח אִישׁ בּוֹר אֹו כִּי־יִכְרֶה אִישׁ בֹּר וְלֹא יְכַסֶּנּוּ וְנָפַל־שָׁמָּה שׁוֹר אֹו חֲמֹור׃ לד בַּעַל הַבּוֹר יְשַׁלֵּם כֶּסֶף יָשִׁיב לִבְעָלָיו וְהַמֵּת יִהְיֶה־לֹּו׃

לה וְכִי־יִגֹּף שׁוֹר־אִישׁ אֶת־שׁוֹר רֵעֵהוּ וָמֵת וּמָכְרוּ אֶת־הַשּׁוֹר הַחַי וְחָצוּ אֶת־כַּסְפּוֹ וְגַם אֶת־הַמֵּת יֶחֱצוּן׃ לו אֹו נוֹדַע כִּי שׁוֹר נַגָּח הוּא מִתְּמֹול שִׁלְשֹׁם וְלֹא יִשְׁמְרֶנּוּ בְּעָלָיו שַׁלֵּם יְשַׁלֵּם שׁוֹר תַּחַת הַשּׁוֹר וְהַמֵּת יִהְיֶה־לֹּו׃

(12) **He who fatally strikes a man shall be put to death.**

(13) **If he did not do it by design, but it came about by an act of God, I will assign you a place to which he can flee.**

(14) **When a man schemes against another and kills him treacherously, you shall take him from My very altar to be put to death.**

(15) **He who strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.**

(16) **He who kidnaps a man — whether he has sold him or is still holding him — shall be put to death.**

(17) **He who insults his father or his mother shall be put to death.**

(18) **When men quarrel and one strikes the other with stone or fist, and he does not die but has to take to his bed —**

(19) **if he then gets up and walks outdoors upon his staff, the assailant shall go unpunished, except that he must pay for his idleness and his cure.**

(20) **When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod, and he dies there and then, he must be avenged.**

(21) But if he survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, since he is the other's property.

(22) When men fight, and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and a miscarriage results, but no other damage

ensues, the one responsible shall be fined according as the woman's husband may exact from him, the payment to be based on reckoning.

(23) **But if other damage ensues, the penalty shall be life for life,**

(24) **eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,**

(25) **burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.**

(26) **When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye.**

(27) **If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.**

(28) **When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox is not to be punished.**

(29) **If, however, that ox has been in the habit of goring, and its owner, though warned, has failed to guard it, and it kills a man or a woman — the ox shall be stoned and its owner, too, shall be put to death.**

(30) **If ransom is laid upon him, he must pay whatever is laid upon him to redeem his life.**

(31) **So, too, if it gores a minor, male or female, [the owner] shall be dealt with according to the same rule.**

(32) **But if the ox gores a slave, male or female, he shall pay thirty shekels of silver to the master, and the ox shall be stoned.**

(33) **When a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or an ass falls into it,**

(34) **the one responsible for the pit must make restitution; he shall pay the price to the owner, but shall keep the dead animal.**

(35) **When a man's ox injures his neighbor's ox and it dies, they shall sell the live ox and divide its price; they shall also divide the dead animal.**

(36) **If, however, it is known that the ox was in the habit of goring, and its owner has failed to guard it, he must restore ox for ox, but shall keep the dead animal.**

(12) **He who fatally strikes a man shall be put to death**: The overarching principle of the Torah's criminal law is that the punishment exacted is not determined by a need to avenge the offense, but by how the situation can best be rectified. If, for example, murder or stealing would go unpunished, then society would soon disintegrate, and that is why the punishment exists. But there is no punishment in the Torah whose objective is simply to wreak vengeance on the criminal.

(13) **If he did not do it by design, but it came about by an act of God, I will assign you a place to which he can flee**: Negligent homicide is redressed by exiling the killer to a City of Refuge. Here only the very general principle is presented. The details of this commandment are elaborated in Numbers (35:9 ff.) and Deuteronomy (19:1 ff.).

But it came about by an act of God: The killing happened inadvertently, and was thus decided in Heaven. In such a situation one cannot (indeed, must not) try to find justice or justification.

(14) **When a man schemes against another and kills him treacherously, you shall take him from My very altar to be put to death**: After describing the shelter provided for an unwitting killer, the Torah emphasizes that, conversely, there must be no shelter for a murderer under any circumstances.

In the biblical era, it was accepted in certain cultures that a criminal could escape punishment by entering the sanctuary and taking hold of the altar (see 1 Kings, 2:28). The Torah here emphatically and categorically rejects any such notion.

(15) **He who strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death**: This means a person who deliberately strikes, and wounds, either of his parents.

(16) **He who kidnaps a man — whether he has sold him or is still holding him — shall be put to death**: Kidnapping is considered a form of "social murder." That is, to be deprived of one's personal freedom is equivalent to being deprived of life itself.

(17) **He who insults his father or his mother shall be put to death**: Hebrew *mekallel*, the word used in this verse, means "one who curses." To merely "insult" a parent is of course a grave sin. But it becomes a capital offense, punishable by death in an earthly court, only when the child has uttered an actual curse.

Like the death penalty in Judaism in general, the death sentences prescribed for the various offenses in this portion are in practice virtually impossible to apply. This is because of the extraordinarily stringent judicial conditions that would have to be met (in the cross-examination of witnesses, for example, and in ascertaining that the perpetrator had full knowledge and understanding, in advance, of the nature of his offense and of the punishment that would ensue).

The Torah's intent in making them capital offenses is essentially to emphasize the gravity of the crimes.

(18-19) **When men quarrel and one strikes the other with stone or fist, and he does not die but has to take to his bed — if he then gets up and walks outdoors upon his staff, the assailant shall go unpunished, except that he must pay for his idleness and his cure**: Compensation for personal injury is payable on five points: For the depreciation of the injured in the labor market, for the physical pain inflicted, for medical expenses incurred, for lost wages, and for embarrassment suffered.

(19) **And his cure**: The Torah considers the practice of medicine, and the benefits it confers, a boon to humanity. The idea that "going to a doctor demonstrates a lack of faith in God" is flatly rejected. While it is true that all sickness and disease come from God, it is no less true that the physician's ability to heal, his right to heal, and his obligation to heal are all likewise given to him by God.

(20) **When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod, and he dies there and then, he must be avenged**: One who murders his slave incurs the death penalty for that crime, just as he would for murdering any other person.

The discussion here concerns non-Jewish slaves, whose status in Jewish law generally paralleled that of slaves throughout the ancient world in most respects. But with regard to physical safety, the Torah

protected the rights of such slaves to a far greater degree than did other legal systems of those times.

(21) **But if he survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, since he is the other's property**: In this case, the master does not incur the death penalty.

Since he is the other's property: Because the death of a slave results in a significant loss to the master as well, it is presumed – in the absence of evidence to the contrary – that he had not actually intended to kill his slave.

In deciding such issues, however, we consider also the manner and extent of the blow. If it was inflicted with deadly force, or by means of a deadly weapon, then the master will be held liable for murder even if the slave managed to live another day or two in the wake of the injury. But if, conversely, a relatively minor blow turned out *post facto* to be fatal, the death of the slave, however lamentable, would be deemed only a negligent homicide.

(22) **When men fight, and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and a miscarriage results, but no other damage ensues, the one responsible shall be fined**: "No other damage ensues" means that the woman herself is not fatally injured.

(23) **But if other damage ensues, the penalty shall be life for life**: If the woman dies, her death is deemed a murder, and the killer pays with his life. The argument that he had no actual intention of killing her is invalid in this case, because one must always exercise especial care in the presence of a pregnant woman.

(24) **Eye for eye, tooth for tooth**: It is today accepted in all civilized societies that at the level of practical law, this phrase is not to be taken literally, and only means monetary compensation.

We read earlier: "When men quarrel and one strikes the other … and … has to take to his bed … he must pay" (21:18-19). In that case it is clear beyond all doubt that monetary compensation is meant. Thus, at the practical level "an eye for eye" too cannot be interpreted otherwise.

It is no accident, however, that the language of the Torah here is formulated in terms of retributive justice rather than simple monetary compensation. The purpose of the Written Torah cannot be reduced to merely establishing halachah, the practical application of the law.

The aim of the Written Torah is to convey the very essence of real justice. "An eye for an eye" is not human justice, but it is Divine justice. Although we must not in real life exact that level of justice for the loss of an eye, it is crucial to understand that by the law of the Supreme (Heavenly) Court, "an eye for an eye" is in fact the penalty that *should be* imposed. It is precisely this understanding that the Written Torah wishes to convey.

When we protest too much that "an eye for eye" means compensation and nothing more, one of the Torah's critical lessons is lost on us. "An eye for an eye," while certainly not intended as a principle of practical halachah, is an essential principle for understanding the ways of the universe.

(25) **Burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise**: The point here is that the same principle applies also to damage that is only temporary.

(26-27) **When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth**: This applies only to non-Jewish slaves purchased on the "international market," who were under the jurisdiction of the general laws of slavery of those times (i.e., he is a slave for life).

The Torah's innovation here is the granting of freedom to a slave who has been irreparably maimed or mutilated at the hands of his master. Because slaves were very expensive and highly valued on the farm, this law protected slaves from the aggressive or violent tendencies of their owners.

(28) **When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox is not to be punished**: When a person's possessions or property cause damage, he is held responsible only for situations that he could have reasonably expected, and should have foreseen. Since it is not the usual nature of an ox to inflict deliberate, malicious injury, in the event that it does happen the owner is not held to account.

Its flesh shall not be eaten: No benefit may be derived from the flesh of such an ox, which means that its meat may not be fed even to animals. (Compare this to 22:30, where the Torah explicitly states: "You shall be holy people to Me: you must not eat flesh torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs").

(29) **If, however, that ox has been in the habit of goring, and its owner, though warned, has failed to guard it, and it kills a man or a woman — the ox shall be stoned and its owner, too, shall be put to death**: If, however, the given possession or property was previously recognized as posing increased danger, then failure to take appropriate measures to forestall further tragedies is criminal negligence, and the Torah considers the killing to that extent to be deliberate.

(30) **If ransom is laid upon him, he must pay whatever is laid upon him to redeem his life**: All of the above notwithstanding, in actual practice the owner of the ox is not put to death; he is only required to make monetary restitution. (In spite of appearances, the "if" of this verse is not conditional, but is in fact how the law is actually applied).

(31) **So, too, if it gores a minor, male or female, [the owner] shall be dealt with according to the same rule**: A minor son and daughter are exactly equivalent. Given the prevailing laws of those times, this legislation by the Torah was a significant innovation.

(32) **But if the ox gores a slave, male or female, he shall pay thirty shekels of silver to the master, and the ox shall be stoned**: Once again, this refers to non-Jewish slaves, and is generally consistent with the legal systems of that era.

(33-34) **When a man opens a pit ... and an ox or an ass falls into it, the one responsible for the pit must make restitution**: A person is responsible for the consequences of his actions that result in damage to the property of another. But on the other hand, the Torah speaks of an ox or an ass falling into the pit, and not a human being, because a person must look where he is going. Thus, his first responsibility is to look out for his own safety, rather than shifting that responsibility onto others for not assuring his absolute security.

(35) **When a man's ox injures his neighbor's ox and it dies, they shall sell the live ox and divide its price; they shall also divide the dead animal**: In the absence of prior knowledge that the ox was aggressive, the court will not normally consider the question of "whose ox started first." The law punishes the owners of the goring ox and the dead ox equally, thus forcing all parties to the conflict to take the same precautions.

(36) **If, however, it is known that the ox was in the habit of goring, and its owner has failed to guard it, he must restore ox for ox, but shall keep the dead animal**: The owner of the goring ox is in this case deemed criminally negligent.

19.4. LAWS CONCERNING PROPERTY DAMAGE (21:37–22:14)

לז כִּי יִגְנֹב־אִישׁ שׁוֹר אוֹ־שֶׂה וּטְבָחוֹ אוֹ מְכָרוֹ חֲמִשָּׁה בָקָר יְשַׁלֵּם
תַּחַת הַשּׁוֹר וְאַרְבַּע־צֹאן תַּחַת הַשֶּׂה׃

א אִם־בַּמַּחְתֶּרֶת יִמָּצֵא הַגַּנָּב וְהֻכָּה וָמֵת אֵין לוֹ דָּמִים׃ ב אִם־זָרְחָה
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עָלָיו דָּמִים לוֹ שַׁלֵּם יְשַׁלֵּם אִם־אֵין לוֹ וְנִמְכַּר בִּגְנֵבָתוֹ׃ ג אִם־
הִמָּצֵא תִּמָּצֵא בְיָדוֹ הַגְּנֵבָה מִשּׁוֹר עַד־חֲמוֹר עַד־שֶׂה חַיִּים שְׁנַיִם
יְשַׁלֵּם׃

ד כִּי יַבְעֵר־אִישׁ שָׂדֶה אוֹ־כֶרֶם וְשִׁלַּח אֶת־בְּעִירֹה וּבִעֵר בִּשְׂדֵה אַחֵר
מֵיטַב שָׂדֵהוּ וּמֵיטַב כַּרְמוֹ יְשַׁלֵּם׃

ה כִּי־תֵצֵא אֵשׁ וּמָצְאָה קֹצִים וְנֶאֱכַל גָּדִישׁ אוֹ הַקָּמָה אוֹ הַשָּׂדֶה שַׁלֵּם
יְשַׁלֵּם הַמַּבְעֵר אֶת־הַבְּעֵרָה׃

ו כִּי־יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ כֶּסֶף אוֹ־כֵלִים לִשְׁמֹר וְגֻנַּב מִבֵּית הָאִישׁ אִם־
יִמָּצֵא הַגַּנָּב יְשַׁלֵּם שְׁנָיִם׃ ז אִם־לֹא יִמָּצֵא הַגַּנָּב וְנִקְרַב בַּעַל־הַבַּיִת
אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אִם־לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ בִּמְלֶאכֶת רֵעֵהוּ׃ ח עַל־כָּל־דְּבַר־פֶּשַׁע
עַל־שׁוֹר עַל־חֲמוֹר עַל־שֶׂה עַל־שַׂלְמָה עַל־כָּל־אֲבֵדָה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר

כִּי־הוּא זֶה עֲד הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֹא דְּבַר־שְׁנֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר יַרְשִׁיעֻן אֱלֹהִים יְשַׁלֵּם שְׁנַיִם לְרֵעֵהוּ׃

ט כִּי־יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ חֲמוֹר אוֹ־שׁוֹר אוֹ־שֶׂה וְכָל־בְּהֵמָה לִשְׁמֹר וּמֵת אוֹ־נִשְׁבַּר אוֹ־נִשְׁבֶּה אֵין רֹאֶה׃ י שְׁבֻעַת יְיָ תִּהְיֶה בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם אִם־לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ בִּמְלֶאכֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְלָקַח בְּעָלָיו וְלֹא יְשַׁלֵּם׃ יא וְאִם־גָּנֹב יִגָּנֵב מֵעִמּוֹ יְשַׁלֵּם לִבְעָלָיו׃ יב אִם־טָרֹף יִטָּרֵף יְבִאֵהוּ עֵד הַטְּרֵפָה לֹא יְשַׁלֵּם׃

יג וְכִי־יִשְׁאַל אִישׁ מֵעִם רֵעֵהוּ וְנִשְׁבַּר אוֹ־מֵת בְּעָלָיו אֵין־עִמּוֹ שַׁלֵּם יְשַׁלֵּם׃ יד אִם־בְּעָלָיו עִמּוֹ לֹא יְשַׁלֵּם אִם־שָׂכִיר הוּא בָּא בִּשְׂכָרוֹ׃

(37) **When a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox, and four sheep for the sheep. —**

(22:1) **If the thief is seized while tunneling, and he is beaten to death, there is no bloodguilt in his case.**

(2) **If the sun has risen on him, there is bloodguilt in that case. — He must make restitution; if he lacks the means, he shall be sold for his theft.**

(3) **But if what he stole — whether ox or ass or sheep — is found alive in his possession, he shall pay double.**

(4) **When a man lets his livestock loose to graze in another's land, and so allows a field or a vineyard to be grazed bare, he must make restitution for the impairment of that field or vineyard.**

(5) **When a fire is started and spreads to thorns, so that stacked, standing, or growing grain is consumed, he who started the fire must make restitution.**

(6) **When a man gives money or goods to another for safekeeping, and they are stolen from the man's house — if the thief is caught, he shall pay double;**

(7) **if the thief is not caught, the owner of the house shall depose before God that he has not laid hands on the other's property.**

(8) In all charges of misappropriation — pertaining to an ox, an ass, a sheep, a garment, or any other loss, whereof one party alleges, "This is it" — the case of both parties shall come before God: he whom God declares guilty shall pay double to the other.

(9) When a man gives to another an ass, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to guard, and it dies or is injured or is carried off, with no witness about,

(10) an oath before the Lord shall decide between the two of them that the one has not laid hands on the property of the other; the owner must acquiesce, and no restitution shall be made.

(11) But if [the animal] was stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner.

(12) If it was torn by beasts, he shall bring it as evidence; he need not replace what has been torn by beasts.

(13) When a man borrows [an animal] from another and it dies or is injured, its owner not being with it, he must make restitution.

(14) If its owner was with it, no restitution need be made; but if it was hired, he is entitled to the hire.

(37) **When a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it**: This is a serious crime. It is easy to steal such animals, because they themselves often go missing, and a shepherd cannot always keep track of each one individually. According to the Code of Hammurabi, theft of cattle incurs the death penalty. (This was the law in many European countries even as late as the nine-teenth century). The Torah, however, never imposes the death penalty for damage to property, but only requires that restitution be made in multiples of twice, four, or five times the value of the stolen item.

He shall pay five oxen for the ox, and four sheep for the sheep: An ox performs useful work on the farm. The thief, by stealing the ox, has deprived the owner of that work potential, and must therefore pay more substantial compensation for the theft.

(22:1) **If the thief is seized while tunneling, and he is beaten to death, there is no bloodguilt in his case**: When a thief enters another's home stealthily, it is assumed that he is prepared even to kill if he deems it necessary. Thus, killing such a thief is considered an act of self-defense.

(2) **If the sun has risen on him, there is bloodguilt in that case**: Tradition understands this phrase not literally (i.e., the incident occurs during daylight hours), but metaphorically: If it is clear as day to you that the burglar has no violent intent, then *ipso facto* there is no justification for killing him.

He must make restitution; if he lacks the means, he shall be sold for his theft: This is the only situation in which it is permitted to sell a Jew into slavery (and only to another Jew), namely: In order to pay compensation for a theft he has committed. As we have noted (§19.2), the legislation in the opening passage of this *Mishpatim* portion concerned just this kind of slave.

(3) **But if what he stole — whether ox or ass or sheep — is found alive in his possession, he shall pay double**: But at 21:37 above ("When a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it"), payment was set at four or five times the value of the stolen animal. In that case the thief had already managed to dispose of the goods, making it more difficult to apprehend him. The penalty imposed was therefore more severe.

(4) **When a man lets his livestock loose to graze in another's land, and so allows a field or a vineyard to be grazed bare, he must make restitution for the impairment of that field or vineyard: The literal translation is**: "Of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution." Even if it was not the best field or the best vineyard that suffered damage, the guilty party must nonetheless pay from his best. Such is the price of negligence.

(5) **When a fire is started and spreads to thorns**: In the situation being described here, a person kindled fire lawfully and with thoroughly constructive intentions in his own field, but the fire then went out of control and spread to a neighboring field.

So that stacked, standing, or growing grain is consumed: The literal translation is: "... so that the shocks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field are consumed." In case one might be wondering how the field itself (apart from its produce already mentioned) can be consumed, the Talmud explains: The fire scorched the plowed soil, so that it hardened, and it was necessary to plow it yet again.

He who started the fire must make restitution: In any circumstances where a person creates a potentially hazardous situation, which then – even if contrary to normal, reasonable expectations – goes out of control, he is considered guilty of criminal negligence.

(6) **When a man gives money or goods to another for safekeeping**: The Torah identifies several different situations of bailment (i.e., when chattel or cattle belonging to one party are kept in the possession of another).

The halachah distinguishes four cases of bailment, depending on whether the item is in the bailee's possession primarily for his own benefit or for the benefit of the bailor, and whether or not compensation is being paid in exchange for the benefit received. Thus, there are four kinds of guardians: an unpaid guardian, a paid guardian, a borrower, and a hirer (Mishnah Baba Metzia 7:8).

In each case the bailee incurs a different level of responsibility for the item in his safekeeping, depending on the aforementioned factors.

The general principle is that having less benefit from a situation likewise implies a lower level of responsibility. And conversely, with greater profit comes commensurately greater responsibility.

A person who agrees to store and guard another's property at no charge bears only limited liability for the item, while one who undertakes to store or guard for a fee – or, all the more so, if he takes the item into his possession for his own use – his legal liability for the safety of the item must naturally be greater.

And they are stolen from the man's house — if the thief is caught, he shall pay double: Double restitution is the standard penalty imposed by the Torah for theft.

(7) **if the thief is not caught, the owner of the house shall depose before God that he has not laid hands on the other's**

property: The bailee in this case, who agrees to keep his neighbor's belongings free of charge, renders him a service thereby, which therefore limits his liability. If the item disappears, an oath is sufficient to absolve him.

That he has not laid hands: This oath can be understood as "I don't have the item hidden in my own position," and/or "I have not made personal use of the item improperly, or in a manner that exceeded the terms of my agreement with the bailor."

In the event that the bailee has in fact violated the terms of the agreement, his level of responsibility increases, and he is held liable for the loss.

(8) **In all charges of misappropriation ... he whom God declares guilty shall pay double to the othe**r: In view of the sequence of these verses, Tradition believes that this verse is a continuation of the previous situation. Thus, if the bailee swears that he has not "laid hands" on his neighbor's possession, but new circumstances are then discovered, such that the court, based on testimony of credible witnesses, concludes that the bailee has sworn falsely – this too is held equivalent to theft, and likewise carries the penalty of double restitution.

(9) **When a man gives to another an ass, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to guard**: The previous passages involved simple storage of money or inanimate articles whose state remains constant during storage, while the discussion here concerns living animals that need to be fed and cared for.

Accordingly, the Tradition understands this as an instance of a paid guardian, who is compensated for the storage services he provides, which in this case include feeding and caring for the animals left in his charge.

(9-11) **And it dies or is injured or is carried off, with no witness about, an oath before the Lord shall decide between the two of them ... and no restitution shall be made. But if [the animal] was stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner**: A bailee who receives a fee for his storage services is a "paid guardian," who must exercise additional care to safeguard the item left in

his possession. If it is stolen, he is deemed to have fallen short of that obligation, and is held liable to replace it.

Conversely, however, in the case of an unforeseen mishap – e.g., the animal dies a natural death, or is attacked and mutilated by a wild beast, or is taken by force by robbers – but there are no witnesses, the bailee must only swear that he has not "laid hands" on the item or been negligent with its care, and he is then exempted from all liability.

An oath before the Lord shall decide between the two of them: A commonly held religious belief system is the foundation of mutual trust in Jewish society.

(12) **If it was torn by beasts, he shall bring it as evidence; he need not replace what has been torn by beasts**: If there are remains, i.e., the unforeseen (and therefore unpreventable) circumstances are confirmed by material evidence, then he need not even take an oath.

(13) **When a man borrows [an animal] from another and it dies or is injured, its owner not being with it, he must make restitution**: This is the third case. Because the bailee borrowed the item to use it free of charge, he is liable even for unpreventable situations of damage.

(14) **If its owner was with it, no restitution need be made**: If the owner of the animal is present, then he is deemed to have not actually given it to his neighbor for use, but is simply working with his own animal, while giving the other the results of its labors (and not the animal itself). In this situation, the responsibility to safeguard the animal remains with its owner, and even a "borrower" (who pays no fee) is not held liable.

But if it was hired, he is entitled to the hire: This is the last of the four cases. The owner of the animal lends it to his neighbor not as a favor, but in exchange for a fee. In this case, the fee is deemed to include "insurance coverage" for accidents, and if there is such an occurrence, the owner of the animal does not receive compensation.

19.5. FAMILIAL AND SOCIAL REGULATIONS (22:15-30)

טו וְכִי־יְפַתֶּה אִישׁ בְּתוּלָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אֹרָשָׂה וְשָׁכַב עִמָּהּ מָהֹר
יִמְהָרֶנָּה לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: טז אִם־מָאֵן יְמָאֵן אָבִיהָ לְתִתָּהּ לּוֹ כֶּסֶף יִשְׁקֹל
כְּמֹהַר הַבְּתוּלֹת:

יז מְכַשֵּׁפָה לֹא תְחַיֶּה: יח כָּל־שֹׁכֵב עִם־בְּהֵמָה מוֹת יוּמָת:

יט זֹבֵחַ לָאֱלֹהִים יָחֳרָם בִּלְתִּי לַיהוָה לְבַדּוֹ: כ וְגֵר לֹא־תוֹנֶה וְלֹא
תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי־גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: כא כָּל־אַלְמָנָה וְיָתוֹם לֹא
תְעַנּוּן: כב אִם־עַנֵּה תְעַנֶּה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם־צָעֹק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמֹעַ אֶשְׁמַע
צַעֲקָתוֹ: כג וְחָרָה אַפִּי וְהָרַגְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בֶּחָרֶב וְהָיוּ נְשֵׁיכֶם אַלְמָנוֹת
וּבְנֵיכֶם יְתֹמִים:

כד אִם־כֶּסֶף | תַּלְוֶה אֶת־עַמִּי אֶת־הֶעָנִי עִמָּךְ לֹא־תִהְיֶה לּוֹ כְּנֹשֶׁה לֹא־
תְשִׂימוּן עָלָיו נֶשֶׁךְ: כה אִם־חָבֹל תַּחְבֹּל שַׂלְמַת רֵעֶךָ עַד־בֹּא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
תְּשִׁיבֶנּוּ לוֹ: כו כִּי הִוא כְסוּתֹה לְבַדָּהּ הִוא שִׂמְלָתוֹ לְעֹרוֹ בַּמֶּה יִשְׁכָּב
וְהָיָה כִּי־יִצְעַק אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי־חַנּוּן אָנִי:

כז אֱלֹהִים לֹא תְקַלֵּל וְנָשִׂיא בְעַמְּךָ לֹא תָאֹר: כח מְלֵאָתְךָ וְדִמְעֲךָ לֹא
תְאַחֵר בְּכוֹר בָּנֶיךָ תִּתֶּן־לִי: כט כֵּן־תַּעֲשֶׂה לְשֹׁרְךָ לְצֹאנֶךָ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים
יִהְיֶה עִם־אִמּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי תִּתְּנוֹ־לִי: ל וְאַנְשֵׁי־קֹדֶשׁ תִּהְיֻוּן לִי וּבָשָׂר
בַּשָּׂדֶה טְרֵפָה לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ לַכֶּלֶב תַּשְׁלִכוּן אֹתוֹ:

(15) **If a man seduces a virgin for whom the bride-price has not been paid, and lies with her, he must make her his wife by payment of a bride-price.**

(16) **If her father refuses to give her to him, he must still weigh out silver in accordance with the bride-price for virgins.**

(17) **You shall not tolerate a sorceress.**

(18) **Whoever lies with a beast shall be put to death.**

(19) Whoever sacrifices to a god other than the Lord alone shall be proscribed.

(20) **You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.**

(21) **You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan.**

(22) **If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me,**

(23) **and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.**

(24) **If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not act toward them as a creditor; exact no interest from them.**

(25) **If you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you must return it to him before the sun sets;**

(26) **it is his only clothing, the sole covering for his skin. In what else shall he sleep? Therefore, if he cries out to Me, I will pay heed, for I am compassionate.**

(27) **You shall not revile God, nor put a curse upon a chieftain among your people.**

(28) **You shall not put off the skimming of the first yield of your vats. You shall give Me the first-born among your sons.**

(29) **You shall do the same with your cattle and your flocks: seven days it shall remain with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.**

(30) **You shall be holy people to Me: you must not eat flesh torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs.**

(15) **If a man seduces a virgin for whom the bride-price has not been paid, and lies with her, he must make her his wife by payment of a bride-price**: The laws of the Torah strive, whenever possible, not to punish, but to rectify the overall situation.

(16) **If her father refuses to give her to him, he must still weigh out silver in accordance with the bride-price for virgins**: Likewise, if the girl herself does not want to marry the seducer, she is not forced to do so. It is a fundamental principle of the Torah that no parent may force a child, be it a son or a daughter, to be married against his or her own wishes.

(17-18) **You shall not tolerate a sorceress. Whoever lies with a beast shall be put to death**: Persons who perform such acts are seen as utilizing God-given forces for evil purposes (spiritual forces in the case of witchcraft, life-giving forces in the case of bestiality). Such crimes incur the death penalty because they destroy the fabric of society.

Whoever lies with a beast shall be put to death: The Talmud notes that bestiality too was in ancient times employed for occult purposes. This is the reason that the Torah juxtaposes these two verses.

(19) **Whoever sacrifices to a god other than the Lord alone shall be proscribed**: The more literal translation is "shall be utterly destroyed," that is, executed. Idolatry is not merely the simple violation of a prohibition, but an absolute departure from the teachings of the Torah in their totality. The perpetrator must therefore be eradicated from the Jewish people.

(20) **You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him**: In biblical Hebrew, a ger, "stranger, alien," is a non-Jew who has settled in a Jewish country among Jews. (In later Hebrew ger came to mean, more specifically, a convert to Judaism). An alien's position is vulnerable, for he has no relatives or long-established compatriots who will come to his aid. The Torah therefore repeatedly warns against oppressing the stranger.

The Oral Torah, and the halachah, which ultimately derives from it, distinguishes between two types of *ger* (proselyte): (1) *ger tzedek* ("righteous proselyte"), a former gentile who has converted to Judaism, and is thus now a Jew in every sense, and (2) *ger toshav* ("resident alien"), who remains a non-Jew, while fully taking upon himself the obligations of the Torah, which means complying with the "Seven Noahide

Commandments," including loyalty and obedience to Jewish authority in the Land of Israel.

The laws that apply to each of these two types of *ger* are completely different. The former is considered a Jew and an integral part of the Jewish nation in every respect, while the latter is not. But because it is the way of the Written Torah to lay out only the general principles, while leaving it up to the Oral Torah to fill in the details, the Torah here uses only the one general term, *ger*, for both types.

(20) **For you were strangers in the land of Egypt**: The experience of Egyptian slavery, and the redemption from it, the Exodus, are both vitally important to the formulation of Jewish morality.

(21) **You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan**: Widows and orphans too are especially vulnerable, often having absolutely no one they can depend on to come to their aid or defense. The Torah therefore emphasizes the strict prohibition of oppressing them. (The severity of the offense is further underscored by the consequences of committing it, as described in the next verse).

(22–23) **If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans**: This unusually harsh condemnation of those who oppress widows and orphans, including threats of death and family misfortunes to the perpetrators, is an indication of the enormous religious significance of social justice in Judaism.

(24) **If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not act toward them as a creditor; exact no interest from them**: The Hebrew word for interest (usury) here is *neshech*, from the root *N Sh Ch*, "to bite," which refers, in particular, to a snakebite. The imagery is especially apt, because the usurer, pretending to want only to help his desperate neighbor, extends to him the kind of "venomous credit" from which he may never recover.

Jewish tradition teaches us an important lesson, that an interest-free loan to our fellow human being is more helpful to him than the same funds presented as an outright gift. An interest-free loan enables

a person to get back on his feet by working to repay the debt, thus normalizing his life in the process.

Simple handouts ("welfare" or "relief" payments) are frequently downright harmful to society, because they accustom people to the possibility of living quite adequately without working. As compared with gifts to the needy, a loan that needs to be repaid, but with no interest accruing, is therefore generally far more beneficial in the long run.

To the poor among you: The Torah's ban on usury is based on the reality that imposing interest payments on a destitute debtor, for whom repaying even just the principal is already a significant hardship, constitutes a form of "oppression." But suppose he is not poor, and is only borrowing funds to further improve his living conditions, or to expand his business. Is the prohibition of exacting interest still justified?

This question first arose as a practical issue in the seventeenth century, when most of Europe transitioned from an agrarian to an industrial economy, and the issuance of interest-bearing loans assumed a completely different character than it had previously had. In order to address this change of circumstances, the rabbis of that period instituted an innovation, the *hetter iska* – literally, "business permit"; that is, a permit to engage in interest-based business dealings that would otherwise be forbidden to both the borrower and the lender. This issue will be further elaborated in the *Bible Dynamics* commentary to Deuteronomy (22:20), where the topic of interest-bearing loans is treated in greater detail.

(25-26) **If you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you must return it to him before the sun sets; it is his only clothing, the sole covering for his skin. In what else shall he sleep?**: Although the lender has already demonstrated admirable forbearance and generosity (but as the Law in fact *requires*) by agreeing to lend funds to his poor neighbor interest-free, that is still not yet the whole story. The Torah further requires the lender to show sympathy to the borrower in matters concerning property he has transferred to the lender as security for the loan.

(27) **You shall not revile God, nor put a curse upon a chieftain among your people**: Criticizing one's fellow human being and curs-

ing him are obviously two very different things. This prohibition concerns only the latter. Criticism is normal and constructive, but curses only incite hatred, and are therefore prohibited.

You shall not revile God: The Hebrew word *Elohim*, although grammatically plural, refers most often to God, and is one of His primary names. But *Elohim* can also mean any "gods" whatsoever.

Thus, *Elohim lo tekallel* of this verse, in addition to its main meaning as translated here – "You shall not revile God" – can also be understood as "You shall not revile gods." That is, it is a prohibition on cursing the gods of other nations and religions. Indeed, they are false deities, but since they are worshipped by the peoples of the world and are influential in their spiritual development, it is forbidden to revile them.

(28) **You shall not put off the skimming of the first yield of your vats. You shall give Me the first-born among your sons**: The commandment to consecrate firstborn sons to the Almighty was already mentioned (13:2) immediately after the Exodus from Egypt, and as a remembrance thereof. (In actual practice, the consecration of a firstborn son is accomplished by "redeeming" him by means of a small payment by the child's father to the priest).

The same commandment is repeated here, and further extended to include also the first fruits of each harvest, which must be brought to the Temple as recognition that life and material success are gifts from Above.

(29) **You shall do the same with your cattle and your flocks**: seven days it shall remain with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me: This commandment regarding cattle and flocks relates to their firstborns specifically.

(30) **You shall be holy people to Me: you must not eat flesh torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs**: Food restrictions, especially this one that forbids partaking of an animal torn by beasts in the field, are an important element of preparing for holiness. But holiness is not defined by this *per se*, and does not consist solely in such prohibitions. We will take a closer look at the theme of holiness in our *Bible Dynamics* commentary to the Book of Leviticus.

19.6. LAWS CONCERNING JUSTICE AND THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM (23:1-9)

א לֹא תִשָּׂא שֵׁמַע שָׁוְא אַל־תָּשֶׁת יָדְךָ עִם־רָשָׁע לִהְיֹת עֵד חָמָס:
ב לֹא־תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי־רַבִּים לְרָעֹת וְלֹא־תַעֲנֶה עַל־רִב לִנְטֹת אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים
לְהַטֹּת: ג וְדָל לֹא תֶהְדַּר בְּרִיבוֹ: ד כִּי תִפְגַּע שׁוֹר אֹיִבְךָ אוֹ חֲמֹרוֹ
תֹּעֶה הָשֵׁב תְּשִׁיבֶנּוּ לוֹ: ה כִּי־תִרְאֶה חֲמוֹר שֹׂנַאֲךָ רֹבֵץ תַּחַת מַשָּׂאוֹ
וְחָדַלְתָּ מֵעַזֹּב לוֹ עָזֹב תַּעֲזֹב עִמּוֹ: ו לֹא תַטֶּה מִשְׁפַּט אֶבְיֹנְךָ בְּרִיבוֹ:
ז מִדְּבַר־שֶׁקֶר תִּרְחָק וְנָקִי וְצַדִּיק אַל־תַּהֲרֹג כִּי לֹא־אַצְדִּיק רָשָׁע:
ח וְשֹׁחַד לֹא תִקָּח כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יְעַוֵּר פִּקְחִים וְיסַלֵּף דִּבְרֵי צַדִּיקִים:
ט וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם אֶת־נֶפֶשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרָיִם:

(1) **You must not carry false rumors; you shall not join hands with the guilty to act as a malicious witness:**

(2) **You shall neither side with the mighty to do wrong — you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute so as to pervert it in favor of the mighty —**

(3) **nor shall you show deference to a poor man in his dispute.**

(4) **When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him.**

(5) **When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him.**

(6) **You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes.**

(7) **Keep far from a false charge; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer.**

(8) **Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the clear-sighted and upset the pleas of those who are in the right.**

(9) **You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.**

(1) **You must not carry false rumors**: Strictly speaking, and from the point of view of the halachah, this passage is a warning directed to judges and witnesses in a court of law. But the text of the Torah does not make this explicit, since it is the underlying principles and ideals that are always most important, and those apply not only to actual legal proceedings.

You must not carry: The expression "to carry false rumors" is neutral with respect to whether it refers to the person who disseminates the rumor or to the receiver. Indeed, it is forbidden not only to generate or repeat such rumors, but even passively to listen to them.

You shall not join hands with the guilty to act as a malicious witness: Even if your testimony is not decisive in the case and will not affect the court's decision, you must nevertheless not testify along with evildoers whose false testimony is in fact malicious in its ability to cause actual harm.

(2) **Mighty**: The word *rabim* in this verse has two meanings: as "mighty" or as "majority." In the first sense, this verse is a couple to the next verse: it is forbidden to please both the mighty and the poor. In the second sense, the question is raised whether the individual should agree or not agree with the majority opinion.

You shall neither side with the majority (mighty) to do wrong: This is a lesson in non-conformism – remaining steadfast in one's convictions even against the majority. The critical importance of independent thinking pervades all of Jewish culture. To cite just one salient example: During deliberations by the Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish legal academy and ecclesiastical court), it was standard procedure for the younger, less experienced members to take the floor first. This allowed them to freely express their points of view without feeling pressured by the seniority and authority of the elders.

You shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute so as to pervert it in favor of the mighty: You must testify honestly, thinking only about the testimony itself, and not about how it will be received.

You shall neither side with the majority to do wrong … in favor of the majority: In halachic matters, the Talmud understands this phrase as: "You shall neither side with the majority to do wrong – do in

favor of the majority." On this basis, honorable and worthy issues (court orders, communal resolutions, and the like) are routinely decided by a majority of competent votes or opinions.

(3) **Nor shall you show deference to a poor man in his dispute:** The Torah prohibits pandering to the wealthy, as often happens in the real world when financial gain is at stake. But the Torah warns equally against indulging the poor – which likewise becomes a problem when we allow ourselves to proceed from "ideological" considerations, and not from our sense of what is absolutely right. Justice must not be allowed to suffer because of our sympathy for the poor. A wealthy man should not be exploited simply because he is wealthy.

(4) **When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him**: We must deal honorably with the property other persons, even our enemies. This commandment is stated in a somewhat different form in Deuteronomy (22:1 ff.).

(5) **When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him**: This demand goes even further than the preceding: We must also help an enemy to solve his everyday problems. By rendering such assistance, we improve relations between people, and can even put an end to prevailing hostility.

You must nevertheless raise it with him: Only *with him*. If he is able to participate, but prefers to stand by and watch while you do all the work, then you have no obligation. Helping means assisting someone who is committed to advancing his own cause. When that condition is lacking, helping a person does not make much sense.

(6) **You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes**: After warning us a few verses back against indulging the poor in judgment, the Torah now admonishes us conversely: We must not oppress the poor. Judicial decisions must not be influenced by either litigant's economic status.

(7) **Keep far from a false charge; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer**: The principle of presumption of innocence is here declared. If there is any doubt whatsoever about the guilt of the accused, no punishment

may be exacted. Rather, we must in that case leave the matter to God, Who will not acquit the wrongdoer, and will see to it that the guilty are held to account.

(8) **Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the clear-sighted and upset the pleas of those who are in the right**: It is a well-known, established "fact" of Middle Eastern law that any "honest" judge will accept gifts only from the party who is in the right, and never from the other side. The Torah forbids such practice.

"Bribes" come in different forms – not only material, but psychological and ideological as well. If a judge is interested in a particular outcome of a case for psychological or ideological reasons, this too will impair his ability to judge objectively.

(9) **You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt**: The prohibition of oppressing an alien appears more than thirty times in the Torah. We saw a similar mandate just above (22:20) in the context of social welfare given to the poor, and here the prohibition appears in the context of the judicial system.

19.7. LAWS CONCERNING THE SABBATH AND FESTIVALS (23:10-19)

י וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע אֶת־אַרְצֶךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ: יא וְהַשְּׁבִיעִת
תִּשְׁמְטֶנָּה וּנְטַשְׁתָּהּ וְאָכְלוּ אֶבְיֹנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְיִתְרָם תֹּאכַל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה כֵּן־
תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכַרְמְךָ לְזֵיתֶךָ: יב שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
תִּשְׁבֹּת לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ שׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרֶךָ וְיִנָּפֵשׁ בֶּן־אֲמָתְךָ וְהַגֵּר: יג וּבְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־
אָמַרְתִּי אֲלֵיכֶם תִּשָּׁמֵרוּ וְשֵׁם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים לֹא תַזְכִּירוּ לֹא יִשָּׁמַע
עַל־פִּיךָ: יד שָׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים תָּחֹג לִי בַּשָּׁנָה: טו אֶת־חַג הַמַּצּוֹת תִּשְׁמֹר
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצּוֹת כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִךָ לְמוֹעֵד חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב כִּי־בוֹ
יָצָאתָ מִמִּצְרָיִם וְלֹא־יֵרָאוּ פָנַי רֵיקָם: טז וְחַג הַקָּצִיר בִּכּוּרֵי מַעֲשֶׂיךָ
אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע בַּשָּׂדֶה וְחַג הָאָסִף בְּצֵאת הַשָּׁנָה בְּאָסְפְּךָ אֶת־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ מִן־
הַשָּׂדֶה: יז שָׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָל־זְכוּרְךָ אֶל־פְּנֵי הָאָדֹן | יְי: יח
לֹא־תִזְבַּח עַל־חָמֵץ דַּם־זִבְחִי וְלֹא־יָלִין חֵלֶב־חַגִּי עַד־בֹּקֶר: יט רֵאשִׁית
בִּכּוּרֵי אַדְמָתְךָ תָּבִיא בֵּית יְי אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תְבַשֵּׁל גְּדִי בַּחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ:

(10) **Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield;**

(11) **but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.**

(12) **Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed.**

(13) **Be on guard concerning all that I have told you. Make no mention of the names of other gods; they shall not be heard on your lips.**

(14) **Three times a year you shall hold a festival for Me:**

(15) **You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread — eating unleavened bread for seven days as I have commanded you — at the set time in the month of Abib, for in it you went forth from Egypt; and none shall appear before Me empty-handed;**

(16) **and the Feast of the Harvest, of the first fruits of your work, of what you sow in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work from the field.**

(17) **Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign, the Lord.**

(18) **You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened; and the fat of My festal offering shall not be left lying until morning.**

(19) **The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.**

(10-11) **Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow**: Shemittah, a year of rest for the earth observed every seventh year, is similar in concept to the Shabbat observed one day out of every week. The meaning of the Shabbat is, that no matter how important our work is for transforming the world, we must not become enslaved by that work. And likewise,

the meaning of the Shemittah year is, that no matter how important the Land of Israel is for the proper development of the Jewish people, they must not become enslaved to the land.

You shall let it rest and lie fallow: You must not cultivate the land, or make any use of its crop. That is, rather than taking it for your own use, you must leave it for the needy and the wild beasts (as the verse goes on to say).

Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat: Here the social and ecological aspect of the Shemittah year is emphasized.

You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves: These grow perennially, and we might have thought that only the produce that was planted in the seventh year belongs to the entire people collectively. The Torah therefore tells us explicitly that the yield of perennial plants also belongs to all in the Shemittah year.

(12) **Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your ass may rest, and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed**: Earlier, in the Ten Commandments (20:8 ff.), a cosmic rationale was advanced for weekly Shabbat observance ("For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day"). But here (as above, with respect to the Shemittah year) the justification is social: to assure a day of rest for slaves and domesticated animals, who cannot set a day of rest for themselves.

(13) **Be on guard concerning all that I have told you. Make no mention of the names of other gods; they shall not be heard on your lips**: Observing the prohibition of idolatry is equivalent to preserving the entire Torah.

(14) **Three times a year you shall hold a festival for Me**: Only the three pilgrimage holidays, the *Shalosh Regalim*, are mentioned here, but not Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There can be two explanations for this: (1) in this passage the Torah speaks of agriculture, and only the three pilgrimage holidays are associated with it, (2) Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are associated with

atonement for sins, and this theme is first mentioned in the Torah only later, after the incident of the golden calf.

(15-17) **The Feast of Unleavened Bread … and none shall appear before Me empty-handed; and the Feast of the Harvest, of the first fruits … and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year …Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign, the Lord**: All Israelites shall make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem for these three festivals – Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. No one may arrive empty-handed – they must come bearing animal sacrifices in honor of the holiday. Each head of household brings his *chagigah* sacrifice (the word means "celebration"), and eats it together with his family as a celebratory, festive meal.

Thus, these festivals serve the purpose, *inter alia*, of associating each family's agricultural activity with the Temple in Jerusalem. The harvest represents the material aspect of life, and is seen as an integral aspect of the spiritual.

(18) **You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened**: These instructions pertain to the festival sacrifices specifically. Leavened foodstuffs, products of the process of fermentation, were not offered on the altar (Lev. 2:11). Leaven is seen as symbolic of a person absorbed in his own ideas and thoughts. The Temple service, in contrast, required psychological and spiritual self-denial, disconnecting oneself from one's own personal goals and outlook.

And the fat of My festal offering shall not be left lying until morning: Leaving over a portion of the meat of the offering until the following morning would demonstrate neglect of the sacrifice. Family and guests were therefore invited to eat festival sacrifices as a group, which facilitated social cohesion.

(19) **The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God**: Above (in v. 16), the connection between the first fruits and Shavuot (the second of the pilgrimage holidays) is already mentioned – but in this verse it is given as a commandment. By bringing the first fruits to the Temple we testify that the earth in its entirety belongs to God, and we acknowledge that we are only His "tenant farmers," as it were.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk: Halachically, this verse is understood as the prohibition of mixing meat and milk.

From a moral viewpoint, however, we can understand this prohibition as an admonition regarding callousness in the slaughter and eating of animals, and also "depriving animals of what is rightfully theirs" by appropriating their milk for our own use. Although the Torah permits the eating of meat, it requires that we not kill animals indifferently, for they are living creatures. The Torah also permits taking milk from animals, but if we do so with no regard for the welfare and feelings of the animal, we commit a form of robbery. We must remember that this milk is not intended for us in the first place. As a demonstration of this understanding, the Torah commands: Limit yourself in what is permitted. Mixing murder and robbery only exacerbates both crimes. Therefore: "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk."

19.8. "YOU SHALL NOT BOIL A KID IN ITS MOTHER'S MILK" (23:19)

יט רֵאשִׁית בִּכּוּרֵי אַדְמָתְךָ תָּבִיא בֵּית יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תְבַשֵּׁל גְּדִי בַּחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ׃

(19) The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

We will pay special attention to this verse and explain, based on it, some important principles.

The prohibition "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" is found in the Torah three times (here; 34:26; and Deut. 14:21). The halachah understands this threefold repetition as alluding to three aspects of the prohibition, namely: cooking a mixture of milk and meat, eating any such mixture, or even deriving any other benefit or profit from such a mixture.

Be that as it may, the form in which this commandment is presented raises questions. Why did the Torah choose such a strange formulation for this prohibition? Why a kid specifically, and why the milk of its

mother? Why did the Torah not express the prohibition of mixing meat and milk straightforwardly and explicitly?

One explanation for this formulation is that the idolaters of antiquity were accustomed to boiling a kid in the milk of its mother, and the Torah therefore chose to describe this aspect of food kashrut in these terms, in order to associate this prohibition with the practice of idolatrous customs.

While this commentary highlights an important point, this does not explain the unusual way this commandment is formulated. We should note that in all three instances when this commandment appears in the Torah, the words "You shall not boil a kid ..." comprise not a complete verse, but only the second half of a larger verse. In other words, one gets the impression that the commandment does not stand on its own, but in each case only supplements the one that immediately precedes it. Moreover, in two of the three instances (here and in 34:26) this commandment is stated in the context of harvest offerings brought to the Temple. Then, how does this relate to kashrut at all?

Some scholars argue that the phrase "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" actually has nothing to do with food, but derives, in their view, from an old Middle Eastern proverb that meant "don't put off what needs to be done" (similar to the modern expression "don't be late, or you'll miss the boat" and the like). The original meaning of this proverb, according to this interpretation, is that one should do his best to eat a delicious young kid before it becomes a tasteless, adult goat.

By this reading, it would be straightforward to explain why this phrase always appears as only the second half of its verse: It is not a standalone commandment, but an instruction not to delay the execution of other commandments – the offering of first fruits to the Temple, for example. Based on this premise, these researchers conclude that this verse is not food-related, nor should it be understood it as a prohibition of mixing meat and milk.

Now we will analyze this opinion, using it as the basis for our discussion of the connection between the Written Torah, the Oral Torah, and Halachah.

Most importantly, Divine revelation is not limited to the text of the Written Torah alone, but, rather, consists of the Written and Oral Torahs

in unison. And in fact, it is the Oral Tradition, not the Written Torah, that is the primary force driving the formulation of Halachah.

The Written Torah addresses life's circumstances only in general terms. It does not elaborate the commandments, but only provides "pegs," so to speak, on which the commandments, fully explicated, can then be "hung" (and those "pegs" are now and again expressed in different terms entirely). Only the Oral Torah provides the specific practical details of how the commandments are to be observed.

The Talmud does much to clarify the connection between the Written and Oral Torahs, enabling us to see them as one unified structure. Through that single Torah edifice, the Tradition has spoken, and made clear, that if the Talmud establishes that a given verse of the Written Torah has a particular meaning in halakhah, then that is its halachic meaning. The historical origins of the verse ("it originally meant such and such") are then of no practical consequence.

However, there are two rather different approaches to studying the Torah. The first of the two approaches is that of "Torah for Halachah": i.e., we read the Written Torah in a halachic, legislative sense, and here Jewish tradition strictly prohibits the interpretation of the Torah differently from what the Talmud has established. Thus, in the halachic sense one may not argue that the phrase "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" means not that milk and meat must be kept separate, but something else entirely. That, in essence, is the Karaite approach to Judaism, which tries to keep its balance while standing "on one foot," the Written Torah alone, while neglecting the Oral Torah. That Karaite approach, in the view of Jewish tradition, is therefore untenable and unacceptable.

The second – non-halachic – mode of reading the Written Torah understands it from the point of view of philosophy, ethics, and a general perception of the world. Such a reading does admit multiple interpretations, and the phrase "you shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" may have a completely different meaning than it does in Halachah. In that context, understanding the verse as a proverb, "Be sure not to miss the boat," is an entirely appropriate and welcome addition to our understanding of the Torah.

These two approaches to reading the Written Torah should be seen not as mutually exclusive, but as complementing each other.

CHAPTER 20

CONCLUDING THE COVENANT (A SECOND ACCOUNT OF THE GIVING OF THE TORAH)

20.1. COMMANDMENTS RESPECTING THE CONQUERING OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL (23:20-33)

כ הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ מַלְאָךְ לְפָנֶיךָ לִשְׁמָרְךָ בַּדָּרֶךְ וְלַהֲבִיאֲךָ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר הֲכִנֹתִי: כא הִשָּׁמֶר מִפָּנָיו וּשְׁמַע בְּקֹלוֹ אַל־תַּמֵּר בּוֹ כִּי לֹא יִשָּׂא
לְפִשְׁעֲכֶם כִּי שְׁמִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ: כב כִּי אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע בְּקֹלוֹ וְעָשִׂיתָ כֹּל
אֲשֶׁר אֲדַבֵּר וְאֵיַבְתִּי אֶת־אֹיְבֶיךָ וְצַרְתִּי אֶת־צָרָרֶיךָ: כג כִּי־יֵלֵךְ מַלְאָכִי
לְפָנֶיךָ וְהֵבִיאֲךָ אֶל־הָאֱמֹרִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי הַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי
וְהִכְחַדְתִּיו: כד לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְלֹא תָעָבְדֵם וְלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה
כְּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי הָרֵס תְּהָרְסֵם וְשַׁבֵּר תְּשַׁבֵּר מַצֵּבֹתֵיהֶם: כה וַעֲבַדְתֶּם
אֵת יְי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּבֵרַךְ אֶת־לַחְמְךָ וְאֶת־מֵימֶיךָ וַהֲסִרֹתִי מַחֲלָה מִקִּרְבֶּךָ:

כו לֹא תִהְיֶה מְשַׁכֵּלָה וַעֲקָרָה בְּאַרְצֶךָ אֶת־מִסְפַּר יָמֶיךָ אֲמַלֵּא: כז
אֶת־אֵימָתִי אֲשַׁלַּח לְפָנֶיךָ וְהַמֹּתִי אֶת־כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר תָּבֹא בָהֶם
וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־כָּל־אֹיְבֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ עֹרֶף: כח וְשָׁלַחְתִּי אֶת־הַצִּרְעָה לְפָנֶיךָ
וְגֵרְשָׁה אֶת־הַחִוִּי אֶת־הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְאֶת־הַחִתִּי מִלְּפָנֶיךָ: כט לֹא אֲגָרְשֶׁנּוּ
מִפָּנֶיךָ בְּשָׁנָה אֶחָת פֶּן־תִּהְיֶה הָאָרֶץ שְׁמָמָה וְרַבָּה עָלֶיךָ חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה:
ל מְעַט מְעָט אֲגָרְשֶׁנּוּ מִפָּנֶיךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר תִּפְרֶה וְנָחַלְתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ:
לא וְשַׁתִּי אֶת־גְּבֻלְךָ מִיַּם־סוּף וְעַד־יַם פְּלִשְׁתִּים וּמִמִּדְבָּר עַד־הַנָּהָר כִּי

| אָתֵּן בְּיֶדְכֶם אֵת יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ וְגֵרַשְׁתָּמוֹ מִפָּנֶיךָ׃ לב לֹא־תִכְרֹת לָהֶם
וְלֵאלֹהֵיהֶם בְּרִית׃ לג לֹא יֵשְׁבוּ בְּאַרְצְךָ פֶּן־יַחֲטִיאוּ אֹתְךָ לִי כִּי תַעֲבֹד
אֶת־אֱלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי־יִהְיֶה לְךָ לְמוֹקֵשׁ׃

(20) **I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have made ready.**

(21) **Pay heed to him and obey him. Do not defy him, for he will not pardon your offenses, since My Name is in him;**

(22) **but if you obey him and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.**

(23) **When My angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I annihilate them,**

(24) **you shall not bow down to their gods in worship or follow their practices, but shall tear them down and smash their pillars to bits.**

(25) **You shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will remove sickness from your midst.**

(26) **No woman in your land shall miscarry or be barren. I will let you enjoy the full count of your days.**

(27) **I will send forth My terror before you, and I will throw into panic all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn tail before you.**

(28) **I will send a plague ahead of you, and it shall drive out before you the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites.**

(29) **I will not drive them out before you in a single year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply to your hurt.**

(30) **I will drive them out before you little by little, until you have increased and possess the land.**

(31) **I will set your borders from the Sea of Reeds to the Sea of Philistia, and from the Wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hands, and you will drive them out before you.**

(32) **You shall make no covenant with them and their gods.**

(33) **They shall not remain in your land, lest they cause you to sin against Me; for you will serve their gods — and it will prove a snare to you.**

(20) **I am sending an angel**: After laying out the civil and criminal codes of Torah law, the text returns to its description of the concluding of the Covenant with God (below, 24:1-18), now viewing it from a different perspective than it did previously.

The commandment to go to battle for conquering the Land serves as an introduction to the description of the concluding of the Covenant.

I am sending an angel before you: This passage, unlike a later, similar one (as we shall soon explain), carries no negative connotations. The sending of this angel is not an ad hoc expedient necessitated by developing circumstances; rather, it appears that this was a part of the original plan. The Hebrew word *mal'ach* although it most typically means "angel," can also mean "messenger" or "leader." The Almighty is sending the people such a guide to lead them to the Land of Israel, and Moses here has no reason to oppose this proposal.

Here the Torah does not say that the angel is being sent to go before the people *instead of* God – that is, that the presence of the angel implies that God is removing His Own presence from the people. On the contrary, the emphasis here is on elaborating the direct assistance that God will provide for conquering the Land.

Later (35:2), however, after the punishment for the sin of the golden calf, the "sending of the angel" is understood as a reduction in the level of God's involvement. That is, God will not Himself go among the people, but will send the angel in His place. However, Moses cannot accept any such replacement, and God therefore will ultimately agree to refrain from sending the angel, and to go Himself among the people.

To guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have made ready: Now that the people have received the Law, God directs them to conquer and possess their Land, because only there can that law and those commandments be realized.

(21) **Pay heed to him and obey him. Do not defy him, for he will not pardon your offenses**: The angel is only a representative of the

Almighty. He is given a program to execute, but does not decide anything on his own. Arguing with the angel or defying his instructions is therefore pointless.

(22-28) **But if you obey him and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies ... I will send forth My terror before you, and I will throw into panic all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn tail before you. I will send a plague ahead of you, and it shall drive out before you**: If they carefully follow the instructions of the angel, the Jews will have no need even to wage war against the inhabitants of Canaan, because the Almighty Himself will drive the enemy away.

(24) **You shall not bow down to their gods in worship or follow their practices, but shall tear them down and smash their pillars to bits**: Here these principles are presented only in broad strokes, to be elaborated in greater detail below.

(25-26) **You shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will remove sickness from your midst. No woman in your land shall miscarry or be barren. I will let you enjoy the full count of your days**: The people's relationship with God at this stage is still built on fear, not love. The level of a connection with God based on love finds detailed expression only later in the Torah, in the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses is no longer addressing a generation of former slaves, but their children and grandchildren, a new generation of people who are free men in every respect.

I will let you enjoy the full count of your days: No one will die a premature death. People will live long, productive lives.

(29-30) **I will not drive them out before you in a single year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply to your hurt. I will drive them out before you little by little, until you have increased and possess the land**: Although it might seem that the acquisition of the Land will happen too slowly, the dispersal of the natives only gradually is in fact a positive aspect, and an important one for enabling the Jews to put down firm roots. The development of the Land of Israel will proceed in parallel with the growth of the population.

(31) **I will set your borders from the Sea of Reeds to the Sea of Philistia, and from the Wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hands, and you will drive them out before you**: These borders – the southern boundary, from the Nile and the Sea of Reeds; the northern boundary, reaching to the Euphrates River; the eastern boundary, through the Wilderness (west of the Jordan river); and the western boundary, along the Sea of Philistia (the Mediterranean Sea) – these are the maximal borders of the Land of Israel. Because this passage is presenting the general principles, the maximal boundaries are given, although the actual scope of the territory delineated for immediate conquest will be later reduced.

(32) **You shall make no covenant with them and their gods**: The rationale for this prohibition of entering into an alliance with the inhabitants of Canaan is that doing so would mean, essentially, forging an alliance with their deities.

(33) **They shall not remain in your land, lest they cause you to sin against Me; for you will serve their gods — and it will prove a snare to you**: When a people takes over a country there is always the temptation to adopt the existing customs and cults that are already practiced by the indigenous population, because those customs have a "natural feel" with respect to the land. God will therefore not allow the inhabitants of Canaan and their cults to remain in the Land, because of the danger that their idolatrous practices would pose for the Jews.

Conversely, however, those Canaanites who completely abandoned their idolatry and obeyed Jewish religious and political authority could continue to live in the Land[1].

[1] Not only did the Israelites refrain from warring with these Canaanite groups, they even defended and protected them. See, for example, the incident of the Gibeonites in Joshua, ch. 10.

20.2. THE PROCEDURE FOR CONCLUDING THE COVENANT (24:1-11)

א וְאֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עֲלֵה אֶל־יְיָ אַתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים
מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מֵרָחֹק: ב וְנִגַּשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְבַדּוֹ אֶל־יְיָ וְהֵם
לֹא יִגֶּשׁוּ וְהָעָם לֹא יַעֲלוּ עִמּוֹ: ג וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לָעָם אֶת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי
יְיָ וְאֵת כָּל־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל־הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים
אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְיָ נַעֲשֶׂה: ד וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יְיָ וַיַּשְׁכֵּם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּבֶן
מִזְבֵּחַ תַּחַת הָהָר וּשְׁתֵּים עֶשְׂרֵה מַצֵּבָה לִשְׁנֵים עָשָׂר שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
ה וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־נַעֲרֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּזְבְּחוּ זְבָחִים שְׁלָמִים
לַיהוָה פָּרִים: ו וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה חֲצִי הַדָּם וַיָּשֶׂם בָּאַגָּנֹת וַחֲצִי הַדָּם זָרַק עַל־
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ז וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר
יְיָ נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע: ח וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַדָּם וַיִּזְרֹק עַל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה
דַם־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת יְיָ עִמָּכֶם עַל כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: ט וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה
וְאַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: י וַיִּרְאוּ אֵת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְתַחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לִבְנַת הַסַּפִּיר וּכְעֶצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לָטֹהַר: יא וְאֶל־
אֲצִילֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיֶּחֱזוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ:

(1) **Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel, and bow low from afar.**

(2) **Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but the others shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him."**

(3) **Moses went and repeated to the people all the commands of the Lord and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying, "All the things that the Lord has commanded we will do!"**

(4) **Moses then wrote down all the commands of the Lord. Early in the morning, he set up an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.**

(5) **He designated some young men among the Israelites, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as offerings of well-being to the Lord.**

(6) **Moses took one part of the blood and put it in basins, and the other part of the blood he dashed against the altar.**

(7) Then he took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will faithfully do!"

(8) Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord now makes with you concerning all these commands."

(9) Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended;

(10) and they saw the God of Israel: under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity.

(11) Yet He did not raise His hand against the leaders of the Israelites; they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

(1) **Then He said to Moses:** The description given here of the concluding of the Covenant concludes with Moses ascending the Mountain (24:15-18) – the same as was indicated at the Giving of the Torah, which likewise concludes with Moses ascending the Mountain (20:18).

This signifies that the concluding of the Covenant as recounted here, and the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, are one and the same event, being described merely from two different points of view.

Just as the first and second chapters of Genesis give us two different accounts of the Creation, and our task there is to highlight the differences between the two versions, and to extract from them two different perspectives on humankind, so here too, by focusing on the differences between the two descriptions we can derive a multidimensional picture of this pivotal event in the history of the Jewish people.

In this commentary, we shall first examine in detail the text of this second description (of the concluding of the Covenant), which we will then summarize in a high-level comparison of the two Torah portions.

(1–2) **Come up to the Lord, with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu**: Only the elder two of Aaron's four sons are mentioned. It was they who were at that time what we would call "the up-and-coming spiritual leadership of the new generation."

And seventy elders of Israel, and bow low from afar. Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but the others shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him: Moses could rise to the very highest level, to "come near the Lord." Aaron, his sons, and the elders could only "bow low from afar," an intermediate level. And the nation as a whole could only stand well below, at the foot of the mountain.

(3) **Moses went and repeated to the people all the commands of the Lord and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying, "All the things that the Lord has commanded we will do!"**: The people agree to observe the commandments. But at first, they have no desire to understand the meaning of those commandments.

(4) **Moses then wrote down all the commands of the Lord. Early in the morning, he set up an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel**: In order to advance the people, Moses takes action in two directions: (1) He commits the words of the Almighty to writing, so that the Jews can deliberate on the text of the covenant and discuss it among themselves. (2) He sets up an altar and twelve pillars, whose symbolism demonstrates at once Israel's unity and also diversity.

(5) **He designated some young men among the Israelites**: These were the firstborns, apparently, who at that time served as priests.

And they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as offerings of well-being to the Lord: The burnt offerings were completely burnt on the altar, and the "offerings of well-being" were eaten by the people as "a banquet with the Almighty," as it were.

(6-8) **Moses took one part of the blood and put it in basins, and the other part of the blood he dashed against the altar … Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord now makes with you concerning all these commands"**: The Covenant between God and the Jewish nation is concluded as a contract "signed with blood." In other words, the penalty for failure to comply is death.

(7) **Then he took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people**: While concluding the covenant, Moses reads its essential

points to the people, thus instructing them to be always mindful of their actions in order to remain in compliance.

There are various opinions as to what Moses read aloud, whether it was the whole Torah from the beginning up to the Yitro portion, or the social statutes of the *Mishpatim* portion, or simply the Ten Commandments. These approaches differ in their understanding of the actual essence of the covenant – in whether it embodied, respectively, the history of the world and the Jewish people, human social institutions, or general religious principles.

And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will faithfully do!": Literally translated, *na'aseh ve-nishma* means "we will do and we will hear" (or "listen"). But *nishma* can also mean "we will understand." The people now want also to understand the commandments. This desire to understand arose only after Moses had read them the book of the Covenant.

"All that the Lord has spoken we will faithfully do!": Jewish tradition takes special note of the word order, as meaning: "First we will do, even if we don't yet understand and will only later come to understand." This is of course a higher level than the previous one (v. 3, where the people were committed to doing, while making no mention whatsoever of understanding). But even this higher level is still not high enough.

We often encounter a viewpoint that considers the words *na'aseh ve-nishma* – "we will do and we will understand" – the true Jewish ideal. But this opinion is very one-sided.

It is true that that approach ("do, in order that you will understand") is genuinely important at any initial stage, because it is impossible to genuinely understand until we begin to put our understanding into action.

Later in the Torah, however, in the book of Deuteronomy, when Moses recounts the events of the giving of the Torah, he reverses the word order and quotes the Jews as having said, "We will listen and we will do" (5:24, literal translation). By this approach, one needs first to understand *before* he can do – a more advanced level, wherein the action is carried out through understanding that has already been acquired. We

will discuss this point in more detail in the Bible Dynamics commentary to Deuteronomy.

(9) **Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended**: Only the most advanced element of the community is involved in this ascent. Nevertheless, it is a model to which all should aspire, and in future times (the Messianic era) the entire Jewish nation will rise to that level.

(10) **And they saw the God of Israel: under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity**: They have achieved an advanced level of prophetic vision.

And they saw the God of Israel: This is the Almighty as He is manifested to the world through His people Israel. Thus, they saw the Divine light as realized by the Jewish people's realization of their mission in the course of world history.

Under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity: *Livnat ha-sappir* means, literally, "brick of sapphire." The Divinity manifesting Itself to the world through Israel is supported on bricks of sapphire, symbolizing eminently constructive work that uses materials of the highest quality. And "like the very sky for purity" indicates that the foundation of Divine work is a pure and lucid value system. (The term "heaven" is often used in the Torah with this connotation).

They beheld God, and they ate and drank: Although they ascended to an exceedingly high level of Divinity, they did not become "spirits." They maintained their thoroughly material, human existence – "they ate and drank." Their meal is in all respects comparable to the meal of the "sacrifices of well-being" of which the people at the foot of the mountain are partaking (v. 5).

As we have already mentioned,[1] there was a widely held belief in the world at large that "seeing God" necessarily leads to death. The Almighty here shows the people that this is not so, that the ideal is not to depart from this life, but, rather, to combine and integrate the material and the spiritual.

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[1] See §17.2 above, and *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, §23.9.

Yet He did not raise His hand against the leaders of the Israelites: The expression "He did not raise His hand against the leaders of the Israelites" is usually understood to mean that he caused them no harm, which would mean that they committed some wrongful act, but God forgave them for that. However, this interpretation cannot be supported by the context of the passage.

We can therefore interpret this verse (albeit in a sense that is rather atypical for the given expression) as "He did not extend His hand to them," that is, He did not bestow on them the gift of prophecy. Or, that God did not extend His hand in order to conceal Himself from them (as the Torah says later about Moses himself, 33:22: "as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by".) In all events, this would mean that although "they beheld God," "they ate and drank," that is, they remained ordinary, normal human beings, just as they had been before.

20.3. MOSES ASCENDS MOUNT SINAI (24:12-18)

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הָהָרָה וֶהְיֵה־שָׁם וְאֶתְּנָה לְךָ֣ אֶת־לֻחֹ֗ת
הָאֶ֤בֶן וְהַתּוֹרָה֙ וְהַמִּצְוָ֔ה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַ֖בְתִּי לְהוֹרֹתָֽם׃ יג וַיָּ֣קָם מֹשֶׁ֔ה וִיהוֹשֻׁ֖עַ
מְשָׁרְתּ֑וֹ וַיַּ֣עַל מֹשֶׁ֔ה אֶל־הַ֥ר הָאֱלֹהִֽים׃ יד וְאֶל־הַזְּקֵנִ֖ים אָמַ֑ר שְׁבוּ־לָ֣נוּ
בָזֶ֔ה עַ֚ד אֲשֶׁר־נָשُ֣ב אֲלֵיכֶ֔ם וְהִנֵּ֥ה אַהֲרֹ֖ן וְחוּר֑ עִמָּכֶ֗ם מִי־בַ֤עַל דְּבָרִים֙
יִגַּ֣שׁ אֲלֵהֶ֔ם׃ טו וַיַּ֣עַל מֹשֶׁ֔ה אֶל־הָהָ֖ר וַיְכַ֥س הֶעָנָֽן׃ אֶת־הָהָ֑ר׃ טז וַיִּשְׁכֹּ֣ן
כְּבוֹד־יְ֭הוָה עַל־הַ֣ר סִינַ֑י וַיְכַסֵּ֥הוּ הֶעָנָ֖ן שֵׁ֥שֶׁת יָמִ֑ים וַיִּקְרָ֣א אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֔ה בַּיּ֥וֹם
הַשְּׁבִיעִ֖י מִתּ֥וֹךְ הֶעָנָֽן׃ יז וּמַרְאֵ֣ה כְבוֹד־יְ֭הוָה כְּאֵ֣שׁ אֹכֶ֑לֶת בְּרֹ֣אשׁ הָהָ֗ר
לְעֵינֵ֥י בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ יח וַיָּבֹ֣א מֹשֶׁ֔ה בְּתֹ֖וךְ הֶעָנָ֑ן וַיַּ֣עַל אֶל־הָהָ֔ר וַיְהִ֥י מֹשֶׁ֖ה
בָּהָ֥ר אַרְבָּעִ֖ים יוֹ֥م וְאַרְבָּעִ֖ים לָֽיְלָה׃

(12) **The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and wait there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them."**

(13) **So Moses and his attendant Joshua arose, and Moses ascended the mountain of God.**

(14) To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. You have Aaron and Hur with you; let anyone who has a legal matter approach them."

(15) When Moses had ascended the mountain, the cloud covered the mountain.

(16) The Presence of the Lord abode on Mount Sinai, and the cloud hid it for six days. On the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.

(17) Now the Presence of the Lord appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain.

(18) Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moses remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

(12) **The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and wait there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them"**: We see here several parallel channels for transmission of the Divine teachings:

- "**Tablets**" are the Ten Commandments written on the tablets of stone.
- "**Teachings**" means the Written Torah.
- "**Commandments**" is a system of keeping the commandments, i.e., the Oral Torah.

In addition to those, Tradition sees here two more additional channels for transmitting the Divine teachings in words:

- "**Which I have inscribed**" are the Prophets and the Ketuvim (Hagiographa) that supplement the Torah;
- "**To instruct them**" is the learning system that was later permanently enshrined in the Talmud.

Thus, God from the very outset, already at Sinai, has given Moses all these five channels for transmitting the Torah. And all future texts of Judaism will be created based on them.

(13) **So Moses and his attendant Joshua arose, and Moses ascended the mountain of God**: Although the Almighty had instructed Moses to ascend the Mountain alone, Joshua accompanies Moses the first part of the way, and remains halfway up the mountain to wait for him.

(14) **To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. You have Aaron and Hur with you; let anyone who has a legal matter approach them"**: During the war with Amalek (17:9-10) the disposition was rather different: Joshua fought Amalek in the valley, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur stood at the top of the hill, psychologically and spiritually supporting the battle. But here, there is a separation of leadership, a temporary breach of communication between Moses and Aaron. As it turns out, Aaron in isolation from Moses will not be able to contain the people, which will lead to the creation of the golden calf.

(15) **When Moses had ascended the mountain**: Moses had ascended, and Joshua remained halfway up the mountain, between the camp and the summit.

The cloud covered the mountain: To Moses, the Divine presence has the appearance of a cloud.

(16) **The Presence of the Lord abode on Mount Sinai, and the cloud hid it for six days. On the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud**: Even Moses needs an additional six days to "acclimatize" himself. This is his inner preparation for the ascent.

(17) **Now the Presence of the Lord appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain**: To the people, the Presence of the Lord has the appearance of a consuming fire. In other words, for them the Torah represents fire: rigidity, law, and coercion. This fire consumes everything that comes near it. The people therefore keep their distance, not venturing to approach.

For Moses, however, the Presence of the Lord is a cloud – water, life, and grace. Moses can therefore ascend the mountain.

Even today, the Jews' relationship to the Torah, and the possibility of their individual "ascent to the summit of Mount Sinai," likewise depend on how they view the Torah – whether they see it as fire or as water.

(18) **Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moses remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights**: The giving of the Torah continues with Moses ascending Mount Sinai, to remain there for forty days and forty nights. This is a fairly long interval, and can only mean that there is still something else of great significance that Moses must receive there, and then convey to the Jewish people. We will see from the following portions, *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, that this "something else of great significance" is the Temple, which is a "Mount Sinai in miniature," thanks to which the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, will continue to rest on the people of Israel.

20.4. COMPARING THE TWO DESCRIPTIONS OF THE GIVING OF THE TORAH / THE CONCLUDING OF THE COVENANT

Thus, the Torah gives two descriptions of the concluding of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people, which have the following characteristics in common:

- There is a preliminary discussion in which the people promise to follow the Covenant (19:5-8, 24:3)
- The following day (or three days later), the concluding of the Covenant takes place (19:16, 24: 4)
- After the concluding of the Covenant, Moses ascends the Mountain (20:18, 24:15).

But there are also significant differences between the two descriptions:

First description (weekly portion *Yitro*)	**Second description (weekly portion *Mishaptim*)**
God Himself speaks, Direct Revelation (20:1).	Moses speaks, reading to the people from the Book of the Covenant (24:4-7).

Thunder and lightning, the mountain trembled violently, the sound of the shofar is heard (19:16).	There are no special natural phenomena.
The people experience emotional agitation and the terror of being about to die. They are afraid, and they shrink back (20:15-16).	The people react responsibly and calmly (24:7).
Universal commandments that apply to all of humanity (Decalogue, 20:1-14).	Specific commandments ("When you acquire a Hebrew slave," etc., 24:1 – 23:19).
The Jewish people are charged with the universal, human task of being a kingdom of priests and a holy people, i.e., conduits of the Divine light for humanity (19: 5-6).	The Jewish people are assigned the specific, particularly national task of conquering the Land (23:20-33).
Described in the same portion that tells of Jethro, the sage of the nations of the world, it is applicable to all peoples (18: 1-27).	Described in the context of Moses' dialogue with the people, it refers only to Jews (24: 1-11).
Moses is the only leader. He cordons off the Mountain, which no one ascends but him, not even the priests. Aaron partially ascends, but does not participate in Revelation (19: 21-24).	There are many leaders: Moses, Aaron and his sons, Hur, Joshua. Aaron, his sons the priests, and the elders ascend and "behold God"; that is, they participate in Revelation.
The people act as a monolithic unit, with no individual specificity or internal structure.	There is an internal structure within the people, as expressed by seventy elders and twelve pillars (24:1, 4).
Separation from natural life: "Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman" (19:10-15).	Participation in natural life: "They ate and drank" (24:9-11).

The conclusion speaks of the principles of monotheism: "You shall not make any gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold." etc. (20:19-23).	The conclusion speaks of the period of waiting for Moses to return from the mountain, and of the details of the transmission of the Tradition to the Jewish people: "I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them." (24:12-14).
In summation: This is how it looks from the perspective of humankind as a whole.	**In summation: This is how it looks from the internal perspective of the Jewish nation.**

Thus, the giving of the Torah is presented here in two aspects: as revelation, the principles of which are universal, comprising the Ten Commandments, and as Covenant, consisting of detailed, specific legislation.

It is important in one's understanding of the Torah to maintain a balance between these two aspects.

WEEKLY
PORTION [7]

TERUMAH

CHAPTER 21
MOSES' TEMPLE AND AARON'S TEMPLE

21.1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE FINAL SEGMENT OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

The third and final segment of the book of Exodus is dedicated to the topic of the Temple and *hashra'at ha-Shechinah*, the resting of the Divine Presence upon the people of Israel. Or, somewhat more concretely, the preservation of holiness among the Jewish nation. This final portion of Exodus consists of five weekly portions (7–11).

We have already noted earlier that in this book of Exodus, each pair of adjacent weekly portions (except for one outlier) presents us with the "Moses' viewpoint" followed by the corresponding "Aaron's viewpoint." The contrast between those two is especially pronounced in relation to the Temple.

The structure of this third part of the Book of Exodus is as follows:

- (7) *Terumah* (25:1-27:19) – The command to build the Tabernacle: Moses' approach;
- (8) *Tetzaveh* (27:20-30:10) – The command to build the Tabernacle: Aaron's approach;
- (9) *Ki Tissa* (30:11-34: 35) – Crisis (an unpaired portion);
- (10) *Vayakhel* (35:1-38:20) – The building of the Tabernacle: Moses' approach (with Aaron's additions);
- (11) *Pekudei* (38:21-40:38) – The building of the Tabernacle: Aaron's approach (with Moses' additions);

The first two portions are God's words from above to Moses on Mount Sinai, portraying an ideal vision of the Tabernacle. The two versions present two different approaches to the Tabernacle: Moses' and Aaron's, respectively.

The third of the five weekly portions, *Ki Tissa*, the "unpaired" portion, recounts the incident of the golden calf. It is a portion of crisis.

The final two of the five portions describe the actual implementation of the Tabernacle, God's Temple here on earth. In each of them, both Moses' and Aaron's views are intertwined, although each of the two portions has its respective dominant thrust.

21.2. THE CREATION OF THE TEMPLE AS PLANNED IN ADVANCE

As already noted, portions *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh* are a description of the Temple's ideal character, as presented by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Portion *Ki Tissa* follows, with the crisis of the golden calf. And finally, *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* recount the implementation of the Temple idea – the actual construction of the Tabernacle.

The given chronological sequence would indicate that since the instructions concerning the construction of the Tabernacle were given before the incident of the golden calf occurred, they have no immediate or obvious connection to that story.

We do however occasionally encounter the erroneous viewpoint that the Jews received the commandment to build the Tabernacle only in the aftermath of the story of the golden calf, as a concession that God had to make to human weakness and to vestiges of paganism. According to this view, God was telling the Jews, as it were: "Well, if you have to offer sacrifices, and there is no getting around that, then at least offer them to Me, the Almighty, and not to some golden calf."

This opinion derives from a misunderstanding of certain statements of Maimonides, who does in fact say that the purpose of certain commandments and institutions of the Torah – the Temple and its sacrificial rites, in particular – was to deter Israel from the practice of idolatry that was so abundantly widespread in ancient times.

And yet, it is completely wrong to understand such statements as saying that the Temple service was instituted exclusively for preventing idolatry – as if to suggest that if idolatry no longer exists in our times, then the Temple and its service have likewise been rendered entirely obsolete.

On the contrary – the appearance of the description of the Tabernacle in the Torah before the incident of the golden calf clearly indicates that any idea of the Temple and its rites as merely a concession after the fact is untenable. Such an attempt to interpret the building of the Tabernacle as "God's reaction to the departure of the people from the covenant" is fallacious in the extreme. For in fact, quite the opposite is true. The Temple and its service are essential components of Judaism, and not only in an historical sense, but for the future development of the Jewish people as well[1].

21.3. THE TABERNACLE AS THE CONTINUATION OF THE REVELATION AT SINAI

After the giving of the Torah, Moses climbs the mountain and receives the commandment to build the Tabernacle. As the people cannot ascend Mount Sinai with him, Moses must bring down to them the great vision that is revealed to him there.

There is fire on that mountain. And there is a cloud. Building the Temple means that both that fire and that cloud must be brought down from heaven to earth.

The Divine revelation on Mount Sinai was an utterly unique event in world history. It was therefore necessary to create some kind of structure that would serve as a constant reminder of that experience. The Torah devotes no less than five weekly portions to perpetuating

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[1] This does not imply that the third Temple will be like the first and second in every respect. In particular, it will be a Temple not only for the Jewish nation, but for all of mankind. It is also possible that there will be no animal sacrifices, but only plant-based offerings. However, this is an expansive topic that requires separate coverage.

the Revelation at Sinai through the building of the Tabernacle and establishing the Temple service and its rites as permanent institutions.

The importance of the Temple in Jewish tradition is so enormous that it is almost impossible to overstate it. So much is written in the Torah about the Temple, so much attention and emphasis are centered on it, that an unbiased reading of the Torah almost gives one the impression that everything that came before the Temple happened only for its sake:

God created the world in order to create man, in order to make Israel the Chosen People among all of mankind, in order to liberate them from Egypt, in order to give them the Torah and bring them to the Land of Israel, so that they could build the Temple there.

Simply put, we can formulate all of the preceding as: "The very essence of the Torah is that God commands His people Israel to build the Temple and worship Him in it."

But why does God need a Temple? What does this Temple add to the world, and what does its existence actually mean?

The Temple is of course not an end in itself; it is only the means to an end. But that does not make it any less important.

The Temple is a unique place in which a meeting of the Creator and His creation becomes possible. God wants such a direct encounter with mankind, because He wants to maintain a dialogue with His creatures. It is the very purpose underlying the creation of the world.

At the current level of human development, however, an overt meeting of God and man as such is not yet possible. The Almighty has therefore made known His wish that a special place on earth be created where a more limited form of such a meeting can take place – a "meeting" that is nonetheless to some extent plainly evident and manifest.

That place is the Temple, and in this does the very meaning and essence of the Temple and its service consist.

The Temple is a "Mount Sinai in miniature," and the Tabernacle that the Israelites are about to build is a portable version of the same. The initial meeting of God and man, which took place on Mount Sinai, could not end there. In order that what had happened at Sinai could continue onward, God commanded Israel to build the Tabernacle – a portable Temple.

21.4. SANCTITY OF SPACE AND SANCTITY OF TIME

For the nearly two thousand years of their exile the Jewish people had no Temple. They therefore concentrated on the sanctity of time rather than of space – on the Shabbat, and not on the Temple. Although all this was the result of a glaring deficiency, the absence of the Temple, some Diaspora philosophers reasoned that it was probably better that way anyway. They even went so far as to proclaim that "Judaism does not build temples in space, but only in time." These philosophers taught that the Divine teachings cannot possibly be identified with any particular physical or geographical place or space, because they believed that any such notion directly contradicts the principle of the universality of God.

But this point of view was only a form of psychological compensation, a defensive reaction – in this case, to the absence of the Temple. And just as the existence of the Sabbath, a specially demarcated sacred time in no way contradicts the fact that God is eternal, and present in each and every moment, so too the existence of a specially demarcated sacred space, the Temple, is no contradiction to God's omnipresence.

Moreover, the foundations of monotheism require that we acknowledge that God is manifested at all times and in all things, in time and in space. But if we believe in a proposition that God is "especially manifested" in specific moments but not in specific places, then there is obviously "insufficiency of manifestation of Divinity." Therefore, this approach appears to be incorrect.

Concentrating on the Jewish "Temple in time," on the Shabbat and festivals, and not on the Temple in Jerusalem, was a necessary expedient. Clearly, it is more helpful to focus on that which is an empirical reality in one's life. Constraining Judaism to ever narrower confines was necessary for the preservation of Judaism, but it would be categorically incorrect to consider this flawed situation ideal. Indeed, for two thousand years the Jews had built their sanctity exclusively in time, but only because they could not build it in space, and not for any lack of interest or desire to do so. Zionism and the Jews' return to the Land of Israel have now restored them once again to the reality of sanctity in space.

Many passages in the Torah combine these two aspects, time and space, as represented by the construction of the Temple and the observance of the Sabbath. For example: "... Make everything [in the Temple] that I have commanded you ... Nevertheless, you must keep My Sabbaths" (31:7,13). The Halachah interprets this to mean that even the construction of the Temple had to be suspended on Shabbat. And this connection also sheds light on why the thirty-nine categories of labor prohibited on Shabbat precisely coincide with the labors that were performed in constructing the Temple. But even apart from the halachic aspect, the underlying meaning of these verses consists in the idea of unifying the sanctity of time and of space, as represented by the unity of the Temple and the Shabbat.

In this regard, Zionism, which restored the Jewish understanding of the sanctity of space, is a critical element for correcting those distortions of Judaism that were brought about by the exceedingly long exile that the Jewish people endured.

21.5. TEMPLE OF REVELATION, TEMPLE OF ATONEMENT

Weekly portion *Terumah* is paired with portion *Tetzaveh*. Both portions describe the disposition of the Temple, but each from a different perspective.

In the *Terumah* portion, Moses gets all the action; there is no mention of Aaron. And in *Tetzaveh* the situation is reversed: The protagonist is Aaron, and Moses does not appear. Thus, these two portions give us two different viewpoints on the Temple – Moses' and Aaron's, respectively.

In Moses' Temple, a visitor to the Sanctuary can enter without intermediaries. Contact with holiness occurs without barriers. There are no priests there; anyone entering the Temple is deemed sufficiently pure to come in contact with holiness directly. To his left, looking south, stands the Menorah, lampstand, representing the light of wisdom, and to the right (north), is a table with its "breads of display" (symbolizing material success). Between those two is a direct passage to the Holy of Holies. Nothing blocks a person's way forward.

In the Holy of Holies stands the Ark of the Covenant, which contains the Tablets of the Law. Above the Ark of the Covenant are two cherubim, and from the space between them the Almighty's voice can be heard. Thus, the essence of Moses' Temple is Divine revelation based on a person's spiritual and material achievements. He comes to the Temple to hear the voice of God, to understand the world's essential nature and how it is constructed, and what God wants from a him. In Moses' view, man is intrinsically pure. His goal is to approach God and receive Divine revelation.

But Aaron's approach is different. Upon entering Aaron's Temple, one sees priests there. Because man is inherently prone to sin, he may not proceed directly – he lacks the necessary purity and righteousness. The priests block his passage. They act as intermediaries and offer sacrifices to the Almighty on his behalf. A person arriving at Aaron's Temple is not allowed to come in direct contact with holiness; the priests are there do that for him.

The priests are dressed to impress. Their distinctive garb is specially designed to stir the people's imagination. In Aaron's Temple the impact of aesthetics plays an enormous role. The priests' clothing inspires a certain idea in the minds of the people, "a mental image of holiness." (Because it is always the deceptive power of a person's imagination that leads him to sin, we must counter that force by exciting his imagination in the opposite direction: to sanctity).

At the center of Aaron's Temple stands the Altar of Incense. This altar, although it is an essential element of the Temple, is not described in the *Terumah* portion, but only in *Tetzaveh* (30:1-7). The Altar of Incense, located in the Temple's main hall, blocks direct passage to the Holy of Holies. A cloud of burning incense fills the Temple site, concealing the Almighty and His revelation.

Why does a person come to Aaron's Temple if he cannot advance directly to Revelation? He comes with a completely different purpose: to be cleansed of his sins. He cannot cleanse himself, because he is sinful by nature. The priests help him to be cleansed, thus achieving atonement on his behalf.

The priests' ceremonial garments, described in the *Tetzaveh* portion (28:4–43) in great detail, must spark the emotions of those who

come to the Temple, in order to improve and correct them. Indeed, a person cannot be corrected by rational arguments alone; in order to accomplish that we must evoke in him a vivid experience. The four garments worn by ordinary priests correspond to the four most serious sins that are inherent in human nature at its most primitive level, and those garments are intended to help redeem him from those: murder, crudity, violence, and sexual debauchery (we will examine these points in more detail below).

Because no person is free from these four sins, every priest wore these four garments. Four additional garments, worn only by the High Priest, helped people rid themselves of the more "sophisticated" sins that are characteristic of a more refined human character: malignant speech, judgmentalism, arrogance, and idolatry. Each priestly garment contributes in its own way to liberating a person from sin, for this is the very purpose of Aaron's Temple, after all, the reason that it exists.

Thus, Moses and Aaron perceive human nature from two opposite vantage points.

In Aaron's view, man is, first and foremost, sinful. The function of the Temple is to help man achieve forgiveness, so that he can avoid being punished for his sins. Accordingly, the centerpiece of the Temple service is the offering of sacrifices, whose primary purpose is to effect human purification. The most prominent day in the Temple calendar is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement – the only day of the year that the High Priest is permitted to enter the Holy of Holies.

Moses, however, can enter the Holy of Holies at any time, because he comes there not for atonement, but for revelation. Although atonement in the Holy of Holies takes place but once a year, on Yom Kippur, revelation is ever present there. Moses contends that the essence of the Temple is not atonement but Divine revelation. Atonement is only the requisite means by which the receipt of such revelation is facilitated and achieved.

Note too that the difference between Moses' and Aaron's approaches is reflected in the names of the two weekly portions. Aaron's portion is *Tetzaveh*, from *tzaveh*, "(to) order, command." From Aaron's point of view, forging a connection with the Temple is compulsatory

for all. Every person has sins, and unless he is cleansed from those, he cannot improve and advance.

But the name of Moses' portion is *Terumah*, from "*rum*," which denotes raising, or being raised. A *terumah* is an offering or contribution presented voluntarily. In Moses' view, people come to the Temple to bring offerings of their own volition, and are themselves elevated in that process along with their offerings. Spiritual advancement, and the opportunity to hear God's voice and to receive Divine revelation, are given only to those persons who themselves strive for them. Those things are given to man according to the level of what he yearns for by his own free choice.

Of course, none of us has attained the level that Moses' could and did. Only Moses could enter directly into the Holy of Holies at any time. But in telling us of Moses' attainments and point of view, the Torah is teaching us that sinfulness is not an intrinsic human characteristic, that man was not created *ab initio* as a sinner. Needless to say, a person who has sinned must seek correction. But in his primal nature, man is as Moses sees him.

Thus, the Tabernacle must unite the two views – Moses and Aaron, revelation and atonement. The two views are mutually complementary.

As previously explained in detail, one of humanity's fundamental problems is eternal conflict between brothers. This conflict runs through the entire book of Genesis: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers.[1]

Moses and Aaron finally manage to resolve this conflict. The resolution derives from the brothers' realization that rather than competing for primacy, they actually complement each other. This, in fact, is why Moses and Aaron are so successful. Their relationship is not competitive but complementary. The Temples of Moses and of Aaron are likewise mutually complementary.

This idea of a "hybrid" Temple that unites the aspects of revelation and atonement is rather different from how the Temple is usually

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[1] The problem of fraternal conflict has been elaborated in detail at §15.4 above. See also *Bible Dynamics* to Genesis, Ch. 42.

conceived. It affords us a completely new perspective on the Temple's significance, and its role in Jewish history.

21.6. THE TEMPLE'S TWO ROLES IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

In this portion we will endeavor to outline just a number of general ideas, whose detailed elaboration, however, is beyond the scope of a Torah commentary such as this.

The idea of the Temple as "the Temple of Atonement" has persisted for many centuries. And conversely, the aspect of "the Temple of Revelation" was, after Moses, at first only partially manifested. Although the High Priest would at times hear a voice emanating from the Holy of Holies, and the role of revelation in the Temple was further expressed by the Urim and Thummim on the clothes of the High Priest, that aspect still remained mostly dormant for several centuries (see 28:30). That is, until the era of the kings of Israel, when a compelling realization of this aspect of revelation in the Temple can be discerned.

It is a well-known fact of Jewish history that three great kings – Saul, David, and Solomon – ruled the united Jewish kingdom in the early days of the commonwealth; that is, when all twelve tribes comprised a united kingdom. These three kings are important not only as historical figures for their times, but also as models of Jewish advancement for all time, including, of course, the future that for us is yet to come. For that future epoch, these kings are seen as Messianic archetypes, representing two different Messiahs – *Mashiach ben Yosef*, and *Mashiach ben David*. And this means that the relationship between those two Messiahs is essential for us today for understanding the developmental paths of the State of Israel.

Each of the three kings saw the Temple in a completely different light. Saul had no interest in a Temple whatsoever, while David yearned to build the Temple, but by God's decision could not. Only his son Solomon was able to accomplish it.

These different attitudes toward the Temple directly corresponded to the national-political orientations of each of the three kings, i.e.,

their respective views on the essential purpose of the Jewish state's operations and the meaning of its existence.

From Saul's point of view, the goal of the state was to provide safety from external threat – to guarantee Jewish independence and security. At this level, there is no need for a Temple.

But as David saw it, the goal was a national and religious revival. Because this is a higher level than Saul's, David was able to relocate the Ark to Jerusalem[1] and to prepare a site for the future Temple. However, he could not himself build it, because, seemingly, even at that stage of national-religious revival, the Temple was still not needed.

Solomon, however, had a third approach to the meaning of the state's existence. The primary objective of his kingdom was to disseminate knowledge of the Almighty, the God of the Torah, among the rest of mankind. The kings of other nations, attracted by the novel ideas of monotheism, came to visit Solomon in order to learn, and for this he needed a Temple. Thus, when the Jewish state had finally attained the level of King Solomon's view of Judaism – the level of disseminating monotheistic principles – the Temple, now promoting Divine revelation, was now the Temple of Moses.

Maimonides further notes that when the Jewish people came to the Land of Israel they could not begin immediately to build the Temple, because they needed first to appoint a king (i.e., to build a state), and then to fight Amalek; the building of the Temple could only begin after those foundations had been laid.

When the wars had finally ended, when the problems of national security had been satisfactorily addressed, and when the primary remaining task of Jewish life was the dissemination of Jewish monotheism and the Divine teachings among mankind – only then and at that level could the Temple be built.

Only in such a Temple – built for the purpose of spreading the Divine message, and not only for atonement of sins – are the approaches of Moses and Aaron equally manifest.

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[1] Until this time, for many decades after the capture of the ark by the Philistines and the destruc-tion of Shiloh, the ark, not much "in demand," was located at Kiriath-jearim (see 1 Sam. 7:2).

If we believe, as was commonly held for many centuries, that the main goal of Temple was the cleansing of sins – that is, if we perceive it as the Temple of Aaron – then we have a very one-sided view of the Temple, and we feel no need even to have one, because the idea of cleansing sin through sacrifice is so far removed from our thinking and our orientation.

So long as the Jewish people feel no need for the Temple, it is clear that it cannot be restored. If, however, we are imbued with Moses' perspective, and we *feel* the Divine revelation, then we will come to understand what the true meaning of the Temple is for us. And then we can, and will, rebuild it.

21.7. THE CREATION OF THE GOLDEN CALF AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE CRISIS IN LEADERSHIP

Portion *Ki Tissa*, which tells the story of the golden calf, sits between the "heavenly depiction of the Temple" and its "earthly realization." When a celestial idea descends to earth, it necessarily experiences a crisis.

The golden calf was not created to replace God, it was meant as a replacement for Moses. The people asked for someone to stand in for their missing leader, not for the Almighty. In a sense, the people of that generation deified Moses – and not without justification!

At the very beginning of the story of the Exodus, as the Almighty is sending Moses to Egypt, He tells Moses: "Thus he [Aaron] shall serve as your spokesman, with you playing the role of God to him." And then, later: "See, I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet" (4:16, 7:1). In relation to Aaron, to the people, and to Pharaoh, Moses is God, and Aaron – a translator, a prophet, a transmission link for Moses' words.

Of course, the concept of "God" as applied to Moses did not mean that Moses was actually God, but only that he was the Almighty's representative on earth.

This super-exalted status of Moses, which he needed to have in order to lead the Exodus, turned out in a critical situation to be a trap for his followers.

Tradition believes that the instigators for the creation of a new deity were the *eirev rav*, "the mixed multitude," i.e., those Egyptians who joined the Jewish people and left Egypt with them at the Exodus. The creation of the golden calf happened not because the *eirev rav* were avid idolaters, but because of their close connection with Moses. The Jews of the Exodus were attracted by the idea of returning to Canaan, the land of their forefathers, but the Egyptians who joined them had no connection with Canaan, although they did have faith in the person of Moses. Moses' disappearance perplexed this group, and they urgently demanded a new leader.

Thus, the golden calf was not a manifestation of pure idolatry. Rather, it was *Shituf* – attaching graphic images to the Almighty in the search for a new and visible representation of the Almighty on earth.

It is highly indicative that it was Aaron who created the golden calf. The book of Deuteronomy makes clear that it was the creation of that calf that prevented Aaron from entering the Promised Land.

(Strictly speaking, Moses and Aaron were so punished because Moses, toward the end of the forty years in the wilderness, struck the rock with his staff [Num. 20:1-13], rather than speaking to it, as God had instructed him to do. But it was Moses, not Aaron, who struck the rock; why, then, was Aaron punished with him? The answer is that Aaron was in fact being punished for having made the golden calf, but that punishment had been postponed until the last year of the journey through the wilderness).

The key to understanding the entire story is that the creation of the calf happened when Aaron was separated from Moses, during the latter's forty-day stay on Mount Sinai. While Aaron is in Moses' company he functions normally, transmitting his words to the people. But when Aaron breaks away from Moses and acts on his own, he glorifies the idea of intermediation and creates a *Shituf* religion, the basis of which is attaching a supplemental image to the Almighty. That image then itself becomes a mediator between the Almighty and the people.

21.8. JUDAISM'S RELATIONSHIP TO CHRISTIANITY, AS MODELED BY THE RELATIONSHIP OF MOSES AND AARON

As already noted, for Moses the main point of the Temple is revelation, but for Aaron it is atonement for sins. In Moses' view, man is essentially pure, and he therefore strives to achieve greater closeness to God. Aaron, on the other hand, essentially sees man as a sinner in need of purification and redemption. It is the latter approach that underlies Christianity: man must be purified in order to avoid purgatory. And it was Aaron who, breaking away from Moses, creates the golden calf – i.e., he creates a *Shituf* religion.

There are many elements in the classical Orthodox Christianity that were borrowed from the Jewish Temple: the priests' garments, the burning of incense, the altar, and even the symbolism of the sacrifices (in which wine and bread are declared the body and blood of the sacrificial victim). But in the Temple, these elements – the priests, the incense, and the sacrifices – all represent Aaron's, not Moses', attribute.

Conversely, the synagogue borrows elements related to the aspects of Moses' Temple – most notably, the Ark, in which the Torah Scroll is kept, except when it is taken out to be read during the service. The synagogue is thus modeled on the Temple of revelation. In the synagogue, there are no priests wearing special clothes, or altars or incense. And in the same spirit, the synagogue, in addition to its role as a place of prayer, is also a central place of study – for studying the sacred texts and deliberating on them communally, in order to understand their meaning. Lessons in Torah are an integral feature of every synagogue. In the synagogue one finds not only prayer books, but an entire library of teaching materials. The rabbi is primarily a teacher, who teaches his congregants the meaning of Divine revelation.

Thus, we see that the synagogue is a reflection of Moses' Temple, as described in portion *Terumah*, while the Christian church is modeled after Aaron's Temple, as described in the *Tetzaveh* portion[1].

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[1] This is not an absolute distinction, of course. The Jewish synagogue liturgy incorporates prayers that petition for forgiveness of sins (Aaron's aspect), while the Christian church service includes readings of biblical texts (Moses' aspect). Nevertheless, we can consider such elements as only supplementary, and not central to the actual essence of each of those services.

In the classical Christian service, which realizes Aaron's attribute, the most important element is the emotional effect – the imagination of the parishioners, and their emotional and aesthetic experience.

But in the synagogue service, which implements the Moses attribute, this aspect is conspicuously absent – there are no special aesthetic effects. The emotionality of the service rests only on the understanding of the texts, and on each participant's independent reading of the prayers. Even singing, an inseparable feature of the Christian service, finds only episodic use in Jewish worship.

Each of the two religious systems incorporated those features of the Temple that were closest to it. Their differences reflect the overall relationship of Judaism and Christianity, which is also the relationship of Moses and Aaron, respectively.

Moses receives the Torah's teachings directly from God, but he is tongue-tied – in the sense that he unable to convey these teachings to the masses. But Aaron, although he has no direct and independent access to Divine revelation, knows how to speak so that the masses will understand him.

And by analogy: The Jews are reasonably successful at receiving Divine revelation, and yet they have difficulty conveying that revelation to the rest of humanity. The Jews are often perceived by mankind as "tongue-tied." Christianity receives revelation through the Jews, but, like Aaron, it knows how to clothe that revelation in a form that is accessible to the peoples of the world. Unlike Judaism in all its complexity, Christianity speaks to people in a language they readily understand, and it therefore turns out to be that very membrane (i.e., interpreter, interface) that Judaism can permeate in order to reach all of mankind.

When Aaron is separated from Moses he creates the golden calf, the "earthly Divine image" that enables the *eirev rav* (in our analogy, non-Jews interested in monotheism) to acquire their level of connection with God. But this type of connection can function only while Moses is absent. Once Moses returns, contact with God through Moses is restored, and the golden calf is no longer needed.

In a sense, the departure of the Jews from the historical scene two thousand years ago, after the Romans destroyed the Temple and the Jewish state, created the sensation of a vacuum (similar to the vacu-

um created by Moses' absence for the Jews who stood at Sinai). This vacuum was subsequently filled by Christianity, which gave humanity a level of contact with God through a religion of *Shituf* – the "earthly Divine image."

But in our times, now that the Jews have returned to their Land, the religious structure of the world has changed. As the need for an "earthly Divine image" continues to recede, the religious feeling that was previously directed towards that image can now be corrected.

21.9. AARON'S CONNECTION WITH MOSES IS RESTORED

Of course, the world needs both Moses and Aaron – but the question of the nature of their relationship is critically important.

When Moses draws Aaron closer to himself, everything moves forward correctly – the Temple of teachings and Divine revelation brings the Temple of emotion and atonement closer to itself. But when Aaron senses that he operates independently, emotion becomes the core of religious experience. Moses enters the Holy of Holies directly and at any time, but Aaron can enter there only once in the year, and even then, only after the burning of incense, when everything is obscured in a haze and visibility has been reduced to a blur (Lev. 16:2,12-13). Accordingly, his dialogue with God is likewise clouded.

The nations of the world cannot realize their religious intuition without placing emotional and aesthetic experience at the center of their religiosity. Therefore, for the spiritual advancement of the Western world we should try not to eliminate these experiences, but to connect them correctly to their Jewish origins. Aaron joins Moses, and Christianity regains its connection with Judaism.

In fact, this process has been ongoing for the past five hundred years. Some of the more significant theological milestones to be mentioned in this connection are: Protestantism; translation of the Bible into European languages and immense interest in the study of Scripture; the concept of "Jewish truth"; Christian Zionism; the modern revolution in the theology of Western Christianity and its transition

from "replacement theology" to "supplementation theology" under the influence of the European Jewish Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. A detailed discussion of this process, however, is beyond the scope of this book.

[1] Until this time, for many decades after the capture of the ark by the Philistines and the destruc-tion of Shiloh, the ark, not much "in demand," was located at Kiriath-jearim (see 1 Sam. 7:2).

CHAPTER 22
THE TEMPLE OF MOSES

22.1. MOSES' TEMPLE: THE GENERAL STRUCTURE

Moses' Temple is a "Mount Sinai in miniature." When Moses ascends Mount Sinai, he enters a cloud – the mist in which God is concealed. This same cloud will later hover over and cover the Tabernacle, the Tent of the Pact (Num. 9:15).

Just as the Jewish nation stood at Mount Sinai to receive Divine revelation, the purpose of Moses' Temple is to prolong and perpetuate that revelation, so that the people can continue hearing the Divine word.

Portion *Terumah* describes the Tabernacle as follows. The entrance to the Tabernacle was from the east. The ark, with two cherubim on its cover, stood near the opposite, western wall, in the Holy of Holies, hemmed off by a curtain. The actual source of revelation was the empty space between the cherubim. (The transcendental, Almighty God speaks to the world as if "from out of the void"). On the opposite side of the curtain were the table (which stood on the north, to the right of the entrance) and, facing the table, the menorah (on the south, to the left of the entrance). Facing the Tabernacle just described, but outside of it, in the courtyard ("enclosure," 27:9) stood the altar of burnt offering.

Thus, the revelation, emanating from the Holy of Holies, is further expressed in two ways: through the table and its "bread of display," i.e., sustenance, representing economic success and abundance, and through the menorah, i.e., which represents illumination and wisdom. Table and lamp are the basic foundations of everyday life. Virtually everything that affects life and the quality of life comes down to these two things:

economics and enlightenment (the latter includes both Jewish wisdom and worldly wisdom), as represented by the table and the lampstand that stood prominently in the Temple.

That said, the source of Divine revelation remains ever behind the curtain. Revelation, which is not directly visible in our world, is manifested in two ways: through enlightenment – wisdom – and through a successful material life. Only by combining these two paths can a person maintain his balance in striving to come close to God.

At the entrance to the Temple, in the courtyard, stands the altar, the symbol of human desire to approach God. The concept of *korban*, sacrifice, in the Torah derives from the root "*K-R-B*" – "*karev*," "to draw near."[1] Unless a person takes his own first step in the direction of the table and the lampstand, he cannot hope to properly understand the level of either of those.

22.2. GIFTS FOR THE BUILDING OF THE TABERNACLE (25:1-9)

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ־לִי תְּרוּמָה
מֵאֵת כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְּבֶנּוּ לִבּוֹ תִּקְחוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמָתִי: ג וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה
אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאִתָּם זָהָב וָכֶסֶף וּנְחֹשֶׁת: ד וּתְכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת
שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים: ה וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וַעֲצֵי שִׁטִּים:
ו שֶׁמֶן לַמָּאֹר בְּשָׂמִים לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים: ז אַבְנֵי־שֹׁהַם
וְאַבְנֵי מִלֻּאִים לָאֵפֹד וְלַחֹשֶׁן: ח וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם:
ט כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מַרְאֶה אֹתְךָ אֶת תַּבְנִית הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֶת תַּבְנִית כָּל־
כֵּלָיו וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ:

(1) **The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:**

(2) **Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him.**

(3) **And these are the gifts that you shall accept from them: gold, silver, and copper;**

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[1] A detailed examination of this topic will follow in our *Bible Dynamics* commentary to the book of Leviticus.

(4) blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair;

(5) tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood;

(6) oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense;

(7) lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

(8) And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.

(9) Exactly as I show you — the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings — so shall you make it.

(2) **Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him**: The Hebrew word here translated as "gifts" is *terumah* (whence the name of this weekly Torah portion itself). The construction of the Temple is based on the idea of *terumah*, a voluntary offering.

It all begins with a person's voluntary decision from within to approach God. The description of the Temple in the chapters that follow is also sequenced from the inside outward: First the ark that is kept in the Holy of Holies, then the table, the lampstand (menorah), the Tent of Meeting and the planks for the walls of the tent, then the altar in the outer courtyard (the "enclosure") and the fencing of the courtyard. And by analogy, everything begins with, and derives from, innermost human volition.

(3) **And these are the gifts that you shall accept from them: gold, silver, and copper**: A little later we will see that everything in Tabernacle that pertains to human "greatness" is made of gold, the things that serve as a "base" (foundation) are of silver, and things designed to prepare a person for entering the Tabernacle are made of copper.

(4) **Blue, purple, and crimson yarns**: The yarns dyed in these colors were made of wool.

Blue: In Hebrew this blue-colored wool is called *techelet*. It is the same sky-blue wool prescribed by the Torah for the threads of the tzitzit: "Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them

attach a cord of blue (*techelet*) to the fringe at each corner" (Num. 15:38; see *Bible Dynamics* there).

Purple, and crimson yarns: Like the **techelet**, these yarns, essential to the construction of the Tabernacle, were colored with the brilliant, highly-prized dyes that were renowned in antiquity. These materials, in the ancient world more valuable than gold, were found only in the garments of kings (as still preserved in the English term "royal purple").

Fine linen, goats' hair: That is, a mixture of wool and linen was used. In civilian life, this combination, called *sha'atnez*, is expressly forbidden by the Torah: "You shall not wear cloth combining wool and linen" (Deut. 22:11, see also Lev. 19:19)[1].

But the Temple, the representation of Heaven on earth, lies outside the realm of ordinary life. Therefore, in spite of the usual prohibition, the fabrics used in the Temple, including the cloth used to make the priestly garments, were made of wool and linen woven together.

(5) **Tanned ram skins**: The Hebrew, here translated as "tanned," is *me'odamim*, ostensibly from *adom*, "red." But these skins were used only as an intermediate layer of the Tabernacle coverings, and as such were visible neither from the inside nor the outside; thus, their color would not have mattered so far as aesthetics were concerned. The commentators therefore believe that *me'odamim* refers not to the coloring of these skins, but to the particular process that was used to prepare the hides. The translation here, "tanned ram skins," likewise reflects this view.

Dolphin skins: *Tachash* has not been positively identified with any animal species known today. Although translated here as "dolphin," the classical commentators have generally assumed *tachash* to be some species of horned cattle.

And acacia wood: The acacia is said to be a broad-trunked tree, whose wood is lightweight, absorbs little moisture, and is relatively immune to decay. All the wooden elements of the Tabernacle were made from it.

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[1] For an elaboration of this prohibition of *sha'atnez*, see *Bible Dynamics* on Deut. 22:11.

(6) **Oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense**: Special olive oil was used for anointing the priests, as well as the Tabernacle itself and its furnishings (29:7, 40:9-11,16).

(7) **Lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece**: These are the robes of the high priest (see 28:4 ff.).

(8) **And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them**: God will dwell not only in the Temple, but also "among *them*," i.e., the Jewish people. The concept of Shechinah (from the Hebrew root *SH K N*, which means "to dwell") refers to God's presence – specifically, His presence in our lives. The existence of the Temple deepens and strengthens this connection.

(9) **Exactly as I show you — the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings — so shall you make it**: Moses on Mount Sinai receives not only verbal descriptions, but even graphical depictions of the Temple and all its furnishings. The "Written Torah" is not limited to the actual written text. Rather, it includes fundamental elucidations of the text as well, because they are so inextricably connected to the written text itself.

22.3. THE ARK OF THE PACT (25:10-22)

י וְעָשׂוּ אֲרֹון עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אַמָּתַיִם וָחֵצִי אָרְכּוֹ וְאַמָּה וָחֵצִי רָחְבּוֹ וְאַמָּה
וָחֵצִי קֹמָתוֹ: יא וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ תְּצַפֶּנּוּ וְעָשִׂיתָ
עָלָיו זֵר זָהָב סָבִיב: יב וְיָצַקְתָּ לּוֹ אַרְבַּע טַבְּעֹת זָהָב וְנָתַתָּה עַל אַרְבַּע
פַּעֲמֹתָיו וּשְׁתֵּי טַבָּעֹת עַל־צַלְעוֹ הָאֶחָת וּשְׁתֵּי טַבָּעֹת עַל־צַלְעוֹ הַשֵּׁנִית:
יג וְעָשִׂיתָ בַדֵּי עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם זָהָב: יד וְהֵבֵאתָ אֶת־הַבַּדִּים
בַּטַּבָּעֹת עַל צַלְעֹת הָאָרֹן לָשֵׂאת אֶת־הָאָרֹן בָּהֵם: טו בְּטַבְּעֹת הָאָרֹן
יִהְיוּ הַבַּדִּים לֹא יָסֵרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ: טז וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־הָאָרֹן אֵת הָעֵדֻת אֲשֶׁר
אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ: יז וְעָשִׂיתָ כַפֹּרֶת זָהָב טָהוֹר אַמָּתַיִם וָחֵצִי אָרְכָּהּ וְאַמָּה
וָחֵצִי רָחְבָּהּ: יח וְעָשִׂיתָ שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים זָהָב מִקְשָׁה תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם מִשְּׁנֵי
קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת: יט וַעֲשֵׂה כְרוּב אֶחָד מִקָּצָה מִזֶּה וּכְרוּב־אֶחָד מִקָּצָה
מִזֶּה מִן־הַכַּפֹּרֶת תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַכְּרֻבִים עַל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו: כ וְהָיוּ הַכְּרֻבִים

פְּרִשֵׂי כְנָפַיִם לְמַעְלָה סֹכְכִים בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל־
אָחִיו אֶל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת יִהְיוּ פְּנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים: כא וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עַל־הָאָרֹן
מִלְּמָעְלָה וְאֶל־הָאָרֹן תִּתֵּן אֶת־הָעֵדֻת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ: כב וְנוֹעַדְתִּי
לְךָ שָׁם וְדִבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־אֲרֹן
הָעֵדֻת אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֲצַוֶּה אֹתְךָ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

(10) **They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high.**

(11) **Overlay it with pure gold — overlay it inside and out — and make upon it a gold molding round about.**

(12) **Cast four gold rings for it, to be attached to its four feet, two rings on one of its side walls and two on the other.**

(13) **Make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold;**

(14) **then insert the poles into the rings on the side walls of the ark, for carrying the ark.**

(15) **The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark: they shall not be removed from it.**

(16) **And deposit in the Ark [the tablets of] the Pact which I will give you.**

(17) **You shall make a cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide.**

(18) **Make two cherubim of gold — make them of hammered work — at the two ends of the cover.**

(19) **Make one cherub at one end and the other cherub at the other end; of one piece with the cover shall you make the cherubim at its two ends.**

(20) **The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They shall confront each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover.**

(21) **Place the cover on top of the Ark, after depositing inside the Ark the Pact that I will give you.**

(22) **There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you — from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Pact — all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people.**

A model of the Ark of the Covenant
(artist's conception, one of several possible renderings).

(10) **They shall make an ark**: The description of the Temple begins with its centerpiece – not the altar, but the ark, containing the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Thus we see clearly that the main point of the Temple is not atonement, but Divine revelation.

Two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high: None of the dimensions of the ark are in units of whole cubits; they all include half cubits. This is an indication that the ark is not completely "self-contained." The ark cannot fulfill its purpose, Divine revelation, in isolation, but only within the context of the entire universe, and as an integral part of it.

(10-11) **Of acacia wood … Overlay it with pure gold**: The ark, the table of the bread of display (also called the "showbread"), and the menorah all combine wood and gold. (The ark and the table are made of wood overlaid with gold, and the menorah, although solid gold, is in the shape of a tree). Wood grows naturally, and thus symbolizes inner human life, the natural development of passions and the soul. But the wood must be contained in a solid, rigid framework of metal.

Overlay it with pure gold — overlay it inside and out: The external overlay of gold gives the ark a handsome appearance. And the inner gold lining pays honor to the tablets.

Overlay it with pure gold: There is gold in the Temple everywhere – in its vessels and even in its curtains. But gold is also the material that was used to create the golden calf.

In contemporary language, gold is a synonym for wealth. But in the language of the Torah, not gold, but silver, *kesef*, is the word that means "money." Gold symbolizes that which is humanly excellent and ideal (e.g., the golden mean).

God predicted to Abraham that his descendants would be exiles in a foreign land, "and in the end they shall go free with great wealth" (Gen. 15:14). Gold thus represents the cultural "wealth" that the Jews brought with them out of Egypt. But this Egyptian "gold" was not pure, and in undergoing the process of purification it therefore had to be divided into two parts. The "superfluous, improper" gold went to creating the golden calf, while the "virtuous" gold that remained was used to construct the Tabernacle.

(11) **And make upon it a gold molding round about**: The word zer, here translated as "molding," literally means "crown." This molding is the "crown of the Torah," which symbolizes the regal status of those, who, by studying and observing the Torah, merit to wear that crown.

The molding rose above the outer edges of the walls of the ark, supporting the cover, which rested on the upper edges of the walls.

(12-16) **Cast four gold rings for it … Make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold; then insert the poles into the rings … The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark: they shall not be removed from it**: The apparatus for carrying the ark is an integral part of it, and must never be detached from it. Even in the future, when there will no longer be any need to transport the ark, because it will reside not in the Tabernacle, but in the permanent Temple in Jerusalem, the poles must nonetheless always remain in the rings. This is to emphasize that the potential for movement and human development always remains.

(16) **And deposit in the Ark [the tablets of] the Pact which I will give you**: This will be the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. For

many religions, the centerpiece of the temple is the "image" of their gods as they conceive them. In Judaism, however, at the center of the Temple stands not God's image, but the symbol of His revelation; that is, God's law. The most important aspect of the Jewish concept of the "invisible God" is that the center of religious feeling is not the "image" of God, but following God's ways.

(17) **You shall make a cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide**: The purpose of the ark is to preserve the two tablets. The ark's cover with its cherubim is a separate but integral part of the ark, whose purpose is to continue the revelation begun at Sinai.

(18) **Make two cherubim of gold**: *Cherub* in Hebrew is keruv (plural *keruvim*). We first encountered cherubim in the Torah when God stationed them to guard the entrance to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had been ejected: "He [God] drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24).

Thus, cherubim stand on the threshold between two worlds, keeping those worlds apart, by guarding the entrance to the "higher" world. Here, in the description of the ark, as at the Garden of Eden, cherubim again stand at the boundary between the two worlds, creating an "entrance" through which the Divine word enters our world. The Tanakh later describes God as "enthroned on cherubim" and "mounting a cherub and flying" (e.g., 1 Sam. 4:4, 2 Sam. 6:2, Isa. 37:16, Ps. 18:11). The common thread is that cherubim are identified with entry points into higher worlds.

Two cherubim: "Cherubim" is already plural, but unlike the passage in Genesis (3:24) which leaves the number of cherubim unspecified, here we are told explicitly that that there should be two cherubim. This is because they are here are a symbol of revelation, which implies two personalities in dialogue. In Genesis, however, where the theme is Creation, the emphasis is on the Creator, and not on the cherubim.

(19) **Of one piece with the cover shall you make the cherubim at its two ends**: The cover and its two cherubim form a single apparatus for continuing the Divine Revelation.

(20) **The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They shall confront each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover**: The two cherubim face each other, symbolizing love and dialogue, but they are also turned toward the cover, thus expressing their connection with the ark, and creating above the cover a special space.

(21) **Place the cover on top of the Ark, after depositing inside the Ark the Pact that I will give you**: Inside the ark are the Tablets – Divine revelation that is already expressed and recorded. God's voice is further heard from the space between the cherubim on the cover of the ark; this is the continuing revelation.

(22) **There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you — from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Pact — all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people**: The ongoing revelation, the voice of God that emanates from the space between the cherubim above the ark, derives directly from the original revelation – the tablets in the ark.

22.4. THE TABLE FOR THE BREAD OF DISPLAY (25:23-30)

כג וְעָשִׂיתָ שֻׁלְחָן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אַמָּתַיִם אָרְכּוֹ וְאַמָּה רָחְבּוֹ וְאַמָּה וָחֵצִי
קֹמָתוֹ: כד וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר וְעָשִׂיתָ לּוֹ זֵר זָהָב סָבִיב: כה וְעָשִׂיתָ
לּוֹ מִסְגֶּרֶת טֹפַח סָבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ זֵר־זָהָב לְמִסְגַּרְתּוֹ סָבִיב: כו וְעָשִׂיתָ לּוֹ
אַרְבַּע טַבְּעֹת זָהָב וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־הַטַּבָּעֹת עַל אַרְבַּע הַפֵּאֹת אֲשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּע
רַגְלָיו: כז לְעֻמַּת הַמִּסְגֶּרֶת תִּהְיֶיךָ הַטַּבָּעֹת לְבָתִּים לְבַדִּים לָשֵׂאת אֶת־
הַשֻּׁלְחָן: כח וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַבַּדִּים עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם זָהָב וְנִשָּׂא־בָם
אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן: כט וְעָשִׂיתָ קְעָרֹתָיו וְכַפֹּתָיו וּקְשׂוֹתָיו וּמְנַקִּיֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר יֻסַּךְ
בָּהֵן זָהָב טָהוֹר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם: ל וְנָתַתָּ עַל־הַשֻּׁלְחָן לֶחֶם פָּנִים לְפָנַי
תָּמִיד:

(23) **You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high.**

(24) Overlay it with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it.

(25) Make a rim of a hand's breadth around it, and make a gold molding for its rim round about.

(26) Make four gold rings for it, and attach the rings to the four corners at its four legs.

(27) The rings shall be next to the rim, as holders for poles to carry the table.

(28) Make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold; by these the table shall be carried.

(29) Make its bowls, ladles, jars and jugs with which to offer libations; make them of pure gold.

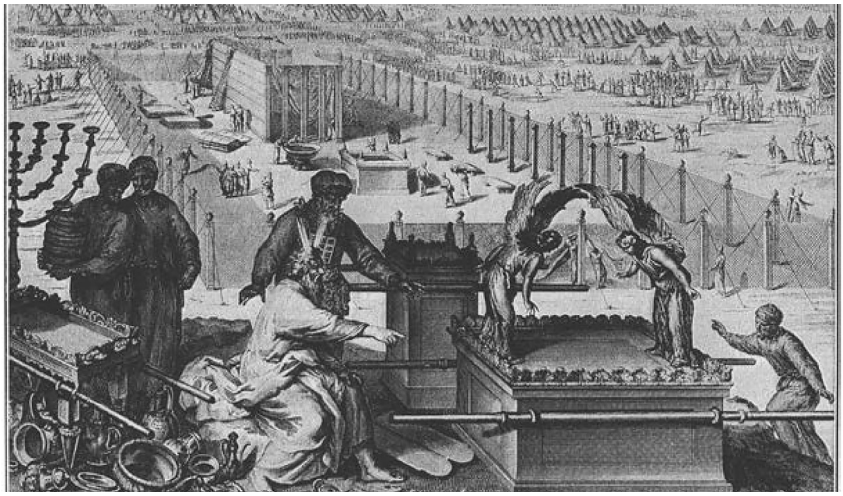
(30) And on the table you shall set the bread of display, to be before Me always.

(23) **You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high**: The table was located at the north wall, to the right of the entrance. It symbolizes the economic well-being of the state and its citizens.

(24) **Overlay it with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it**: This molding, or "crown," symbolizes the "crown of the kingship," paired with the "crown of the Torah," i.e., of the ark (v. 11). It represents the religious dignity and the royal status of those who take responsibility for the economic well-being of the nation.

(25) **Make a rim of a hand's breadth around it, and make a gold molding for its rim round about**: This rim, together with the legs of the table, formed the frame on which the tabletop lay. Its edges held the rim (a design similar to the ark's cover).

(26-28) **Make four gold rings for it … as holders for poles to carry the table**: The rings and poles for carrying the table were just like those of the ark, but with a significant difference: When the table stood in the Tabernacle, and was not being transported, its poles were removed from the rings.



The Ark of the Covenant (artist's conception). To its left is the Golden Altar, Moses (who is seen with his radiant countenance shown as horns, based on an improbable rendering of Ex. 34:29,30,35), Aaron, the Menorah, and the Table with its Breads of Display. Seen at the rear is the Tent of the Meeting at the far end of the Tabernacle enclosure and, surrounding it in the distance, the ordered encampments of the tribes of Israel. ("Biblical Images," The Hague, 1728)

(29) **Make its bowls, ladles, jars and jugs with which to offer libations; make them of pure gold**: All these are appurtenances for the bread of display that is set on the table (v. 30).

Ladles: An alternate translation is "pans." These contained frankincense, a mixture of aromatic herbs, that was placed on the table alongside the bread of display (Lev. 24:7).

(30) **And on the table you shall set the bread of display, to be before Me always**: The table symbolizes material well-being, and the bread set on the table symbolizes that all sustenance comes from the Almighty. Judaism orients a person to material success and well-being, for these too are seen as having religious value.

The bread of display: There were twelve breads, one for each of the tribes of Israel. This is an indication that the Almighty's blessing rests on all of Israel's economy collectively, and also on the independent material and social life of each individual tribe.

22.5. THE MENORAH (25:31-40)

לא וְעָשִׂיתָ מְנֹרַת זָהָב טָהוֹר מִקְשָׁה תֵּעָשֶׂה הַמְּנוֹרָה יְרֵכָהּ וְקָנָהּ
גְּבִיעֶיהָ כַּפְתֹּרֶיהָ וּפְרָחֶיהָ מִמֶּנָּה יִהְיוּ: לב וְשִׁשָּׁה קָנִים יֹצְאִים מִצִּדֶּיהָ
שְׁלֹשָׁה | קְנֵי מְנֹרָה מִצִּדָּהּ הָאֶחָד וּשְׁלֹשָׁה קְנֵי מְנֹרָה מִצִּדָּהּ הַשֵּׁנִי: לג
שְׁלֹשָׁה גְּבִעִים מְשֻׁקָּדִים בַּקָּנֶה הָאֶחָד כַּפְתֹּר וָפָרַח וּשְׁלֹשָׁה גְבִעִים
מְשֻׁקָּדִים בַּקָּנֶה הָאֶחָד כַּפְתֹּר וָפָרַח כֵּן לְשִׁשֶּׁת הַקָּנִים הַיֹּצְאִים מִן־
הַמְּנֹרָה: לד וּבַמְּנֹרָה אַרְבָּעָה גְבִעִים מְשֻׁקָּדִים כַּפְתֹּרֶיהָ וּפְרָחֶיהָ:
לה וְכַפְתֹּר תַּחַת שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמֶּנָּה וְכַפְתֹּר תַּחַת שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמֶּנָּה
וְכַפְתֹּר תַּחַת־שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמֶּנָּה לְשֵׁשֶׁת הַקָּנִים הַיֹּצְאִים מִן־הַמְּנֹרָה:
לו כַּפְתֹּרֵיהֶם וּקְנֹתָם מִמֶּנָּה יִהְיוּ כֻּלָּהּ מִקְשָׁה אַחַת זָהָב טָהוֹר:
לז וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־נֵרֹתֶיהָ שִׁבְעָה וְהֶעֱלָה אֶת־נֵרֹתֶיהָ וְהֵאִיר עַל־עֵבֶר פָּנֶיהָ:
לח וּמַלְקָחֶיהָ וּמַחְתֹּתֶיהָ זָהָב טָהוֹר: לט כִּכַּר זָהָב טָהוֹר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ אֶת
כָּל־הַכֵּלִים הָאֵלֶּה: מ וּרְאֵה וַעֲשֵׂה בְּתַבְנִיתָם אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה מָרְאֶה בָּהָר:

(31) **You shall make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its base and its shaft, its cups, calyxes, and petals shall be of one piece.**

(32) **Six branches shall issue from its sides; three branches from one side of the lampstand and three branches from the other side of the lampstand.**

(33) **On one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals, and on the next branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand.**

(34) **And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals:**

(35) **a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches; and a calyx, of one piece with it, under the second pair of branches, and a calyx, of one piece with it, under the last pair of branches; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand.**

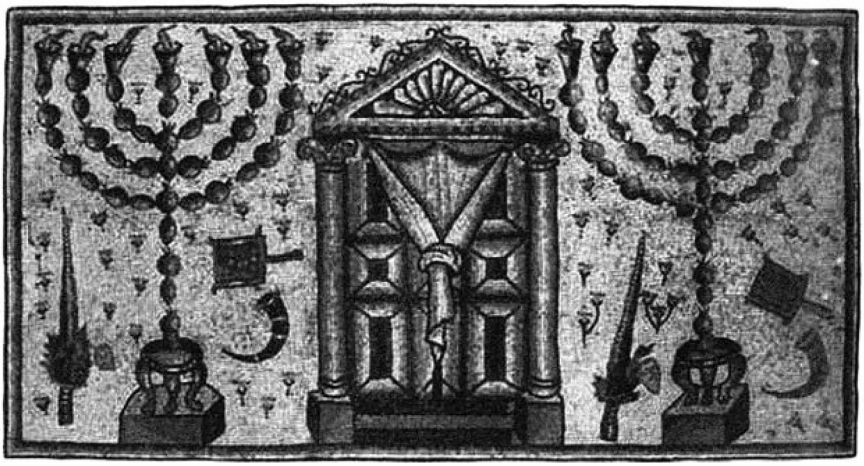
(36) Their calyxes and their stems shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single hammered piece of pure gold.

(37) **Make its seven lamps — the lamps shall be so mounted as to give the light on its front side —**

(38) **and its tongs and fire pans of pure gold.**

(39) **It shall be made, with all these furnishings, out of a talent of pure gold.**

(40) **Note well, and follow the patterns for them that are being shown you on the mountain.**



The Menorah, with all its wicks directed toward the central column.
(A mosaic in the Hammat Tiberias Synagogue, fourth century C.E.)

(31) **You shall make a lampstand of pure gold**: Unlike the ark, the symbol of Divine revelation, which rests behind the curtain and is obscured from view from the outside, the lampstand, the menorah, is a symbol of wisdom that comes from man and through man. The menorah is therefore displayed openly, fully visible outside the curtain.

The menorah stands opposite the table and its breads of display. The table and the menorah are interrelated: The Jewish people can give light to humanity only when they themselves are living a life of material success.

The lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its base and its shaft, its cups, calyxes, and petals shall be of one piece: It must be fashioned from a single piece of gold, not assembled from several separate parts. Wisdom – cognition of the universe – is a single, unified intuitive process, not a collection of disparate, independent details.

(32) **Six branches shall issue from its sides**: Taken together with the central trunk of the menorah, these branches symbolize the seven days of creation.

(33–34) **On one branch … three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals … And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals**: Although the menorah is made of gold, it has the appearance of a tree that grows and develops.

The Menorah. (A mosaic in the Shalom al Yisrael Synagogue, Jericho, seventh century C.E.)

(35) **A calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches; and a calyx … under the second pair of branches, and a calyx … under the last pair of branches; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand**: Each pair of branches forms a single unit. This emphasizes the need to find a balance between conflicting human character traits.

(36) **Their calyxes and their stems shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single hammered piece of pure gold**: Unlike philosophies that divide the world into unrelated, constituent parts, Divine wisdom sees the world as a single, unified whole.

(37) **Make its seven lamps**: In the menorah there are six ordinary lamps on the branches, and one special lamp on the central stem. Like

the seven days of creation, these symbolize the diversity of spirituality in the world, the unity of all its manifestations.

The lamps shall be so mounted as to give the light on its front side: Opinions differ as to the exact positioning of the menorah and its parts. The consensus is that the lamps (the cups that held the oil) were not symmetrical, but each had a protruding angle to hold the wick, such that each cup could be made to point in a particular direction. At the same time, the menorah, which stood at the southern wall, was positioned from north to south, parallel to the curtain. The lamp on the central stem, called *ner maaravi*, the "western lamp," was directed westward, toward the Holy of Holies, while the remaining six lamps (three on either side) were set to point toward that central lamp.

(38) **And its tongs and fire pans of pure gold**: Not only the menorah itself, but also all its accessories – the "instruments of wisdom" – were made of gold.

(39) **It shall be made, with all these furnishings, out of a talent of pure gold**: The Greek term "talent" is used to translate the Hebrew word of *kikar*, the largest monetary and weight measure in ancient times. Different estimates of this unit in the Torah range from 27 to 68 kg (60 to 151 pounds). Rav Arye Kaplan, relying on Rashi, considers the maximum value of *kikar* to be correct, i.e. 68 kg. He calculates that in this case the diameter of the stems of the Menorah was about 3 cm (slightly more than 1 inch).

(40) **Note well, and follow the patterns for them that are being shown you on the mountain**: Rather than presenting the images only in words, God also showed Moses actual images of the Temple objects, appliances, and utensils, which thus became a part of him, as it were; Moses now carried in his mind an image of the Temple. This sacred image was then transmitted directly from teacher to student, therefore always remaining to some extent an oral depiction that cannot be fully fixed in text.

22.6. THE TABERNACLE'S COVERING (26:1-14)

א וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן תַּעֲשֶׂה עֶשֶׂר יְרִיעֹת שֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר וּתְכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן
וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי כְּרֻבִים מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֵׁב תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם: ב אֹרֶךְ | הַיְרִיעָה
הָאַחַת שְׁמֹנֶה וְעֶשְׂרִים בָּאַמָּה וְרֹחַב אַרְבַּע בָּאַמָּה הַיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת
מִדָּה אַחַת לְכָל־הַיְרִיעֹת: ג חֻמֵּשׁ הַיְרִיעֹת תִּהְיֶיךָן חֹבְרֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־
אֲחֹתָהּ וְחָמֵשׁ יְרִיעֹת חֹבְרֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ: ד וְעָשִׂיתָ לֻלְאֹת תְּכֵלֶת
עַל שְׂפַת הַיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת מִקָּצָה בַּחֹבֶרֶת וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה בִּשְׂפַת הַיְרִיעָה
הַקִּיצוֹנָה בַּמַּחְבֶּרֶת הַשֵּׁנִית: ה חֲמִשִּׁים לֻלָאֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה בַּיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת
וַחֲמִשִּׁים לֻלָאֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה בִּקְצֵה הַיְרִיעָה אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחְבֶּרֶת הַשֵּׁנִית
מַקְבִּילֹת הַלֻּלָאֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ: ו וְעָשִׂיתָ חֲמִשִּׁים קַרְסֵי זָהָב
וְחִבַּרְתָּ אֶת־הַיְרִיעֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ בַּקְּרָסִים וְהָיָה הַמִּשְׁכָּן אֶחָד:
ז וְעָשִׂיתָ יְרִיעֹת עִזִּים לְאֹהֶל עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן עַשְׁתֵּי־עֶשְׂרֵה יְרִיעֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה
אֹתָם: ח אֹרֶךְ | הַיְרִיעָה הָאַחַת שְׁלֹשִׁים בָּאַמָּה וְרֹחַב אַרְבַּע בָּאַמָּה
הַיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת מִדָּה אַחַת לְעַשְׁתֵּי עֶשְׂרֵה יְרִיעֹת: ט וְחִבַּרְתָּ אֶת־חֲמֵשׁ
הַיְרִיעֹת לְבָד וְאֶת־שֵׁשׁ הַיְרִיעֹת לְבָד וְכָפַלְתָּ אֶת־הַיְרִיעָה הַשִּׁשִּׁית
אֶל־מוּל פְּנֵי הָאֹהֶל: י וְעָשִׂיתָ חֲמִשִּׁים לֻלָאֹת עַל שְׂפַת הַיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת
הַקִּיצֹנָה בַּחֹבֶרֶת וַחֲמִשִּׁים לֻלָאֹת עַל שְׂפַת הַיְרִיעָה הַחֹבֶרֶת הַשֵּׁנִית:
יא וְעָשִׂיתָ קַרְסֵי נְחֹשֶׁת חֲמִשִּׁים וְהֵבֵאתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָסִים בַּלֻּלָאֹת וְחִבַּרְתָּ
אֶת־הָאֹהֶל וְהָיָה אֶחָד: יב וְסֶרַח הָעֹדֵף בִּירִיעֹת הָאֹהֶל חֲצִי הַיְרִיעָה
הָעֹדֶפֶת תִּסְרַח עַל אֲחֹרֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן: יג וְהָאַמָּה מִזֶּה וְהָאַמָּה מִזֶּה בָּעֹדֵף
בְּאֹרֶךְ יְרִיעֹת הָאֹהֶל יִהְיֶה סָרוּחַ עַל־צִדֵּי הַמִּשְׁכָּן מִזֶּה וּמִזֶּה לְכַסֹּתוֹ:
יד וְעָשִׂיתָ מִכְסֶה לָאֹהֶל עֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וּמִכְסֵה עֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים
מִלְּמָעְלָה:

The Cover's Inner Layer:

(1) **As for the tabernacle, make it of ten strips of cloth; make these of fine twisted linen, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, with a design of cherubim worked into them.**

(2) **The length of each cloth shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each cloth shall be four cubits, all the cloths to have the same measurements.**

(3) **Five of the cloths shall be joined to one another, and the other five cloths shall be joined to one another.**

(4) **Make loops of blue wool on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set; and do like-wise on the edge of the outermost cloth of the other set:**

(5) **make fifty loops on the one cloth, and fifty loops on the edge of the end cloth of the other set, the loops to be opposite one another.**

The Cover's Middle Layer:

(6) **And make fifty gold clasps, and couple the cloths to one another with the clasps, so that the tabernacle becomes one whole.**

(7) **You shall then make cloths of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; make the cloths eleven in number.**

(8) **The length of each cloth shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each cloth shall be four cubits, the eleven cloths to have the same measurements.**

(9) **Join five of the cloths by themselves, and the other six cloths by themselves; and fold over the sixth cloth at the front of the tent.**

(10) **Make fifty loops on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the cloth of the other set.**

(11) **Make fifty copper clasps, and fit the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together so that it becomes one whole.**

(12) **As for the overlapping excess of the cloths of the tent, the extra half-cloth shall overlap the back of the tabernacle,**

(13) **while the extra cubit at either end of each length of tent cloth shall hang down to the bottom of the two sides of the Tabernacle and cover it.**

The Cover's Outer Layer:

(14) **And make for the tent a covering of tanned ram skins, and a covering of dolphin skins above.**

(1) **As for the tabernacle**: Continuing its description of the Tabernacle's structure, the Torah proceeds to its outer parts: the tent and the curtain.

Most typically, the description of a building begins with its external structure, and only then moves on to the objects that fill it. The description of the Sanctuary, however, begins with the Tabernacle vessels, and the externals then follow. The very essence of the Tabernacle is hidden inside it; the externals exist only for the realization of the internals.

Make it of ten strips of cloth; make these of fine twisted linen, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns: Each thread of the cloth was woven from four threads, one of linen and three woolen. As previously noted, the usual prohibition of combining wool and linen does not apply to the Temple.

With a design of cherubim: Cherubim exist on the boundary between worlds – in this case, between manifest Divinity and hidden Divinity. The coverings of the walls of the Temple are therefore embroidered with images of cherubim.

The essence of the Temple is neither prayer nor sacrifice *per se*, but an opportunity for humans to experience a personal encounter with God. Cherubim mark the boundary at which this encounter takes place.

The Inner, Middle, and Outer Covers: Thus, the Tabernacle has three layers of coverage.

- The inner layer of coverings is a thin fabric woven of four different threads, with an elaborate pattern and images of cherubim, and connected with gold hooks.
- The middle layer is made of a dense woolen fabric, and is four cubits wider than the inside cover. It hangs along the edges of the tent, its parts connected by copper hooks.
- The outer layer of the cover is stitched from lambskin, and then overlaid with *tachash* skins, and these cover the entire Tabernacle. Tradition informs us that the *tachash* skins were multi-colored, imparting to the Tabernacle its striking outer beauty.

From inside the Tabernacle one sees walls made of planks. A thin, patterned veil covers the ceiling, whose golden button-hooks shine,

reflecting the light of the menorah, and on top of that layer goat hair coverings set it off from the outside world. Above those is a layer of lambskin that affords protection from rain and wind. All this gives an impression of skin, flesh, and bones. The temple is like a body that has its vital organs within: the ark, the table, and the menorah.

22.7. THE PLANKS OF THE TABERNACLE (26:15-30)

טו וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים לַמִּשְׁכָּן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים עֹמְדִים: טז עֶשֶׂר אַמּוֹת
אֹרֶךְ הַקֶּרֶשׁ וְאַמָּה וַחֲצִי הָאַמָּה רֹחַב הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד: יז שְׁתֵּי יָדוֹת
לַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד מְשֻׁלָּבֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ כֵּן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל קַרְשֵׁי
הַמִּשְׁכָּן: יח וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים לַמִּשְׁכָּן עֶשְׂרִים קֶרֶשׁ לִפְאַת נֶגְבָּה
תֵּימָנָה: יט וְאַרְבָּעִים אַדְנֵי־כֶסֶף תַּעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת עֶשְׂרִים הַקֶּרֶשׁ שְׁנֵי
אֲדָנִים תַּחַת־הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד לִשְׁתֵּי יְדֹתָיו וּשְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת־הַקֶּרֶשׁ
הָאֶחָד לִשְׁתֵּי יְדֹתָיו: כ וּלְצֶלַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן הַשֵּׁנִית לִפְאַת צָפוֹן עֶשְׂרִים
קָרֶשׁ: כא וְאַרְבָּעִים אַדְנֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד וּשְׁנֵי
אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד: כב וּלְיַרְכְּתֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן יָמָּה תַּעֲשֶׂה שִׁשָּׁה
קְרָשִׁים: כג וּשְׁנֵי קְרָשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂה לִמְקֻצֹעֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן בַּיַּרְכָתָיִם: כד וְיִהְיוּ
תֹאֲמִם מִלְּמַטָּה וְיַחְדָּו יִהְיוּ תַמִּים עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ אֶל־הַטַּבַּעַת הָאֶחָת כֵּן
יִהְיֶה לִשְׁנֵיהֶם לִשְׁנֵי הַמִּקְצֹעֹת יִהְיוּ: כה וְהָיוּ שְׁמֹנֶה קְרָשִׁים וְאַדְנֵיהֶם
כֶּסֶף שִׁשֶּׁה עָשָׂר אֲדָנִים שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד וּשְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים
תַּחַת הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד: כו וְעָשִׂיתָ בְרִיחִם עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים חֲמִשָּׁה לְקַרְשֵׁי
צֶלַע־הַמִּשְׁכָּן הָאֶחָד: כז וַחֲמִשָּׁה בְרִיחִם לְקַרְשֵׁי צֶלַע־הַמִּשְׁכָּן הַשֵּׁנִית
וַחֲמִשָּׁה בְרִיחִם לְקַרְשֵׁי צֶלַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְיַרְכְּתַיִם יָמָּה: כח וְהַבְּרִיחַ
הַתִּיכֹן בְּתוֹךְ הַקְּרָשִׁים מִבְרַח מִן־הַקָּצֶה אֶל־הַקָּצֶה: כט וְאֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים
תְּצַפֶּה זָהָב וְאֶת־טַבְּעֹתֵיהֶם תַּעֲשֶׂה זָהָב בָּתִּים לַבְּרִיחִם וְצִפִּיתָ אֶת־
הַבְּרִיחִם זָהָב: ל וַהֲקֵמֹתָ אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן כְּמִשְׁפָּטוֹ אֲשֶׁר הָרְאֵיתָ בָּהָר:

(15) **You shall make the planks for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, upright.**

(16) **The length of each plank shall be ten cubits and the width of each plank a cubit and a half.**

(17) **Each plank shall have two tenons, parallel to each other; do the same with all the planks of the Tabernacle.**

(18) **Of the planks of the Tabernacle, make twenty planks on the south side:**

(19) **making forty silver sockets under the twenty planks, two sockets under the one plank for its two tenons and two sockets under each following plank for its two tenons;**

(20) **and for the other side wall of the Tabernacle, on the north side, twenty planks,**

(21) **with their forty silver sockets, two sockets under the one plank and two sockets under each following plank.**

(22) **And for the rear of the Tabernacle, to the west, make six planks;**

(23) **and make two planks for the corners of the Tabernacle at the rear.**

(24) **They shall match at the bottom, and terminate alike at the top inside one ring; thus shall it be with both of them: they shall form the two corners.**

(25) **Thus there shall be eight planks with their sockets of silver: sixteen sockets, two sockets under the first plank, and two sockets under each of the other planks.**

(26) **You shall make bars of acacia wood: five for the planks of the one side wall of the Tabernacle,**

(27) **five bars for the planks of the other side wall of the Tabernacle, and five bars for the planks of the wall of the Tabernacle at the rear to the west.**

(28) **The center bar halfway up the planks shall run from end to end.**

(29) **Overlay the planks with gold, and make their rings of gold, as holders for the bars; and overlay the bars with gold.**

(30) Then set up the Tabernacle according to the manner of it that you were shown on the mountain.

(15-16) **You shall make the planks for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, upright. The length of each plank shall be ten cubits and the width of each plank a cubit and a half**: The walls of the Tabernacle were assembled from flat planks, each approximately 5 m × 75 cm × 25 cm (16 ft × 30 in × 10 in).

(17) **Each plank shall have two tenons, parallel to each other; do the same with all the planks of the Tabernacle**: The boards fit snugly against one another, and the tenons held them together.

(18) **Of the planks of the Tabernacle, make twenty planks on the south side**: The length of a wall of the Tabernacle is 30 cubits = approx. 15 m (49 ft).

(19) **Making forty silver sockets under the twenty planks, two sockets under the one plank for its two tenons and two sockets under each following plank for its two tenons**: Each plank stood on two "feet."

Forty silver sockets: As noted earlier, everything in the tabernacle that is in the nature of a "base" (foundation) is made of silver.

(22) **And for the rear of the Tabernacle, to the west, make six planks**: The width of the Tabernacle is 10 cubits = 5 m (16.4 ft). The covering was 7 meters (23 ft) larger, partially covering the planks on the north and south sides. The second covering reached the ground on the south, north, and west, but overhung by only a cubit on the east.

(23) **And make two planks for the corners of the Tabernacle at the rear**: At the entrance to the Tabernacle, which was on the east, there was a curtain (and not a wall).

(24) **They shall match at the bottom, and terminate alike at the top inside one ring; thus shall it be with both of them: they shall form the two corners**: The bars must fit snugly together at the bottom, so that the thickness of the walls of the two feet will not separate them or push them apart. At the top of each plank was a furrow at both edges, into which rings were inserted, to connect each of the two neighboring bars.

Thus shall it be with both of them: they shall form the two corners: The two corner planks were likewise connected from above by rings, but these rings were larger than the ones along the walls.

(25) **Thus there shall be eight planks with their sockets of silver**: sixteen sockets, two sockets under the first plank, and two sockets under each of the other planks: This refers to the rear, western side of the Tabernacle. It had six planks of its own, and "two planks in thickness" from each of the longitudinal walls.

(26-29) **You shall make bars of acacia wood**: five for the planks of the one side wall of the Tabernacle, five bars for the planks of the other side … and five bars for the … rear … Overlay the planks with gold, and make their rings of gold … and overlay the bars with gold: Rings were fastened to the planks on the outside, into which bars were inserted horizontally, connecting several planks together. All the walls of the Tabernacle were coated with gold both inside and out.

(28) **The center bar halfway up the planks shall run from end to end**: "The planks supporting the curtains of the Tabernacle" (that is, the Jewish people) have several types of connections. Every human being has his own internal "supports"; he is connected to his fellow man with "rings," and "localized bars" connect groups of people who are closely associated. Finally, there is also the internal "center bar" (not visible from the outside) that passes through all of humanity, uniting them as a single entity. This system of multilayered bonding creates social cohesion.

(30) **Then set up the Tabernacle according to the manner of it that you were shown on the mountain**: Moses received on Mount Sinai not only the details of the Tabernacle's individual components, but instructions for its overall assembly as well.

22.8. THE CURTAINS, AND THE POSITIONING OF THE TABERNACLE'S VESSELS (26:31-37)

The Tabernacle's Interior Curtain:

לא וְעָשִׂיתָ פָּרֹכֶת תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר מַעֲשֵׂה
חֹשֵׁב יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ כְּרֻבִים: לב וְנָתַתָּה אֹתָהּ עַל־אַרְבָּעָה עַמּוּדֵי
שִׁטִּים מְצֻפִּים זָהָב וָוֵיהֶם זָהָב עַל־אַרְבָּעָה אַדְנֵי־כָסֶף: לג וְנָתַתָּה

אֶת־הַפָּרֹכֶת׃ תַּחַת הַקְּרָסִים׃ וְהֵבֵאתָ שָׁמָּה מִבֵּית לַפָּרֹכֶת אֵת אֲרֹן
הָעֵדֻת וְהִבְדִּילָה הַפָּרֹכֶת לָכֶם בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים:
לד וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עַל אֲרֹן הָעֵדֻת בְּקֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים: לה וְשַׁמְתָּ
אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן מִחוּץ לַפָּרֹכֶת וְאֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה נֹכַח הַשֻּׁלְחָן עַל צֶלַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן
תֵּימָנָה וְהַשֻּׁלְחָן תִּתֵּן עַל־צֶלַע צָפוֹן: לו וְעָשִׂיתָ מָסָךְ לְפֶתַח הָאֹהֶל
תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֵם: לז וְעָשִׂיתָ
לַמָּסָךְ חֲמִשָּׁה עַמּוּדֵי שִׁטִּים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם זָהָב וָוֵיהֶם זָהָב וְיָצַקְתָּ לָהֶם
חֲמִשָּׁה אַדְנֵי נְחֹשֶׁת:

(31) You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen; it shall have a design of cherubim worked into it.

(32) Hang it upon four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and having hooks of gold, [set] in four sockets of silver.

(33) Hang the curtain under the clasps, and carry the Ark of the Pact there, behind the curtain, so that the curtain shall serve you as a partition between the Holy and the Holy of Holies.

(34) Place the cover upon the Ark of the Pact in the Holy of Holies.

(35) Place the table outside the curtain, and the lampstand by the south wall of the Tabernacle opposite the table, which is to be placed by the north wall.

(36) You shall make a screen for the entrance of the Tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, done in embroidery.

(37) Make five posts of acacia wood for the screen and overlay them with gold — their hooks being of gold — and cast for them five sockets of copper.

(31) **You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen; it shall have a design of cherubim worked into it**: Cherubim separate worlds having different levels of holiness. The cherubim on the inner curtain separate the "ordinary" Holy, i.e., the general Tabernacle premises, from the Holy of Holies.

(32) **Hang it upon four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and having hooks of gold, [set] in four sockets of silver**: There is no flooring inside the Tabernacle; it simply stands on the bare ground. The posts for the curtain are therefore installed in a manner similar to the planks of the walls. However, the posts (unlike the wall planks) have only one foot each, not two.

(33) **Hang the curtain under the clasps, and carry the Ark of the Pact there, behind the curtain, so that the curtain shall serve you as a partition between the Holy and the Holy of Holies**: The Hebrew *ve-hivdilah*, here translated as "shall serve as a partition," can also have the less physical, more conceptual meaning of "shall distinguish." That is, the curtain serves to distinguish between two essential, conceptual levels of holiness.

The Holy and the Holy of Holies represent two different levels of sanctity. The lampstand and the table in the "Holy" (the outer sanctuary) are symbolic of two domains of sanctity that are inherent in everyday life – wisdom and prosperity, respectively – and God's presence in each of those. But that "lower" level of sanctity is nourished from a higher, transcendental sanctity, the Holy of Holies – the ark, and the revelation that emanates from it.

(34) **Place the cover upon the Ark of the Pact in the Holy of Holies**: After this difference in the levels of holiness has been established, i.e., the distinction between the spirituality of ordinary life versus Divine revelation, only then does "ongoing revelation" become possible, as represented by the cover of the ark.

(35) **Place the table outside the curtain, and the lampstand by the south wall of the Tabernacle opposite the table, which is to be placed by the north wall**: The balance of the table and the lampstand, as discussed earlier, is here emphasized. The entrance to the Tabernacle (and also the Temple) was from the east, such that the table was to the right of the person entering, and the menorah to his left.

(36) **You shall make a screen for the entrance of the Tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, done in embroidery**: This is the Tabernacle's outer curtain, positioned at the entrance to it.

(37) **Make five posts of acacia wood for the screen and overlay them with gold — their hooks being of gold — and cast for them five sockets of copper**: Here we have gold and copper used together, which in the Tabernacle is not typical.

Since this screen separates the Tabernacle from the courtyard (the "enclosure," 27:9), in deference to the former its pillars are covered with gold. But the sockets, like most things in the courtyard, were designed for cleansing (that is, for preparing the visitor for entry to the actual Tabernacle), and were therefore made of copper.

22.9. THE ALTAR OF THE BURNT OFFERING (27:1-8)

א וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים חָמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת אֹרֶךְ וְחָמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת
רֹחַב רָבוּעַ יִהְיֶה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשָׁלֹשׁ אַמּוֹת קֹמָתוֹ: ב וְעָשִׂיתָ קַרְנֹתָיו עַל
אַרְבַּע פִּנֹּתָיו מִמֶּנּוּ תִּהְיֶין קַרְנֹתָיו וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ נְחֹשֶׁת: ג וְעָשִׂיתָ סִּירֹתָיו
לְדַשְּׁנוֹ וְיָעִיו וּמִזְרְקֹתָיו וּמִזְלְגֹתָיו וּמַחְתֹּתָיו לְכָל־כֵּלָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה נְחֹשֶׁת:
ד וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ מִכְבָּר מַעֲשֵׂה רֶשֶׁת נְחֹשֶׁת וְעָשִׂיתָ עַל־הָרֶשֶׁת אַרְבַּע
טַבְּעֹת נְחֹשֶׁת עַל אַרְבַּע קְצוֹתָיו: ה וְנָתַתָּה אֹתָהּ תַּחַת כַּרְכֹּב הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
מִלְּמָטָּה וְהָיְתָה הָרֶשֶׁת עַד חֲצִי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ו וְעָשִׂיתָ בַדִּים לַמִּזְבֵּחַ בַּדֵּי
עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם נְחֹשֶׁת: ז וְהוּבָא אֶת־בַּדָּיו בַּטַּבָּעֹת וְהָיוּ הַבַּדִּים
עַל־שְׁתֵּי צַלְעֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בִּשְׂאֵת אֹתוֹ: ח נְבוּב לֻחֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר
הֶרְאָה אֹתְךָ בָּהָר כֵּן יַעֲשׂוּ:

(1) **You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide — the altar is to be square — and three cubits high.**

(2) **Make its horns on the four corners, the horns to be of one piece with it; and overlay it with copper.**

(3) **Make the pails for removing its ashes, as well as its scrapers, basins, flesh hooks, and fire pans — make all its utensils of copper.**

(4) **Make for it a grating of meshwork in copper; and on the mesh make four copper rings at its four corners.**

(5) **Set the mesh below, under the ledge of the altar, so that it extends to the middle of the altar.**

(6) **And make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with copper.**

(7) **The poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles remain on the two sides of the altar when it is carried.**

(8) **Make it hollow, of boards. As you were shown on the mountain, so shall they be made.**

(1) **You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide — the altar is to be square — and three cubits high**: This is the outer altar that stood in the courtyard of the temple, and was used for performing and burning the sacrifices. (The inner altar, the altar of incense, is described not in this weekly portion, but only in the following one, at 30:1 ff.).

(2) **Make its horns on the four corners, the horns to be of one piece with it**: The horns of the altar are a symbol of power and grandeur (as they are on horned animals), and also of directing one's thoughts and emotions upward, toward Heaven. Moreover, Hebrew keren means not only "horn," but also "beam" or "ray" (of light, e.g.). The verbal form, karan, is the word the Torah uses (34:29) to describe the radiance of Moses' face when he descended from Mount Sinai. Thus, the horns of the altar incorporate all of the above associations.

(2-3) **And overlay it with copper … make all its utensils of copper**: The altar and its utensils are made of copper, because their purpose is preparation – viz., to prepare a person for advancing toward holiness.

(4) **Make for it a grating of meshwork in copper**: The grating facilitates the proper burning of the sacrifices.

(7-8) **The poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles remain on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. Make it hollow, of boards**: The walls of the altar were wooden planks sheathed with copper on the outside. Inside it was hollow, which made it light enough to be carried on poles. When at each encampment in the wilderness the Tabernacle was reassembled for use, the altar was filled with earth, in accordance with the commandment "Make for Me an altar of earth" (20:21).

22.10. THE TABERNACLE'S ENCLOSURE (27:9-19)

ט וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת חֲצַר הַמִּשְׁכָּן לִפְאַת נֶגֶב־תֵּימָנָה קְלָעִים לֶחָצֵר שֵׁשׁ
מָשְׁזָר מֵאָה בָאַמָּה אֹרֶךְ לַפֵּאָה הָאֶחָת: י וְעַמֻּדָיו עֶשְׂרִים וְאַדְנֵיהֶם
עֶשְׂרִים נְחֹשֶׁת וָוֵי הָעַמֻּדִים וַחֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם כָּסֶף: יא וְכֵן לִפְאַת צָפוֹן
בָּאֹרֶךְ קְלָעִים מֵאָה אֹרֶךְ וְעַמֻּדָו עֶשְׂרִים וְאַדְנֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרִים נְחֹשֶׁת וָוֵי
הָעַמֻּדִים וַחֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם כָּסֶף: יב וְרֹחַב הֶחָצֵר לִפְאַת־יָם קְלָעִים חֲמִשִּׁים
אַמָּה עַמֻּדֵיהֶם עֲשָׂרָה וְאַדְנֵיהֶם עֲשָׂרֶה: יג וְרֹחַב הֶחָצֵר לִפְאַת קֵדְמָה
מִזְרָחָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה: יד וַחֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה אַמָּה קְלָעִים לַכָּתֵף עַמֻּדֵיהֶם
שְׁלֹשָׁה וְאַדְנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה: טו וְלַכָּתֵף הַשֵּׁנִית חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה קְלָעִים
עַמֻּדֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה וְאַדְנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה: טז וּלְשַׁעַר הֶחָצֵר מָסָךְ | עֶשְׂרִים
אַמָּה תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֵם עַמֻּדֵיהֶם
אַרְבָּעָה וְאַדְנֵיהֶם אַרְבָּעָה: יז כָּל־עַמּוּדֵי הֶחָצֵר סָבִיב מְחֻשָּׁקִים כֶּסֶף
וָוֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְאַדְנֵיהֶם נְחֹשֶׁת: יח אֹרֶךְ הֶחָצֵר מֵאָה בָאַמָּה וְרֹחַב |
חֲמִשִּׁים בַּחֲמִשִּׁים וְקֹמָה חָמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת שֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר וְאַדְנֵיהֶם נְחֹשֶׁת:
יט לְכֹל כְּלֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן בְּכֹל עֲבֹדָתוֹ וְכָל־יְתֵדֹתָיו וְכָל־יִתְדֹּת הֶחָצֵר נְחֹשֶׁת:

(9) **You shall make the enclosure of the Tabernacle: On the south side, a hundred cubits of hangings of fine twisted linen for the length of the enclosure on that side —**

(10) **with its twenty posts and their twenty sockets of copper, the hooks and bands of the posts to be of silver.**

(11) **Again a hundred cubits of hangings for its length along the north side — with its twenty posts and their twenty sockets of copper, the hooks and bands of the posts to be of silver.**

(12) **For the width of the enclosure, on the west side, fifty cubits of hangings, with their ten posts and their ten sockets.**

(13) **For the width of the enclosure on the front, or east side, fifty cubits:**

(14) **fifteen cubits of hangings on the one flank, with their three posts and their three sockets;**

(15) **fifteen cubits of hangings on the other flank, with their three posts and their three sockets;**

(16) and for the gate of the enclosure, a screen of twenty cubits, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, done in embroidery, with their four posts and their four sockets.

(17) All the posts round the enclosure shall be banded with silver and their hooks shall be of silver; their sockets shall be of copper.

(18) The length of the enclosure shall be a hundred cubits, and the width fifty throughout; and the height five cubits — [with hangings] of fine twisted linen. The sockets shall be of copper:

(19) all the utensils of the Tabernacle, for all its service, as well as all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of copper.

(9) **You shall make the enclosure of the Tabernacle**: On the south side: In Hebrew, this enclosure is called *chatzer*, meaning, simply, "courtyard" or "court." The Tabernacle's courtyard was fenced in with "hangings" that hung on posts and were fastened with pegs and tension ropes.

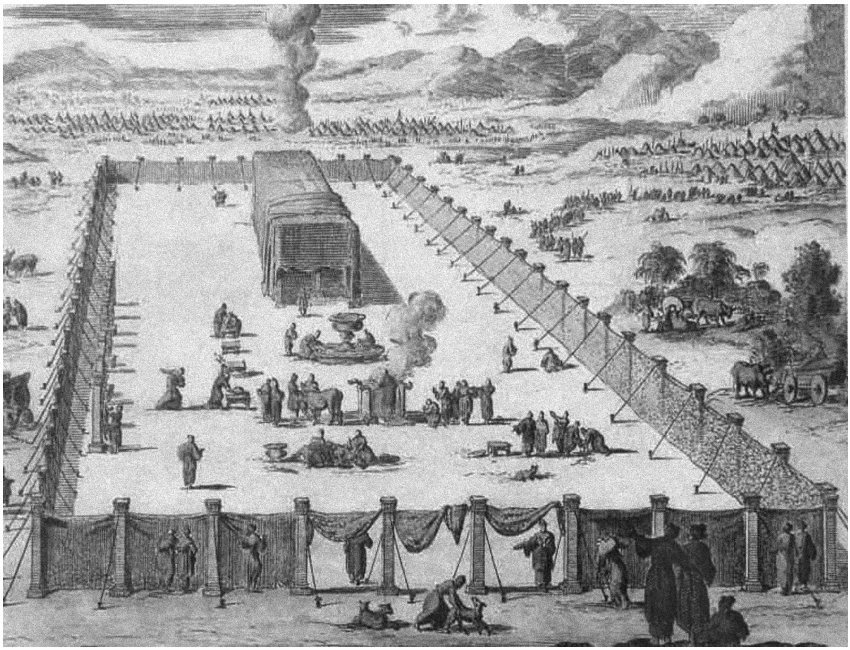
Of fine twisted linen: The courtyard ("enclosure"), which serves as portal for entering the Tabernacle itself, expresses the idea that "purity" (*tohorah*) is a prerequisite for achieving holiness. The white linen hangings of the courtyard also highlight this point.

A hundred cubits ... for the length ... on that side: The dimensions of the courtyard are 100 × 50 cubits = 50 × 25 m (164 × 82 ft).

(10) **With its twenty posts and their twenty sockets of copper**: Each of these posts shall have one foot at its base.

(11) **Sockets of copper, the hooks and bands of the posts to be of silver**: We saw earlier that the fasteners for the planks of the Tabernacle (its bolts and rings) were made of gold, and the feet were of silver. Here, for the courtyard, the fasteners are of silver, and the feet are made of copper.

(12) **For the width of the enclosure, on the west side, fifty cubits of hangings, with their ten posts and their ten sockets**: This is the rear of the courtyard.



A general view of the Tabernacle (an assumed reconstruction).

(13-16) **For the width of the enclosure on the front, or east side, fifty cubits: fifteen cubits of hangings on the one flank … fifteen cubits of hangings on the other flank … and for the gate of the enclosure, a screen of twenty cubits**: Thus, on the east there were two portions of hangings, each fifteen cubits wide, on either side of the central entrance. The entrance itself, twenty cubits wide, was blocked by a special screen, except that the screen was positioned not directly in line with the two hangings, but set off from it a small distance toward the inside of the courtyard, thus allowing entry to the courtyard by walking around the screen.

Of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, done in embroidery: The hangings that surrounded the courtyard were made of white linen, but the central screen, at the entrance, was colored, like the curtain at the entrance to the Tabernacle.

(18) **The length of the enclosure shall be a hundred cubits, and the width fifty throughout**: Given that we already know from the foregoing description that the courtyard was rectangular, and that its shorter dimension (on the east and the west) was fifty cubits, it is not clear why the Torah needs to add "and the width fifty throughout." This passage is therefore understood as follows. The full length of the courtyard, one hundred cubits, was notionally divided into two widths of fifty cubits each; that is, the courtyard was conceptually divided into two equal parts, each a square of 50 × 50 cubits. The front (eastern) half of the courtyard contained the altar and its surrounding space, while the Tabernacle was located at the courtyard's far (western) half.

And the height five cubits — [with hangings]: The height of the enclosure is half that of the Tabernacle itself (see 26:16); thus the Tabernacle is prominently visible from afar.

(19) **All the utensils of the Tabernacle … all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of copper**: Tension ropes tied to the pegs of the Tabernacle that were driven into the ground held its coverings tight (see 35:18). Likewise, the purpose of the courtyard's ropes and pegs was to hold the courtyard's posts tightly in place.

WEEKLY
PORTION [8]

TETZAVEH

CHAPTER 23

AARON'S TEMPLEE

23.1. KINDLING THE MENORAH (27:20-21)

כ וְאַתָּה תְּצַוֶּה | אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ שֶׁמֶן זַיִת זָךְ כָּתִית
לַמָּאוֹר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד: כא בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד מִחוּץ לַפָּרֹכֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־
הָעֵדֻת יַעֲרֹךְ אֹתוֹ אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו מֵעֶרֶב עַד־בֹּקֶר לִפְנֵי יְיָ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם
לְדֹרֹתָם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

(20) You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly.

(21) Aaron and his sons shall set them up in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain which is over [the Ark of] the Pact, [to burn] from evening to morning before the Lord. It shall be a due from the Israelites for all time, throughout the ages.

(20-21) **You shall further instruct the Israelites**: More literally, "You shall further command the Israelites." As noted earlier, both the previous weekly portion, *Terumah*, and this one now beginning, *Tetzaveh*, provide detailed descriptions of the Tabernacle, but from two different viewpoints – Moses' and Aaron's, respectively.

We also noted that the word *Terumah* means "voluntary offering," while *Tetzaveh* denotes a firm and obligatory command. These two portion names likewise reflect the difference between Moses' and Aaron's understanding of the essence of human nature (and the role that the Temple plays in human life).

Moses' approach is based on a fundamental trust in people and in humanity. Moses believes that man, who is by his nature not sinful but righteous, will do everything he possibly can to advance Divine ideals in the world. We only need to explain those ideals to him, so that he knows what is to be done.

Aaron, on the other hand, believes that man's essential nature is to sin, to stray, and to err, and that without firm orders imposed on him from the outside, he can never recover from his failings. Commandments and orders are therefore a key element of Aaron's viewpoint.

To bring you clear oil: "Clear" in this context means devoid of any sediment.

Of beaten olives: The process of obtaining oil from olives happens in two stages. First the olives are squeezed, or pounded in a mortar; this yields the highest grade oil, clear of any sediment. At the second stage the olives, including the pits, are ground between millstones; the resulting oil now contains sediment. For lighting the menorah, only the oil of the first stage is suitable, "of beaten olives," – beaten but not crushed. For the meal offerings (which had to be mixed with oil), the oil of the second stage is also suitable.

For lighting, for kindling lamps regularly: The commentators note that it is usually much easier to collect donations for creating something extraordinary and monumental, than for supporting just the run-of-the-mill daily operations. A monumental creation endures, and can include a tablet listing the names of all the donors, to be viewed by their descendants, who will take pride in the generosity of their ancestors, and its visible results.

But contributions for regular, daily operations, on the other hand, are spent without leaving any lasting, "tangible memory." People are thus far more inclined to contribute for the exquisite, solid-gold menorah than for the oil that it burns daily with no trace of it remaining. Thus, donations for creating the menorah itself can be collected on a voluntary basis (*terumah*), but collections to finance the oil must be made mandatory (*tetzaveh*).

For lighting: Aaron's primary task in the Temple is thus, in a sense, the kindling of the lamp. This is the very first commandment mentioned

in connection with the Temple service, because the true essence of the Temple is not sacrifice, but illumination and enlightenment.

For kindling lamps regularly … from evening to morning: *Tamid* means "regularly," not "perpetually without any interruption whatsoever." (Indeed, it was normal for the light of the menorah to burn out each morning, and to be rekindled anew later the same day). This meaning of *tamid* can be seen likewise in the *korban ha-tamid*, the "perpetual" daily sacrifice offered each day in the Temple (twice each day, actually), as we will read toward the end of this *Tetzaveh* portion (29:38 ff.).

The menorah was kindled each evening, and it burned until the following morning.

Notwithstanding everything just written about the meaning of *tamid*, there is in fact an alternate opinion that the central ("western") lamp of the seven individual lamps of the menorah did have to burn perpetually and continuously, and the remaining six lamps were lit from it each evening.

(21) **Aaron and his sons shall set them up in the Tent of Meeting**: *Ohel mo'ed*, the "Tent of Meeting" is another name for the Tabernacle, which emphasizes that its main purpose is to enable a person to "meet his Maker" even while living right here on this earth.

Outside the curtain which is over [the Ark of] the Pact: Here the menorah is contrasted with the ark. The ark (God's voice), located behind the curtain, needs no "maintenance," for it functions on its own. But the menorah, located "outside the curtain" (and representing the light emanating from the Jewish people's spiritual activities), required constant care. The priests cleaned the menorah, added oil, and kindled it, all on a daily basis. Similarly, the table required its "bread of display" to be replaced weekly. Spiritual and material success both require constant work.

These two forms of revelation, of the ark and of the menorah, manifest through different channels – the ark through audible sound, and the menorah through light. The task of the Jewish people (the "menorah") is not to transmit God's orders in their direct form, but to illuminate the world so that deeper meanings then become visible, thus enabling the peoples of the world to perceive the Divine message. The voice that

emanates from the ark cannot be properly understood without the light of the menorah. The Jewish people's light is of course on an incomparably lower level than that of Divine revelation, but their spiritual light is able, nonetheless, to illuminate the path of mankind with that revelation.

It shall be a due from the Israelites for all time, throughout the ages: The priests service the needs of the people, and serve on their behalf. The purpose of priests in Judaism is not to appease God, as other religious systems believed in antiquity, but to create favorable conditions for an encounter to take place between the Jewish people and God.

23.2. THE ELEVATION OF THE PRIESTS AND THEIR GARMENTS (28:1-5)

א וְאַתָּה הַקְרֵב אֵלֶיךָ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכַהֲנוֹ־לִי אַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אֶלְעָזָר וְאִיתָמָר בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן:
ב וְעָשִׂיתָ בִגְדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ לְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ לְכָבוֹד וּלְתִפְאָרֶת: ג וְאַתָּה תְּדַבֵּר
אֶל־כָּל־חַכְמֵי־לֵב אֲשֶׁר מִלֵּאתִיו רוּחַ חָכְמָה וְעָשׂוּ אֶת־בִּגְדֵי אַהֲרֹן
לְקַדְּשׁוֹ לְכַהֲנוֹ־לִי: ד וְאֵלֶּה הַבְּגָדִים אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ חֹשֶׁן וְאֵפוֹד וּמְעִיל
וּכְתֹנֶת תַּשְׁבֵּץ מִצְנֶפֶת וְאַבְנֵט וְעָשׂוּ בִגְדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ לְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וּלְבָנָיו
לְכַהֲנוֹ־לִי: ה וְהֵם יִקְחוּ אֶת־הַזָּהָב וְאֶת־הַתְּכֵלֶת וְאֶת־הָאַרְגָּמָן וְאֶת־
תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וְאֶת־הַשֵּׁשׁ:

(1) **You shall bring forward your brother Aaron, with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve Me as priests: Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron.**

(2) **Make sacral vestments for your brother Aaron, for dignity and adornment.**

(3) **Next you shall instruct all who are skillful, whom I have endowed with the gift of skill, to make Aaron's vestments, for consecrating him to serve Me as priest.**

(4) **These are the vestments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a fringed tunic, a headdress, and a sash. They**

shall make those sacral vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons, for priestly service to Me;

(5) **they, therefore, shall receive the gold, the blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and the fine linen.**

(1) **You shall bring forward your brother Aaron, with his sons**: Literally, "Bring close to you your brother Aaron and his sons." Moses must keep Aaron close to him. That is, even in the Temple service, which is the priests' domain, Moses leads, and Aaron, in the role of High Priest, is only his assistant.

Your brother Aaron, with his sons, from among the Israelites: They put the priesthood into practice on behalf of the entire nation.

Here God addresses Moses ("You shall bring forward"), but not by name; only Aaron's name is mentioned. Moreover, Moses' name is not mentioned throughout this entire weekly portion *Tetzaveh*, even when the context would seem to require it. It is thus obvious that the Torah's intention is to highlight Aaron's function while remaining silent about Moses.

And conversely, in the previous portion, *Terumah*, Aaron is not mentioned even when the context clearly requires that. For example, in discussing the table and the bread of display, the Torah only says, quite impersonally, "And on the table you shall set the bread of display, to be before Me always" (25:30), although it was in fact Aaron's (i.e., the priests') job each week to replace those breads on the table with fresh loaves.

You shall bring forward your brother Aaron: Moses must draw Aaron close to him, because Aaron is seen as complementing Moses, and not vice versa. Everything begins with revelation; atonement for sin is only an adjunct to that. If Aaron leads, that is, if sins and atonement become the dominant religious theme and capture all the attention, this will inevitably lead to the creation of the golden calf, which is in fact exactly what does happen when Aaron keeps himself at a distance from Moses.

If the essence of serving God is cleansing ourselves from sin, this would mean that sin is something wonderful, because the sin that we are correcting is the vehicle that brings us closer to God. And conversely,

serving God would be utterly pointless without the sin that must be cleansed.

That would further imply that this religious approach actually *wants* a person to sin, and is more interested in a person *because* he is a sinner. Any such point of view represents God in a truly horrendous form – as having created mankind as sinners, precisely so that there would be someone to whom He could grant atonement. As bizarre as all this sounds, it is exactly what Judaism would look like if Aaron's approach were allowed to prevail over Moses' approach.

Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron: The four sons of Aaron who now receive the priesthood are enumerated. Moreover, the priesthood they are receiving will likewise pass to their descendants after them who are here not yet born. Note, however, that Aaron's grandsons who do already exist are not mentioned here. Thus, those grandsons did not receive the priesthood automatically. This turned out to be a problem for Phinehas, Elazar's son, in particular. (See *Bible Dynamics* on Num. 25:11).

(2) **Make sacral vestments for your brother Aaron, for dignity and adornment**: The clothes of the priests are designed to impress the people and influence them emotionally. We could say that in some sense, the priests are not personalities in their own right; they are in the category of "Temple vessels": There is the menorah, there is the table, there is the altar, and there are priests – all having the exact same weight and significance.

While performing the Temple service the priests forfeit their individuality, for there they are only a connecting link between man and God. Just as the table and the menorah and the altar meet well-defined specifications, and cannot otherwise fulfill their designated functions, so too the priests must be dressed in special garments, without which they cannot fulfill their function in the Temple. And just as the Temple utensils must be consecrated to make them fit for Temple service, so too must the priests be consecrated.

We note, however, that there are other situations where the priests, even while performing functions prescribed by the Torah, retain their individuality – for example, when the priests are consulted for rendering

legal decisions (Deut. 17:9). The priests appear in such situations without their priestly raiment, which they wear in the Temple exclusively.

(3) **Next you shall instruct all who are skillful, whom I have endowed with the gift of skill, to make Aaron's vestments, for consecrating him to serve Me as priest**: The literal translation is: "And you shall speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom." Only individuals who are already wise at heart can be filled with wisdom. Divine light comes to those who are already advancing towards it.

(4) **These are the vestments they are to make … for priestly service to Me**: The garments of the priests are so important that their description occupies very considerable space in the Torah, notwithstanding that Moses himself needs no sacred garments for entering the Temple.

It should also be noted that the clothes of kings, prophets, and judges are not mentioned in the Torah at all. Only for Aaron and his descendants do clothes assume such an elevated level of importance. Because Aaron's Temple exists for the cleansing of sins, the priestly garments play a special role in that process. As we shall presently explain, the priestly garments correspond to those aspects of human nature that are the very source of those sins – the reasons that those sins are committed, and must be corrected.

The priests' clothing is meant to create an impression in the minds of visitors to the Temple – to influence people, not God. The people who come to the Temple and see these clothes focus their attention on deliverance from their sins. The High Priest has to make a particularly strong impression, since he effects atonement for the sins of prominent, high-ranking members of society (see, e.g., Lev. 4:1-26). All this is why the priests' garments had to be so splendid in their appearance.

A breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a fringed tunic, a headdress, and a sash: An ordinary priest wore four garments, and the High Priest four more in addition to those. The four basic priestly garments were designed to counter man's raw passions and sinful inclinations, to purify him "from head to toe":

1. Breeches (*michnasayim*) – "correction of the legs," sexual passions;

2. Sash (*avnet*) – "correction of the abdomen," of emotions, "ruminations of the heart";

3. Tunic (*kutonet*) – "correction of the breast," of actions: refraining from violence;

4. Headdress (*mitznefet*, turban) – "correction of the head": refraining from crudity toward others.

In addition to those four basic garments worn by ordinary priests, the additional four worn by the High Priest were aimed at correcting the passions of a refined personalities:

5. Ephod (an apron-like accessory) – correction of idolatrous inclinations;

6. Breastpiece (*choshen*) – correction of erroneous orders and erroneous court decisions;

7. Robe (*me'il*) – correction of the inclination to speak leshon hara ("evil speech");

8. Diadem (*tzitz*) – correction of arrogance.

Thus, two levels of effort are needed – the basic level and the more advanced level – for correcting the human soul, as executed by the ordinary priests and the High Priest, respectively.

The Torah's description of the priestly garments that follows begins with the special garments of the High Priest, and only then moves on to the garments common to all priests. This is because the *kohen gadol* (High Priest) represents the very essence of the Temple service, while the status of the *kohen hedyot* (ordinary priest) can be seen as derivative from the status of the *kohen gadol*.

The number of priestly robes, eight, symbolizes man's superiority over nature. The number seven represents nature, and it is nature that leads to sin. To overcome sin, one must rise above nature.

(5) **They, therefore, shall receive the gold, the blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and the fine linen**: The materials needed for making the priests' garments are the same as the materials use to make the covers of the Tabernacle (26:1), because the priests are seen as "utensils" of the Temple.

23.3. THE EPHOD (28:6-14)

ו וְעָשׂוּ אֶת־הָאֵפֹד זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן תּוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר מַעֲשֵׂה
חֹשֵׁב: ז שְׁתֵּי כִתֵפֹת חֹבְרֹת יִהְיֶה־לּוֹ אֶל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו וְחֻבָּר: ח וְחֵשֶׁב
אֲפֻדָּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂהוּ מִמֶּנּוּ יִהְיֶה זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת
שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר: ט וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־שְׁתֵּי אַבְנֵי־שֹׁהַם וּפִתַּחְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶם
שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: י שִׁשָּׁה מִשְּׁמֹתָם עַל הָאֶבֶן הָאֶחָת וְאֶת־שְׁמֹת
הַשִּׁשָּׁה הַנּוֹתָרִים עַל־הָאֶבֶן הַשֵּׁנִית כְּתוֹלְדֹתָם: יא מַעֲשֵׂה חָרַשׁ אֶבֶן
פִּתּוּחֵי חוֹתָם תְּפַתַּח אֶת־שְׁתֵּי הָאֲבָנִים עַל־שְׁמֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֻסַבֹּת
מִשְׁבְּצֹת זָהָב תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם: יב וְשַׂמְתָּ אֶת־שְׁתֵּי הָאֲבָנִים עַל כִּתְפֹת
הָאֵפֹד אַבְנֵי זִכָּרֹן לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת־שְׁמוֹתָם לִפְנֵי יְי עַל־
שְׁתֵּי כְתֵפָיו לְזִכָּרֹן:

יג וְעָשִׂיתָ מִשְׁבְּצֹת זָהָב: יד וּשְׁתֵּי שַׁרְשְׁרֹת זָהָב טָהוֹר מִגְּבָלֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה
אֹתָם מַעֲשֵׂה עֲבֹת וְנָתַתָּה אֶת־שַׁרְשְׁרֹת הָעֲבֹתֹת עַל־הַמִּשְׁבְּצֹת:

(6) **They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, worked into designs.**

(7) **It shall have two shoulder-pieces attached; they shall be attached at its two ends.**

(8) **And the decorated band that is upon it shall be made like it, of one piece with it: of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen.**

(9) **Then take two lazuli stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel:**

(10) **six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth.**

(11) **On the two stones you shall make seal engravings — the work of a lapidary — of the names of the sons of Israel. Having bordered them with frames of gold,**

(12) **attach the two stones to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, as stones for remembrance of the Israelite people, whose names Aaron shall carry upon his two shoulder-pieces for remembrance before the Lord.**

(13) Then make frames of gold

(14) and two chains of pure gold; braid these like corded work, and fasten the corded chains to the frames.

The High Priest wearing his vestments, including the Robe, the Fringed Tunic, and the Breastplate.

(6) They shall make the ephod: The purpose of the ephod was to correct for idolatrous inclinations. These are especially dangerous for prominent, high-ranking individuals.

The ephod was an apron-like accessory worn in various ancient cults as a distinguishing mark of a religious servant. The book of Samuel (2 Sam. 6:14), says of King David, when he brought the ark to Jerusalem: "David whirled with all his might before the Lord; David was girt with a linen ephod."

The commentators explain that idolaters wore a similar apron on the front of the upper body, but the Torah prescribes that it be worn from behind and in a lower position, to disparage, as it were, that idolatrous practice. Thus, the ephod represents purifying – and to some extent integrating into the service of the Almighty – aspirations that fuel idolatry. But even so, they must occupy only a subordinate, even denigrated, position.

The worship of idolatry that was so prevalent in ancient times was not merely a consequence of ignorance; it was a feeling of having a real connection with higher worlds. But that connection was incorrectly realized. Although we must wage war against idolatry, ultimately it should not be abrogated or eradicated entirely; rather, the energy that feeds idolatry, properly redirected, must have a place in the monotheistic system.

23.4. THE BREASTPIECE (28:15-30)

טו וְעָשִׂיתָ חֹשֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֵׁב כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֵפֹד תַּעֲשֶׂנּוּ זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת
וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ: טז רָבוּעַ יִהְיֶה כָּפוּל
זֶרֶת אָרְכּוֹ וְזֶרֶת רָחְבּוֹ: יז וּמִלֵּאתָ בוֹ מִלֻּאַת אֶבֶן אַרְבָּעָה טוּרִים אֶבֶן
טֹור אֹדֶם פִּטְדָה וּבָרֶקֶת הַטּוּר הָאֶחָד: יח וְהַטּוּר הַשֵּׁנִי נֹפֶךְ סַפִּיר
וְיָהֲלֹם: יט וְהַטּוּר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לֶשֶׁם שְׁבוֹ וְאַחְלָמָה: כ וְהַטּוּר הָרְבִיעִי
תַּרְשִׁישׁ וְשֹׁהַם וְיָשְׁפֵה מְשֻׁבָּצִים זָהָב יִהְיוּ בְּמִלּוּאֹתָם: כא וְהָאֲבָנִים
תִּהְיֶיךָ עַל־שְׁמֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁתֵּים עֶשְׂרֵה עַל־שְׁמֹתָם פִּתּוּחֵי חוֹתָם
אִישׁ עַל־שְׁמוֹ תִּהְיֶיךָ לִשְׁנֵי עָשָׂר שָׁבָט: כב וְעָשִׂיתָ עַל־הַחֹשֶׁן שַׁרְשֹׁת
גַּבְלֵת מַעֲשֵׂה עֲבֹת זָהָב טָהוֹר: כג וְעָשִׂיתָ עַל־הַחֹשֶׁן שְׁתֵּי טַבְּעוֹת זָהָב
וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־שְׁתֵּי הַטַּבָּעוֹת עַל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן: כד וְנָתַתָּה אֶת־שְׁתֵּי
עֲבֹתֹת הַזָּהָב עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַטַּבָּעֹת אֶל־קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן: כה וְאֵת שְׁתֵּי קְצוֹת
שְׁתֵּי הָעֲבֹתֹת תִּתֵּן עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַמִּשְׁבְּצֹות וְנָתַתָּה עַל־כִּתְפוֹת הָאֵפֹד
אֶל־מוּל פָּנָיו: כו וְעָשִׂיתָ שְׁתֵּי טַבְּעוֹת זָהָב וְשַׂמְתָּ אֹתָם עַל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹת
הַחֹשֶׁן עַל־שְׂפָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר אֶל־עֵבֶר הָאֵפֹד בֵּיתָה: כז וְעָשִׂיתָ שְׁתֵּי טַבְּעוֹת
זָהָב וְנָתַתָּה אֹתָם עַל־שְׁתֵּי כִּתְפוֹת הָאֵפוֹד מִלְּמַטָּה מִמּוּל פָּנָיו לְעֻמַּת
מַחְבַּרְתּוֹ מִמַּעַל לְחֵשֶׁב הָאֵפוֹד: כח וְיִרְכְּסוּ אֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן מֵטַּבְּעֹתָו אֶל־
טַבְּעֹת הָאֵפוֹד בִּפְתִיל תְּכֵלֶת לִהְיֹות עַל־חֵשֶׁב הָאֵפוֹד וְלֹא־יִזַּח הַחֹשֶׁן
מֵעַל הָאֵפוֹד: כט וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת־שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט
עַל־לִבּוֹ בְּבֹאוֹ אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְזִכָּרֹן לִפְנֵי־יְי תָּמִיד: ל וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־חֹשֶׁן
הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֶת־הָאוּרִים וְאֶת־הַתֻּמִּים וְהָיוּ עַל־לֵב אַהֲרֹן בְּבֹאוֹ לִפְנֵי יְי
וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת־מִשְׁפַּט בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־לִבּוֹ לִפְנֵי יְי תָּמִיד:

(15) **You shall make a breastpiece of decision, worked into a design; make it in the style of the ephod: make it of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen.**

(16) **It shall be square and doubled, a span in length and a span in width.**

(17) **Set in it mounted stones, in four rows of stones. The first row shall be a row of carnelian, chrysolite, and emerald;**

(18) **the second row: a turquoise, a sapphire, and an amethyst;**

(19) **the third row: a jacinth, an agate, and a crystal;**

(20) **and the fourth row: a beryl, a lapis lazuli, and a jasper. They shall be framed with gold in their mountings.**

(21) **The stones shall correspond [in number] to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, corresponding to their names. They shall be engraved like seals, each with its name, for the twelve tribes.**

(22) **On the breastpiece make braided chains of corded work in pure gold.**

(23) **Make two rings of gold on the breastpiece, and fasten the two rings at the two ends of the breastpiece,**

(24) **attaching the two golden cords to the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece.**

(25) **Then fasten the two ends of the cords to the two frames, which you shall attach to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at the front.**

(26) **Make two rings of gold and attach them to the two ends of the breastpiece, at its inner edge, which faces the ephod.**

(27) **And make two other rings of gold and fasten them on the front of the ephod, low on the two shoulder-pieces, close to its seam above the decorated band.**

(28) **The breastpiece shall be held in place by a cord of blue from its rings to the rings of the ephod, so that the breastpiece rests on the decorated band and does not come loose from the ephod.**

(29) **Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel on the breastpiece of decision over his heart, when he enters the sanctuary, for remembrance before the Lord at all times.**

(30) **Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord at all times.**

(15) **You shall make a breastpiece of decision**: The *choshen mishpat* was a woven, double-folded accessory, measuring one handbreadth square, onto which twelve precious stones were fastened, three stones in each of four rows, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. Each stone reflected the unique features of its tribe.

The twelve precious stones of the High Priest's Breastplate (artist's conception).

The High Priest symbolizes the unity of the people. But because unity in no way implies identicality, it is expressed in the ephod not by a single large stone, nor even by twelve stones of the same color and type. The unity of the Jewish nation means uniting a multitude of different people of different tribes into a cohesive whole. This is what the variation in the stones in the breastpiece represents.

On each of the twelve stones the name of one of the tribes of Israel was engraved. In this case, Levi was included as one of the twelve tribes, which meant that Manasseh and Ephraim were subsumed under the rubric of a single stone, "the stone of the tribe of Joseph." Thus, the number of tribes and the number of stones coincided – twelve tribes and twelve stones.

We read just above: "Then take two lazuli stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel" (v. 9). The names of the twelve tribes were inscribed on the two shoulder clasps, six tribes on each of two stones. And twelve more stones were affixed to the breastpiece itself, with the name of a single tribe engraved on each stone. Thus, the name of each tribe appeared twice: in its group of six tribes on one of the two shoulders, and then again, individually on its own stone, on the breastpiece itself.

The lazuli stones on the two shoulders were identical, and thus effectively the same for all the tribes, while each of the twelve precious stones on the breastpiece itself was unique to its tribe. Thus, the idea of a common foundation complemented by the uniqueness of each tribe is

emphasized. This is the very idea that the garments of the High Priest are meant to symbolize.

Like all the priests' garments, the breastpiece served as one of the elements of correction for persons visiting the Temple. The needed correction in this case was for judicial errors – hence the full name of the breastpiece: *choshen mishpat*, "the breastpiece of decision," or, more literally, "the breastpiece of judgment" (v. 15).

Such errors of judgment can occur in an official judicial system, where a judge's decision has clear and obvious legal consequences, but also in everyday situations, when we, as ordinary civilians, judge our fellow humans. In both cases, such errors in judgment are made (most typically) by high-ranking individuals, and it is therefore the task of the High Priest to correct such errors.

To be fair in its decisions, a court must consider the many different values and viewpoints observed across the spectrum of various "tribes," and this is what the stones on the High Priest's breastpiece represent. But at the same time, a court's decisions must also express a single, unified approach to the problems of all the citizens within its jurisdiction. The single judicial breastpiece underscores this point.

The priests' garments, like all the Temple vessels and utensils, are made from the highest quality and most expensive materials. For metal objects, gold is used whenever possible. For wooden objects, the wood it is taken from trees of the most highly prized species. The stones in the Temple are of superior quality – the most diverse, and the most highly valued. Clearly, the precious stones of the breastpiece and the shoulder clasps on which the names of the tribes were engraved have nothing in common with ordinary pebbles that one finds along the road. Each gem is special, and no two are identical, just as no two of the tribes were identical – each tribe contributes to the Jewish nation its unique set of values and characteristics.

By virtue of its spectacular beauty the breastpiece worn by the High Priest embodied this idea in a very tangible way. This kind of idea cannot be conveyed with paint, but only by something having a palpable essence and made from permanent materials. Gold and precious stones do not wear out, nor does their color fade or their surface crack, nor does the metal rust.

However, it is important to understand, that God Himself needs none of these things. Rather, they are needed so that visitors to the Temple will be influenced emotionally by the experience, and will be inspired there to find correction and improvement in the human sense.

(30) **Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim**: The Urim and Thummim are mentioned here, but their function is not explained. Tradition says that the Urim and Thummim were used to pose questions to the Almighty. These questions were always limited to matters of national, not individual, interest. The questions posed to the Urim and Thummim always came from a king or a judge – someone in a position of political leadership, not a civilian member of the population.

Nachmanides notes that the Urim and Thummim, although mentioned here for the very first time, are prefixed with the definite article *ha* ("the"): et *ha-urim ve-et ha-tummim*, – the Urim and the Thummim. No other component of the Temple is introduced this way, which suggests that there is something unique about the Urim and Thummim that allows the Torah to treat them as already universally recognized, even with no prior mention of them.

Moreover, when subsequent passages describe the construction of the Temple and its vessels and accessories by Bezalel, the Temple's chief architect (see 31:1 ff.), the Urim and Thummim are not mentioned. We can thus conclude that the Urim and Thummim were not created by Bezalel, but were brought down by Moses from Mount Sinai. That is, either Moses received them there from the Almighty in finished form, or Moses himself created them there.

There are various opinions among the sages as to what the Urim and Thummim were exactly, and how they functioned. According to one opinion, they were a parchment strip on which the seventy-two-letter "ineffable" name of the Almighty was inscribed, which was then inserted between two layers of fabric within the breastpiece (and that is why the breastpiece was constructed as two separate layers). Another opinion states that the term "Urim and Thummim" refers to the actual names of the tribes that were engraved on the stones of the breastpiece itself. When the High Priest consulted God about a question posed to

him, some of the letters in the twelve engraved names began to glow or flash, and the High Priest then composed the response to the question based on those letters. According to this view, *urim ve-tummim* translates, roughly, as "fires that give the complete answer" (from *ur*, "fire," and *tom*, "completeness").

In the period of the Second Temple, the High Priest's breastpiece no longer possessed this ability to get Divine answers to questions posed via the Urim and Thummim.

23.5. THE ROBE OF THE EPHOD (28:31-35)

לא וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־מְעִיל הָאֵפֹד כְּלִיל תְּכֵלֶת׃ לב וְהָיָה פִי־רֹאשׁוֹ בְּתוֹכוֹ
שָׂפָה יִהְיֶה לְפִיו סָבִיב מַעֲשֵׂה אֹרֵג כְּפִי תַחְרָא יִהְיֶה־לּוֹ לְאֹ יִקָּרֵעַ׃
לג וְעָשִׂיתָ עַל־שׁוּלָיו רִמֹּנֵי תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי עַל־שׁוּלָיו סָבִיב
וּפַעֲמֹנֵי זָהָב בְּתוֹכָם סָבִיב׃ לד פַּעֲמֹן זָהָב וְרִמֹּון פַּעֲמֹן זָהָב וְרִמֹּון
עַל־שׁוּלֵי הַמְּעִיל סָבִיב׃ לה וְהָיָה עַל־אַהֲרֹן לְשָׁרֵת וְנִשְׁמַע קוֹלוֹ בְּבֹאוֹ
אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ לִפְנֵי יְיָ וּבְצֵאתוֹ וְלֹא יָמוּת׃

(31) **You shall make the robe of the ephod of pure blue.**

(32) **The opening for the head shall be in the middle of it; the opening shall have a binding of woven work round about — it shall be like the opening of a coat of mail — so that it does not tear.**

(33) **On its hem make pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, all around the hem, with bells of gold between them all around:**

(34) **a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe.**

(35) **Aaron shall wear it while officiating, so that the sound of it is heard when he comes into the sanctuary before the Lord and when he goes out — that he may not die.**

(31) **You shall make the robe of the ephod of pure blue**: The me'il is a long-sleeved tunic that is put on over the head, and reaches almost to the ground.

(33-35) **On its hem make pomegranates … with bells of gold … Aaron shall wear it while officiating, so that the sound of it is heard when he comes into the sanctuary before the Lord**: The *me'il* was meant to correct for the sin of *leshon hara* (speaking ill of others). The ringing of its bells was a reminder that the things we say spread far and wide, and that we must therefore exercise great care in using our power of speech.

(32) **The opening for the head shall be in the middle of it; the opening shall have a binding of woven work round about — it shall be like the opening of a coat of mail — so that it does not tear**: The "opening for the head" is here called *pi ha-me'il*, literally, "the mouth of the robe." This further emphasizes the connection to the sin of *leshon hara*. Like the robe, we must keep a tight "binding" around our own mouths by strictly monitoring our speech.

The obligation to correct improper ("evil") speech applies to all people, but it is far more important for prominent individuals, whose unworthy words can do incomparably more harm than the evil words of the rank and file. This is why the *me'il* is one of the garments of the High Priest, not the ordinary *kohanim* (priests).

23.6. THE FRONTLET (28:36-38)

לו וְעָשִׂיתָ צִיץ זָהָב טָהוֹר וּפִתַּחְתָּ עָלָיו פִּתּוּחֵי חֹתָם קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה:
לז וְשַׂמְתָּ אֹתוֹ עַל־פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת וְהָיָה עַל־הַמִּצְנֶפֶת אֶל־מוּל פְּנֵי־
הַמִּצְנֶפֶת יִהְיֶה: לח וְהָיָה עַל־מֵצַח אַהֲרֹן וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת־עֲוֹן הַקֳּדָשִׁים
אֲשֶׁר יַקְדִּישׁוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכָל־מַתְּנֹת קָדְשֵׁיהֶם וְהָיָה עַל־מִצְחוֹ תָּמִיד
לְרָצוֹן לָהֶם לִפְנֵי יְי:

(36) **You shall make a frontlet of pure gold and engrave on it the seal inscription: "Holy to the Lord."**

(37) **Suspend it on a cord of blue, so that it may remain on the headdress; it shall remain on the front of the headdress.**

(38) **It shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may take away any sin arising from the holy things that the Israelites consecrate, from any of their sacred donations; it shall be on his forehead at all times, to win acceptance for them before the Lord.**

(36) **You shall make a frontlet of pure gold and engrave on it the seal inscription**: "Holy to the Lord": The purpose of the frontlet (*tzitz*, diadem) is to correct for the sin of arrogance.

There is rudeness and there is arrogance, and they are not the same thing. Even a person who is always polite, never rude, to others might still be arrogant, and feel no actual regard for those people. The various elements of the priestly garments correct for these sins.

Because the sin of rudeness concerns all people equally, its correction is found in the turban, which is worn by all priests. But the sin of arrogance applies in greater measure to high-ranking individuals, and its correction is therefore in the *tzitz*, the diadem, worn only by the High Priest.

(38) **It shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may take away any sin arising from the holy things that the Israelites consecrate, from any of their sacred donations; it shall be on his forehead at all times, to win acceptance for them before the Lord**: The intentions of the person bringing an offering in the Temple are of utmost importance – his attitude toward the Temple, and to the offering. A defect on the part of the offerer in those intentions and that attitude is what the Torah here calls "any sin arising from the holy things." With the aid of the diadem inscribed with the words "Holy to the Lord," those defective attitudes can be corrected, so as "to win acceptance for the Children of Israel before the Lord."

23.7. TUNIC, SASH, TURBAN, AND BREECHES (28:39-43)

לט וְשִׁבַּצְתָּ הַכְּתֹנֶת שֵׁשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מִצְנֶפֶת שֵׁשׁ וְאַבְנֵט תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה
רֹקֵם: מ וְלִבְנֵי אַהֲרֹן תַּעֲשֶׂה כֻתֳּנֹת וְעָשִׂיתָ לָהֶם אַבְנֵטִים וּמִגְבָּעוֹת
תַּעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם לְכָבוֹד וּלְתִפְאָרֶת: מא וְהִלְבַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ
וְאֶת־בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ וּמָשַׁחְתָּ אֹתָם וּמִלֵּאתָ אֶת־יָדָם וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם וְכִהֲנוּ
לִי: מב וַעֲשֵׂה לָהֶם מִכְנְסֵי־בָד לְכַסּוֹת בְּשַׂר עֶרְוָה מִמָּתְנַיִם וְעַד־יְרֵכַיִם
יִהְיוּ: מג וְהָיוּ עַל־אַהֲרֹן וְעַל־בָּנָיו בְּבֹאָם | אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אוֹ בְּגִשְׁתָּם
אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְשָׁרֵת בַּקֹּדֶשׁ וְלֹא־יִשְׂאוּ עָוֹן וָמֵתוּ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לוֹ וּלְזַרְעוֹ
אַחֲרָיו:

(39) **You shall make the fringed tunic of fine linen. You shall make the headdress of fine linen. You shall make the sash of embroidered work.**

(40) **And for Aaron's sons also you shall make tunics, and make sashes for them, and make turbans for them, for dignity and adornment.**

(41) **Put these on your brother Aaron and on his sons as well; anoint them, and ordain them and consecrate them to serve Me as priests.**

(42) **You shall also make for them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; they shall extend from the hips to the thighs.**

(43) **They shall be worn by Aaron and his sons when they enter the Tent of Meeting or when they approach the altar to officiate in the sanctuary, so that they do not incur punishment and die. It shall be a law for all time for him and for his offspring to come.**

(40-42) **And for Aaron's sons also you shall make tunics, and make sashes for them, and make turbans for them and … linen breeches**: After describing the four garments specific to the High Priest, the Torah moves on to the basic four worn by every priest ("Aaron's sons"): breeches, tunic, turban, and sash. These garments were designed to contain and correct the four most detrimental human qualities equally prevalent in all strata of society:

Breeches: The priests' breeches (*michnasayim*) are associated with restraining sexual passions. We have already seen the same idea in the Torah's commandment that the priests must not ascend the altar by means of stairs: "Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it" (20:23).

Sashes: (*avnet*) was a wide strip of fabric 32 cubits in length (approx. 16 m, or 52 ft) that the priest wrapped around his waist. In the gematria system (which assigns to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet a fixed numerical value), the number 32 corresponds to the value of the word lev, "heart." The purpose of the sash was "correction of the middle and upper body," – purification of the emotions, and ruminations of the heart. The sashes worn by the priests separated their heart, their upper body, from the lower body, in order that emotional yearnings would not become enslaved to sexual passions. Evil inclinations of the heart arise from the union of higher and lower human instincts, which must therefore be separated.

Tunics: (*kutonet*) The tunic worn by every priest represents "correction of the body," i.e., of improper action. This means, in particular, restraint from violence. (There is a conceptual association here with the idea of a straitjacket).

Turbans: The *mitznefet* or *migba'at* is a "correction for the head" – restraint from being rude to one's fellow man. A person wearing such headgear senses *koved rosh* – literally, heaviness of the head – a disposition of seriousness, brought on by his awareness of having assumed "the burden of the kingdom of heaven." The modern *kippah* (the Jewish skullcap worn by men) is the successor to the turbans of the priests.

23.8. THE PRIESTS SERVE IN THE TEMPLE BAREFOOT

There is no mention of shoes among Aaron's garments – the priests serve barefoot.

One reason for the requirement to walk barefoot in the Temple is that it allows a person to make bodily contact with the physical essence

of the Temple lying under his feet. Shoes would be an interposition from this perspective, and must therefore be removed.

Wearing shoes also indicates independence. A person wearing shoes can move freely, wherever he wants and on almost any surface, whereas a person who walks barefoot is significantly limited in his movement. Thus, by removing his shoes in the Temple, a person renounces his independence, submitting instead to the Temple service, its solemnity and its strictures.

These two aspects – physical closeness to the Temple, and renouncing one's independence there – are interrelated, since, in principle, any closeness in some sense limits a person's independence. For that reason, wherever there is holiness God says, "remove your shoes from your feet" (see, e.g., Exod. 3:5 and Joshua 5:15). By doing so, one expresses his feeling of closeness to God, and his willingness to submit to God's will.

CHAPTER 24

THE ANOINTING OF THE PRIESTS AND THE TEMPLE SERVICE

24.1. THE ANOINTING OF THE PRIESTS (29:1-37)

א וְזֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־תַּעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם לְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתָם לְכַהֵן לִי קַח פַּר אֶחָד
בֶּן־בָּקָר וְאֵילִם שְׁנַיִם תְּמִימִם: ב וְלֶחֶם מַצּוֹת וְחַלֹּת מַצּוֹת בְּלוּלֹת
בַּשָּׁמֶן וּרְקִיקֵי מַצּוֹת מְשֻׁחִים בַּשָּׁמֶן סֹלֶת חִטִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם:
ג וְנָתַתָּ אוֹתָם עַל־סַל אֶחָד וְהִקְרַבְתָּ אֹתָם בַּסָּל וְאֶת־הַפָּר וְאֵת שְׁנֵי
הָאֵילִם: ד וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו תַּקְרִיב אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְרָחַצְתָּ
אֹתָם בַּמָּיִם: ה וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־הַבְּגָדִים וְהִלְבַּשְׁתָּ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַכֻּתֹּנֶת
וְאֵת מְעִיל הָאֵפֹד וְאֶת־הָאֵפֹד וְאֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן וְאָפַדְתָּ לּוֹ בְּחֵשֶׁב הָאֵפֹד:
ו וְשַׂמְתָּ הַמִּצְנֶפֶת עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־נֵזֶר הַקֹּדֶשׁ עַל־הַמִּצְנֶפֶת:
ז וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־שֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְיָצַקְתָּ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ וּמָשַׁחְתָּ אֹתוֹ: ח וְאֶת־
בָּנָיו תַּקְרִיב וְהִלְבַּשְׁתָּם כֻּתֳּנֹת: ט וְחָגַרְתָּ אֹתָם אַבְנֵט אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו
וְחָבַשְׁתָּ לָהֶם מִגְבָּעֹת וְהָיְתָה לָהֶם כְּהֻנָּה לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם וּמִלֵּאתָ יַד־
אַהֲרֹן וְיַד־בָּנָיו: י וְהִקְרַבְתָּ אֶת־הַפָּר לִפְנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְסָמַךְ אַהֲרֹן
וּבָנָיו אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם עַל־רֹאשׁ הַפָּר: יא וְשָׁחַטְתָּ אֶת־הַפָּר לִפְנֵי יְיָ פֶּתַח
אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: יב וְלָקַחְתָּ מִדַּם הַפָּר וְנָתַתָּה עַל־קַרְנֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בְּאֶצְבָּעֶךָ
וְאֶת־כָּל־הַדָּם תִּשְׁפֹּךְ אֶל־יְסוֹד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: יג וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הַחֵלֶב
הַמְכַסֶּה אֶת־הַקֶּרֶב וְאֵת הַיֹּתֶרֶת עַל־הַכָּבֵד וְאֵת שְׁתֵּי הַכְּלָיֹת וְאֶת־
הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר עֲלֵיהֶן וְהִקְטַרְתָּ הַמִּזְבֵּחָה: יד וְאֶת־בְּשַׂר הַפָּר וְאֶת־עֹרוֹ
וְאֶת־פִּרְשׁוֹ תִּשְׂרֹף בָּאֵשׁ מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה חַטָּאת הוּא: טו וְאֶת־הָאַיִל
הָאֶחָד תִּקָּח וְסָמְכוּ אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם עַל־רֹאשׁ הָאָיִל: טז וְשָׁחַטְתָּ

אֶת־הָאֵיל וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־דָּמוֹ וְזָרַקְתָּ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: יז וְאֶת־הָאַיִל
תְּנַתֵּחַ לִנְתָחָיו וְרָחַצְתָּ קִרְבּוֹ וּכְרָעָיו וְנָתַתָּ עַל־נְתָחָיו וְעַל־רֹאשׁוֹ:
יח וְהִקְטַרְתָּ אֶת־כָּל־הָאַיִל הַמִּזְבֵּחָה עֹלָה הִוא לַיהוָה רֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ אִשֶּׁה
לַיהוָה הִוא: יט וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת הָאַיִל הַשֵּׁנִי וְסָמַךְ אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם
עַל־רֹאשׁ הָאָיִל: כ וְשָׁחַטְתָּ אֶת־הָאַיִל וְלָקַחְתָּ מִדָּמוֹ וְנָתַתָּה עַל־תְּנוּךְ
אֹזֶן אַהֲרֹן וְעַל־תְּנוּךְ אֹזֶן בָּנָיו הַיְמָנִית וְעַל־בֹּהֶן יָדָם הַיְמָנִית וְעַל־בֹּהֶן
רַגְלָם הַיְמָנִית וְזָרַקְתָּ אֶת־הַדָּם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: כא וְלָקַחְתָּ מִן־הַדָּם
אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּמִשֶּׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְהִזֵּיתָ עַל־אַהֲרֹן וְעַל־בְּגָדָיו וְעַל־
בָּנָיו וְעַל־בִּגְדֵי בָנָיו אִתּוֹ וְקָדַשׁ הוּא וּבְגָדָיו וּבָנָיו וּבִגְדֵי בָנָיו אִתּוֹ:
כב וְלָקַחְתָּ מִן־הָאַיִל הַחֵלֶב וְהָאַלְיָה וְאֶת־הַחֵלֶב | הַמְכַסֶּה אֶת־הַקֶּרֶב
וְאֶת יֹתֶרֶת הַכָּבֵד וְאֶת | שְׁתֵּי הַכְּלָיֹת וְאֶת־הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר עֲלֵיהֶן וְאֶת
שׁוֹק הַיָּמִין כִּי אֵיל מִלֻּאִים הוּא: כג וְכִכַּר לֶחֶם אַחַת וְחַלַּת לֶחֶם שֶׁמֶן
אַחַת וְרָקִיק אֶחָד מִסַּל הַמַּצּוֹת אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי יְי: כד וְשַׂמְתָּ הַכֹּל עַל כַּפֵּי
אַהֲרֹן וְעַל כַּפֵּי בָנָיו וְהֵנַפְתָּ אֹתָם תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְי: כה וְלָקַחְתָּ אֹתָם
מִיָּדָם וְהִקְטַרְתָּ הַמִּזְבֵּחָה עַל־הָעֹלָה לְרֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ לִפְנֵי יְי אִשֶּׁה הִוא
לַיהוָה: כו וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־הֶחָזֶה מֵאֵיל הַמִּלֻּאִים אֲשֶׁר לְאַהֲרֹן וְהֵנַפְתָּ אֹתוֹ
תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְי וְהָיָה לְךָ לְמָנָה: כז וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֵת | חֲזֵה הַתְּנוּפָה וְאֵת
שׁוֹק הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר הוּנַף וַאֲשֶׁר הוּרַם מֵאֵיל הַמִּלֻּאִים מֵאֲשֶׁר לְאַהֲרֹן
וּמֵאֲשֶׁר לְבָנָיו: כח וְהָיָה לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו לְחָק־עוֹלָם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
כִּי תְרוּמָה הִוא וּתְרוּמָה יִהְיֶה מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִזִּבְחֵי שַׁלְמֵיהֶם
תְּרוּמָתָם לַיהוָה: כט וּבִגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר לְאַהֲרֹן יִהְיוּ לְבָנָיו אַחֲרָיו
לְמָשְׁחָה בָהֶם וּלְמַלֵּא־בָם אֶת־יָדָם: ל שִׁבְעַת יָמִים יִלְבָּשָׁם הַכֹּהֵן
תַּחְתָּיו מִבָּנָיו אֲשֶׁר יָבֹא אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לְשָׁרֵת בַּקֹּדֶשׁ: לא וְאֵת אֵיל
הַמִּלֻּאִים תִּקָּח וּבִשַּׁלְתָּ אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ בְּמָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ: לב וְאָכַל אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו
אֶת־בְּשַׂר הָאַיִל וְאֶת־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר בַּסָּל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: לג וְאָכְלוּ
אֹתָם אֲשֶׁר כֻּפַּר בָּהֶם לְמַלֵּא אֶת־יָדָם לְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתָם וְזָר לֹא־יֹאכַל
כִּי־קֹדֶשׁ הֵם: לד וְאִם־יִוָּתֵר מִבְּשַׂר הַמִּלֻּאִים וּמִן־הַלֶּחֶם עַד־הַבֹּקֶר
וְשָׂרַפְתָּ אֶת־הַנּוֹתָר בָּאֵשׁ לֹא יֵאָכֵל כִּי־קֹדֶשׁ הוּא: לה וְעָשִׂיתָ לְאַהֲרֹן
וּלְבָנָיו כָּכָה כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוִּיתִי אֹתָכָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תְּמַלֵּא יָדָם: לו וּפַר
חַטָּאת תַּעֲשֶׂה לַיּוֹם עַל־הַכִּפֻּרִים וְחִטֵּאתָ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בְּכַפֶּרְךָ עָלָיו
וּמָשַׁחְתָּ אֹתוֹ לְקַדְּשׁוֹ: לז שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תְּכַפֵּר עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתוֹ
וְהָיָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים כָּל־הַנֹּגֵעַ בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ יִקְדָּשׁ:

(1) **This is what you shall do to them in consecrating them to serve Me as priests: Take a young bull of the herd and two rams without blemish;**

(2) **also unleavened bread, unleavened cakes with oil mixed in, and unleavened wafers spread with oil — make these of choice wheat flour.**

(3) **Place these in one basket and present them in the basket, along with the bull and the two rams.**

(4) **Lead Aaron and his sons up to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and wash them with water.**

(5) **Then take the vestments, and clothe Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the decorated band of the ephod.**

(6) **Put the headdress on his head, and place the holy diadem upon the headdress.**

(7) **Take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him.**

(8) **Then bring his sons forward; clothe them with tunics**

(9) **and wind turbans upon them. And gird both Aaron and his sons with sashes. And so they shall have priesthood as their right for all time. You shall then ordain Aaron and his sons.**

(10) **Lead the bull up to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and let Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the head of the bull.**

(11) **Slaughter the bull before the Lord, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting,**

(12) **and take some of the bull's blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger; then pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.**

(13) **Take all the fat that covers the entrails, the protuberance on the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat on them, and turn them into smoke upon the altar.**

(14) **The rest of the flesh of the bull, its hide, and its dung shall be put to the fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.**

(15) **Next take the one ram, and let Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the ram's head.**

(16) **Slaughter the ram, and take its blood and dash it against all sides of the altar.**

(17) **Cut up the ram into sections, wash its entrails and legs, and put them with its quarters and its head.**

(18) **Turn all of the ram into smoke upon the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord, a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the Lord.**

(19) **Then take the other ram, and let Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the ram's head.**

(20) **Slaughter the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the ridge of Aaron's right ear and on the ridges of his sons' right ears, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet; and dash the rest of the blood against every side of the altar round about.**

(21) **Take some of the blood that is on the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle upon Aaron and his vestments, and also upon his sons and his sons' vestments. Thus shall he and his vestments be holy, as well as his sons and his sons' vestments.**

(22) **You shall take from the ram the fat parts — the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the protuberance on the liver, the two kidneys with the fat on them — and the right thigh; for this is a ram of ordination.**

(23) **Add one flat loaf of bread, one cake of oil bread, and one wafer, from the basket of unleavened bread that is before the Lord.**

(24) **Place all these on the palms of Aaron and his sons, and offer them as an elevation offering before the Lord.**

(25) **Take them from their hands and turn them into smoke upon the altar with the burnt offering, as a pleasing odor before the Lord; it is an offering by fire to the Lord.**

(26) **Then take the breast of Aaron's ram of ordination and offer it as an elevation offering before the Lord; it shall be your portion.**

(27) You shall consecrate the breast that was offered as an elevation offering and the thigh that was offered as a gift offering from the ram of ordination — from that which was Aaron's and from that which was his sons' —

(28) and those parts shall be a due for all time from the Israelites to Aaron and his descendants. For they are a gift; and so shall they be a gift from the Israelites, their gift to the Lord out of their sacrifices of well-being.

(29) The sacral vestments of Aaron shall pass on to his sons after him, for them to be anointed and ordained in.

(30) He among his sons who becomes priest in his stead, who enters the Tent of Meeting to officiate within the sanctuary, shall wear them seven days.

(31) You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh in the sacred precinct;

(32) and Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

(33) These things shall be eaten only by those for whom expiation was made with them when they were ordained and consecrated; they may not be eaten by a layman, for they are holy.

(34) And if any of the flesh of ordination, or any of the bread, is left until morning, you shall put what is left to the fire; it shall not be eaten, for it is holy.

(35) Thus you shall do to Aaron and his sons, just as I have commanded you. You shall ordain them through seven days,

(36) and each day you shall prepare a bull as a sin offering for expiation; you shall purge the altar by performing purification upon it, and you shall anoint it to consecrate it.

(37) Seven days you shall perform purification for the altar to consecrate it, and the altar shall become most holy; whatever touches the altar shall become consecrated.

(1-2) **This is what you shall do to them in consecrating them to serve Me as priests**: Take a young bull of the herd and two rams without

blemish: In the course of the Tabernacle's consecration three sacrifices are brought: *chattat*, *olah*, and *milu'im*.[1]

The young bull is the *chattat* (29:11-14), "sin offering," a sacrifice brought for atonement. Since the Temple of Aaron is engaged, primarily, in the cleansing of sins, the first order of the day is to atone for the sins of the priests themselves.

The first ram is the *olah* (29:15-18), "burnt offering." It represents the idea that the priest himself has become, as it were, a "burnt offering." That is, the priest no longer exists as a personality in his own right, for he has now entered a completely subordinate state, becoming a "walking utensil" within the Temple.

The second ram is the *milu'im* (29:19-22), "the ram of ordination," an offering respecting assumption of office. Unlike the *olah*, this sacrifice was not burned; rather, Aaron and his sons were to eat it, in recognition of their newly elevated status in life.

These three sacrifices represent three stages traversed by Aaron and his sons in the process of taking office.

The first stage is purification. Then comes the second stage, in which the priests renounce their status as individuals (in essence, they cease to exist as such). And finally the third stage – the return to life, with food, which symbolizes that spirituality, initially dissevered from materiality, must eventually return, to reconnect with the material.

An important illustration of this idea can be seen in a fascinating midrash, which states, that before the High Priest entered the Temple's Holy of Holies (which he did only once yearly, on Yom Kippur), a rope would be tied around his leg.

The purpose of the rope, according to the usual, simple explanation, was that, in the event that something unforeseen were to occur, causing the High Priest to die or lose consciousness, he could be extracted from the Holy of Holies by means of the rope, since it was forbidden for anyone else but him to enter that supremely sacred space.

However, there is an alternate explanation: The purpose of the rope was to tether the High Priest to life outside the Temple, as a tangible

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[1] The various types of sacrifices are covered in more detail in many sections of Leviticus, and we will comment on them there.

reminder to him of where he had come from before entering the Holy of Holies, in case he might suddenly decide that he preferred to remain there permanently.

The human soul, as it comes near to God, must not forget that its primary task is to return to the day-to-day world.

(4) **Lead Aaron and his sons up to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting**: The literal translation is: "Bring Aaron and his sons close to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." But the Hebrew word *takriv*, which means "you shall bring close," can also mean "you shall bring as a sacrifice," as it often does.

When, like the other vessels of the Temple, the priests are anointed with oil to initiate them into the Temple service, they are themselves "sacrificed," as it were, losing their personal identity, and assuming instead the status of mere "Temple utensils."

A priest cannot live a completely natural life. For example, death is an integral part of life, but a priest must have no contact with the dead, for he is forbidden to defile himself with the impurity of death. (An ordinary priest is allowed to attend the funeral of only his seven closest relatives, but the High Priest is prohibited to do even that). Thus, the priest lives in a highly idealized world in which it seems that there is no death.

But other crises too happen in life, the most significant of these being crises of family life – divorce, or the death of a spouse. A priest is largely insulated from these as well – he is forbidden to marry a divorcée; that is, he must have no connection with a person who has survived the crisis of married life. And the High Priest must not marry even a widow.

But there is more. Work, too, is an integral and essential part of life. It adds much complexity to life, but also leads to self-realization. A priest, however, does not "earn a living" as the rest of us do. He lives off Temple offerings and other "priestly gifts," and has no freedom to choose an occupation or profession, for his duties are strictly proscribed.

Thus, the priest deals neither with death, nor with life crises, nor with the workaday world. All this means that the priest has been severed from the natural order of life, and in this sense the priest has himself been "sacrificed." His private, personal life is sacrificed, so that he can instead serve the community.

And wash them with water: This means full immersion in a mikveh of "natural waters," which creates a channel of communication with the Creation.

(5) **Then take the vestments, and clothe Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the decorated band of the ephod**: The "sacrificial" status of the priests is further emphasized by their passivity in the consecration procedure, as described here in the Torah: "Clothe Aaron," "gird him," and so on. The Kohen does not dress himself – he is dressed, he is washed. The Kohen is not a subject, but merely a Temple utensil.

(7) **Take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him**: Anointing is the process of initiating a person into a higher role; in other words: imposing a mission on him. The anointing is done with special olive oil made for this purpose. Not only in the Temple's menorah, but in ancient times, in general, a primary use of olive oil was for lighting lamps for illumination at night. Thus, oil is symbolic of enlightenment. The first recorded anointings were done by Moses for initiating the priests and dedicating the original Temple vessels. Later, kings and priests assuming their new offices were anointed in recognition of the event.

(10) **Lead the bull up to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and let Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the head of the bull**: This is *semichah*, "laying of hands" on the head of an animal sacrifice. The idea is that the person bringing the sacrifice "transfers himself" into the animal, which is then slaughtered and sacrificed in his stead.

(11) **Slaughter the bull before the Lord, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and take some of the bull's blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger; then pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar**: Moses himself executes all the sacrificial rites in the process of initiating the Kohanim. (And yet, as noted earlier, Moses' name appears nowhere here, nor anywhere in this entire weekly portion *Tetzaveh*; only Aaron is mentioned by name). Thus, all the priests receive their priestly status from Moses, who performs the entire ritual, although he never actually occupies the post of High Priest, not even temporarily during this initiation week.

Moses is a kind of "super-priest" by virtue of his state of *dveikut*, attachment to God. Aaron, in order to enter the Temple and meet with the Almighty, must first make many technical preparations – garments, ablutions, sacrifices, and so on. Aaron needs special garments to get closer to God, but Moses has no need for those, and enters the Holy of Holies dressed just as he is. Moses has none of Aaron's limitations.

The source of this difference is that Aaron is busy atoning for sins, "going from minus to zero," we could say, and so he remains immersed in those "negative" attributes, i.e., the sins and failings of the people for whom he seeks atonement. Moses, on the other hand, has none of these "negative" attributes. He is occupied with exclusively positive aspects – ascent and advancement towards God – and this is what he radiates to all with whom he comes in contact.

Aaron's Torah derives from Moses' Torah, and is an auxiliary to it. Atonement from sin is only a facultative, ancillary function with respect to Divine revelation; it is not an independent value in its own right.

(13) **Take all the fat that covers the entrails, the protuberance on the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat on them, and turn them into smoke upon the altar**: The parts of the sacrifice that are brought to the altar are located in the animal's gut below the diaphragm. Rabbi Judah Halevi in his *Kuzari* (4:25) explains it this way:

> "All organs located under the diaphragm are the foundation of nature and of genesis, for the diaphragm separates the realm of basic nature from the realm of conscious life. If a person wants to draw upon the most fundamental life force, he will sooner find it in the abdomen than in the heart and brain. In this area of nature is the root of all existence, and the seed for the birth of a new life comes only from there. It was from these organs that the Almighty chose the parts of the sacrifice: the fat, the blood, the liver membrane, and the two kidneys. He did not choose the heart, the brain, the lungs, or the diaphragm."

Thus, what to us seems inferior actually contains within itself the essence of the most superlative.

(14-18) **The rest of the flesh of the bull, its hide, and its dung shall be put to the fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering. Next take**

the one ram ...Turn all of the ram into smoke upon the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord, a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the Lord: The sin offering is only an "external," preparatory action – purification as preparation for service – and is therefore burned outside the camp. The burnt offering, on the other hand, is burned upon the altar, because it represents the Temple service itself.

To the Lord, a pleasing odor: It is pleasing to the Lord because the person who brings it demonstrates thereby his attentiveness to the Divine commandments.

(19) **Then take the other ram, and let Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the ram's head**: This is the "ram of ordination." (In Leviticus, where Moses and the priests actually execute the prescriptions of this chapter, this is made explicit: "He brought forward the second ram, the ram of ordination," Lev. 8:22).

(20) **Slaughter the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the ridge of Aaron's right ear and on the ridges of his sons' right ears, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet; and dash the rest of the blood against every side of the altar round about**: Aaron's body corresponds to the altar itself, and his extremities to the horns of the altar. The ear is symbolic of the priest's willingness to hear and obey God's instruction, the finger symbolizes that he is prepared to fulfill all of the Torah's commandments, and the toe symbolizes alacrity – readiness to run to fulfill the duties assigned to him.

(21) **Take some of the blood that is on the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle upon Aaron and his vestments, and also upon his sons and his sons' vestments. Thus shall he and his vestments be holy, as well as his sons and his sons' vestments**: Blood is a symbol of life, and oil of light. Blood and oil are used to consecrate Aaron, his sons, and their clothes, because those garments symbolize the functions and calling of the priests themselves.

(24) **Place all these on the palms of Aaron and his sons, and offer them as an elevation offering before the Lord**: Aaron and his sons serve as a link of transmission for bringing sacrifices to the Almighty.

(25) **Take them from their hands and turn them into smoke upon the altar with the burnt offering, as a pleasing odor before the Lord; it is an offering by fire to the Lord**: The altar is an extension of Aaron's hands.

(26) **Then take the breast of Aaron's ram of ordination and offer it as an elevation offering before the Lord; it shall be your portion**: The Almighty is addressing all these instructions to Moses. Thus, "your portion" means that this portion belongs to Moses as "super-priest."

(27) **You shall consecrate the breast that was offered as an elevation offering and the thigh that was offered as a gift offering: The literal translation is**: "You shall consecrate the breast of the wave-offering, and the thigh of the heave-offering, which is waved, and which is heaved up."

The breast which is waved (*chazeh ha-tenufah*) and the (right) thigh which is heaved up (*shok ha-terumah*) were the primary ritual parts of the sin-offering. They were "waved" and "heaved," and then put on the altar, but were not completely burned, being given instead to the priests, to be eaten by them. The breast is the "realm of feelings," "the temple of the heart," while the thigh represents action. Both of these aspects of life must be subordinated to God and to our connection with Him.

This initiation offering of the priests was the only sacrifice in which this distinction was made between the breast and the thigh. The breast was for Moses to eat, and the thigh went to Aaron. Moses is the source of actual communication with God, while Aaron is only the this-worldly action as applied to Moses' other-worldly ideal – the realization of Moses' potential.

(28) **And those parts shall be a due for all time from the Israelites to Aaron and his descendants. For they are a gift; and so shall they be a gift from the Israelites, their gift to the Lord out of their sacrifices of well-being**: In future sacrifices too these parts would be given to the priests. When in later generations Jews brought *shelamim*, "sacrifices of well-being," the breast and the thigh from the meat of the sacrifice had to be given to the priests, and those parts were themselves the "offering." The remainder of the sacrifice would be eaten near the Temple by the offerer, his family, and their guests, in the form of a festive meal.

(29-30) **The sacral vestments of Aaron shall pass on to his sons after him, for them to be anointed and ordained in. He among his sons who becomes priest in his stead, who enters the Tent of Meeting to officiate within the sanctuary ...**: These garments, a prerequisite for assuming the post of High Priest, emphasize that the priest is not an entity, but merely a function.

He shall wear them seven days: When a new High Priest first takes up the Temple service, he goes through an orientation process that lasts seven days, during which time he may not leave the Temple. Only after the completion of that process can he begin to serve. Those seven days of preparation allude to the Seven Days of Creation, i.e., to nature. Thus, the Kohen begins his service in the Temple one step *above* nature, on the eighth day[1].

(31-33) **You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh ... and Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram ...These things shall be eaten only by those for whom expiation was ... ordained and consecrated**: Partaking of the flesh of the sacrifice highlights the idea that the Temple service represents the fullness of life. It does not mean transitioning to total spirituality and being entirely separated from everything material.

(34) **And if any of the flesh of ordination, or any of the bread, is left until morning, you shall put what is left to the fire; it shall not be eaten, for it is holy**: Leaving over any edible part of the sacrifice until the next day would demonstrate indifference toward the sacrifice. It must therefore be eaten without delay.

(35) **Thus you shall do to Aaron and his sons, just as I have commanded you. You shall ordain them through seven days**: The seven days of consecration for the priesthood correspond to the seven days of Creation.

(36) **And each day you shall prepare a bull as a sin offering for expiation; you shall purge the altar by performing purification upon it, and you shall anoint it to consecrate it**: This process of

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[1] This topic is discussed in more detail in the book of Leviticus, in weekly portion *Shemini*. We will offer our comments on it there.

atonement ("purging") and sanctification of the altar took place simultaneously with, and parallel to, the initiation of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood.

(37) **Seven days you shall perform purification for the altar to consecrate it, and the altar shall become most holy**: The Temple vessels will acquire their special status of "most holy" only after their consecration (see 30:29). But for the time being, their purpose is only to perform their designated functions in the Sanctuary.

Whatever touches the altar shall become consecrated: In this sense the altar is like all other Temple vessels. Anything that touches them is raised to consecrated status, and must not be used for ordinary, profane purposes.

24.2. THE DAILY TEMPLE SACRIFICES (29:38-46)

לח וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כְּבָשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה שְׁנַיִם לַיּוֹם תָּמִיד:
לט אֶת־הַכֶּבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֹּקֶר וְאֵת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַּעֲשֶׂה בֵּין
הָעַרְבָּיִם: מ וְעִשָּׂרֹן סֹלֶת בָּלוּל בְּשֶׁמֶן כָּתִית רֶבַע הַהִין וְנֶסֶךְ רְבִיעִת
הַהִין יָיִן לַכֶּבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד: מא וְאֵת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַּעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעַרְבָּיִם
כְּמִנְחַת הַבֹּקֶר וּכְנִסְכָּהּ תַּעֲשֶׂה־לָּהּ לְרֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ אִשֶּׁה לַיהוָה: מב עֹלַת
תָּמִיד לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם פֶּתַח אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי יְ אֲשֶׁר אִוָּעֵד לָכֶם שָׁמָּה
לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ שָׁם: מג וְנֹעַדְתִּי שָׁמָּה לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִקְדַּשׁ בִּכְבֹדִי:
מד וְקִדַּשְׁתִּי אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו אֲקַדֵּשׁ
לְכַהֵן לִי: מה וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים: מו וְיָדְעוּ
כִּי אֲנִי יְ אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְשָׁכְנִי בְתוֹכָם
אֲנִי יְ אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:

(38) **Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar: two yearling lambs each day, regularly.**

(39) **You shall offer the one lamb in the morning, and you shall offer the other lamb at twilight.**

(40) There shall be a tenth of a measure of choice flour with a quarter of a hin of beaten oil mixed in, and a libation of a quarter hin of wine for one lamb;

(41) and you shall offer the other lamb at twilight, repeating with it the meal offering of the morning with its libation — an offering by fire for a pleasing odor to the Lord,

(42) a regular burnt offering throughout the generations, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. For there I will meet with you, and there I will speak with you,

(43) and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence.

(44) I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests.

(45) I will abide among the Israelites, and I will be their God.

(46) And they shall know that I the Lord am their God, who brought them out from the land of Egypt that I might abide among them, I the Lord their God.

(38) **Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar**: After detailing the procedure for initiating the priests and the altar, the Torah moves on to describing the priests' regular duties.

Two yearling lambs each day, regularly: This is the *korban tamid*, the "perpetual sacrifice" brought twice daily with never any exception whatsoever, and thus the most constant element of the Temple service.

(39) **You shall offer the one lamb in the morning, and you shall offer the other lamb at twilight**: "At twilight" means before sunset. These two daily offerings will in later times serve as the basis for establishing the second and third of the three daily prayers – shacharit and minchah.

(40) **There shall be a tenth of a measure of choice flour**: "Tenth measure" in Hebrew is issaron (from eser, "ten," and meaning a tenth part of an *ephah*). It is identical with the omer (see 16:36), a measure of dry capacity equal to approx. 2,2 liters.

With a quarter of a hin of beaten oil mixed in: A hin is approx. 6 liters.

Beaten oil: This is the oil which flows from olives when pressure is applied to them, without grinding the pits. The Talmud, however, asserts that even second-stage pressed oil (obtained by grinding the olives together with their pits) is suitable for the *Menachot* (meal offerings).

And a libation of a quarter hin of wine: An animal sacrifice combines meat, flour, oil, and wine, which represent the main categories of human nourishment.

(42) **A regular burnt offering throughout the generations, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. For there I will meet with you, and there I will speak with you**: Revelation is primary, with atonement and sacrifice only the preparations for it.

(43) **And there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence**: The Almighty will meet not only with Moses, but with all the people. Thus, the Temple as a meeting place will be sanctified by God's presence.

(45) **I will abide among the Israelites**: This is the calling of the Jewish people – to serve as God's abode on earth.

And I will be their God: I will govern the Jewish people by being directly involved in their lives, and not in the manner that I govern other nations – indirectly, through angels (that is, through their obedience to the laws of nature and society).

(46) **And they shall know that I the Lord am their God, who brought them out from the land of Egypt that I might abide among them, I the Lord their God**: The purpose of the Exodus was to create a place for God in the lower worlds, which is achieved through the Jewish people.

24.3. THE ALTAR OF INCENSE (30:1-10)

א וְעָשִׂיתָ מִזְבֵּחַ מִקְטַר קְטֹרֶת עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ׃ ב אַמָּה אָרְכּוֹ
וְאַמָּה רָחְבּוֹ רָבוּעַ יִהְיֶה וְאַמָּתַיִם קֹמָתוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ קַרְנֹתָיו׃ ג וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ
זָהָב טָהוֹר אֶת־גַּגּוֹ וְאֶת־קִירֹתָיו סָבִיב וְאֶת־קַרְנֹתָיו וְעָשִׂיתָ לּוֹ זֵר
זָהָב סָבִיב׃ ד וּשְׁתֵּי טַבְּעֹת זָהָב תַּעֲשֶׂה־לּוֹ | מִתַּחַת לְזֵרוֹ עַל שְׁתֵּי

צַלְעֹתָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה עַל־שְׁנֵי צִדָּיו וְהָיָה לְבָתִּים לְבַדִּים לָשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ בָּהֵמָּה:
ה וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַבַּדִּים עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם זָהָב: ו וְנָתַתָּה אֹתוֹ
לִפְנֵי הַפָּרֹכֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־אֲרֹן הָעֵדֻת לִפְנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָעֵדֻת
אֲשֶׁר אִוָּעֵד לְךָ שָׁמָּה: ז וְהִקְטִיר עָלָיו אַהֲרֹן קְטֹרֶת סַמִּים בַּבֹּקֶר
בַּבֹּקֶר בְּהֵיטִיבוֹ אֶת־הַנֵּרֹת יַקְטִירֶנָּה: ח וּבְהַעֲלֹת אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַנֵּרֹת בֵּין
הָעַרְבַּיִם יַקְטִירֶנָּה קְטֹרֶת תָּמִיד לִפְנֵי יְיָ לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: ט לֹא־תַעֲלוּ עָלָיו
קְטֹרֶת זָרָה וְעֹלָה וּמִנְחָה וְנֶסֶךְ לֹא תִסְּכוּ עָלָיו: י וְכִפֶּר אַהֲרֹן עַל־
קַרְנֹתָיו אַחַת בַּשָּׁנָה מִדַּם חַטַּאת הַכִּפֻּרִים אַחַת בַּשָּׁנָה יְכַפֶּר עָלָיו
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם קֹדֶשׁ־קָדָשִׁים הוּא לַיהוָה:

(1) **You shall make an altar for burning incense; make it of acacia wood.**

(2) **It shall be a cubit long and a cubit wide — it shall be square — and two cubits high, its horns of one piece with it.**

(3) **Overlay it with pure gold: its top, its sides round about, and its horns; and make a gold molding for it round about.**

(4) **And make two gold rings for it under its molding; make them on its two side walls, on opposite sides. They shall serve as holders for poles with which to carry it.**

(5) **Make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold.**

(6) **Place it in front of the curtain that is over the Ark of the Pact — in front of the cover that is over the Pact — where I will meet with you.**

(7) **On it Aaron shall burn aromatic incense: he shall burn it every morning when he tends the lamps,**

(8) **and Aaron shall burn it at twilight when he lights the lamps — a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout the ages.**

(9) **You shall not offer alien incense on it, or a burnt offering or a meal offering; neither shall you pour a libation on it.**

(10) **Once a year Aaron shall perform purification upon its horns with blood of the sin offering of purification; purification shall be performed upon it once a year throughout the ages. It is most holy to the Lord.**

(1) **You shall make an altar for burning incense; make it of acacia wood**: This is the smaller of the two altars. It stood inside the Tabernacle, and was used mainly for the burning of incense. This altar should not be confused with the much larger altar, made of wood, and sheathed in copper, that stood in the Tabernacle courtyard (see 27:1 ff.), and was used for performing the daily sacrifices and for the burning of their parts, as prescribed.

After describing the garments of the priests and the sacrifices, the Torah thus returns to the Temple accessories, because two of those, although essential to the Temple service, have not yet been mentioned: the altar of incense, and the laver for washing the hands and feet of the priests.

The altar of incense is described here, at the end of this weekly portion, *Tetzaveh*, and not in the previous portion, *Terumah*, because the altar's purpose is associated with Aaron, not Moses. The laver, however, is described only in the upcoming portion, *Ki Tissa.* This is because the laver is an element of neither Moses' nor Aaron's "ideal" Temple; rather, it is an element of correction for the sin of the golden calf (a central theme of *Ki Tissa*), as we shall explain below.

(2) **It shall be a cubit long and a cubit wide — it shall be square — and two cubits high, its horns of one piece with it**: This altar is fairly small in size, measuring only one cubit square, as compared with the altar of the sacrifices that stood in the courtyard and was five cubits square (27:1). A cubit is defined as the average length of a man's forearm from the tip of the middle finger to the bottom of the elbow.

Like all the altars, this altar has "horns," i.e., ledges that protrude upward from each of its four corners, as if pointing toward Heaven. These horns must be cast from the same material as the altar and fashioned with it and as a part of it. The horns must not be created separately and then attached to the altar.

(3) **Overlay it with pure gold**: its top, its sides round about, and its horns; and make a gold molding for it round about: In this respect, the altar of incense is like the other accessories that are located inside the Tabernacle.

A gold molding: The literal translation is "a crown of gold." This is the "crown of the priesthood," the third of the three crowns found in the

Temple. (The other two crowns are the ark's crown (25:11), which represents the "crown of the Torah," and the table's crown (25:24), representing the "crown of royalty"). The Torah, the kingdom, and the priesthood are to become the three independent lines of power within the Jewish people.[1]

(6) **Place it in front of the curtain that is over the Ark of the Pact — in front of the cover that is over the Pact — where I will meet with you**: The altar of incense is actually in the same category as the other vessels of the Tabernacle that were described earlier, in the *Terumah* portion. And yet, the description of the altar of incense appears here, not there.

The altar of incense is described only here, after the description of the priests and their service, because this altar is an element of Aaron's, not Moses', Temple. In Moses' ideal Temple nothing prevented anyone at all from entering, and proceeding directly to the Holy of Holies. But in Aaron's Temple this is impossible: The golden altar of incense, and the cloud of incense above it, are blocking that path.

Aaron's Temple exerts a particular influence on the human imagination. The "cloud" of the incense (Lev. 16:13) is a reminder of the cloud that cloaked Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16, 20:18, 24:15 ff.). Moses passes at will directly into this cloud, but for the common man, the cloud hides that which is most high and incomprehensible.

(7-10) **On it Aaron shall burn aromatic incense**: he shall burn it every morning when he tends the lamps … at twilight … Once a year Aaron shall perform purification upon its horns with blood of the sin offering of purification: Atonement is effected on this altar every day of the year, but only at the level of incense, while atonement through blood happens daily only on the altar of the outer courtyard. Only once a year, on Yom Kippur, is atonement made on this inner altar, by sprinkling sacrificial blood upon it.

It is most holy to the Lord: The Temple vessels acquire the level of "most holy" as described in this verse, but literally translated as "Holy

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[1] This system (to which also a fourth line, prophecy, is added) is described in detail in the book of Deuteronomy, in weekly portion *Shofetim*.

of Holies" – that is, the most exalted level of holiness. In this particular case, the altar of incense earns this status by virtue of its special role in the Yom Kippur rite.

WEEKLY
PORTION [9]

KI TISSA

CHAPTER 25
THE CRISIS OF THE GOLDEN CALF

25.1. A PORTION OF CRISIS

In the paired structure of the Torah's weekly portions,[1] portion *Ki Tissa* is conspicuously unpaired. *Ki Tissa* deals with crisis, and crisis is by its very nature a violation of order. Thus, this portion itself can be seen as repudiating the regular order of things.

Actually, *Ki Tissa* does have a "mate," but it is found not here in this second book of the Torah, Exodus, but in the next book, Leviticus. That portion is *Shemini*. (A more detailed discussion of this "separate pairing" of these two Torah portions will be found in the *Bible Dynamics* commentary to Leviticus). This pairing of portions across two different books of the Torah should be taken as an indication that in a higher and much broader sense, the essence of this particular crisis is a feature inherent in the foundation and order of the universe.

The previous Torah portions were all about the Torah and the Tabernacle in an ideal sense. *Ki Tissa* represents a transition to reality – a descent from the mountain, as it were. And in descent from heaven to earth, crisis is inevitable.

Ki Tissa, "When you take a census," the name of this portion, literally means "when you will raise." Ascent too happens through crisis. The incident of the golden calf is a story of a downfall and destruction, which at the same time is an integral part of ascension, progress. The term for

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[1] We have described this in detail above, §2.2.

this in the Kabbalah is *Shevirat Ha-Keilim*, "the shattering of vessels," which is then followed by *tikkun*, "correction, repair."

This crisis follows very soon after the giving of the Torah, and in a certain sense is inseparable from it. The giving of the Torah is, essentially, the Almighty's appeal to a humanity to strive for a level that stands higher than most people are actually able to attain. This is why the Jewish nation as a whole could not receive the Torah directly. The only option was for God to call an emissary (Moses) to the mountaintop and transmit the Torah to the people through him.

But it is then unavoidable that the disparity between the ideal emissary and his real human followers will come to the fore.

The sin of the golden calf, in this regard, was inevitable – just as the breaking of the first tablets and the creation of the second tablets and their inscription was inevitable. (Needless to say, however, this "metaphysical inevitability" diminishes neither from the severity of the crime, nor from the guilt of those who participated in committing it).

This is one of the important lessons of the *Ki Tissa* portion.

25.2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE *KI TISSA* PORTION

Portion *Ki Tissa* consists of three parts:

1. **(30:11-31:18)** – Preparing for the crisis. Here the Torah describes those elements of the Temple that were not covered in portions *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, because those items relate not to the ideal Temple structure, but to the need to overcome evil in the lower world.

2. **(32:1-29)** – The actual incident of the making of the golden calf, and the crisis that ensued.

3. **(32:30-34:35)** – Overcoming the crisis and renewing the covenant.

25.3. THE INCIDENT OF THE GOLDEN CALF AND THE INCIDENT OF THE SPIES

It should be noted that the Jews' punishment for committing the sin of idolatry in the story of the golden calf was less severe than the punishment they later received in the incident of the scouts (when the people did not want to go to conquer the Land of Israel; see Numbers, ch. 14). This demonstrates that idolatry is a lesser crime in God's eyes than an unwillingness on the part of the Jewish people to build their own state in the Land of Israel.

In creating the calf, although the Jews made a truly serious blunder, they were not giving up on themselves and their future. They were bewildered, not knowing what to do; they needed a leader to go ahead of them and show them the way. Because the calf was meant to replace Moses, not God, their crime was not deemed all that horrific.

After the punishment of the participants in the sin of the calf, the people as a whole survived and moved on to the Land of Israel. Aaron did not forfeit his priesthood, nor did the Jews lose their chosenness. Simply put, it is a story of ordinary, and excusable, human error.

But the Jews' refusal to conquer the Land of Israel, in the incident of the scouts, brought far worse consequences, because it meant that they were refusing to fulfill their mission of bringing Divine light to the world. Indeed, that mission can be realized only when the Jews are a true nation living autonomously in their own state, the Land of Israel. And so, their refusal to realize that mission led to the death of an entire generation, the "generation of the wilderness."

CHAPTER 26

THE TABERNACLE DESCRIPTION – CONCLUSION

26.1. THE ELEMENTS OF THE TEMPLE THAT PERFORM CLEANSING

The beginning of the *Ki Tissa* portion completes the description of the Tabernacle: The collection of the half-shekels for performing the census, the laver, the anointing oil and the incense, and the prohibition of constructing the Tabernacle on Shabbat. All these elements are neither a part of Moses' Temple nor of Aaron's. Rather, they relate to the maintenance of the Temple rendered necessary by an imperfect universe, the reality that human activity in the world is inevitably accompanied by pollution. Preliminary purification is therefore required before a person can enter the Temple.

In portions *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, two ideal images of the Temple – Moses' and Aaron's viewpoints, respectively – were outlined. Portion *Ki Tissa* that follows them presents the problem of the descent of the ideal Temple, and the Torah, into the lower world, which led to a crisis, and to a breakdown of the system, as expressed in the smashing of the tablets. The elements of the Temple that relate to this particular problem are therefore described at the beginning of portion *Ki Tissa*.

Although the crises that arise in the process of ascent cannot be avoided (see also §25.1), it is possible nonetheless to build a mechanism into the system in advance that will help to cope with the consequences of the crisis, and allow it to be more easily overcome.

Thus, in the following weekly portions, *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei*, the situation does in fact find its correction, and the Temple can be built in reality.

26.2. COUNTING THE HALF-SHEKELS (30:11-16)

יא וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: יב כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
לִפְקֻדֵיהֶם וְנָתְנוּ אִישׁ כֹּפֶר נַפְשׁוֹ לַיהוָה בִּפְקֹד אֹתָם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה בָהֶם
נֶגֶף בִּפְקֹד אֹתָם: יג זֶה | יִתְּנוּ כָּל־הָעֹבֵר עַל־הַפְּקֻדִּים מַחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל
בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה הַשֶּׁקֶל מַחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל תְּרוּמָה לַיהוָה:
יד כֹּל הָעֹבֵר עַל־הַפְּקֻדִּים מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וָמַעְלָה יִתֵּן תְּרוּמַת יְיָ:
טו הֶעָשִׁיר לֹא־יַרְבֶּה וְהַדַּל לֹא יַמְעִיט מִמַּחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל לָתֵת אֶת־
תְּרוּמַת יְיָ לְכַפֵּר עַל־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם: טז וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־כֶּסֶף הַכִּפֻּרִים מֵאֵת
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָתַתָּ אֹתוֹ עַל־עֲבֹדַת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהָיָה לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְזִכָּרוֹן לִפְנֵי יְיָ לְכַפֵּר עַל־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם:

(11) **The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:**

(12) **When you take a census of the Israelite people according to their enrollment, each shall pay the Lord a ransom for himself on being enrolled, that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled.**

(13) **This is what everyone who is entered in the records shall pay: a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight — twenty gerahs to the shekel — a half-shekel as an offering to the Lord.**

(14) **Everyone who is entered in the records, from the age of twenty years up, shall give the Lord's offering:**

(15) **the rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel when giving the Lord's offering as expiation for your persons.**

(16) **You shall take the expiation money from the Israelites and assign it to the service of the Tent of Meeting; it shall serve**

the Israelites as a reminder before the Lord, as expiation for your persons.

(11) **The Lord spoke to Moses, saying**: As soon as portion *Tetzaveh*, which tells of Aaron's Temple, has ended, and portion *Ki Tissa* begins, the Torah once again immediately calls Moses by name.

(12) **When you take a census of the Israelite people according to their enrollment**: "Their enrollment" here in the text is *lifkudeihem*, literally, "[according] to their enumerations." But the Hebrew root *P-K-D* has other meanings besides counting, including "to command" (e.g., troops; see Deut. 20:9). Thus we can translate *lifkudeihem* as "for their review" (in the military sense). This census, whose purpose is to establish each person's function and position in battle, is needed for conquering the Land of Israel.

(12) **Each shall pay the Lord a ransom for himself on being enrolled, that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled**: "A ransom for himself," *kofer nafsho*, means literally: "a ransom for his soul." But what is the connection between census and ransom?

In each person we need to see a unique personality, the sum total of all his individual qualities. But the census perceives people as a "quantity," setting aside the uniqueness and infinity of every individual and of the Jewish people as a whole.

And yet, the realities of life require us to know also, for practical purposes, the overall population count, for otherwise it will not be possible to govern the people properly, let alone to lead them into battle.

In order that the census will not lead us to see any human being as nothing more than "one equivalent unit," the Torah here establishes two requirements: (1) The people must be counted only indirectly; e.g., we count them by counting the number of coins received when each person gives one coin. (2) We acknowledge that the act of counting people is inherently "sinful," for it does "harm" to the idea that every individual is uniquely and infinitely valuable. A "ransom for the soul" must therefore be built into the calculation.

(13) **This is what everyone who is entered in the records shall pay: a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight … as an offering to the**

Lord: The "sanctuary weight" of a shekel is nine grams (.3 ounces) of silver.

(13) **By the sanctuary weight — twenty gerahs to the shekel**: The Torah adds this refinement in order to tell us which shekel is meant for this application. There were various shekels, but only one gerah, a standard coin.

This shekel is also used to measure the amount of silver that is required for fulfilling certain commandments – redeeming a firstborn son, for example: "Take as their redemption price, from the age of one month up, the money equivalent of five shekels by the sanctuary weight, [each shekel of] which is twenty gerahs" (Num. 18:16).

(14) **Everyone who is entered in the records, from the age of twenty years up, shall give the Lord's offering**: As explained just above (in connection with the word *lifkudeihem*), the census counts adult males who are fit to serve in the military. ("You and Aaron shall record them by their groups, from the age of twenty years up, all those in Israel who are able to bear arms," Num. 1:3).

(15) **The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel when giving the Lord's offering as expiation for your persons**: Because this is not a property tax, but an atonement for the soul, all are equal in this regard. The halving of the shekel serves as a reminder that no person in isolation is a self-sufficient unit, but only a "half" of one. A person can achieve wholeness only in conjunction with others.

(16) **You shall take the expiation money from the Israelites and assign it to the service of the Tent of Meeting; it shall serve the Israelites as a reminder before the Lord, as expiation for your persons**: In laying the foundations of the Tabernacle, the fundamental equality of all Jews is established. Thus, each individual senses that on his own he is incomplete, and also that his participation is essential to fulfilling the communal mission.

26.3. THE LAVER (30:17-21)

יז וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: יח וְעָשִׂיתָ כִּיּוֹר נְחֹשֶׁת וְכַנּוֹ נְחֹשֶׁת
לְרָחְצָה וְנָתַתָּ אֹתוֹ בֵּין־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּבֵין הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְנָתַתָּ שָׁמָּה מָיִם:
יט וְרָחֲצוּ אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם וְאֶת־רַגְלֵיהֶם: כ בְּבֹאָם אֶל־
אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יִרְחֲצוּ־מַיִם וְלֹא יָמֻתוּ אוֹ בְּגִשְׁתָּם אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְשָׁרֵת
לְהַקְטִיר אִשֶּׁה לַיהוָה: כא וְרָחֲצוּ יְדֵיהֶם וְרַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יָמֻתוּ וְהָיְתָה
לָהֶם חָק־עוֹלָם לוֹ וּלְזַרְעוֹ לְדֹרֹתָם:

(17) **The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:**

(18) **Make a laver of copper and a stand of copper for it, for washing; and place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar. Put water in it,**

(19) **and let Aaron and his sons wash their hands and feet [in water drawn] from it.**

(20) **When they enter the Tent of Meeting they shall wash with water, that they may not die; or when they approach the altar to serve, to turn into smoke an offering by fire to the Lord,**

(21) **they shall wash their hands and feet, that they may not die. It shall be a law for all time for them — for him and his offspring — throughout the ages.**

(18) **Make a laver of copper … for washing**: Real life is imperfect, and no mortal is completely free of pollution. The laver emphasizes the need for purification before entering the Temple and participating in its service.

A laver of copper: The laver was like a large cauldron with spouts, from which the water flowed.

And a stand of copper for it: As already noted, three metals were used in the Tabernacle: (1) Gold, a symbol of moral human qualities, gave the Tabernacle much of its magnificence. (2) Silver, representing the material and economic aspects of life, was used in the foundations of the walls and pillars of the Tabernacle. (3) Copper, symbolic of human passions, was a key element in those Tabernacle features that served to prepare the visitor for entry.

Copper bears a certain resemblance to gold, but it is not gold. Likewise, human passions only pretend to be moral. The laver represents the purification (but not the destruction!) of passions, which allows the creative energy of human passions to be channeled in a positive direction.

Linguistically, copper, *nechoshet*, is closely related to *nachash*, "serpent"[1]. Under the influence of his passions a person is unable to distinguish between right and wrong, between good and bad. That is the influence of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The purifying waters dispensed from the copper laver represent the cleansing of a person from those mistakes committed when, driven by his passions, he has mistaken falsehood for truth.

(19) **And let Aaron and his sons wash their hands and feet [in water drawn] from it**: The priests performed the Temple service unshod.

Because the body's extremities continuously come in contact with the outside world, in which evil abounds, they must be cleansed before performing the Temple service. The requirement to wash one's hands before partaking of a meal derives from this same connection, because the table on which a person eats is likened to an altar, and each meal is likened to a sacrifice. (The custom of putting salt on bread at every meal is likewise based on this connection: Salt was an essential element in the Temple offerings. "You shall season your every offering of meal with salt; you shall not omit from your meal offering the salt of your covenant with God; with all your offerings you must offer salt." – Lev. 2:13)

(20) **When they enter the Tent of Meeting they shall wash with water, that they may not die; or when they approach the altar to serve, to turn into smoke an offering by fire to the Lord**: The Temple service, like any service, requires proper preliminary preparation, or it can result in death. A practical example of this is an electrician who makes bodily contact with a high-voltage source without suitable preparation and equipment.

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[1] This connection between *nachash*, "serpent," and *nechoshet* "copper," is especially evident in the story of the copper serpent, see Num. 21:9.

(21) **They shall wash their hands and feet, that they may not die. It shall be a law for all time for them — for him and his offspring — throughout the ages**: The commandment is repeated to emphasize that it applies not only to Aaron himself and his sons, but to all successive generations. Cleansing the priests from impurities is necessary not only when the Temple service is first initiated; it remains an essential element of the Temple's functions for all time.

26.4. THE ANOINTING OIL (30:22-33)

כב וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר׃ כג וְאַתָּה קַח־לְךָ בְּשָׂמִים רֹאשׁ מָר־
דְּרוֹר חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת וְקִנְמָן־בֶּשֶׂם מַחֲצִיתוֹ חֲמִשִּׁים וּמָאתָיִם וּקְנֵה־בֹשֶׂם
חֲמִשִּׁים וּמָאתָיִם׃ כד וְקִדָּה חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְשֶׁמֶן זַיִת הִין׃
כה וְעָשִׂיתָ אֹתוֹ שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ רֹקַח מִרְקַחַת מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֵחַ שֶׁמֶן
מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה׃ כו וּמָשַׁחְתָּ בוֹ אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֵת אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת׃
כז וְאֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְאֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה וְאֶת־כֵּלֶיהָ וְאֵת מִזְבַּח
הַקְּטֹרֶת׃ כח וְאֶת־מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְאֶת־הַכִּיֹּר וְאֶת־כַּנּוֹ׃
כט וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם וְהָיוּ קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים כָּל־הַנֹּגֵעַ בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ׃ ל וְאֶת־
אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו תִּמְשֹׁחַ וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם לְכַהֵן לִי׃ לא וְאֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
תְּדַבֵּר לֵאמֹר שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה זֶה לִי לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם׃ לב עַל־בְּשַׂר
אָדָם לֹא יִיסָךְ וּבְמַתְכֻּנְתּוֹ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ כָּמֹהוּ קֹדֶשׁ הוּא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם׃
לג אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִרְקַח כָּמֹהוּ וַאֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן מִמֶּנּוּ עַל־זָר וְנִכְרַת מֵעַמָּיו׃

(22) **The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:**

(23) **Next take choice spices: five hundred weight of solidified myrrh, half as much — two hundred and fifty — of fragrant cinnamon, two hundred and fifty of aromatic cane,**

(24) **five hundred — by the sanctuary weight — of cassia, and a hin of olive oil.**

(25) **Make of this a sacred anointing oil, a compound of ingredients expertly blended, to serve as sacred anointing oil.**

(26) **With it anoint the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Pact,**

(27) **the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and all its fittings, the altar of incense,**

(28) **the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand.**

(29) **Thus you shall consecrate them so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be consecrated.**

(30) **You shall also anoint Aaron and his sons, consecrating them to serve Me as priests.**

(31) **And speak to the Israelite people, as follows: This shall be an anointing oil sacred to Me throughout the ages.**

(32) **It must not be rubbed on any person's body, and you must not make anything like it in the same proportions; it is sacred, to be held sacred by you.**

(33) **Whoever compounds its like, or puts any of it on a layman, shall be cut off from his kin.**

(23) **Next take choice spices**: five hundred weight of solidified myrrh: About 8 kg (17.6 lb).

(25) **Make of this a sacred anointing oil, a compound of ingredients expertly blended, to serve as sacred anointing oil**: The anointing is done with oil – a special olive oil that symbolizes illumination, since olive oil was used to kindle the menorah (27:20). The Temple and its accessories are a source of light for the Jewish people and for humanity.

(26) **With it anoint the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Pact**: The ark is mentioned first, because it is the main element of the Tabernacle.

(27) **The table and … the lampstand and … the altar of incense**: After the ark, the other elements of the inner Tabernacle are enumerated as more important than those that follow.

(28) **The altar of burnt offering … and the laver**: The external elements of the Tabernacle are now listed.

(29) **Thus you shall consecrate them so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be consecrated**: After the Temple

vessels are sanctified, they acquire a more exalted status, for they have now been officially designated for fulfilling their immediate functions in the Sanctuary. And likewise, anything that touches them acquires the same level of holiness, and must not be used for secular purposes. The same has already been stated above concerning the altar (29:37).

(30) **You shall also anoint Aaron and his sons, consecrating them to serve Me as priests**: The priests themselves are, as it were, Temple "utensils."

(31-32) **And speak to the Israelite people, as follows**: This shall be an anointing oil sacred to Me throughout the ages. It must not be rubbed on any person's body, and you must not make anything like it in the same proportions; it is sacred, to be held sacred by you: A clear distinction must be made between the sacred and the secular. Maintaining clear distance between the two supports and reinforces the energy of holiness.

(33) **Whoever compounds its like, or puts any of it on a layman**: "Layman" here means anyone who is neither a priest nor a king.

Shall be cut off from his kin: It is important for national survival to preserve the awe of the sacred that the Temple is meant to inspire.

26.5. THE COMPOSITION OF THE INCENSE (30:34-38)

לד וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה קַח־לְךָ֣ סַמִּ֗ים נָטָ֤ף | וּשְׁחֵלֶת֙ וְחֶלְבְּנָ֔ה סַמִּ֖ים
וּלְבֹנָ֑ה זַכָּ֣ה בַ֔ד בְּבַ֥ד יִהְיֶ֖ה: לה וְעָשִׂ֣יתָ אֹתָ֗הּ קְטֹ֤רֶת רֹקַח֙ מַעֲשֵׂ֣ה
רוֹקֵ֔חַ מְמֻלָּ֖ח טָה֑וֹר קֹֽדֶשׁ: לו וְשָׁחַקְתָּ֣ מִמֶּ֔נָּה הָדֵ֥ק וְנָתַתָּ֖ה מִמֶּ֑נָּה לִפְנֵ֣י
הָעֵדֻ֗ת בְּאֹ֣הֶל מוֹעֵ֔ד אֲשֶׁר֙ אִוָּ֣עֵד לְךָ֔ שָׁ֖מָּה קֹ֣דֶשׁ קָֽדָשִׁ֑ים תִּהְיֶ֥ה לָכֶֽם:
לז וְהַקְּטֹ֣רֶת אֲשֶׁר־תַּעֲשֶׂ֗ה בְּמַתְכֻּנְתָּ֔הּ לֹ֥א תַעֲשׂ֖וּ לָכֶ֑ם קֹ֥דֶשׁ תִּהְיֶ֖ה לְךָ
לַיהוָֽה: לח אִ֣ישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂ֣ה כָמֹ֗הָ לְהָרִ֤יחַ בָּהּ֙ וְנִכְרַ֔ת מֵעַמָּֽיו:

(34) **And the Lord said to Moses: Take the herbs stacte, onycha, and galbanum — these herbs together with pure frankincense; let there be an equal part of each.**

(35) Make them into incense, a compound expertly blended, refined, pure, sacred.

(36) Beat some of it into powder, and put some before the Pact in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you; it shall be most holy to you.

(37) But when you make this incense, you must not make any in the same proportions for yourselves; it shall be held by you sacred to the Lord.

(38) Whoever makes any like it, to smell of it, shall be cut off from his kin.

(34) **And the Lord said to Moses: Take the herbs stacte ...**: This is the resin of balsamic trees.

Onycha: A floral species of the carnation family.

Pure frankincense: An aromatic resin obtained from certain trees that is used in incense and perfumes.

Galbanum: A fetid plant with a heavy, offensive odor, which nonetheless, when combined with the other components, improves the overall smell of the mixture.

The Midrash sees in the presence of this component of the incense a lesson in the correct attitude towards sinners. Rather than treating them with contempt, we must integrate them into the community, and include them in our journey toward holiness. Without galbanum the right quality of the incense cannot be achieved. And by analogy, without a certain amount of impropriety within the Jewish nation, the proper quality of life cannot be achieved.

Any system must be heterogeneous, otherwise it cannot develop and advance. The task demanded of the Jews is to achieve holiness not as individuals, but collectively as a nation, which necessarily includes both the righteous and the sinners. The composition of the incense demonstrates the principle of "unity in diversity," where each element has its proper place, and is indispensable.

(35) **Make them into incense, a compound expertly blended, refined, pure, sacred**: This is the incense burnt daily on the golden altar, the altar of incense (30:7).

(36) **Beat some of it into powder, and put some before the Pact in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you**: Once a year, on Yom Kippur, incense was burnt before the Pact (i.e. the ark), in the Holy of Holies, and only on this one day in the year was the blood of sacrifices sprinkled on the inner, golden altar (this was done daily only on the outer, copper altar). Thus, on Yom Kippur the atonement process "moves into the Sanctuary" to reach the Holy of Holies, where the High Priest too enters on that one day, and only then.

(37-38) **When you make this incense, you must not make any in the same proportions for yourselves; it shall be held by you sacred to the Lord. Whoever makes any like it, to smell of it, shall be cut off from his kin**: The exalted sanctity of the incense is like that of the anointing oil mentioned only a few verses earlier.

26.6. BEZALEL'S AND OHOLIAB'S CALLING (31:1-11)

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: ב רְאֵה קָרָאתִי בְשֵׁם בְּצַלְאֵל בֶּן־אוּרִי
בֶן־חוּר לְמַטֵּה יְהוּדָה: ג וָאֲמַלֵּא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּחָכְמָה וּבִתְבוּנָה
וּבְדַעַת וּבְכָל־מְלָאכָה: ד לַחְשֹׁב מַחֲשָׁבֹת לַעֲשׂוֹת בַּזָּהָב וּבַכֶּסֶף
וּבַנְּחֹשֶׁת: ה וּבַחֲרֹשֶׁת אֶבֶן לְמַלֹּאת וּבַחֲרֹשֶׁת עֵץ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכָל־
מְלָאכָה: ו וַאֲנִי הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אִתּוֹ אֵת אָהֳלִיאָב בֶּן־אֲחִיסָמָךְ לְמַטֵּה־דָן
וּבְלֵב כָּל־חֲכַם־לֵב נָתַתִּי חָכְמָה וְעָשׂוּ אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתֶךָ: ז אֶת |
אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת־הָאָרֹן לָעֵדֻת וְאֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וְאֵת כָּל־כְּלֵי
הָאֹהֶל: ח וְאֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן וְאֶת־כֵּלָיו וְאֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה הַטְּהֹרָה וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלֶיהָ
וְאֵת מִזְבַּח הַקְּטֹרֶת: ט וְאֶת־מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְאֶת־הַכִּיֹּר
וְאֶת־כַּנּוֹ: י וְאֵת בִּגְדֵי הַשְּׂרָד וְאֶת־בִּגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְאַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶת־
בִּגְדֵי בָנָיו לְכַהֵן: יא וְאֵת שֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְאֶת־קְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים לַקֹּדֶשׁ
כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוִּיתֶךָ יַעֲשׂוּ:

(1) **The Lord spoke to Moses:**

(2) **See, I have singled out by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.**

(3) I have endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft;

(4) to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper,

(5) to cut stones for setting and to carve wood — to work in every kind of craft.

(6) Moreover, I have assigned to him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have also granted skill to all who are skillful, that they may make everything that I have commanded you:

(7) the Tent of Meeting, the Ark for the Pact and the cover upon it, and all the furnishings of the Tent;

(8) the table and its utensils, the pure lampstand and all its fittings, and the altar of incense;

(9) the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand;

(10) the service vestments, the sacral vestments of Aaron the priest and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests;

(11) as well as the anointing oil and the aromatic incense for the sanctuary. Just as I have commanded you, they shall do.

(2) **See, I have singled out by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah**: Hur has already been mentioned earlier in the Torah in two contexts. He was, along with Aaron, one of Moses' two closest assistants in the war with Amalek (17:10). And he was one of the leaders who remained with the people when Moses ascended the mountain for his forty-day stay there (24:12).

Hur was Moses' nephew, the son of Caleb and Miriam, Moses' sister. His descendants thus combine the royal bearing of the tribe of Judah and the priestly character of the Levites. Bezalel, who according to Tradition was only thirteen years old when hand-picked by God as the Tabernacle's chief architect, represents the young, up-and-coming generation of the nation that left Egypt.

(3) **I have endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft**: The literal translation is: "I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship."

"Wisdom" (chochmah) is an overall perceptiveness; "understanding" (*tevunah*) is the ability to analyze and distinguish nuances; "knowledge" (*da'at*) is the know-how that enables a person to act correctly in any given situation. A person who possesses all of these qualities together is said to be "filled with the spirit of God."

(4) **To make designs for work**: Building the Sanctuary is creative work. It is not just about meeting the technical requirements.

(6) **Moreover, I have assigned to him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan**: Judah, Bezalel's tribe, is the most advanced and organized. In Judaism, Judah and his tribe represent royalty, for they are the heirs to the kingdom (as seen in the Davidic dynasty; see also Gen. 49:10).

At the other end of the spectrum is the tribe of Dan. The Danites are the dissenters, anarchists, and provocateurs of the Jewish people. (See *Bible Dynamics* commentary on Genesis 49:16-18). The Temple and all its accessories are to be built by synthesizing the characteristics of these two antipodal tribes of the Jewish people.

Some degree of anarchy and ataxia is essential not only for society in general (because certain non-standard situations cannot be addressed with "proper" practices and prescribed actions alone), but in matters of holiness as well.

And I have also granted skill to all who are skillful: The literal translation is: "And in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom." Only when someone is already wise can we then give them yet more wisdom (as paradoxical as this may seem).

(7) **The Ark for the Pact and the cover upon it**: The purpose of the Ark is to hold the tablets that establish ongoing revelation. The ark's lid holds the cherubim.

(8) **The pure lampstand**: The "purity" of the menorah refers to its being fashioned from a single slab of pure gold.

26.7. THE SABBATH AND THE BUILDING OF THE TABERNACLE (31:12-17)

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: יג וְאַתָּה דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אַךְ
אֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמֹרוּ כִּי אוֹת הִוא בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם לָדַעַת כִּי
אֲנִי יְיָ מְקַדִּשְׁכֶם: יד וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת כִּי קֹדֶשׁ הִוא לָכֶם מְחַלְלֶיהָ
מוֹת יוּמָת כִּי כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה בָהּ מְלָאכָה וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִקֶּרֶב
עַמֶּיהָ: טו שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים יֵעָשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת שַׁבָּתוֹן
קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת מוֹת יוּמָת: טז וְשָׁמְרוּ
בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם:
יז בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹת הִוא לְעֹלָם כִּי־שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה יְיָ אֶת־
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנָּפַשׁ:

(12) **And the Lord said to Moses:**

(13) **Speak to the Israelite people and say: Nevertheless, you must keep My Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I the Lord have consecrated you.**

(14) **You shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy for you. He who profanes it shall be put to death: whoever does work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his kin.**

(15) **Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.**

(16) **The Israelite people shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time:**

(17) **it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed.**

(13) **Nevertheless, you must keep My Sabbaths**: God's directions to Moses for the construction of the Tabernacle are now complete, and this commandment concerning the observance of the Sabbath is the very last instruction Moses will receive before descending from the mountain.

The importance of the Shabbat has already been very prominently stressed previously, in the story of the manna, and as the fourth of the Ten Commandments. But the emphasis here is on "Nevertheless": Even when you are occupied with the building of the Tabernacle, a commandment of genuinely great consequence, you must nevertheless observe my Sabbaths, for they take precedence even over the building of the Temple.

For this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I the Lord have consecrated you: Shabbat is a "Temple in time," and is thus no less important than the physical "Temple in space."

(14) **You shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy for you. He who profanes it shall be put to death: whoever does work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his kin**: Two parallel punishments are prescribed by the Torah for violating the Sabbath: punishment at the hands of the human court, death – and the punishment at the hands of Heaven, *karet*, "excision of the soul by the Almighty".

(15) **Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord**: *Prima facie*, there is no need for the Torah to tell us that work may be done on the weekdays. But in fact, the Hebrew text is even more emphatic than the English here. Literally translated, it says: "Six days shall work be done." *Shall*, not may. The contrast between the six weekdays and the Shabbat is emphasized, thus giving considerably more force to the importance of observing the Shabbat. From the Torah's point of view, performing constructive work on the weekdays is in fact quite important, but observing the Sabbath is at least as important, if not more so.

(16) **The Israelite people shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time**: This verse highlights the Sabbath not only as just one of the Torah's many commandments, but also as a direct sign of God's covenant.

(17) **It shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed**: The Temple is

a microcosm, and the creation of the Temple is like the creation of the world. Thus, just as the original Creation found its completion in the Shabbat, so must the creation of the Temple cease for the observance of the Shabbat.

CHAPTER 27
THE GOLDEN CALF

27.1. THE UNDERLYING MEANING OF THE WORSHIP OF THE GOLDEN CALF

As already noted, the concept of "gold" is not associated with material wealth in the Torah. (Silver serves that purpose instead). Rather, gold is used as a metaphor for noble spiritual qualities. Accordingly, the worship of the golden calf was not a deification of material wealth, but of a particular ethical system, whose essence we shall consider below.

There were periods in history when the Jews worshipped deities of other nations: Baal, Astarte, Moloch, and many others. But only the golden calf was an idol of the Jews' own invention. The echoes of this "national form of idolatry" resounded throughout all of Jewish history.

When Jeroboam, king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, sought to achieve religious independence from Judea, he "made two golden calves. He said to the people, 'You have been going up to Jerusalem long enough. This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!' He set up one in Bethel and placed the other in Dan" (1 Kings 12:28-29).

This cult was preserved until the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Even when the prophet Elijah managed to destroy the worshippers of Baal, a foreign deity imported from Phoenicia (1 Kings, 18:39), it did not shake the cult of the calf. Such stability shows that Jeroboam's calves did not introduce anything alien or new into Jewish religious life, because worship of the calf was a natural form of idolatry for the Jewish people.

The Midrash connects the golden calf with Joseph, as follows. Joseph was buried in a sarcophagus at the bottom of the Nile. In order to raise Joseph from the depths and take him out of Egypt (Exodus 13:19), Moses wrote on a metal plate the words *aleh shor*, "Rise, o Bull" (the bull being a symbol of Joseph, see Deut. 33:17) and cast it into the Nile. Joseph's sarcophagus then rose to the surface, and Moses carried it with him when they left Egypt.

A certain young man, adds the Midrash, retrieved the plate with the inscription, and hid it in his possession. Later, at Sinai, when the people demanded of Aaron, "Come, make us a god," Aaron collected their gold and threw it into the fire, whereupon the same young man then threw his metal plate too with its inscription into the fire. The words "Rise, o Bull" were brought to life again, but this time in a completely different form: Out of the fire rose the golden calf.

This midrash is telling us that the worship of the golden calf was the worship of the attribute of Joseph; that is, the deification of the qualities of the Jewish people that are associated with Joseph's attributes. It is no coincidence that in later Jewish history, worship of the calf was widespread. It endured in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, whose population mainstay was Joseph's descendants – the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

Bull, calf, ox – these represent not just any ordinary force, but a uniquely constructive force of ancient civilization, "the tractor of antiquity," used for plowing, carrying heavy burdens, and driving the mill for grinding grain. The bull served as a primary material force for improving the world.

These same properties were characteristic of Joseph. He was determined to change and improve the world around him. In his youth, he tried (unsuccessfully) to correct his brothers. Enslaved to Potiphar, Pharaoh's courtier, Joseph became the steward of his household and all his possessions, for "his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord lent success to everything he undertook" (Gen. 39:3).

Later, after advancing a plan to save all of Egypt from hunger and becoming second-in-command to Pharaoh (Gen. 41), Joseph revamped the entire land of Egypt. He developed the country's infrastructure, agriculture, and government, and saved Egypt from death by starvation. Even

before any of these monumental achievements, the Torah calls Joseph "a successful man" (Gen. 39:2)[1].

The golden calf is an expression of Jewish admiration for those qualities of Joseph, for the uniquely Jewish aptitude for transforming the surrounding world. This, in fact, is the "national Jewish form of idolatry."

Of course, such abilities are highly essential even from a religious point of view. Active participation in advancing civilization and correcting the world is the very first religious commandment of the entire Torah. ("God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it' " (Gen. 1:28). If the Jews will not demonstrate their ability to contribute to the development of science and general culture, then even in matters of spirituality no one will listen to what they have to say.

Nevertheless, the capacity to transform the world is only a tool for advancing the Divine teachings; it must not be made a goal for its own sake. Excessive admiration for this aspect reduces all Jewish self-identification to enumerating Jewish Nobel prize laureates, and reflecting on the number of Jews who have made practical contributions to the benefit of mankind.

This worship of "Joseph's qualities" is, in essence, the worship of the golden calf.

27.2. MOSES RECEIVES THE TABLETS OF THE LAW

יח וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּכַלֹּתוֹ לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ בְּהַר סִינַי שְׁנֵי לֻחֹת הָעֵדֻת לֻחֹת אֶבֶן כְּתֻבִים בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים׃הַמִּשְׁחָה וְאֶת־קְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים לַקֹּדֶשׁ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוִּיתָךְ יַעֲשׂוּ׃

(18) **When He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the Pact, stone tablets inscribed with the finger of God.**

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[1] For more on this aspect of Joseph's personality, see *Bible Dynamics* on Genesis, Ch. 42.

(18) **When He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the Pact**: More literally, "the two tablets of the Testimony." Later (Deut. 10:4) we learn that the inscription on the tablets was the Ten Commandments. This completion of the Sinai revelation echoes its beginning, and the Ten Commandments take center stage as the quintessence of the Torah.

Stone tablets inscribed with the finger of God: This testifies to the greatness of the tablets. The letters engraved upon them were literally Divine. But on the other hand, this was the very reason that the tablets had to be broken. Being so perfectly celestial, the tablets could not survive their descent to earth. Something so Divine that it is created with no human participation whatsoever cannot gain a foothold in the material world.

To be sure, maintaining the right balance is essential. Elements of the corporeal, terrestrial world must be present, but if they are allowed to predominate, the result will be Aaron's sin. Aaron always wanted to remain "below" with the people, never to be cut off from them, even when they were undeniably in the wrong. And the outcome? Aaron's golden calf.

27.3. THE CREATION OF THE GOLDEN CALF (32:1-6)

א וַיַּרְא הָעָם כִּי־בֹשֵׁשׁ מֹשֶׁה לָרֶדֶת מִן־הָהָר וַיִּקָּהֵל הָעָם עַל־אַהֲרֹן
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּם | עֲשֵׂה־לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי־זֶה |
מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מֶה־הָיָה לוֹ: ב
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַהֲרֹן פָּרְקוּ נִזְמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשֵׁיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם
וּבְנֹתֵיכֶם וְהָבִיאוּ אֵלָי: ג וַיִּתְפָּרְקוּ כָּל־הָעָם אֶת־נִזְמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר
בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל־אַהֲרֹן: ד וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיָּצַר אֹתוֹ בַּחֶרֶט וַיַּעֲשֵׂהוּ
עֵגֶל מַסֵּכָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלוּךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:
ה וַיַּרְא אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ לְפָנָיו וַיִּקְרָא אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמַר חַג לַיהוָה מָחָר:
ו וַיַּשְׁכִּימוּ מִמָּחֳרָת וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיַּגִּשׁוּ שְׁלָמִים וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל וְשָׁתוֹ
וַיָּקֻמוּ לְצַחֵק:

(1) When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt — we do not know what has happened to him."

(2) Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

(3) And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

(4) This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

(5) When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron announced: "Tomorrow shall be a festival of the Lord!"

(6) Early next day, the people offered up burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; they sat down to eat and drink, and then rose to dance.

(1) **When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain**: Moses ascended the mountain on the seventh of Sivan, the day after the Sinai revelation and the giving of the Torah. The incident of the golden calf took place on the fortieth day after that, the seventeenth of Tammuz. Later in Jewish history, that day became an occasion of mourning and fasting.

When He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the Pact … When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain: These adjacent verses appear in the Torah in immediate succession, with no paragraph break between them. This clearly indicates a close thematic connection between the two verses. Namely: Moses has received the tablets, and his forty-day stay on the mountain has now ended. But only now, after forty days without Moses, do the people grow weary of waiting any longer, and demand of Aaron to create for them a deity. Why is this?

The Midrash explains it this way: Before Moses left the people to ascend the mountain, he informed them that he would be away for forty days, by which he meant forty full days. But the people erroneously understood "forty days" in the more usual sense, i.e., that that first partial day already counted as the first day of the forty. Thus, on the eve of Moses' return the people were sure that the appointed time had already passed, that he had abandoned them, and that they were now bereft of a leader. And so they demanded of Aaron to create the golden calf.

However, these events are connected, not only technically (an error in the calculation), but also internally. Until Moses received the tablets, the people instinctively sensed that Moses still had business on the mountain. But once Moses had received the tablets, and yet he still remained at large for no apparent reason, the people rose up and exclaimed: "That man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt — we do not know what has happened to him." They came to Aaron, demanding, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us."

The chasm between the ideal and the reality here assumes a visible, topographic dimension. Moses is up above, and the people down below. Moses needs time to descend. Descent from the mountain – the process of transferring higher ideals into the lower world – takes time, for it is an incongruity built into the inner workings of the universe. And that creates a crisis. So long as the task has not yet been completed above, the people are prepared to wait below. But when that time has already expired, and still with no visible result, their anticipation becomes unbearable. This is the answer to the question of why the people became impatient only at the very end of the forty days.

(1) **The people gathered against Aaron**: Aaron was only Moses' assistant. So even now, in Moses' absence, Aaron is perceived not as an independent leader, but only as a link of transmission.

And said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt — we do not know what has happened to him": In seeking a replacement for Moses, the people ask not for a leader, but for a "god." This is not just a figure of speech – the people actually relate to Moses as their god.

Indeed, God Himself refers to Moses twice at the beginning of the Exodus story in such terms: "Thus he [Aaron] shall serve as your spokesman,

with you playing the role of God to him" (4:16). "See, I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet" (7:1).

The generation that left Egypt, and still fosters a slave mentality, needs just such an attitude toward their commander-in-chief, just this view of Moses as an absolute leader – a "god." But there is another side to this coin: As soon as their leader disappears beyond the horizon, the people, who are accustomed to being led, become lost and disoriented, and demand a new leader, even agreeing to receive him in the form of an idol.

(2–5) **Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me" ... He built an altar before it; and announced: "Tomorrow shall be a festival of the Lord!"**: The Midrash explains Aaron's actions as his attempt to stall for time. Aaron thought: The women and children greatly value their jewelry. If I ask them for their golden earrings, they will hesitate to part with them. It will take some time for me to persuade them, and meanwhile Moses will return.

And for the same reason, Aaron "built an altar before it," i.e., he decided to build the altar himself, because that would take longer than building it as a communal effort. "And Aaron announced: 'Tomorrow shall be a festival of the Lord!' " Tomorrow, not today – all this in the hope that in the meantime Moses would arrive.

However, the Torah also says clearly that Aaron actively created the calf. Thus, his actions cannot be explained simply as a delaying tactic.

The reason Aaron cannot stand up to the people is that his connection with them runs too deep. Unlike Moses, who always kept himself somewhat aloof from the people, Aaron continued to live in their midst, and was at one with them. In theological terms, Aaron's approach can be summed up as something like this: "In order to elevate a sinner, you must yourself descend into sin with him, and maintain close contact with him. You can then use that relationship to redeem him from his plight." Without that attachment to the people and his direct involvement with them, Aaron could not have fulfilled his function of mediating between Moses and the people. But precisely because of this same connection, when Aaron breaks away from Moses he yields to the pertinacity of the multitude and creates the calf.

So long as Aaron worked with Moses side by side, there were no issues. Moses drew a hard line, and, although Aaron softened it whenever possible, the inner firmness always remained. But when Aaron is forced to act independently, without his brother, the whole system immediately begins to crumble.

(3) **And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron**: The Midrash notes that the Torah does not say that the people took off the gold rings that were in the ears of their wives and children, as Aaron had just asked them to do. They gave Aaron their own earrings, rather than waiting for their wives and children to give him theirs, because they were so eager, and so much in a hurry, to create the calf.

Thus, the direct meaning of this verse emphasizes that the Jewish passion for a new deity and new leadership was so compelling, that the people simply could not wait. Indeed, they were prepared to sacrifice even their own comfort, the pleasure of their adornments, in order to fulfill that need. Not always, by far, does a people strive for freedom, and for their right to exercise their own independent judgment and free will. Quite often the very opposite is the case – the people long to be led.

(4) **This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf**: Here the Torah highlights Aaron's personal, active involvement in creating the calf. Without Aaron, there would have been no calf. Thus, Aaron's role in the incident can hardly be considered passive.

A molten calf: It was Aaron who gave it that form. The people had not indicated what appearance they expected the deity to have.

And they exclaimed, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!": Previously they had believed that it was Moses who had brought them out ("That man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt — we do not know what has happened to him," v. 1). But now he is gone. Moses was to them a demigod, and the calf would now replace him.

Thus, the creation of the golden calf was not idolatry in its purest and most extreme form, but only *Shituf*, "attachment," – worship of the Almighty by "attaching" a supplementary image to Him.

(5) **When Aaron saw this**: The Torah does not tell us exactly what Aaron saw. The Midrash offers two options:

1. Aaron saw that the calf was alive, as the Psalms state (106:20): "They exchanged their glory for the image of a bull that feeds on grass." Aaron saw that the calf possessed true vital energy, and he understood that it was impossible to go against that.

2. The Midrash notes that Moses, when he left the people to ascend the mountain, had appointed both Aaron and Hur to lead the people in his absence (24:14). And yet, Hur receives no further active mention in the Torah. The Midrash therefore believes that Hur was killed when he stood up to the people, and tried to interfere with their creation of the calf. The murder of Hur is what Aaron saw, and quite understandably decided it would be best for him not to oppose the creation of calf. Instead, he chose the path of stalling for time, and postponing the celebration until the morrow.

Both of these Midrashic versions are saying that Aaron felt he had no choice but to agree to creating the calf. In the first version, Aaron is compelled by an internal emotional attraction to the calf, his admiration for its invincible appeal. According to the second version, Aaron is motivated by the force of very cogent external coercion. Either way, the Midrash is saying that there was nothing Aaron could do in the situation, and that this mitigates his guilt.

The Midrash notwithstanding, the simple and direct meaning of "When Aaron saw this" is that the Torah wishes to emphasize the power of vision over hearing in this situation. "Aaron saw," and was therefore unable to hear, or, did not want to hear, the second of the Ten Commandments that God Himself had proclaimed only weeks earlier right there at Sinai: "You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth" (20:4). The people likewise are not satisfied to "hear a voice," they need to see their leader – they need the visible image of the calf[1].

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[1] The relationship between seeing and hearing in the context of higher powers will be explored more fully in *Bible Dynamics* on Deuteronomy.

And Aaron announced: "Tomorrow shall be a festival of the Lord!": A feast to the Lord, not to the calf. Here once again we see that the people are not renouncing their belief in the Almighty; they consider the calf only a means of reinforcing their connection with Him.

The worship of the calf, in the absolute sense, is not true idolatry, but only *Shituf*. However, the Torah presents the incident of the golden calf as an outright violation of the prohibition of idolatry, in order to emphasize that for the Jewish people any such form of worshipping God is absolutely inadmissible and unpardonable.

(6) **Early next day, the people offered up burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being**: It is not clear to whom they brought these offerings and sacrifices, whether to the calf, or to the Almighty in gratitude for their having gotten a new leader. Apparently, the people themselves were divided along these two lines, but only a relatively small group actually worshipped the calf.

They sat down to eat and drink, and then rose to dance: This underscores the psychology of a people that wants and needs to be led. Only when such people feel that they have a leader can they feel safe and rejoice.

27.4. GOD CONDEMNS THE PEOPLE, BUT MOSES BEGS FOR THEM TO BE FORGIVEN (32:7-14)

ז וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֶךְ־רֵד כִּי שִׁחֵת עַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:
ח סָרוּ מַהֵר מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִם עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מַסֵּכָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ־לוֹ
וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלוּךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:
ט וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רָאִיתִי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עַם־קְשֵׁה־עֹרֶף הוּא:
י וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִּי וְיִחַר־אַפִּי בָהֶם וַאֲכַלֵּם וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתְךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל:
יא וַיְחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־פְּנֵי יְיָ אֱלֹהָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה יְיָ יֶחֱרֶה אַפְּךָ בְּעַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר
הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכֹחַ גָּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה: יב לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם
לֵאמֹר בְּרָעָה הוֹצִיאָם לַהֲרֹג אֹתָם בֶּהָרִים וּלְכַלֹּתָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה
שׁוּב מֵחֲרוֹן אַפֶּךָ וְהִנָּחֵם עַל־הָרָעָה לְעַמֶּךָ: יג זְכֹר לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק

וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לָהֶם בָּךְ וַתְּדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם אַרְבֶּה אֶת־
זַרְעֲכֶם כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֶתֵּן לְזַרְעֲכֶם
וְנָחֲלוּ לְעֹלָם: יד וַיִּנָּחֶם יְ עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ:

(7) The Lord spoke to Moses, "Hurry down, for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely.

(8) They have been quick to turn aside from the way that I enjoined upon them. They have made themselves a molten calf and bowed low to it and sacrificed to it, saying: 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"

(9) The Lord further said to Moses, "I see that this is a stiffnecked people.

(10) Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation."

(11) But Moses implored the Lord his God, saying, "Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.

(12) Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.' Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people.

(13) Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, how You swore to them by Your Self and said to them: I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke, to possess forever."

(14) And the Lord renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people.

(7) **The Lord spoke to Moses**: This paragraph of eight verses is highly essential for understanding the dynamics of Moses' personality and his relationship with the Jewish people.

In the introductory portions of this commentary on Exodus, where we examined Rabbi I. L. Ashkenazi's (Manitou) ideas about Moses, we noted that God could not have offered to produce a new nation from Moses unless that offer coincided with Moses' own inner desires. After all, a person can never be seduced with something that he finds unappealing.

Manitou goes on to explain that in fact, Moses had just such a desire and just such a plan: to abandon the Jewish people who were enslaved in Egypt, whom he considered hopeless, and to create of himself a new chosen people. This is why Moses (in his week-long dialogue with God at the site of the Burning Bush) at first refused flat out to lead the Jews out of Egypt.

But then, after much urging and cajoling by God, Moses finally agrees to work with the existing Jewish people. And in the story of the circumcision at the inn (4:24-26), Moses also acknowledges the importance of the Abrahamic covenant. But all this happens only under duress, which means that Moses' assent to comply with the Divine plan is still incomplete.

Moses must therefore advance yet one more level: He must overcome independently the incorrect attitudes he had previously entertained, which eventually happens right here, in the incident of the golden calf. Moses' previous plan (which he has long since relinquished), to become the progenitor of a new nation, now once again looms on the horizon of possibility, because God Himself is offering it to Moses. "Let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation" (v. 10). But Moses refuses God's offer, and this time he does so entirely of his own free will. For Moses, this is a monumental spiritual advancement.

God's relationships with the heroes of Tanakh – its greatest personalities, the Patriarchs and prophets, for example – are very often built on this scheme. At first, God, over a long interval, moves a person from his original position to another position along the spectrum that is more consistent with the Divine plan.

But when the individual in question finally takes this step, God suddenly retreats, fully opening again all pathways, and allowing the person to make his own choice. That moment, when he is again free to choose, when no one is forcing him to take the proper position or direction, and

he chooses it of his own accord, is the moment when a person achieves the greatest spiritual growth.

So too is God's approach with respect to Moses. At first, at the Burning Bush, God attempts to persuade Moses to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, and not to create a new nation. God explains to Moses that the Sinai covenant can be made only on the basis of its precursor, the Abrahamic covenant. But then, here at the incident of the golden calf, God suddenly steps back, and gives Moses the opportunity to choose, leading him on with logic as follows:

From the point of view of the "covenant of the commandments," the Jews, still encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, have clearly breached the covenant and forfeited their chosenness, by creating and worshipping the calf. Therefore, Moses, is it not worthwhile for you to reconsider your original plan to create an entirely new Jewish nation from yourself?

But Moses now refuses this option by the force of his own will and inner convictions, thereby withstanding this test and rising to a new level of personal development.

The formulation of the question in these terms – "Should a new nation be created, or can the Jewish People be remedied?" – resolves the dilemma of which aspect of Judaism takes precedence: the nationalist (they are the descendants of the Patriarchs) or the religious (their chosenness being conditional on the observance of the laws of the Torah, which they have now egregiously violated).

The Sinai covenant seems to give preference to the religious aspect, the observance of the commandments, while the line of the Patriarchs is clearly ethnic, with family ties playing the primary role: Father remains father, and son remains son, without regard to the observance (or non-observance) of religious prescriptions.

By supporting an ethnic, nationalist line, Moses, champion *par excellence* of the "covenant of the commandments," acknowledges that the nationalist aspect trumps the religious. In order for the Jewish people to receive Divine revelation, there must first be a Jewish people. Ontologically, and not only chronologically, the creation of the nation must precede the observance of the Torah.

The nation, familial and parental ties, are things that run immeasurably deeper than complying with the law, even if it is the Divine Law.

The people already had to exist before the Torah was given, and not vice versa. The chosen people, created from the Patriarchs, is such a unique and special national organism, that its nationalist aspect supersedes any religious considerations.

Divine light enters the world primarily through the Jewish people as a single, unified entity; thus, the nation of Israel remains chosen even when a significant segment of the people refuses to abide by the laws of the Almighty. Compliance can be improved and corrected, but a people cannot be recreated.

The Lord spoke to Moses, "Hurry down": This is meant in both the literal and figurative senses. Moses must go down from the mountain, and he must descend from the world of ideals back to reality – to the people whom he leads.

Moses has reached the summit both physically and emotionally – he has risen to an unattainable height. In that situation, there is nowhere to go but down, and Moses is forced to descend, both literally and figuratively.

For your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely: The Midrash sees the emphasis here on "*your* people," and explains that "Moses' people" are the Egyptians who were attracted to Moses' unique personality, and whom, by his own devising, Moses brought into the Jewish fold as proselytes. Thus, the Midrash believes that the instigators to creating the golden calf were the the *eirev rav*, the "mixed multitude" (12:38) who joined the Jewish people at the Exodus and left Egypt with them. It was they who, as soon as Moses disappeared from their field of vision, were the first to demand his replacement.

Midrashic interpretations notwithstanding, the Torah text itself does not explicitly state that it was the **eirev rav** who initiated the creation of the calf. More simply, the words "your people" can be understood to mean that the Almighty is emphasizing the powerful bond between the Jews and Moses, and his responsibility as their leader.

(9) **The Lord further said to Moses, "I see that this is a stiffnecked people**: The words "the Lord further said to Moses" at first glance seem superfluous here, given that God has already been speaking to Moses

since two sentences earlier (v. 7). But God must address Moses a second time, because His first appeal has elicited no response. Moses is so dismayed by the turn of events that he has nothing to answer. God must therefore force Moses to respond by confronting him with a yet more serious problem.

This is a stiffnecked people: They are stubborn and disinclined to obey. Note, however, that such stubbornness has both negative and positive aspects. The Jewish people were not easily persuaded to accept God's Torah and follow it, but once they had accepted the Divine teachings, they remained faithful to them for millennia, even until this very day.

(10) **Now, let Me be**: Since Moses has not yet even begun to ask anything of God, the words "let Me be" can be seen as having a certain provocative character. The Almighty is inviting, even encouraging Moses to pray. He suggests that praying for forgiveness for the people might not be an entirely hopeless endeavor.

That My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation: As explained above, here Moses is being tested.

(11) **But Moses implored the Lord his God**: Only after the Almighty makes known what punishment might lie ahead – the destruction of the entire Jewish nation – does Moses begin to implore God.

At this first stage, Moses petitions God only for the physical survival of the Jewish people. Later, after Moses has descended from the mountain and dealt with the situation, he then ascends to God again, to ask for more – that their status as the chosen people also be preserved (v. 30 32).

Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand: The Midrash contrasts this verse with v. 7 above: "The Lord spoke to Moses, 'Hurry down, for *your people*... have acted basely.' " God holds Moses responsible for leading the people. But Moses here tells God, "Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against *Your people*." So far as Moses is concerned, the leader of the Jewish people is God. Moses emphasizes the close association between God and the

Jewish nation – if they are destroyed, mankind will get the wrong ideas about the Almighty.

(12) **Let not the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth." Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people**: The Hebrew for "with evil [intent]" is *be-ra'ah*, a common word used here in a somewhat atypical phrasing, but which seems to echo Pharaoh's words to Moses before the Exodus (10:10): "The Lord be with you … to let your children go with you! Clearly, you are bent on mischief." The word translated there as "mischief" is also *ra'ah*, and the usage there too is oddly idiomatic. It seems to suggest in Pharaoh's words something along the lines of: "Can't you see that if I let you go, there is catastrophe in your future?!"

The Midrash adduces this similarity of phraseology to explain what Moses is saying here. The Egyptians (and other peoples after them) will not understand why the Jews perished. They will say that Pharaoh was quite right when he warned Moses that leaving Egypt to serve their God would bring the Jews only misfortune.

We note here in passing that since we see that God did in fact accept this argument advanced by Moses for preserving the Jewish people intact, we can infer that God deems public opinion important; that is, He takes into account the interpretations that the nations of the world can reasonably be expected to impute to His actions. We shall deal with this issue in more detail just a little further below.

(13) **Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, how You swore to them by Your Self and said to them**: "I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke, to possess forever": Moses stresses the nationalist theme. Even if the people have violated the Sinai covenant, they must not be destroyed, because they are descendants of the Patriarchs, to whom God solemnly swore that their descendants would become a mighty nation.

How You swore to them by Your Self: Moses is saying to God: A Divine oath is one of the building blocks of the universe itself that establish the fundamental order of things. If indeed the world is to advance,

something in it must remain immutable and unshakable. If this order is violated, there will be no hope for correcting the world.

(14) **And the Lord renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people**: The fact that God accepted Moses' arguments clearly demonstrates that He considered those arguments valid.

The essential points of Moses' arguments are these:

1. The heritage of the Patriarchs, and God's covenant with them, must endure.

2. The four-hundred-year history of the birth of the people from the Patriarchs, and the Exodus itself, together comprise a unique historical experience that finds its culmination in the generation that left Egypt.

3. If the Jewish people is destroyed, the Egyptians will misinterpret the Almighty's actions, and this will inevitably interfere with the ability of the nations of the world to comprehend the Divine light.

All these points are the "safety net" that has allowed the Jewish people to remain alive for millennia, despite the mistakes they have made, and even despite the crimes they have committed against the Torah.

And the Lord renounced the punishment: Literally, "And the Lord changed his mind." Some commentators maintain that it is unacceptable to imagine the Almighty revising His decisions, having second thoughts, or being disappointed in any of His creations. They understand the words "and the Lord changed his mind" as a metaphor exemplifying the principle stated by the Sages that "the Torah speaks in the language of mankind," that is, in human terms that people will easily understand.

In other words, it only seems to *us* that God has changed his mind. These commentators take the position, apparently, that since changing one's mind or revising one's decision can only be a sign of weakness, one cannot speak of those things with reference to God. When the Torah seems to do just that, we must understand it only in a metaphorical sense.

But in fact, the Torah is the source of all monotheistic religious conceptions; thus, our theoretical conjectures about God are only secondary to what is stated plainly in the Torah. Instead of speculating theologically about whether or not God can revise His decisions, the question we should be asking is: Why does the Torah (here and elsewhere[1]) represent God as subject to a change of heart?

The answer is that any characteristic portrayal of God in the Torah has only one intended purpose: To teach us to follow in God's ways, to emulate Him, so that we may find the correct path in life[2]. When the Torah says that God changed his mind, this is meant to teach us that revising one's point of view in light of new evidence and new arguments is completely natural and proper, and not a sign of weakness in any sense.

27.5. DOES GOD CARE ABOUT PUBLIC OPINION?

Moses persuades God to reject the idea of exterminating the Jewish people, by arguing that public opinion would fail to understand the cause, and would misinterpret what had happened. "Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.' " Thus, Moses convinces God to not annihilate the Jews, by making the argument that doing so would lead the international community, in the person of the Egyptians, to draw the wrong conclusions.

But does God really care about public opinion?

The Almighty waits for Moses to make his case not because He does not himself know what to do, but in order to test and educate Moses. When Moses argues that "the Egyptians will not understand," God effectively replies: "What you say is indeed correct, and I accept your argument." The Torah reports this exchange in order to help us understand the motives that guide the Almighty in His actions.

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1 For more on the concept of *hinachem*, "having a change of heart," with reference to God, see *Bible Dynamics* in Genesis §7.8.

2 We will provide more detailed coverage of the principle of *imitatio De*i (Imitating God) in the *Bible Dynamics* commentary to Leviticus.

Thus, God really is profoundly concerned about what the Egyptians will think. God's primary objective is to educate mankind. Moses exists for the sake of the Jews, and the Jews exist for the sake of humanity – they are the instrument of Divine influence in the world. In the grand scheme, God does care about how people interpret events. In directing history God chooses those outcomes that humanity can most easily and accurately comprehend. In this sense, God does in fact care about "public opinion."

Of course, this in no way implies that God always agrees with, and approves of, human thoughts and desires, or that winning people's approval is His only goal. But it is important to God that people, if only the best of them, will understand His approach. He therefore orients Himself to the level of human comprehension such as it is – of which public opinion is an important component and indicator.

That the Almighty chooses to run the world in this manner is an important lesson for us. We should certainly not wait for the entire world to approve of us and to endorse our actions. But we should strive to ensure that the more advanced element of humanity understands and respects our position. And we should be guided in our actions, at least to some extent, by the need to accommodate the peoples of the world at their own level of understanding.

27.6. MOSES SHATTERS THE TABLETS AND DESTROYS THE CALF (32:15-29)

טו וַיִּפֶן וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה מִן־הָהָר וּשְׁנֵי לֻחֹת הָעֵדֻת בְּיָדוֹ לֻחֹת כְּתֻבִים מִשְּׁנֵי
עֵבְרֵיהֶם מִזֶּה וּמִזֶּה הֵם כְּתֻבִים: טז וְהַלֻּחֹת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים הֵמָּה
וְהַמִּכְתָּב מִכְתַּב אֱלֹהִים הוּא חָרוּת עַל־הַלֻּחֹת: יז וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת־
קוֹל הָעָם בְּרֵעֹה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־מֹשֶׁה קוֹל מִלְחָמָה בַּמַּחֲנֶה: יח וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵין קוֹל עֲנוֹת גְּבוּרָה וְאֵין קוֹל עֲנוֹת חֲלוּשָׁה קוֹל עַנּוֹת אָנֹכִי שֹׁמֵעַ:
יט וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר קָרַב אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיַּרְא אֶת־הָעֵגֶל וּמְחֹלֹת וַיֶּחַר־אַף
מֹשֶׁה וַיַּשְׁלֵךְ מִיָּדָו אֶת־הַלֻּחֹת וַיְשַׁבֵּר אֹתָם תַּחַת הָהָר: כ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־
הָעֵגֶל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ וַיִּשְׂרֹף בָּאֵשׁ וַיִּטְחַן עַד אֲשֶׁר־דָּק וַיִּזֶר עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
וַיַּשְׁקְ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: כא וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן מֶה־עָשָׂה לְךָ הָעָם

הַזֶּה כִּי־הֵבֵאתָ עָלָיו חֲטָאָה גְדֹלָה: כב וַיֹּאמֶר אַהֲרֹן אַל־יִחַר אַף אֲדֹנִי
אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֶת־הָעָם כִּי בְרָע הוּא: כג וַיֹּאמְרוּ לִי עֲשֵׂה־לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי־זֶה | מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מֶה־הָיָה לוֹ: כד וָאֹמַר לָהֶם לְמִי זָהָב הִתְפָּרֵקוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ־לִי
וָאַשְׁלִכֵהוּ בָאֵשׁ וַיֵּצֵא הָעֵגֶל הַזֶּה: כה וַיַּרְא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם כִּי פָרֵעַ
הוּא כִּי־פְרָעֹה אַהֲרֹן לְשִׁמְצָה בְּקָמֵיהֶם: כו וַיַּעֲמֹד מֹשֶׁה בְּשַׁעַר
הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לַיהוָה אֵלַי וַיֵּאָסְפוּ אֵלָיו כָּל־בְּנֵי לֵוִי: כז וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם
כֹּה־אָמַר יי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׂימוּ אִישׁ־חַרְבּוֹ עַל־יְרֵכוֹ עִבְרוּ וָשׁוּבוּ
מִשַּׁעַר לְשַׁעַר בַּמַּחֲנֶה וְהִרְגוּ אִישׁ־אֶת־אָחִיו וְאִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ
אֶת־קְרֹבוֹ: כח וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּנֵי־לֵוִי כִּדְבַר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל מִן־הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
כִּשְׁלֹשֶׁת אַלְפֵי אִישׁ: כט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מִלְּאוּ יָדְכֶם הַיּוֹם לַיהוָה כִּי אִישׁ
בִּבְנוֹ וּבְאָחִיו וְלָתֶת עֲלֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה:

(15) **Thereupon Moses turned and went down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, tablets inscribed on both their surfaces: they were inscribed on the one side and on the other.**

(16) **The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing, incised upon the tablets.**

(17) **When Joshua heard the sound of the people in its boisterousness, he said to Moses, "There is a cry of war in the camp."**

(18) **But he answered, "It is not the sound of the tune of triumph, Or the sound of the tune of defeat; It is the sound of song that I hear!"**

(19) **As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.**

(20) **He took the calf that they had made and burned it; he ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water and so made the Israelites drink it.**

(21) **Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?"**

(22) Aaron said, "Let not my lord be enraged. You know that this people is bent on evil.

(23) They said to me, 'Make us a god to lead us; for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt — we do not know what has happened to him.'

(24) So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off!' They gave it to me and I hurled it into the fire and out came this calf!"

(25) Moses saw that the people were out of control — since Aaron had let them get out of control — so that they were a menace to any who might oppose them.

(26) Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come here!" And all the Levites rallied to him.

(27) He said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Each of you put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay brother, neighbor, and kin."

(28) The Levites did as Moses had bidden; and some three thousand of the people fell that day.

(29) And Moses said, "Dedicate yourselves to the Lord this day — or each of you has been against son and brother — that He may bestow a blessing upon you today."

(15) **Thereupon Moses turned and went down from the mountain**: Moses descended the mountain only after he felt convinced that the people were no longer in danger of annihilation.

Bearing the two tablets of the Pact, tablets inscribed on both their surfaces: they were inscribed on the one side and on the other: The Midrash understands this to mean that, miraculously, the engraved text of the Ten Commandments could be read equivalently on both sides of the tablets, even though one and the same inscription penetrated through and through from one side of the stone tablets to the other. The symbolism is that the Torah can be perceived from many different angles and perspectives, but at the same time its essential content and meaning remain ever constant and unchanging.

(16) **The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing, incised upon the tablets**: Both the tablets themselves and the text engraved on them were God's work alone. In the manufacture of the first tablets there was no element of human participation.

But in the second tablets, by contrast, only the inscription was God's, while the tablets themselves were of human origin, crafted by Moses (see 34:1 ff. and Deut. 10:1 ff.). As already noted, the first tablets could not be preserved and had to be broken precisely because of their Divine origin. When higher truths descend to the material world, they will necessarily break down. In kabbalistic terminology this is known as *Shevirat Ha-Keilim*, "the shattering of the vessels."

(17) **When Joshua heard the sound of the people in its boisterousness**: For the entire forty days that Moses was at the summit, Joshua waited for him at the beginning of the main ascent, far from the camp.

When Joshua heard ... he said to Moses, "There is a cry of war in the camp": Because Joshua is a military man by nature[1], he perceives these sounds as the cries of battle.

(18) **But he answered, "It is not the sound of the tune of triumph, Or the sound of the tune of defeat; It is the sound of song that I hear!"**: The Hebrew expression *kol 'annot*, is difficult to understand. Here it's translated as "sound of song" but can also be translated as "sound of distress." As explained by Rashi, the sounds Moshe hears causes him enormous pain (distress). Anyway, it's clear that here Moses rejects Joshua's interpretation. He feels certain that the cries in the camp, in which neither the joy of victory nor the despair of defeat are evident, are not the cries of war. And yet, Moses is himself unable to interpret accurately the sounds he is hearing.

(19) **As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged**: Moses already knew about the creation of the calf, but in what he was now seeing there was an additional element, the dancing, of which the Almighty had not informed Moses while he was still on the mountain. Apparently, this is why Moses could not correctly interpret the "sounds" coming from the camp. This

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[1] See Exod. 17:8-13, and above, §15.6.

dancing came to Moses as a shock: The people had sunk to an even lower level than he had expected to see.

Moses, while still on the mountain, and upon hearing from God about the calf, perceived it as just a "theoretically abstract" mistake: The people had erred by drawing incorrect conclusions, and had therefore worshipped improperly. Most likely, Moses thought, he only needed to speak calmly with the people and explain to them where they had gone wrong.

But here Moses is faced with reality – the people's boisterous joy over having found for themselves an idol. Moses now understands that there is no way to "speak calmly with the people" in such a situation, and he becomes enraged. In a certain sense, all anger is, essentially, directed at oneself – arising from an awareness of one's own failings. Moses now understands that while still on the mountain he had failed to assess the situation accurately.

Thus, what we are seeing at work here in Moses is the dissonance between what a person knows theoretically and what he experiences empirically. But Moses' rage is in fact the correct response in this situation, because only this kind of unbridled emotional reaction could jolt the people into comprehending the severity of their mistake.

And he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain: Moses broke the tablets not only out of anger, but also because he understood that the ultimate purpose of these tablets could not be realized. These first tablets were absolutely Divine – no human being had participated in any way in their creation – and the abyss separating the Divine and the human, as it turned out, could not be bridged. The first tablets had to be broken so that new ones could then appear, in whose creation both God and man would participate.

The smashing of the first tablets was an inevitable occurrence in the process of the giving of the Torah. The first tablets were supposed to teach humanity the loftiest ideals, whose practical application in real life, however, could be realized only at the level of the second tablets. But at the same time, Tradition teaches that the shards of the first tablets were stored in the Ark of the Covenant alongside the second tablets. Their sanctity was preserved in broken form, because even as

mere fragments the first tablets continued to show the people the path to God.

The process of the giving of the first tablets served to clarify which is primary, the people or the Torah. And it was determined that the people are primary. When the people do wrong, the Torah retreats and fragments. Critically decisive issues cannot be resolved theoretically, but only through a real-life crisis. A human being can resolve an existential conflict only by making real-life decisions based on personal choice. It was therefore necessary for both Moses and the people to be put in a situation from which they could extricate themselves honorably.

By smashing the tablets, Moses declares categorically that the people, and not the commandments, are paramount. While still on the mountain, Moses persuaded God to not destroy the people, and this was an important step. But Moses' willingness even to demolish the Torah (temporarily at least), if necessary to achieve that end, demonstrates a much higher level of understanding of the relationship between the people and the Torah. No matter how serious the violation, even if the people sink so low as to become idolaters, the first priority is still to preserve their existence, because it is the only way they will have the opportunity to correct their mistake. Without the people, both the Torah and its commandments are devoid of any meaning.

(20) **He took the calf that they had made and burned it; he ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water and so made the Israelites drink it**: These measures were important for their pedagogical value. The entire people had to participate physically in utterly destroying the idol, by drinking its ashes.

(21) **Moses said to Aaron**: Moses first takes immediate action to destroy the calf, and only when that has been accomplished does he proceed to investigate the circumstances that led to the crime. This is clear manifestation of Moses' leadership approach.

What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?: Even now, Moses still does not understand that Aaron on his own cannot be a leader.

(22) **Aaron said, "Let not my lord be enraged. You know that this people is bent on evil**: Aaron, instead of explaining himself, shifts the

responsibility onto the people and blames them. But by addressing Moses as "my Lord," Aaron emphasizes his subordinate position in relation to Moses.

(24) **So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off!' They gave it to me and I hurled it into the fire and out came this calf!"**: Aaron portrays his role as just passively executing the will of the people.

(25) **Moses saw that the people were out of control — since Aaron had let them get out of control**: By now, Moses has burned the calf and made the people drink the ashes. That is, the object of the idolatry has itself already been destroyed. But Aaron's response shows that the correction is not yet complete – because Aaron (and therefore the people) cannot accept responsibility for what happened. And therefore, the situation can be corrected only with additional "shock therapy."

(26) **Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come here!" And all the Levites rallied to him**: Only the Levites respond to Moses' call; the other tribes' representatives are not yet ready to side with the Almighty. This too demonstrates that the problem of the calf has not yet been resolved.

(27) **He said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Each of you put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp"**: Moses behaves like an absolute monarch who has the authority to execute criminals with or without a trial.

Although the fanaticism of the tribe of Levi[1] renders it unfit to provide a ruler for the people (see *Bible Dynamics* on Gen. 49:5), there are situations, such as this one, where that fanaticism is exactly what is needed, and is indispensable for achieving the immediate objective.

And slay brother, neighbor, and kin: The active adherents of the calf worship had to be killed, without regard to ties of family or friendship.

(28) **The Levites did as Moses had bidden; and some three thousand of the people fell that day**: Only 3,000 out of 600,000 Jews turned out to be active participants in idolatry – relatively few, in other words.

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[1] The fanaticism of Simeon and Levi first found its historical expression in the incident of Dinah and Shechem, Gen. Ch. 34.

But since all the people supported the creation of calf, even those who did not actively participate in worshipping it, the situation could be rectified only with very tough measures.

(29) **And Moses said, "Dedicate yourselves to the Lord this day … that He may bestow a blessing upon you today"**: The blessing bestowed upon the Levites was that later they would be chosen to serve in the Temple. They took the place of the firstborns, who were originally slated for that honor, but showed themselves unworthy of it in the incident of the calf.

27.7. MOSES AGAIN IMPLORES GOD TO FORGIVE THE PEOPLE'S SIN (32:30-35)

ל וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם אַתֶּם חֲטָאתֶם חֲטָאָה גְדֹלָה
וְעַתָּה אֶעֱלֶה אֶל־יְי אוּלַי אֲכַפְּרָה בְּעַד חַטַּאתְכֶם: לא וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל־
יְי וַיֹּאמַר אָנָּא חָטָא הָעָם הַזֶּה חֲטָאָה גְדֹלָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי זָהָב:
לב וְעַתָּה אִם־תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם־אַיִן מְחֵנִי נָא מִסִּפְרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתָבְתָּ:
לג וַיֹּאמֶר יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִי אֲשֶׁר חָטָא־לִי אֶמְחֶנּוּ מִסִּפְרִי: לד וְעַתָּה לֵךְ |
נְחֵה אֶת־הָעָם אֶל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ הִנֵּה מַלְאָכִי יֵלֵךְ לְפָנֶיךָ וּבְיוֹם
פָּקְדִי וּפָקַדְתִּי עֲלֵהֶם חַטָּאתָם: לה וַיִּגֹּף יְי אֶת־הָעָם עַל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ
אֶת־הָעֵגֶל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַהֲרֹן:

(30) **The next day Moses said to the people, "You have been guilty of a great sin. Yet I will now go up to the Lord; perhaps I may win forgiveness for your sin."**

(31) **Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Alas, this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold.**

(32) **Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the record which You have written!"**

(33) **But the Lord said to Moses, "He who has sinned against Me, him only will I erase from My record.**

(34) Go now, lead the people where I told you. See, My angel shall go before you. But when I make an accounting, I will bring them to account for their sins."

(35) Then the Lord sent a plague upon the people, for what they did with the calf that Aaron made.

(30) **The next day Moses said to the people, "You have been guilty of a great sin"**: In his earlier conversation with the Almighty, Moses did whatever he could to play down the people's guilt, in order to reduce the likelihood and severity of their punishment. But in contrast, when addressing the people themselves, Moses pulls no punches whatsoever in pointing out their crimes.

Yet I will now go up to the Lord; perhaps I may win forgiveness for your sin: Moses can turn to God only after he has set the people on the path of correction, which includes (1) punishing the guilty, and (2) getting the people to acknowledge their crime.

(31) **Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Alas, this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold"**: Unlike Aaron, who told Moses, "You know that this people is bent on evil," Moses tells God, "this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold." That is, they are a worthy people overall; they only happened to go wrong in this one instance. This is an indication that Moses' relationship with the people continues to grow stronger, and that he acknowledges their importance despite the crime they have committed.

(32) **Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]**: Although God has previously agreed to not destroy the Jews, He has not yet agreed to preserve their status as a chosen people. And that is precisely what Moses will ask for here.

But if not, erase me from the record which You have written!: This is where Moses becomes truly at one with the people: If the Jewish nation is destroyed, Moses' existence too becomes bereft of all meaning. Moses has achieved this realization as the result of his reassessment of his values, as brought about by the crisis.

From the record which You have written!: Literally, "from the book which You have written." The book that the Almighty writes is the

"book of human life," also known as the "book of history," which is also the "book of the Torah." All of these are one and the same book.

(33) **But the Lord said to Moses, "He who has sinned against Me, him only will I erase from My record"**: No man has the power to decide how his actions and accomplishments will be viewed in the broad historical perspective.

(34) **Go now, lead the people where I told you**: The nation's mission remains unchanged, even though God has not yet responded to Moses' request to preserve the special status of the Jewish people.

See, My angel shall go before you: The level of the Almighty's direct involvement is decreasing. Henceforth, the Jewish people will be led not by God Himself, but only by His angel. This is another test for Moses – will he agree to these conditions, or will he insist on full restoration of the people's former status?

But when I make an accounting, I will bring them to account for their sins: Only the immediate punishment is averted, but the sin itself remains.

(35) **Then the Lord sent a plague upon the people, for what they did with the calf that Aaron made**: Here we learn the final outcome of the story. Despite all of Moses' imploring, and the commutation of the sentence, punishment for the people's sin of idolatry is inevitable.

Aaron's guilt too is once again emphasized, notwithstanding that he will not be punished immediately, but only decades later. (Aaron's punishment consisted in his not being allowed to enter the Promised Land).

CHAPTER 28

RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT

28.1. THE PEOPLE REPENT (33:1-6)

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵךְ עֲלֵה מִזֶּה אַתָּה וְהָעָם אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר
לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה: ב וְשָׁלַחְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ מַלְאָךְ וְגֵרַשְׁתִּי אֶת־הַכְּנַעֲנִי הָאֱמֹרִי
וְהַחִתִּי וְהַפְּרִזִּי הַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי: ג אֶל־אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבָשׁ כִּי לֹא
אֶעֱלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ כִּי עַם־קְשֵׁה־עֹרֶף אָתָּה פֶּן־אֲכַלְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ: ד וַיִּשְׁמַע
הָעָם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הָרָע הַזֶּה וַיִּתְאַבֵּלוּ וְלֹא־שָׁתוּ אִישׁ עֶדְיִו עָלָיו:
ה וַיֹּאמֶר יְי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֱמֹר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם עַם־קְשֵׁה־עֹרֶף רֶגַע
אֶחָד אֶעֱלֶה בְקִרְבְּךָ וְכִלִּיתִיךָ וְעַתָּה הוֹרֵד עֶדְיְךָ מֵעָלֶיךָ וְאֵדְעָה מָה
אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ: ו וַיִּתְנַצְּלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־עֶדְיָם מֵהַר חוֹרֵב:

(1) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Set out from here, you and the people that you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring will I give it' —**

(2) **I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites —**

(3) **a land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go in your midst, since you are a stiffnecked people, lest I destroy you on the way."**

(4) **When the people heard this harsh word, they went into mourning, and none put on his finery.**

(5) **The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelite people, 'You are a stiffnecked people. If I were to go in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now, then, leave off your finery, and I will consider what to do to you.'"**

(6) **So the Israelites remained stripped of the finery from Mount Horeb on.**

(1) **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Set out from here, you and the people that you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring will I give it'**: The audience at Sinai has now ended. For now, God addresses neither the issue of replacing the broken tablets with a second set, nor the matter of correcting the effects of the calf incident. He only sends the people on to the Land of Israel – because that is their mission.

(2-3) **I will send an angel before you ... But I will not go in your midst, since you are a stiffnecked people**: A person who has entered the grounds of the royal palace must adhere to much stricter requirements than the general population of the kingdom.

And likewise, the Almighty's immediate presence among the people implies a much-elevated level of responsibility, with any violation leading to severe punishment. The people's status is therefore diminished – for their own safety.

(4) **When the people heard this harsh word, they went into mourning, and none put on his finery**: The people receive this message about the lowering of their status as "bad news." It is not enough for the Jewish people simply to have a successful material existence; rather, it is their calling to realize the Divine mission in the world. If realization of that mission is impossible, this is a reason to mourn.

(5) **The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelite people, 'You are a stiffnecked people. If I were to go in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you' "**: God's original statement, "But I will not go in your midst, since you are a stiffnecked people, lest I destroy you on the

way," could be understood as a punishment. The reaction to punishment will often be grief, and a plea for forgiveness.

But the revised wording, "You are a stiffnecked people. If I were to go in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you," stresses that in fact this is not a punishment, but only a necessary measure to protect the nation itself from self-destruction. Given those circumstances, the people, instead of just asking for forgiveness, should be thinking about how to correct and improve themselves.

Now, then, leave off your finery: The literal translation is: "Now, then, remove your finery." But didn't the Torah state just above (v. 4), that "the people went into mourning, and none put on his finery"? Apparently, however, whatever finery they were already wearing at that point they did not remove, and here God commands them to do so. Removing external adornments forces people to think about existential questions.

And I will consider what to do to you: The final decision has not yet been rendered. If the people prove that they have truly repented, the Almighty is prepared to mitigate their punishment.

(6) **So the Israelites remained stripped of the finery from Mount Horeb on**: It is not clear what is meant here by "finery." The Midrash states that after the Jews on Mount Sinai took upon themselves the covenant, the angels placed a crown on the head of each one of them. And now these adornments have been removed. In other words, this "finery" is the Jews' sense of pride in being a party to the covenant.

Such a feeling of pride is an indication of the exalted status that a person has attained, but it also implies a great responsibility. Therefore, when the person behaves inappropriately, even to the point of committing a crime, then, apart from his feeling no sense of "adornment" from that earlier pride ("none put on his finery"), it even brings him actual shame. ("The Israelites remained stripped of their finery from Mount Horeb on").

This is a moment of profound repentance among the people. At first, they felt only sorrow, but now they are overcome by a sense of shame, and they truly repent.

28.2. MOSES PITCHES THE TENT OF THE MEETING OUTSIDE THE CAMP (33:7-11)

ז וּמֹשֶׁה יִקַּח אֶת־הָאֹהֶל וְנָטָה־לּוֹ | מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה הַרְחֵק מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה
וְקָרָא לוֹ אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהָיָה כָּל־מְבַקֵּשׁ יי יֵצֵא אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר
מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: ח וְהָיָה כְּצֵאת מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֹהֶל יָקוּמוּ כָּל־הָעָם וְנִצְּבוּ
אִישׁ פֶּתַח אָהֳלוֹ וְהִבִּיטוּ אַחֲרֵי מֹשֶׁה עַד־בֹּאוֹ הָאֹהֱלָה: ט וְהָיָה כְּבֹא
מֹשֶׁה הָאֹהֱלָה יֵרֵד עַמּוּד הֶעָנָן וְעָמַד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְדִבֶּר עִם־מֹשֶׁה:
י וְרָאָה כָל־הָעָם אֶת־עַמּוּד הֶעָנָן עֹמֵד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְקָם כָּל־הָעָם
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ אִישׁ פֶּתַח אָהֳלוֹ: יא וְדִבֶּר יי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים
כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ וְשָׁב אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה וּמְשָׁרְתוֹ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בִּן־נוּן
נַעַר לֹא יָמִישׁ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֹהֶל:

(7) **Now Moses would take the Tent and pitch it outside the camp, at some distance from the camp. It was called the Tent of Meeting, and whoever sought the Lord would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp.**

(8) **Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he had entered the Tent.**

(9) **And when Moses entered the Tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the Tent, while He spoke with Moses.**

(10) **When all the people saw the pillar of cloud poised at the entrance of the Tent, all the people would rise and bow low, each at the entrance of his tent.**

(11) **The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. And he would then return to the camp; but his attendant, Joshua son of Nun, a youth, would not stir out of the Tent.**

(7) **Now Moses would take the Tent and pitch it outside the camp, at some distance from the camp. It was called the Tent of Meeting**: Since the Almighty has made it known that He would no longer go in the

midst of the people, Moses takes measures to preserve the Divine presence by setting up the Tent of Meeting outside the camp.

At some distance from the camp: Not near the camp, i.e., immediately outside it, but at some distance from the camp, emphasizing God's separation from the people.

It was called the Tent of Meeting: The name *ohel moed*, the "Tent of Meeting," was later applied to the Tabernacle, the portable Temple, which was built five and a half months later (see 27:21). (At that point there was no longer any need for this Tent that Moses had set up far from the camp).

And whoever sought the Lord would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp: In order to meet God, a person must demonstrate independence of character: He must go beyond the limits of the camp in search of the Almighty. Not all people are capable of this; only relatively few can "seek the Lord."

(8) **Whenever Moses went out to the Tent**: Moses moved the Tent of Meeting outside the camp, but he continued to live inside the camp.

All the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he had entered the Tent: The rest of the people, even if they are themselves not able to go out to the Tent of Meeting, demonstrate their involvement in Moses' dialogue with God. The words of the Lord that Moses brings back to the people are important to everyone – there are no "disinterested parties" in the camp. All this shows that the people have been corrected and have advanced. Moses sees this as a justification for turning to God with an additional request. (See below, v. 12).

(9) **And when Moses entered the Tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the Tent, while He spoke with Moses**: The pillar of cloud is a visible sign of the Divine Presence. The Tent of Meeting was a "Mount Sinai in miniature," and there Moses continued to receive Revelation.

(10) **When all the people saw the pillar of cloud poised at the entrance of the Tent, all the people would rise and bow low, each at the entrance of his tent**: Thanks to these actions by Moses, the people's connection with God is strengthened.

(11) **The Lord would speak to Moses face to face**: Although the Lord speaks with Moses face to face, Moses cannot see God's face. ("God said, 'you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live'," 33:20).

Hearing and seeing are fundamentally different things. Hearing always involves two subjects. One who hears another person seeks to comprehend what his interlocutor wants to tell him. But when a person sees, he perceives and analyzes the situation himself. He is the sole subject; everything else is only an object.

To "see God" means to understand the meaning of everything that happens in the universe. But this level of understanding is inaccessible to man. Man can only "hear God."

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face: That is, Moses accurately hears and correctly understands what God tells him. But all other prophets perceived God in the manner of a dream; thus, Moses' prophecy carries much more weight than any other prophecy.

As one man speaks to another: As with a friend, and not as with a lord or a master. For all other prophets God acts as master. He issues an edict or sends a prophecy, and man only hears.

But here, "as one man speaks to another" means that there is two-way communication. Besides listening to God's word, Moses also has the right to have his own opinion heard, as it were. This is an inconceivably sublime level of spiritual development that only Moses was able to achieve.

And he would then return to the camp: Moses returns to the the camp daily, in order not to lose touch with the people, and to prevent a recurrence of what happened when he was removed from the people during his long stay on the mountain. In a sense, Moses' receiving Divine revelation through the Tent of Meeting was a correction for the negative "side effects" caused by his receiving Revelation on the mountain.

But his attendant, Joshua son of Nun, a youth, would not stir out of the Tent: The Hebrew word na'ar, "a youth," refers not to age, but to a person's stage of development. And specifically, to a student's self-awareness with respect to his teacher.

Would not stir out of the Tent: Earlier, Moses' disciple, Joshua the son of Nun, waited for Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai. And now he is

constantly at the Tent of Meeting, to which "whoever sought the Lord" would come. Joshua's constant search for God gradually elevated him from military leader to national leader.

28.3. "PRAY LET ME KNOW YOUR WAYS" (33:12-23)

יב וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְ֭הוָה אַתָּה אֹמֵר אֵלַי הַעַל אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְאַתָּה
לֹא הוֹדַעְתַּנִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־תִּשְׁלַח עִמִּי וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ יְדַעְתִּיךָ בְשֵׁם
וְגַם־מָצָאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינָי: יג וְעַתָּה אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הוֹדִעֵנִי נָא
אֶת־דְּרָכֶךָ וְאֵדָעֲךָ לְמַעַן אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה כִּי עַמְּךָ הַגּוֹי הַזֶּה:
יד וַיֹּאמַר פָּנַי יֵלֵכוּ וַהֲנִחֹתִי לָךְ: טו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אִם־אֵין פָּנֶיךָ הֹלְכִים
אַל־תַּעֲלֵנוּ מִזֶּה: טז וּבַמֶּה | יִוָּדַע אֵפוֹא כִּי־מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲנִי
וְעַמֶּךָ הֲלוֹא בְּלֶכְתְּךָ עִמָּנוּ וְנִפְלִינוּ אֲנִי וְעַמְּךָ מִכֹּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי
הָאֲדָמָה:

יז וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה גַּם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּי־
מָצָאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינַי וָאֵדָעֲךָ בְּשֵׁם: יח וַיֹּאמַר הַרְאֵנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבֹדֶךָ:
יט וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אַעֲבִיר כָּל־טוּבִי עַל־פָּנֶיךָ וְקָרָאתִי בְשֵׁם יְ֭הוָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְחַנֹּתִי
אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אָחֹן וְרִחַמְתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם: כ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאֹת
אֶת־פָּנָי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאַנִי הָאָדָם וָחָי: כא וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה הִנֵּה מָקוֹם אִתִּי וְנִצַּבְתָּ
עַל־הַצּוּר: כב וְהָיָה בַּעֲבֹר כְּבֹדִי וְשַׂמְתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוּר וְשַׂכֹּתִי כַפִּי
עָלֶיךָ עַד־עָבְרִי: כג וַהֲסִרֹתִי אֶת־כַּפִּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת־אֲחֹרָי וּפָנַי לֹא יֵרָאוּ:

(12) Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Lead this people forward,' but You have not made known to me whom You will send with me. Further, You have said, 'I have singled you out by name, and you have, indeed, gained My favor.'

(13) Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and continue in Your favor. Consider, too, that this nation is Your people."

(14) And He said, "I will go in the lead and will lighten your burden."

(15) And he said to Him, "Unless You go in the lead, do not make us leave this place.

(16) For how shall it be known that Your people have gained Your favor unless You go with us, so that we may be distinguished, Your people and I, from every people on the face of the earth?"

(17) And the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name."

(18) He said, "Oh, let me behold Your Presence!"

(19) And He answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name Lord, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show.

(20) But," He said, "you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live."

(21) And the Lord said, "See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock

(22) and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by.

(23) Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen."

(12) **Moses said to the Lord**: The next dozen verses are among the most difficult in the entire Torah. They speak of levels of mystical contact with the Divine that cannot be explained clearly and precisely. The ideas cannot be conveyed through ordinary language, except in terms that remotely allude to an esoteric secret.

After experiencing the crisis of the golden calf, Moses now asks God about His ways of running the world. Previously, the law was to him the most important thing, but now he is more concerned with how to overcome crisis, and internal contradictions and conflicts.

Previously, Moses faced only external difficulties: Pharaoh would not let the Jews leave Egypt, or the people did not know or could not understand something, and Moses had to tell it or explain it to them. But now Moses has been confronted with an internal crisis. At first the people seemed to understand everything, consented to everything, and received the Torah. But then, once again, they behaved inappropriately.

Moses was initially focused on advancing forward, rather than correcting past flaws and mistakes, but now he wants to learn about this too. In a sense, we can say that Moses is taking lessons here from his younger brother Aaron, who from the very beginning was always focused on the correction of sins. As it turns out, Aaron's line too is rooted in the foundations of the universe and is not "just the result of some chance error." And although the Divine governance of the world is based on mercy, kindness, and patience, neither does it exclude punishment for transgressions.

Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Lead this people forward,' but You have not made known to me whom You will send with me": Moses asks God to restore to the people His immediate Divine Presence. Although Moses does not explicitly mention his issue with the presence of the angel, he presents the situation as still partially unresolved and awaiting correction. And he considers the possibility of such a correction entirely realistic.

After the people have not only repented (removed their finery), but have demonstrated their desire to approach the Almighty (as expressed by their attentiveness to the Tent of Meeting), Moses works to restore the former level of the Divine Presence among the people. The physical preservation of the people is not enough for him – he demands the preservation of the Jews' chosenness, and of their mission. He therefore cannot consent to God's latest proposal of establishing His presence among the people only through an angel.

We noted above that God's initial instruction to Moses was not to carve the second tablets, nor somehow to find some other correction for everything that had happened. Instead He only sent the people back on their journey to the Land of Israel while also reducing the level of their spirituality and their direct connection with God (33:1-3). Only thanks to Moses' persistence does God finally agree to restore the people to their prior status.

It often happens in life that although we are spared from total collapse, we are nevertheless unable to return to the same level from where we started. Our future fate then depends on whether we just accept our diminished level as the price we must pay for having been saved, or we continue the struggle to be restored to our original position.

Further, You have said, "I have singled you out by name, and you have, indeed, gained My favor": Moses mentions his own merits solely for the sake of advancing the people.

The literal translation of "I have singled you out by name" in this verse is "I know you by name." As noted earlier[1], a name in Hebrew is not merely a convenience for referring to the entity so named; rather, it characterizes the purpose, task, or mission of the given person or object. God's "knowing Moses by name" means that Moses' received his mission and his assignments from the Almighty Himself, with no intermediate involvement of angels. And therefore, Moses argues, that mission and those assignments should likewise be realized only through the Almighty's direct presence among the Jewish people.

And you have, indeed, gained My favor: To "gain (or find) favor" in Hebrew is limtzo chen, which is the very same expression the Torah used in speaking of Noah: "But Noah found favor with the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). Moses considers God's special regard for him not as an indication of his own personal merits, but only as a sign of God's kindness and grace. This testifies to the special gratitude that Moses felt toward the Almighty. And gratitude is the foundation of spiritual growth.

(13) **Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and continue in Your favor. Consider, too, that this nation is Your people: Moses is saying to God**: Explain Your ways to me, so that I can understand how one earns Your grace, so that I may receive it not only for myself, but for the entire nation. For they are Your people, and everything they do in the world they do only for You.

In parallel with restoring the nation's status, Moses now also raises his own status as their leader. Thus, in response to the crisis, Moses has been able not only to rectify the situation, but even to improve it. And this is precisely what makes it possible for him to receive the second tablets, which are a collaborative endeavor between God and Moses.

(14) **And He said, "I will go in the lead and will lighten your burden"**: The Almighty agrees to revise His decision for Moses' sake – to not send an angel, but to go Himself among the people.

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[1] See above, §5.5.

This dialogue reveals that Moses' arguments here are quite valid. Without God's Presence among the people, it will be impossible for the Jews to realize their mission. And since the people exist only in order to fulfill that mission, the Divine Presence will not leave the Jewish people.

(15) **And he said to Him, "Unless You go in the lead, do not make us leave this place"**: If God himself (and the ongoing Divine revelation) will not be with the Jews, then it is better for them to not go anywhere. Because the mission in the Land of Israel would in any event not be fulfilled.

(16) **For how shall it be known that Your people have gained Your favor unless You go with us, so that we may be distinguished, Your people and I, from every people on the face of the earth?**: The purpose of history is to enable all of mankind to connect with God's overt Divine presence. None of the peoples of the world has as yet been able to ascend to that level – the nations are governed through angels. But although that is the norm for all other nations, the Jewish people are special. They need God's constant, direct presence.

Every nation has its angel. That is, the life of the people is governed solely by the laws of nature and the ordinary flow of events. But if the Jews too are subject only to the laws of nature, their chosenness makes no sense. A typical, ordinary people cannot realize its mission to correct humanity. The Jews are an "abnormal" people chosen by God, and God Himself must therefore lead them, without resorting to angels. Accordingly, the history of this people is quite different from those of all the other nations of the world. Moses asks God to restore this "abnormality" to the Jewish people. And God does so.

(17) **And the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have asked**: The Almighty revises His decision and fulfills Moses' two requests: to go Himself among the people, and to distinguish Israel from the other nations.

For you have truly gained My favor: "Your actions are commendable." God has recognized Moses' gratitude as the basis for spiritual advancement and, consequently, as a justification for Moses receiving God's grace, the Jewish people too should receive the same.

And I have singled you out by name: "I understand well the situation with you (and with the Jewish people)." This is the recognition by God that it is impossible for the Jewish mission to be realized without God's direct Divine presence. And for the sake of realizing this mission, He will go among them.

(18) **He said, "Oh, let me behold Your Presence!"**: Having resolved the issues concerning the Jewish nation, Moses now speaks of his own needs and desires.

God is glorified by bringing man closer to Him and by creating mutual understanding with him. As history progresses mankind gradually comes nearer to God, understanding increases, and reverence of God thereby increases. Therefore, "beholding the Presence of the Almighty" means understanding the meaning of the entire past and future history of mankind, revealing the ways in which the world will come to glorify God, and understanding the meaning of all historical events.

The Midrash says: When Moses saw that it was a moment of grace, and that his words were well received, he asked for more than just forgiveness and restoration of the prior status. God does not condemn Moses for this, because there is nothing wrong with making such a request. Although it cannot be fully realized, the aspiration itself is extremely important, because it truly advances humanity, as individuals and also collectively.

(19) **And He answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before you"**: I cannot show you everything in detail, but I will pass it by you, to give you a general understanding.

All My goodness: I will show you that the true motivation behind all My decisions is not to punish the villains, but to exercise mercy.

And I will proclaim before you the name Lord: The level of revelation that you receive is "Lord" (the Tetragrammaton). This corresponds to what the Torah said above (6:3): "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name 'Lord'."

And the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show: Literally, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." I decide this for My own reasons, which are

beyond the comprehension of man. Therefore, I cannot reveal it even to you; man is not able to grasp the meaning of Divine decisions.

(20) **But," He said, "you cannot see My face"**: Earlier the Torah said: "Then Moses and Aaron ... ascended; and they saw the God of Israel" (24:9-10). But here, "Man may not see Me and live." How are we to reconcile these two passages?

The difference between these two situations is in the Divine names and the levels of providence. Moses and the elders could see at the level of *Elohei Yisrael*, "the God of Israel." The name *Elohim*, "God," represents the category of "local justice, reward, and punishment." And yet, no person can see God at the level of "the Lord" (the Tetragrammaton) – the Divine control of the entire universe as a whole.

For man may not see Me and live: As noted above, for a human to "behold God's Presence" would mean that God was revealing to him the meaning of the entire progression of history. A person can understand the past, but no human being can be allowed to see the meaning of the future, because such knowledge of how future events will develop is incompatible with life as it must be lived. Knowing the future would deprive a person of his free will, render his struggles pointless, and make normal human existence impossible. This is what we mean when we say that such knowledge is "incompatible with life."

Accordingly, to Moses too God reveals only the meaning of past events – "You will see My back" (v. 23) – that is, you will see Me as I depart, "but My face must not be seen" – you cannot know future events.

(21) **And the Lord said, "See, there is a place near Me"**: By agreeing to reveal to Moses even a partial understanding of history, God gives Moses "a place near Him."

Station yourself on the rock: "On the rock" means on Mount Sinai, the place of the Giving of the Torah. From there Moses can gain proper perspective.

(22) **And, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by**: That is, the Almighty's Presence will be close enough for you to feel it. But you will not see it.

(23) **Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back**: Even this is already a great achievement, the highest level that a human being can hope to attain. The Midrash explains that God showed Moses the receding image of His Presence, that is, the meaning of past Divine control – historical events that had already happened. Moses could see only the knot at the back of the Almighty's head tefillin – the straps that connect all things, the belts that drive the engine of history.

But My face must not be seen: Man is not granted vision to see ahead, to understand the future course of the history of the universe.

28.4. MOSES ASCENDS THE MOUNTAIN YET AGAIN, AND RECEIVES THE SECOND TABLETS (34:1-4)

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פְּסָל־לְךָ֣ שְׁנֵי־לֻחֹ֗ת אֲבָנִים֙ כָּרִ֣אשֹׁנִ֔ים וְכָתַבְתִּ֖י
עַל־הַלֻּחֹ֑ת אֶ֤ת־הַדְּבָרִ֙ים֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר הָי֔וּ עַל־הַלֻּחֹ֖ת הָרִאשֹׁנִ֑ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר שִׁבַּֽרְתָּ׃
ב וֶֽהְיֵ֥ה נָכ֖וֹן לַבֹּ֑קֶר וְעָלִ֥יתָ בַבֹּ֖קֶר אֶל־הַ֣ר סִינַ֑י וְנִצַּבְתָּ֥ לִּ֖י שָׁ֥ם עַל־רֹ֥אשׁ
הָהָֽר׃ ג וְאִישׁ֙ לֹ֣א־יַעֲלֶ֔ה עִמָּ֖ךְ וְגַם־אִ֣ישׁ אַל־יֵרָ֑א בְּכָל־הָהָ֔ר גַּם־הַצֹּ֥אן
וְהַבָּקָ֖ר אַל־יִרְעֽוּ׃ אֶל־מ֣וּל הָהָ֔ר הַה֖וּא׃ ד וַיִּפְסֹ֣ל שְׁנֵי־לֻחֹ֗ת אֲבָנִים֙
כָּרִ֣אשֹׁנִ֔ים וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֥ם מֹשֶׁ֖ה בַּבֹּ֑קֶר וַיַּ֣עַל אֶל־הַ֣ר סִינַ֔י כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר צִוָּ֖ה יְ֑הוָה אֹת֣וֹ
וַיִּקַּ֥ח בְּיָד֖וֹ שְׁנֵ֥י לֻחֹ֥ת אֲבָנִֽים׃

(1) **The Lord said to Moses: "Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered.**

(2) **Be ready by morning, and in the morning come up to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to Me, on the top of the mountain.**

(3) **No one else shall come up with you, and no one else shall be seen anywhere on the mountain; neither shall the flocks and the herds graze at the foot of this mountain."**

(4) **So Moses carved two tablets of stone, like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets with him.**

(1) **The Lord said to Moses: "Carve two tablets of stone"**: God instructed Moses to create the second tablets only after the people repented, and after Moses came to understand "the ways of the Lord," as explained above.

Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets: This time, Moses carves the tablets and God writes the inscription. Thus, these second tablets serve as a bridge between the Divine and the human, and will not break when Moses brings them down from the mountain.

We can explain that connection as follows. When a person exerts himself to create something of his own, he understands much better the essence of what he has created. The second tablets are therefore stronger and more durable than the first ones were, thus enabling humanity to realize the effort and understanding they have themselves invested in those tablets, and to live according to their precepts. The tablets no longer represent just a fragile, unattainable ideal.

And I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets: The text inscribed on the second tablets is identical to the inscription that was on the first, broken tablets, namely: The Ten Commandments.

Which you shattered: Does Moses not know which tablets are being replaced by the new ones that he must now create?

But God is making a particular point here. It is as if He is saying to Moses: "Only by destroying the first tablets did you make it possible to create the second, improved and corrected tablets."

Our world is the world of *tikkun*, "repair." Something that broke and has now been fixed can therefore be more complete and more effective than it would have been had it remained intact from the start.

(2-3) **Be ready by morning, and in the morning come up to Mount Sinai … No one else shall come up with you, and no one else shall be seen anywhere on the mountain; neither shall the flocks and the herds graze at the foot of this mountain**: These details and conditions are quite comparable to those that obtained when the Torah was first given (19:12).

(4) **So Moses carved two tablets of stone, like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets with him**: Tradition states that Moses ascended Mount Sinai on the first of Elul (forty days after the incident of the golden calf) and remained there for another forty days. This means that Moses descended from the mountain carrying the second tablets on the Tenth of Tishri. On that day Moses informed the people that their sin of the golden calf had been forgiven. And so, that date, the tenth of Tishri, was established for all future generations as Yom Kippur, the solemn day of atonement and forgiveness still observed annually.

28.5. THE THIRTEEN ATTRIBUTES OF GOD'S MANIFESTATION (34:5-9)

ה וַיֵּרֶד יְ֭הוָה בֶּעָנָ֑ן וַיִּתְיַצֵּ֥ב עִמּ֖וֹ שָׁ֑ם וַיִּקְרָ֥א בְשֵׁ֖ם יְהוָֽה׃ ו וַיַּעֲבֹ֥ר יְהוָ֖ה | עַל־פָּנָ֑יו
וַיִּקְרָ֣אׄ יְהוָ֗ה | יְהוָ֤ה אֵל֙ רַח֣וּם וְחַנּ֔וּן אֶ֖רֶךְ אַפַּ֑יִם וְרַב־חֶ֥סֶד וֶאֱמֶֽת׃ ז נֹצֵ֥ר חֶ֖סֶד
לָאֲלָפִ֑ים נֹשֵׂ֣א עָ֔ון וָפֶ֥שַׁע וְחַטָּאָ֖ה וְנַקֵּ֑ה לֹ֣א יְנַקֶּ֗ה פֹּקֵ֤ד | עֲוֹן־אָבוֹת֙
עַל־בָּנִ֔ים וְעַל־בְּנֵי־בָנִ֖ים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁ֥ים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִֽים׃ ח וַיְמַהֵ֥ר מֹשֶׁ֖ה וַיִּקֹּ֣ד
אַרְצָ֑ה וַיִּשְׁתָּֽחוּ׃ ט וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אִם־נָ֣אׄ מָצָ֣אתִי חֵן֩ בְּעֵינֶ֨יךָ אֲדֹנָ֜י יֵלֶךְ־נָ֣א אֲדֹנָ֗י
בְּקִרְבֵּ֔נוּ כִּֽי־עַם־קְשֵׁה־עֹ֖רֶף הֽוּא׃ וְסָלַחְתָּ֣ לַעֲוֹנֵ֔נוּ וּלְחַטָּאתֵ֖נוּ וּנְחַלְתָּֽנוּ׃

(5) **The Lord came down in a cloud; He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name Lord.**

(6) **The Lord passed before him and proclaimed: "The Lord! the Lord! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness,**

(7) **extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations."**

(8) **Moses hastened to bow low to the ground in homage,**

(9) and said, "If I have gained Your favor, O Lord, pray, let the Lord go in our midst, even though this is a stiffnecked people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your own!"

(5) **The Lord came down in a cloud; He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name Lord**: This passage is God's answer to Moses' request to be shown the Divine ways of governing the world. This passage is called *Shelosh Esreh Middot*, "the Thirteen Attributes" of the Almighty's mercy. These lines of the Torah will serve later as the foundation for the Jewish prayers for forgiveness from sin.

We will offer here only one of the various options preserved by Tradition for understanding these Attributes.

(6) **The Lord! the Lord!**: The Tetragrammaton, the Four-Letter Ineffable Name of God, the first and the second of the Thirteen Attributes, occurs twice in succession. According to Tradition, this apparent duplication speaks of God's mercy before a person sins, and His willingness to forgive after the same person has sinned.

A God: *El*, the third Attribute. He is God Who commands all the forces of the Universe, the King Who reigns over nature and over man.

Compassionate: *Rachum*, the fourth Attribute. God is not indifferent; He is compassionate.

And gracious: *Channun*, the fifth Attribute. God aids the righteous, delivering them from misfortune.

Slow to Anger: *Erech apayim*, the sixth Attribute. God restrains His anger and reserves judgment, in the hope that the sinner will repent.

Abounding in Kindness: *Rav chesed*, the seventh Attribute. God is great in performing kindness. He is kind to a much greater degree than a person deserves, even to those who are entirely without merit.

And faithfulness: *Ve-emet*, the eighth Attribute. Literally translated, Emet means "truth." Although the punishment is postponed in order to give the sinner the opportunity to repent, in the end every person receives what he deserves.

(7) **Extending kindness to the thousandth generation**: *Notzer chesed la-alafim*, the ninth Attribute. The merits of ancestors extend even to the thousandth generation of their descendants.

Forgiving iniquity: *No-se avon*, the tenth Attribute. To a person who repents the Almighty restores the purity and strength of soul that the person previously had.

[Forgiving] transgression: *ve-[No-se] Fesha*, the eleventh Attribute. The Almighty forgives even open rebellion against Him.

[Forgiving] sin: *Ve-[No-se] chatta'ah*, the twelfth Attribute. God forgives sins committed inadvertently or out of ignorance.

Yet He does not remit all punishment: *Ve-nake [lo yenake]*, the last of the thirteen Attributes, literally, "[In] remitting, He does not remit." This is usually understood to mean that God remits punishment for the those who repent, but not for the unrepentant.

But visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations: The Almighty visits the sins of the parents on their descendants only when those descendants continue the bad example of their forebears, as stated in the Ten Commandments (20:5): "Visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me." Moreover, punishment is promised for only three or four generations, while kindness is extended to the thousandth generation (v. 7). This demonstrates that in Divine Providence, a single measure of mercy is many times more powerful than the same measure of judgment.

Such is the correlation of principles on which basis the Almighty rules the world. Punishment is necessary, but its power must be much less than the power of mercy.

(8) **Moses hastened to bow low to the ground in homage**: Moses bows in gratitude for the Almighty having fulfilled his request to explain to him the ways of Providence.

(9) **And said, "If I have gained Your favor, O Lord, pray, let the Lord go in our midst**: Now that God has yielded to Moses' first request, Moses mentions also the second.

Even though this is a stiffnecked people: Here Moses does not blame the people, but rather, he asks God to indulge them in their stubbornness. Only the Almighty Himself can forgive. An angel is only a messenger – he decides nothing on his own and cannot forgive anyone.

("Pay heed to him and obey him. Do not defy him, for he will not pardon your offenses, since My Name is in him," 23:21).

Pardon: Only God can forgive. Angels (that is, the forces of nature) have no power to forgive.

Our iniquity and our sin: "Our" sin, not "their" sin. Moses does not separate himself from the people. A righteous leader will not try to absolve himself of responsibility for sins committed by the people he is charged with teaching and educating.

And take us for Your own!: And this is impossible unless God Himself goes among the people.

28.6. LAWS RELATED TO THE COVENANT (34:10-26)

י וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי כֹּרֵת בְּרִית נֶגֶד כָּל־עַמְּךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה נִפְלָאֹת אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־נִבְרְאוּ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם וְרָאָה כָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה
בְּקִרְבּוֹ אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה יי כִּי־נוֹרָא הוּא אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ: יא שְׁמָר־לְךָ
אֵת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם הִנְנִי גֹרֵשׁ מִפָּנֶיךָ אֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי
וְהַחִתִּי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי: יב הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן־תִּכְרֹת בְּרִית לְיוֹשֵׁב
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בָּא עָלֶיהָ פֶּן־יִהְיֶה לְמוֹקֵשׁ בְּקִרְבֶּךָ: יג כִּי אֶת־
מִזְבְּחֹתָם תִּתֹּצוּן וְאֶת־מַצֵּבֹתָם תְּשַׁבֵּרוּן וְאֶת־אֲשֵׁרָיו תִּכְרֹתוּן: יד כִּי
לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאֵל אַחֵר כִּי יי קַנָּא שְׁמוֹ אֵל קַנָּא הוּא: טו פֶּן־תִּכְרֹת
בְּרִית לְיוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ וְזָנוּ | אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְזָבְחוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְקָרָא לְךָ
וְאָכַלְתָּ מִזִּבְחוֹ: טז וְלָקַחְתָּ מִבְּנֹתָיו לְבָנֶיךָ וְזָנוּ בְנֹתָיו אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן
וְהִזְנוּ אֶת־בָּנֶיךָ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן: יז אֱלֹהֵי מַסֵּכָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה־לָּךְ:
יח אֶת־חַג הַמַּצּוֹת תִּשְׁמֹר שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצּוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִךָ
לְמוֹעֵד חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב כִּי בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב יָצָאתָ מִמִּצְרָיִם: יט כָּל־פֶּטֶר
רֶחֶם לִי וְכָל־מִקְנְךָ תִּזָּכָר פֶּטֶר שׁוֹר וָשֶׂה: כ וּפֶטֶר חֲמוֹר תִּפְדֶּה בְשֶׂה
וְאִם־לֹא תִפְדֶּה וַעֲרַפְתּוֹ כֹּל בְּכוֹר בָּנֶיךָ תִּפְדֶּה וְלֹא־יֵרָאוּ פָנַי רֵיקָם:
כא שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִּשְׁבֹּת בֶּחָרִישׁ וּבַקָּצִיר תִּשְׁבֹּת:
כב וְחַג שָׁבֻעֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לְךָ בִּכּוּרֵי קְצִיר חִטִּים וְחַג הָאָסִיף תְּקוּפַת
הַשָּׁנָה: כג שָׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָל־זְכוּרְךָ אֶת־פְּנֵי הָאָדֹן | יי

אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: כד כִּי־אוֹרִישׁ גּוֹיִם מִפָּנֶיךָ וְהִרְחַבְתִּי אֶת־גְּבֻלֶךָ וְלֹא־
יַחְמֹד אִישׁ אֶת־אַרְצְךָ בַּעֲלֹתְךָ לֵרָאוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵי יְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים
בַּשָּׁנָה: כה לֹא־תִשְׁחַט עַל־חָמֵץ דַּם־זִבְחִי וְלֹא־יָלִין לַבֹּקֶר זֶבַח חַג
הַפֶּסַח: כו רֵאשִׁית בִּכּוּרֵי אַדְמָתְךָ תָּבִיא בֵּית יְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תְבַשֵּׁל
גְּדִי בֶּחָלֶב אִמּוֹ:

(10) **He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will work such wonders as have not been wrought on all the earth or in any nation; and all the people who are with you shall see how awesome are the Lord's deeds which I will perform for you.**

(11) **Mark well what I command you this day. I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.**

(12) **Beware of making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land against which you are advancing, lest they be a snare in your midst.**

(13) **No, you must tear down their altars, smash their pillars, and cut down their sacred posts;**

(14) **for you must not worship any other god, because the Lord, whose name is Impassioned, is an impassioned God.**

(15) **You must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for they will lust after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices.**

(16) **And when you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters will lust after their gods and will cause your sons to lust after their gods.**

(17) **You shall not make molten gods for yourselves.**

(18) **You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread — eating unleavened bread for seven days, as I have commanded you — at the set time of the month of Abib, for in the month of Abib you went forth from Egypt.**

(19) **Every first issue of the womb is Mine, from all your livestock that drop a male as firstling, whether cattle or sheep.**

(20) **But the firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. And you must redeem every first-born among your sons. None shall appear before Me empty-handed.**

(21) **Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor; you shall cease from labor even at plowing time and harvest time.**

(22) **You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest; and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.**

(23) **Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign Lord, the God of Israel.**

(24) **I will drive out nations from your path and enlarge your territory; no one will covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times a year.**

(25) **You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened; and the sacrifice of the Feast of Passover shall not be left lying until morning.**

(26) **The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.**

(10) **He said: I hereby make a covenant**: This "renewal of the covenant" portion is quite similar in structure to the account of the concluding of the covenant at the giving of the Torah. The similarity includes the prohibition of approaching Mount Sinai, and the giving of the two tablets on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. The system of essential commandments as presented here is likewise analogous to that of the *Mishpatim* portion. (Vv. 11-26 here closely resemble 23:10-23 there).

However, the emphasis now is not on social commandments (as in the *Mishpatim* portion), but on the prohibitions of idolatry and the foundations of the festivals, since the story of the golden calf indicates that the people have problems with those.

I hereby make a covenant: By virtue of the second tablets, the covenant made before the sin of the golden calf is completely restored.

Before all your people I will work such wonders … and all the people who are with you shall see how awesome are the Lord's deeds which I will perform for you: The Jewish people at this initial stage of development needed miracles to strengthen their faith in Moses.

(12-16) **Beware of making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land against which you are advancing, lest they be a snare in your midst … for they will … invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices … And when you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters … will cause your sons to lust after their gods**: This corresponds to the commandments concerning the conquest of the Land of Israel in the *Mishpatim* portion (23:20-33). However, there is also an addition: the prohibition of entering into mixed marriages, because they lead to assimilation and idolatry.

(17) **You shall not make molten gods for yourselves**: This prohibition is specially emphasized in light of the incident of the calf.

(18) **You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread**: As in the *Mishpatim* portion (23:15 onwards), the Sabbath and the three pilgrimage holidays are discussed, but some details are added.

(19) **Every first issue of the womb is Mine**: The obligation to dedicate the firstborns to the Almighty is stressed. The nation's firstborns, who previously had usually performed the Divine service, were not able to resist the temptation of idolatry in the incident of the calf. This is one of the reasons that the Levites replaced the firstborns for performing the service in the Temple.

(21) **Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor; you shall cease from labor even at plowing time and harvest time**: Here the Torah stresses the strict obligation to observe the Sabbath even during periods of urgent agricultural exigency. The Jewish people, while waiting for Moses, could not hold out even one additional day. That haste and impatience is corrected by the cessation of all labor on Shabbat, regardless of socio-economic considerations or any other factors.

(23-24) **Three times a year all your males shall appear … no one will covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your**

God three times a year: This passage is quite similar to the parallel verse in portion *Mishpatim* (23:17). But here the Torah adds the Almighty's promise to protect the land from enemy nations while the entire Jewish population is gathered at the Temple on the three pilgrimage festivals every year. One of reasons behind the creation of the golden calf was the people's fear of being left without a leader and without protection. God therefore promises here that the people will be able to meet with Him on those occasions without fear.

(25-26) **You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened … The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk**: These final commandments of the renewal of the covenant are identical to those of the final commandments in the legislation of the *Mishpatim* portion (23:18).

28.7. MOSES DESCENDS FROM MOUNT SINAI (34:27-35)

כז וַיֹּאמֶר יְ֭הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתָב־לְךָ֣ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִ֑ים הָאֵ֖לֶּה כִּ֣י עַל־פִּ֣י | הַדְּבָרִ֑ים הָאֵ֖לֶּה כָּרַ֥תִּי אִתְּךָ֛ בְּרִ֥ית וְאֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל׃ כח וַיְהִי־שָׁ֣ם עִם־יְ֭הוָה אַרְבָּעִ֣ים יוֹם֮ וְאַרְבָּעִ֣ים לַ֣יְלָה לֶ֣חֶם לֹ֣א אָכַ֗ל וּמַ֤יִם לֹא֙ שָׁתָ֔ה וַיִּכְתֹּ֖ב עַל־הַלֻּחֹ֑ת אֶ֥ת דִּבְרֵ֖י הַבְּרִ֥ית עֲשֶׂ֖רֶת הַדְּבָרִֽים׃ כט וַיְהִ֗י בְּרֶ֤דֶת מֹשֶׁה֙ מֵהַ֣ר סִינַ֔י וּשְׁנֵ֥י לֻחֹ֖ת הָעֵדֻ֑ת בְּיַ֣ד־מֹשֶׁ֗ה בְּרִדְתּ֤וֹ מִן־הָהָר֙ וּמֹשֶׁ֔ה לֹ֣א יָדַ֔ע כִּ֥י קָרַ֖ן עוֹר֑ פָּנָ֗יו בְּדַבְּרוֹ֙ אִתּ֔וֹ׃ ל וַיַּ֣רְא אַהֲרֹ֔ן וְכָל־בְּנֵ֖י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל אֶת־מֹשֶׁ֗ה וְהִנֵּ֤ה קָרַן֙ עוֹר֔ פָּנָ֖יו וַיִּרְאוּ֥ מִגֶּֽשֶׁת אֵלָֽיו׃ לא וַיִּקְרָ֣א אֲלֵהֶ֗ם מֹשֶׁ֤ה וַיָּשֻׁ֙בוּ֙ אֵלָ֣יו אַהֲרֹ֔ן וְכָל־הַנְּשִׂאִ֖ים בָּעֵדָ֑ה וַיְדַבֵּ֥ר מֹשֶׁ֖ה אֲלֵהֶֽם׃ לב וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵ֣ן נִגְּשׁ֗וּ כָּל־בְּנֵ֤י יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ וַיְצַוֵּ֔ם אֵ֥ת כָּל־אֲשֶׁ֖ר דִּבֶּ֣ר יְ֑הוָה אִתּ֛וֹ בְּהַ֥ר סִינָֽי׃ לג וַיְכַ֣ל מֹשֶׁ֔ה מִדַּבֵּ֥ר אִתָּ֖ם וַיִּתֵּ֣ן עַל־פָּנָ֑יו מַסְוֶֽה׃ לד וּבְבֹ֣א מֹשֶׁ֗ה לִפְנֵ֤י יְ֙הוָה֙ לְדַבֵּ֣ר אִתּ֔וֹ יָסִ֥יר אֶת־הַמַּסְוֶ֖ה עַד־צֵאתֹ֑ו וְיָצָ֣א וְדִבֶּ֗ר אֶל־בְּנֵ֤י יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ אֵ֣ת אֲשֶׁ֣ר יְצֻוֶּֽה׃ לה וְרָא֣וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֗ל אֶת־פְּנֵ֤י מֹשֶׁה֙ כִּֽי־קָרַ֣ן עוֹר֔ פְּנֵ֖י מֹשֶׁ֑ה וְהֵשִׁ֣יב מֹשֶׁ֗ה אֶת־הַמַּסְוֶה֙ עַל־פָּנָ֔יו עַד־בֹּא֖וֹ לְדַבֵּ֥ר אִתּֽוֹ׃

(27) **And the Lord said to Moses: Write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and with Israel.**

(28) **And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water; and he wrote down on the tablets the terms of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.**

(29) **So Moses came down from Mount Sinai. And as Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him.**

(30) **Aaron and all the Israelites saw that the skin of Moses' face was radiant; and they shrank from coming near him.**

(31) **But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the chieftains in the assembly returned to him, and Moses spoke to them.**

(32) **Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he instructed them concerning all that the Lord had imparted to him on Mount Sinai.**

(33) **And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.**

(34) **Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would leave the veil off until he came out; and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded,**

(35) **the Israelites would see how radiant the skin of Moses' face was. Moses would then put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with Him.**

(27) **And the Lord said to Moses: Write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and with Israel**: The text of this fundamental system of commandments (vv. 11-26) must be written in a book (not on tablets), like the Book of the Covenant of portion *Mishpatim* (24:7).

The making of the covenant involves three components: the proclamation, the tablets, and a book containing the legislative code. In the first instance, the process included the giving of the Torah, the giving of the first set of tablets, and the legislative code of portion *Mishpatim*. This second time, the concluding of the covenant consists of God's consent to remain among the Jewish people, the second set of tablets, and the legislative code as given here, inscribed in a book.

(28) **And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights**: These forty days and forty nights correspond to the interval of the same length that Moses remained on the mountain the first time. And now Moses must learn the Torah a second time. His first forty days was for studying the *a priori* Torah – what is correct and proper in the ideal sense. And this second interval is for learning the *a posteriori* Torah – how errors can be corrected after the fact.

He ate no bread and drank no water: Again, this is a repeat of Moses' first stay on the mountain. It emphasizes the unnatural, transcendental nature of the understanding that Moses received during both periods.

And he wrote down on the tablets the terms of the covenant, the Ten Commandments: On the second tablets, as on the first ones, only the Ten Commandments – the Decalogue – were inscribed.

It is not clear from the text who inscribed these words on the tablets. A simple grammatical reading of the text would suggest that it was Moses, since Moses is the subject at the beginning of the sentence, and no other subject is mentioned after that. However, the Torah told us earlier (34:1) that God Himself inscribed the second tablets: "The Lord said to Moses: "Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered." Apparently, then, we must understand the inscription of the Decalogue on the second tablets as a collaborative effort of God and Moses together. And this is in fact the singular significance of the second tablets – they are a joint creation by God and man.

(29) **So Moses came down from Mount Sinai**: This happened on the tenth of Tishri, 120 days after the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Moses had been on the mountain for three consecutive forty-day periods: To receive the first tablets, to pray for forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf, and to receive the second tablets. This day was later established as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement for all generations to come (see Leviticus, ch. 16 and comments there).

And as Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him: The Torah does not say

here, as was said in the case of the first tablets, "tablets inscribed on both their surfaces: they were inscribed on the one side and on the other" (32:15). Rather, here a new detail comes to light: "The skin of Moses' face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him." Thus, Moses now acquires a quality that until now only the tablets themselves possessed: His face is illuminated with a radiance that shines in every direction.

The first time, the light of the Divine teachings came only from the tablets, which Moses brought down from the mountain. Moses was only a messenger, not a participant, in bringing the Divine light to the world. And those first tablets were subsequently broken.

The second time, Moses is a participant in the creation of the tablets – he carved them from stone, and, perhaps, even wrote their inscription jointly with God. But not only that. This time Moses is the actual *subject* of the transmission of the Divine light – the light comes from Moses himself, and not from the tablets he is holding in his hands. Therefore, this time the tablets of the Divine light, delivered to the lower world, will not be broken.

(29) **Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him**: Moses does not realize that he has now himself become the source of the Torah. This lack of awareness was a necessary aspect of Moses' role in this process.

An essential element of Moses' character was his "renunciation of self" (also evident in the phrase, "But if not, erase me from the record which You have written!," 32:32). Moses strove to convey to the people exactly what he received from God, without adding anything at all of his own. Tradition calls this approach *aspaklaria meira*, "transparent glass." Moses had to take this approach in order for the Torah to be transmitted without distortion.

But in fact, the transmission of the Divine teachings from heaven to earth, from the mountaintop to the people, is impossible without active human participation. The true Divine light below is not just an exact copy of the Divine light above (as were the first tablets, which had to be broken), but a refraction of that light through the individuality of each person – his or her active participation in the formation and formulation of the Divine truth. Although this approach will find its fullest expression in the final Book of the Torah (Deuteronomy, Moses' five-week-long

address to the people at the end of his life, which he delivered at his own initiative and in his own language), it has already begun with the second tablets.

(30) **Aaron and all the Israelites saw that the skin of Moses' face was radiant; and they shrank from coming near him**: In the same way that at Sinai they were afraid to make direct contact with God ("All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning… and fell back and stood at a distance," 20:15), here too they fear direct contact with Moses.

(31) **But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the chieftains in the assembly returned to him, and Moses spoke to them**: For Aaron and the people, the idea that a human can be the bearer of Divine revelation seemed so improbable, that only through Moses' efforts were they finally able to accept it.

(31-32) **But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the chieftains in the assembly returned to him, and Moses spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he instructed them concerning all that the Lord had imparted to him on Mount Sinai**: We see here the concentric circles of a spiritual progression: Aaron, then the heads of the community, and then all the Israelites.

Tradition explains the order of transmission of the Divine teachings as follows. First, Moses taught Aaron the given passage of the Torah. Then Aaron's sons were also included, and Moses repeated. Then the "chieftains in the assembly" were brought in (and Moses repeated again). And finally, "all the Israelites came near" (and Moses repeated yet once more).

Thus, Aaron heard the Divine teachings from Moses four times (and three times he saw Moses teaching it to others, which served for him as lessons in pedagogy). Aaron's sons listened three times, the elders twice, and the people once.

And yet (unlike the judicial system described at 18:22), Moses did not allow Aaron or the chieftains to educate the people – he insisted on teaching them himself. Each person, on hearing the Divine teachings, had to perceive those aspects that were most relevant to him. But only Moses had such a complete command of the teachings that he could

present them through the unique perspective of each one of the hundreds of thousands of Jews.

(33-35) **And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would leave the veil off until he came out … the Israelites would see how radiant the skin of Moses' face was. Moses would then put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with Him**: Here the Torah describes how Moses transmitted to the people the Divine teachings that he received in the Tent of Meeting. In that process, when Moses received God's revelation, or when he taught the people, his face was exposed and radiated Divine light. At all other times (in the course of normal, everyday life), Moses' face was covered with a veil.

The transmission of the teachings to the people is described, which Moses himself receives in the Tent of Meeting. During the transmission of the teachings, when Moses receives the revelation from God, or when he teaches the people, his face is open and shines. But the rest of the time (i.e., in everyday life) Moses' face is covered with a veil.

And so it continued throughout all the years of the journey through the wilderness. Just as the light shone from Moses' face only when he and the people were studying the Torah, but it did not penetrate into everyday life, so was Moses himself shut off from the ordinary life of the people. Practically speaking, Moses did not participate in that aspect of the life of the nation, and was not involved in it in any way.

This separation of the Divine teachings from everyday life was necessary in order to introduce religious feeling into a rigid framework. It was precisely the absence of such a framework that led to the creation of the golden calf. But at the same time, Moses' removal from the everyday life of the people led to a loss of understanding between him and the new generation who grew up in the wilderness, and this ultimately led to Moses' losing the opportunity to enter the Promised Land[1].

[1] We shall deal with this issue in our commentary to Numbers.

WEEKLY PORTION [10]

VAYAKHEL

CHAPTER 29
BUILDING THE TABERNACLE

29.1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF *VAYAKHEL* AND *PEKUDEI*

Weekly portions *Vayakhel* (10) and *Pekudei* (11) complete the Book of Exodus. Earlier, in portions *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, Moses received instructions concerning the structure of the Tabernacle. And now, in portions *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei*, the actual building of the Tabernacle will be described. Thus, portions *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh* presented the theoretical approach, while in *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* the practical approach is given.

Much of what was said earlier in the theoretical vein is repeated again in this practical description. But since there is no such thing in the Torah as "just repeating" something, we are forced to conclude that the intent is to communicate to us something new. More specifically, we understand the "repetition" as indicating that the practical implementation somehow differs materially from the preliminary, theoretical plan. When we put something into actual practice, our actions have a completely different meaning from the one they had when we were only making plans. This is why the Torah recounts all the details of the Tabernacle's construction a second time.

Moreover, in the description of the practical construction of the Temple there are important differences from its earlier theoretical description. The most significant of these differences is in the sequence of actions, which demonstrates a change in how the relationship between the various components of the Tabernacle is to be understood.

As already mentioned, there are two models for understanding the Temple and the Torah – Moses' approach and Aaron's approach. In portions *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, where the Temple is described as an ideal, Moses' and Aaron's approaches are each presented separately. The gap between them is highlighted by the fact that Moses is up above, on the mountaintop, while Aaron is down below, with the people. This gap in leadership sparks a crisis that leads to the creation of the golden calf. In other words, the idea of complete separation of Divine revelation into two separate lines, Moses' and Aaron's, cannot be sustained, and it fails.

After the crisis and its resultant *Shevirat Ha-Keilim*, the Kabbalistic term that means "shattering of the vessels," the tikkun ("correction, repair") stage begins, in which the two lines are united into one. Only through this unification do the Divine teachings achieve stability. Thus, portions *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* speak not only of the construction of the Tabernacle, but also of the Tabernacle's stability, and that of the Torah in general.

One notable indicator of this stability is the mention of the tension ropes, not mentioned in the previous portions, that were used to secure the walls of the tent and the courtyard.

But the primary feature that affords the actual Temple its additional stability is the interweaving of Moses' and Aaron's approaches. As a general observation, *Vayakhel* is Moses' portion (the Temple and its vessels), and *Pekudei* is Aaron's (as expressed in the descriptions of the priestly garments, and also in the Torah's meticulous accounting of the materials consumed in the building of the Tabernacle, itself necessary because of man's inclination to sin by embezzling). But even so, both portions include elements from both approaches, and through this they find their balance.

29.2. THE PROHIBITION OF PERFORMING LABOR ON THE SABBATH (35:1-3)

א וַיַּקְהֵל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים
אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְי לַעֲשֹׂת אֹתָם: ב שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּעָשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם

הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִהְיֶה לָכֶם קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבָּת שַׁבָּתוֹן לַיהוָה כָּל־הָעֹשֶׂה בוֹ מְלָאכָה
יוּמָת: ג לֹא־תְבַעֲרוּ אֵשׁ בְּכֹל מֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:

(1) **Moses then convoked the whole Israelite community and said to them: These are the things that the Lord has commanded you to do:**

(2) **On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.**

(3) **You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day.**

(1) **Moses then convoked**: Moses convened the people immediately after he had descended the second time from Mount Sinai, that is, on the eleventh of Tishri.

The whole Israelite community: The construction of the Temple is a communal undertaking, but it concerns each of the Children of Israel personally. Thus, not only the lines of Moses and Aaron are united, but of the entire nation as well.

(2) **On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord**: Earlier, on Mount Sinai, the commandment to refrain from construction on Shabbat was given at the very end of the description of the Tabernacle ("Speak to the Israelite people and say: Nevertheless, you must keep My Sabbaths," 31:13). But here Moses actually begins with that. In the domain of ideas, restrictive conditions need be mentioned only at the end. But where actual practice is concerned, those restrictions come first.

A Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord: The practical Sabbath prohibitions encountered in the Torah heretofore concerned the collection of the manna, primarily (16:11 ff.). But now that the people are moving to the construction of the Tabernacle, their Shabbat observance must be supplemented with new aspects.

Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death: Practically speaking, a Jewish court cannot sentence a person to death for violating the Sabbath. But the idea that violating the Sabbath entails death, at least in principle, is especially important.

The world is designed such that any constant movement, whether in the material or spiritual human realms, must be periodically suspended with pauses. Any movement that is perfectly continuous leads to death. And in this sense, a person who is constantly at work without a day of rest will die.

Moreover, a person who gets carried away by something of great importance, especially in the spiritual and religious realms, is inclined to keep moving ever forward without looking back. But unless you stop from time to time to look around, and to take stock of your progress, you are in danger of going off in the wrong direction. The weekly hiatus that the Shabbat provides is needed in order to prevent that.

(3) **You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day**: The essence of Shabbat is to "suspend transformation of the world." And fire is the most powerful instrument for transforming the world that humans have. This is why igniting and using fire is emphasized so prominently among all the Shabbat prohibitions.

You shall kindle no fire: The Karaites (a Jewish sect that professed, in its religious observances and opinions, to follow the Bible to the exclusion of rabbinical traditions and laws) interpreted the words *lo teva'aru esh*, as "You shall allow no fire to burn" on the Sabbath. That is, not even fire that was kindled before the Sabbath began, and was left to burn on its own.

In contrast, Rabbinic tradition understands *lo teva'aru* as a prohibition of actually kindling fire on Shabbat, whereas fire that was kindled before Shabbat may continue to burn on its own on Shabbat, in order to provide heat or light. We emphasize this idea by lighting the Shabbat candles every Friday afternoon (in winter) or evening (in summer), always shortly before sunset, which marks the onset of Shabbat.

29.3. THE COMMANDMENT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE TEMPLE (35:4-9)

ד וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה
יְ־ה֖וָה לֵאמֹ֑ר: ה קְח֣וּ מֵאִתְּכֶ֗ם תְּרוּמָ֤ה לַיהוָה֙ כָּל־נְדִ֣יב לִבּ֔וֹ יְבִיאֶ֖הָ אֶת
תְּרוּמַ֣ת יְ־ה֑וָה זָהָ֥ב וָכֶ֖סֶף וּנְחֹֽשֶׁת: ו וּתְכֵ֥לֶת וְאַרְגָּמָ֖ן וְתוֹלַ֣עַת שָׁנִ֑י וְשֵׁ֥שׁ
וְעִזִּֽים: ז וְעֹרֹ֣ת אֵילִ֔ם מְאָדָּמִ֖ים וְעֹרֹ֣ת תְּחָשִׁ֑ים וַעֲצֵ֥י שִׁטִּֽים: ח וְשֶׁ֥מֶן
לַמָּאֹ֖ר וּבְשָׂמִ֣ים לְשֶׁ֔מֶן הַמִּשְׁחָ֖ה וְלִקְטֹ֥רֶת הַסַּמִּֽים: ט וְאַבְנֵי־שֹׁ֖הַם
וְאַבְנֵ֣י מִלֻּאִ֑ים לָאֵפֹ֖ד וְלַחֹֽשֶׁן:

(4) Moses said further to the whole community of Israelites: This is what the Lord has commanded:

(5) Take from among you gifts to the Lord; everyone whose heart so moves him shall bring them — gifts for the Lord: gold, silver, and copper;

(6) blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, and goats' hair;

(7) tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood;

(8) oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense;

(9) lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and the breastpiece.

(4-5) **Moses said further to the whole community of Israelites**: This is what the Lord has commanded: Take from among you gifts to the Lord; everyone whose heart so moves him shall bring them — gifts for the Lord: On the whole, Vayakhel is Moses' portion, but supplemented with some of Aaron's aspects. Earlier (25:2), at the beginning of the Terumah portion (which is Moses' portion entirely), the donations to be made to the Temple were presented as offerings to be made voluntarily. But here, in almost the same context, although the general idea of voluntary gifts is preserved ("everyone whose heart so moves him"), it is introduced by a clear imperative element: "This is what the Lord has commanded."

Thus, Moses' approach is supplemented here with an intonation more suggestive of Aaron's orientation, which considers the people's good will on its own insufficient, and therefore requires an actual order.

29.4. THE INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN BUILDING THE TABERNACLE (35:10-19)

י וְכָל־חֲכַם־לֵב בָּכֶם יָבֹאוּ וְיַעֲשׂוּ אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְ׳: יא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן
אֶת־אָהֳלוֹ וְאֶת־מִכְסֵהוּ אֶת־קְרָסָיו וְאֶת־קְרָשָׁיו אֶת־בְּרִיחוֹ אֶת־עַמֻּדָיו
וְאֶת־אֲדָנָיו: יב אֶת־הָאָרֹן וְאֶת־בַּדָּיו אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת וְאֵת פָּרֹכֶת הַמָּסָךְ:
יג אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן וְאֶת־בַּדָּיו וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְאֵת לֶחֶם הַפָּנִים: יד וְאֶת־
מְנֹרַת הַמָּאוֹר וְאֶת־כֵּלֶיהָ וְאֶת־נֵרֹתֶיהָ וְאֵת שֶׁמֶן הַמָּאוֹר: טו וְאֶת־
מִזְבַּח הַקְּטֹרֶת וְאֶת־בַּדָּיו וְאֵת שֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְאֵת קְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים
וְאֶת־מָסַךְ הַפֶּתַח לְפֶתַח הַמִּשְׁכָּן: טז אֵת | מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־מִכְבַּר
הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֶת־בַּדָּיו וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו אֶת־הַכִּיֹּר וְאֶת־כַּנּוֹ: יז אֵת
קַלְעֵי הֶחָצֵר אֶת־עַמֻּדָיו וְאֶת־אֲדָנֶיהָ וְאֵת מָסַךְ שַׁעַר הֶחָצֵר: יח אֶת־
יִתְדֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֶת־יִתְדֹת הֶחָצֵר וְאֶת־מֵיתְרֵיהֶם: יט אֶת־בִּגְדֵי הַשָּׁרֵת
לְשָׁרֵת בַּקֹּדֶשׁ אֶת־בִּגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְאַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶת־בִּגְדֵי בָנָיו לְכַהֵן:

(10) **And let all among you who are skilled come and make all that the Lord has commanded:**

(11) **the Tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its clasps and its planks, its bars, its posts, and its sockets;**

(12) **the ark and its poles, the cover, and the curtain for the screen;**

(13) **the table, and its poles and all its utensils; and the bread of display;**

(14) **the lampstand for lighting, its furnishings and its lamps, and the oil for lighting;**

(15) **the altar of incense and its poles; the anointing oil and the aromatic incense; and the entrance screen for the entrance of the Tabernacle;**

(16) **the altar of burnt offering, its copper grating, its poles, and all its furnishings; the laver and its stand;**

(17) **the hangings of the enclosure, its posts and its sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court;**

(18) **the pegs for the Tabernacle, the pegs for the enclosure, and their cords;**

(19) the service vestments for officiating in the sanctuary, the sacral vestments of Aaron the priest and the vestments of his sons for priestly service.

(10) **And let all among you who are skilled come and make all that the Lord has commanded**: Anyone sufficiently skilled who wants to participate actively in the creation of the Tabernacle may do so, and not only Bezalel and Oholiab. This emphasizes the status of the Temple as a communal endeavor for the entire nation.

(14) **The lampstand … and the oil for lighting**: In *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh* the menorah was described in Moses' portion, and the oil in Aaron's. That is, the creation of the Temple vessels is described separately from their use. But this separation has now been overcome, and the creation of the menorah is described together with its oil.

(11-17) **The Tabernacle, its tent … the ark … the table … the lampstand … the altar of incense … the altar of burnt offering … the hangings of the enclosure**: The order here is significantly different from that in portions *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*. The description here begins with the physical building, not with the utensils. But then it moves sequentially from the inside out, and the elements of Moses' Temple (the ark, the table, the lampstand, the outer altar, and the courtyard) appear in an order generally corresponding to the elements of Aaron's Temple (the altar of incense) and the Temple's additional utensils described at the beginning of portion *Ki Tissa* (the laver).

The reason for this change is that the sequence in the ideal world was determined by the functions of the Temple's elements themselves, but in the real world all parts of the Temple must be assembled into a single unified whole, and that happens only as determined by the physical positioning of the parts.

In the original, ideal plan, the active elements of the Temple are primary, while the means to the ends that they represent are only secondary. The internal elements of the Tabernacle are therefore described first, and only then the external ones.

But the concrete construction of the Tabernacle begins with preparing the external conditions (the outside elements), and only after that can the goal itself be realized (the Temple's internal vessels).

(18) **And their cords**: These cords, which were used to stretch the Tent coverings and the walls of the courtyard, were fastened to stakes hammered into the ground. This detail was not mentioned previously, as it is not integral to the Tabernacle, but is only an "implementation detail" – an element for promoting stability, the need for which arises only at the stage when the Tent and the courtyard are being actually constructed.

(19) **The service vestments for officiating in the sanctuary**: These vestments were used to cover and protect the vessels of the Tabernacle when they were being transported during the wandering through the wilderness.

29.5. THE PEOPLE BRING THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS (35:20-29)

כ וַיֵּצְאוּ כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִלִּפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה: כא וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־
נְשָׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר נָדְבָה רוּחוֹ אֹתוֹ הֵבִיאוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמַת יְי לִמְלֶאכֶת
אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּלְכָל־עֲבֹדָתוֹ וּלְבִגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ: כב וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים עַל־הַנָּשִׁים
כֹּל | נְדִיב לֵב הֵבִיאוּ חָח וָנֶזֶם וְטַבַּעַת וְכוּמָז כָּל־כְּלִי זָהָב וְכָל־אִישׁ
אֲשֶׁר הֵנִיף תְּנוּפַת זָהָב לַיהוָה: כג וְכָל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־נִמְצָא אִתּוֹ תְּכֵלֶת
וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים
הֵבִיאוּ: כד כָּל־מֵרִים תְּרוּמַת כֶּסֶף וּנְחֹשֶׁת הֵבִיאוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַת יְי וְכֹל
אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא אִתּוֹ עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים לְכָל־מְלֶאכֶת הָעֲבֹדָה הֵבִיאוּ: כה וְכָל־
אִשָּׁה חַכְמַת־לֵב בְּיָדֶיהָ טָווּ וַיָּבִיאוּ מַטְוֶה אֶת־הַתְּכֵלֶת וְאֶת־הָאַרְגָּמָן
אֶת־תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וְאֶת־הַשֵּׁשׁ: כו וְכָל־הַנָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר נָשָׂא לִבָּן אֹתָנָה
בְּחָכְמָה טָווּ אֶת־הָעִזִּים: כז וְהַנְּשִׂאִם הֵבִיאוּ אֶת אַבְנֵי הַשֹּׁהַם וְאֶת
אַבְנֵי הַמִּלֻּאִים לָאֵפוֹד וְלַחֹשֶׁן: כח וְאֶת־הַבֹּשֶׂם וְאֶת־הַשֶּׁמֶן לְמָאוֹר
וּלְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים: כט כָּל־אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָדַב לִבָּם
אֹתָם לְהָבִיא לְכָל־הַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה הֵבִיאוּ
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל נְדָבָה לַיהוָה:

(20) **So the whole community of the Israelites left Moses' presence.**

(21) And everyone who excelled in ability and everyone whose spirit moved him came, bringing to the Lord his offering for the work of the Tent of Meeting and for all its service and for the sacral vestments.

(22) Men and women, all whose hearts moved them, all who would make an elevation offering of gold to the Lord, came bringing brooches, earrings, rings, and pendants — gold objects of all kinds.

(23) And everyone who had in his possession blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair, tanned ram skins, and dolphin skins, brought them;

(24) everyone who would make gifts of silver or copper brought them as gifts for the Lord; and everyone who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought that.

(25) And all the skilled women spun with their own hands, and brought what they had spun, in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen.

(26) And all the women who excelled in that skill spun the goats' hair.

(27) And the chieftains brought lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece;

(28) and spices and oil for lighting, for the anointing oil, and for the aromatic incense.

(29) Thus the Israelites, all the men and women whose hearts moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord, through Moses, had commanded to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord.

(20) **So the whole community of the Israelites left Moses' presence**: The entire nation participated in the construction of the Tabernacle. Having taken upon themselves the task of building the Tabernacle, the people went to carry it out.

(21) **And everyone who excelled in ability and everyone whose spirit moved him came**: There was no need to impose a mandatory tax. Everyone brought their donations voluntarily.

(22) **Men and women**: The women too, although not obligated to contribute, decided that they too would participate in the construction of the Temple.

(29) **Thus the Israelites, all the men and women … brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord**: Here the Torah is reporting the end result. Everything that the people had been ordered to do was accomplished through voluntary contributions.

29.6. THE APPOINTMENT OF BEZALEL AND OHOLIAB (35:30-36:1)

ל וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רְאוּ קָרָא יְיָ בְּשֵׁם בְּצַלְאֵל בֶּן־אוּרִי בֶן־חוּר לְמַטֵּה יְהוּדָה: לא וַיְמַלֵּא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּחָכְמָה בִּתְבוּנָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכָל־מְלָאכָה: לב וְלַחְשֹׁב מַחֲשָׁבֹת לַעֲשֹׂת בַּזָּהָב וּבַכֶּסֶף וּבַנְּחֹשֶׁת: לג וּבַחֲרֹשֶׁת אֶבֶן לְמַלֹּאת וּבַחֲרֹשֶׁת עֵץ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכָל־מְלֶאכֶת מַחֲשֶׁבֶת: לד וּלְהוֹרֹת נָתַן בְּלִבּוֹ הוּא וְאָהֳלִיאָב בֶּן־אֲחִיסָמָךְ לְמַטֵּה־דָן: לה מִלֵּא אֹתָם חָכְמַת־לֵב לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת חָרָשׁ | וְחֹשֵׁב וְרֹקֵם בַּתְּכֵלֶת וּבָאַרְגָּמָן בְּתוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וּבַשֵּׁשׁ וְאֹרֵג עֹשֵׂי כָּל־מְלָאכָה וְחֹשְׁבֵי מַחֲשָׁבֹת:

א וְעָשָׂה בְצַלְאֵל וְאָהֳלִיאָב וְכָל | אִישׁ חֲכַם־לֵב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְיָ חָכְמָה וּתְבוּנָה בָּהֵמָּה לָדַעַת לַעֲשֹׂת אֶת־כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְיָ:

(30) **And Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.**

(31) **He has endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft**

(32) **and has inspired him to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper,**

(33) **to cut stones for setting and to carve wood — to work in every kind of designer's craft —**

(34) **and to give directions. He and Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan**

(35) **have been endowed with the skill to do any work — of the carver, the designer, the embroiderer in blue, purple, crimson yarns, and in fine linen, and of the weaver — as workers in all crafts and as makers of designs.**

(1) **Let, then, Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled persons whom the Lord has endowed with skill and ability to perform expertly all the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary carry out all that the Lord has commanded.**

(30-34) **And Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah … and to give directions. He and Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan**: In the parallel passage in portion Ki Tissa (31:1-6), which refers to the appointment of Bezalel and Oholiab, they are represented only as the engineers who execute the plans for building the Tabernacle. But here they appear as teachers and managers of the works in which all the "wise of heart" participate. (The words *ve-chol ish chacham lev* in verse 36:1 mean, literally, "and every man who is wise of heart," notwithstanding that the more modern rendering is "and all the skilled persons").

For the stability of the Tabernacle, it is important that many people participate in its construction, and that everyone makes his own unique contribution to the work. These many different approaches incorporated into the creation of Tabernacle are the spiritual equivalent of the ropes that were tied to stakes in the ground, pulling the pillars of the Tabernacle courtyard in different directions, and thereby giving it its stability.

29.7. THE COLLECTION OF CONTRIBUTIONS IS COMPLETE (36:2-7)

ב וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּצַלְאֵל וְאֶל־אָהֳלִיאָב וְאֶל כָּל־אִישׁ חֲכַם־לֵב אֲשֶׁר
נָתַן יְי חָכְמָה בְּלִבּוֹ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נְשָׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ לְקָרְבָה אֶל־הַמְּלָאכָה לַעֲשֹׂת

אֹתָהּ׃ ג וַיִּקְחוּ מִלִּפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל־הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיאוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לִמְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ לַעֲשֹׂת אֹתָהּ וְהֵם הֵבִיאוּ אֵלָיו עוֹד נְדָבָה
בַּבֹּקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר׃ ד וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־הַחֲכָמִים הָעֹשִׂים אֵת כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ
אִישׁ־אִישׁ מִמְּלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־הֵמָּה עֹשִׂים׃ ה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר
מַרְבִּים הָעָם לְהָבִיא מִדֵּי הָעֲבֹדָה לַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְי לַעֲשֹׂת
אֹתָהּ׃ ו וַיְצַו מֹשֶׁה וַיַּעֲבִירוּ קוֹל בַּמַּחֲנֶה לֵאמֹר אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אַל־יַעֲשׂוּ־
עוֹד מְלָאכָה לִתְרוּמַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וַיִּכָּלֵא הָעָם מֵהָבִיא׃ ז וְהַמְּלָאכָה הָיְתָה
דַיָּם לְכָל־הַמְּלָאכָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ וְהוֹתֵר׃

(2) **Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skilled person whom the Lord had endowed with skill, everyone who excelled in ability, to undertake the task and carry it out.**

(3) **They took over from Moses all the gifts that the Israelites had brought, to carry out the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary. But when these continued to bring freewill offerings to him morning after morning,**

(4) **all the artisans who were engaged in the tasks of the sanctuary came, each from the task upon which he was engaged,**

(5) **and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than is needed for the tasks entailed in the work that the Lord has commanded to be done."**

(6) **Moses thereupon had this proclamation made throughout the camp: "Let no man or woman make further effort toward gifts for the sanctuary!" So the people stopped bringing:**

(7) **their efforts had been more than enough for all the tasks to be done.**

(5) **And said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than is needed for the tasks entailed in the work"**: This demonstrates that the sin of calf has found its correction. Because the Jews had so willingly contributed to the creation of the golden calf, it is important that they now show how much more willingly, and in greater abundance, they contribute to the building of the Tabernacle.

(6) **Moses thereupon had this proclamation made throughout the camp**: **"Let no man or woman make further effort toward**

gifts for the sanctuary!" So the people stopped bringing: The literal translation is: "The people were restrained from bringing," that is, they had to be restrained by force. The Temple is only a part of life; it is not everything there is in life. The enthusiasm that the construction of the Temple arouses in the people must not be so overblown that they are unable to stop when it becomes necessary to stop.

29.8. CREATING THE TABERNACLE AND ITS VESSELS (36:8 – 38:20)

ח וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָל־חֲכַם־לֵב בְּעֹשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן עֶשֶׂר יְרִיעֹת שֵׁשׁ
מָשְׁזָר וּתְכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי כְּרֻבִים מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֵׁב עָשָׂה אֹתָם:
ט אֹרֶךְ הַיְרִיעָה הָאַחַת שְׁמֹנֶה וְעֶשְׂרִים בָּאַמָּה וְרֹחַב אַרְבַּע בָּאַמָּה
הַיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת מִדָּה אַחַת לְכָל־הַיְרִיעֹת: י וַיְחַבֵּר אֶת־חֲמֵשׁ הַיְרִיעֹת
אַחַת אֶל־אֶחָת וְחָמֵשׁ יְרִיעֹת חִבַּר אַחַת אֶל־אֶחָת: יא וַיַּעַשׂ לֵלְאֹת
תְּכֵלֶת עַל שְׂפַת הַיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת מִקָּצָה בַּמַּחְבֶּרֶת כֵּן עָשָׂה בִּשְׂפַת
הַיְרִיעָה הַקִּיצוֹנָה בַּמַּחְבֶּרֶת הַשֵּׁנִית: יב חֲמִשִּׁים לֻלָאֹת עָשָׂה בַּיְרִיעָה
הָאֶחָת וַחֲמִשִּׁים לֻלָאֹת עָשָׂה בִּקְצֵה הַיְרִיעָה אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחְבֶּרֶת הַשֵּׁנִית
מַקְבִּילֹת הַלֻּלָאֹת אַחַת אֶל־אֶחָת: יג וַיַּעַשׂ חֲמִשִּׁים קַרְסֵי זָהָב וַיְחַבֵּר
אֶת־הַיְרִיעֹת אַחַת אֶל־אַחַת בַּקְּרָסִים וַיְהִי הַמִּשְׁכָּן אֶחָד:

יד וַיַּעַשׂ יְרִיעֹת עִזִּים לְאֹהֶל עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן עַשְׁתֵּי־עֶשְׂרֵה יְרִיעֹת עָשָׂה
אֹתָם: טו אֹרֶךְ הַיְרִיעָה הָאַחַת שְׁלֹשִׁים בָּאַמָּה וְאַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת רֹחַב
הַיְרִיעָה הָאֶחָת מִדָּה אַחַת לְעַשְׁתֵּי עֶשְׂרֵה יְרִיעֹת: טז וַיְחַבֵּר אֶת־חֲמֵשׁ
הַיְרִיעֹת לְבָד וְאֶת־שֵׁשׁ הַיְרִיעֹת לְבָד: יז וַיַּעַשׂ לֵלְאֹת חֲמִשִּׁים עַל שְׂפַת
הַיְרִיעָה הַקִּיצֹנָה בַּמַּחְבֶּרֶת וַחֲמִשִּׁים לֻלָאֹת עָשָׂה עַל־שְׂפַת הַיְרִיעָה
הַחֹבֶרֶת הַשֵּׁנִית: יח וַיַּעַשׂ קַרְסֵי נְחֹשֶׁת חֲמִשִּׁים לְחַבֵּר אֶת־הָאֹהֶל
לִהְיֹת אֶחָד: יט וַיַּעַשׂ מִכְסֶה לָאֹהֶל עֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וּמִכְסֶה עֹרֹת
תְּחָשִׁים מִלְּמָעְלָה:

The Coverings of the Tabernacle (36:8-19)

(8) **Then all the skilled among those engaged in the work made the tabernacle of ten strips of cloth, which they made**

of fine twisted linen, blue, purple, and crimson yarns; into these they worked a design of cherubim.

(9) The length of each cloth was twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each cloth was four cubits, all cloths having the same measurements.

(10) They joined five of the cloths to one another, and they joined the other five cloths to one another.

(11) They made loops of blue wool on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set, and did the same on the edge of the outermost cloth of the other set:

(12) they made fifty loops on the one cloth, and they made fifty loops on the edge of the end cloth of the other set, the loops being opposite one another.

(13) And they made fifty gold clasps and coupled the units to one another with the clasps, so that the tabernacle became one whole.

(14) They made cloths of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; they made the cloths eleven in number.

(15) The length of each cloth was thirty cubits, and the width of each cloth was four cubits, the eleven cloths having the same measurements.

(16) They joined five of the cloths by themselves, and the other six cloths by themselves.

(17) They made fifty loops on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set, and they made fifty loops on the edge of the end cloth of the other set.

(18) They made fifty copper clasps to couple the tent together so that it might become one whole.

(19) And they made a covering of tanned ram skins for the tent, and a covering of dolphin skins above.

(8-10) **Then all the skilled among those engaged in the work made the tabernacle of ten strips of cloth ... They joined five of the cloths to one another, and they joined the other five cloths to**

one another: The text goes here from the plural "made all the wise in heart" to the only "he sewed." Many wise in heart create details for the Tabernacle, but only Bezalel can combine these details.

The Planks (36:20-34)

כ וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים לַמִּשְׁכָּן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים עֹמְדִים: כא עֶשֶׂר אַמּוֹת
אֹרֶךְ הַקֶּרֶשׁ וְאַמָּה וַחֲצִי הָאַמָּה רֹחַב הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד: כב שְׁתֵּי יָדֹת
לַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד מְשֻׁלָּבֹת אַחַת אֶל־אֶחָת כֵּן עָשָׂה לְכָל קַרְשֵׁי הַמִּשְׁכָּן:
כג וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים לַמִּשְׁכָּן עֶשְׂרִים קְרָשִׁים לִפְאַת נֶגֶב תֵּימָנָה:
כד וְאַרְבָּעִים אַדְנֵי־כֶסֶף עָשָׂה תַּחַת עֶשְׂרִים הַקְּרָשִׁים שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים
תַּחַת־הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד לִשְׁתֵּי יְדֹתָיו וּשְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת־הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד
לִשְׁתֵּי יְדֹתָיו: כה וּלְצֶלַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן הַשֵּׁנִית לִפְאַת צָפוֹן עָשָׂה עֶשְׂרִים
קְרָשִׁים: כו וְאַרְבָּעִים אַדְנֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד
וּשְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד: כז וּלְיַרְכְּתֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן יָמָּה עָשָׂה שִׁשָּׁה
קְרָשִׁים: כח וּשְׁנֵי קְרָשִׁים עָשָׂה לִמְקֻצֹעֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן בַּיַּרְכָתָיִם: כט וְהָיוּ
תוֹאֲמִם מִלְּמַטָּה וְיִחְדָּו יֶהְיוּ תַמִּים אֶל־רֹאשׁוֹ אֶל־הַטַּבַּעַת הָאֶחָת
כֵּן עָשָׂה לִשְׁנֵיהֶם לִשְׁנֵי הַמִּקְצֹעֹת: ל וְהָיוּ שְׁמֹנֶה קְרָשִׁים וְאַדְנֵיהֶם
כֶּסֶף שִׁשָּׁה עָשָׂר אֲדָנִים שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקֶּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד:
לא וַיַּעַשׂ בְּרִיחֵי עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים חֲמִשָּׁה לְקַרְשֵׁי צֶלַע־הַמִּשְׁכָּן הָאֶחָת:
לב וַחֲמִשָּׁה בְרִיחִם לְקַרְשֵׁי צֶלַע־הַמִּשְׁכָּן הַשֵּׁנִית וַחֲמִשָּׁה בְרִיחִם
לְקַרְשֵׁי הַמִּשְׁכָּן לַיַּרְכָתַיִם יָמָּה: לג וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַבְּרִיחַ הַתִּיכֹן לִבְרֹחַ
בְּתֹוךְ הַקְּרָשִׁים מִן־הַקָּצֶה אֶל־הַקָּצֶה: לד וְאֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים צִפָּה זָהָב
וְאֶת־טַבְּעֹתָם עָשָׂה זָהָב בָּתִּים לַבְּרִיחֻם וַיְצַף אֶת־הַבְּרִיחִם זָהָב:

(20) **They made the planks for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, upright.**

(21) **The length of each plank was ten cubits, the width of each plank a cubit and a half.**

(22) **Each plank had two tenons, parallel to each other; they did the same with all the planks of the Tabernacle.**

(23) **Of the planks of the Tabernacle, they made twenty planks for the south side,**

(24) **making forty silver sockets under the twenty planks, two sockets under one plank for its two tenons and two sockets under each following plank for its two tenons;**

(25) **and for the other side wall of the Tabernacle, the north side, twenty planks,**

(26) **with their forty silver sockets, two sockets under one plank and two sockets under each following plank.**

(27) **And for the rear of the Tabernacle, to the west, they made six planks;**

(28) **and they made two planks for the corners of the Tabernacle at the rear.**

(29) **They matched at the bottom, but terminated as one at the top into one ring; they did so with both of them at the two corners.**

(30) **Thus there were eight planks with their sockets of silver: sixteen sockets, two under each plank.**

(31) **They made bars of acacia wood, five for the planks of the one side wall of the Tabernacle,**

(32) **five bars for the planks of the other side wall of the Tabernacle, and five bars for the planks of the wall of the Tabernacle at the rear, to the west;**

(33) **they made the center bar to run, halfway up the planks, from end to end.**

(34) **They overlaid the planks with gold, and made their rings of gold, as holders for the bars; and they overlaid the bars with gold.**

The Curtain (36:35-38)

לה וַיַּ֫עַשׂ אֶת־הַפָּר֥כֶת תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר מַעֲשֵׂה
חֹשֵׁב עָשָׂה אֹתָהּ כְּרֻבִים: לו וַיַּעַשׂ לָהּ אַרְבָּעָה עַמּוּדֵי שִׁטִּים וַיְצַפֵּם
זָהָב וָוֵיהֶם זָהָב וַיִּצֹק לָהֶם אַרְבָּעָה אַדְנֵי־כָסֶף: לז וַיַּעַשׂ מָסָךְ לְפֶתַח
הָאֹהֶל תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֵם: לח וְאֶת־

עַמּוּדָיו חֲמִשָּׁה וְאֶת־וָוֵיהֶם וְצִפָּה רָאשֵׁיהֶם וַחֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם זָהָב וְאַדְנֵיהֶם חֲמִשָּׁה נְחֹשֶׁת׃

(35) **They made the curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, working into it a design of cherubim.**

(36) **They made for it four posts of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold, with their hooks of gold; and they cast for them four silver sockets.**

(37) **They made the screen for the entrance of the Tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, done in embroidery;**

(38) **and five posts for it with their hooks. They overlaid their tops and their bands with gold; but the five sockets were of copper.**

The Ark (37:1-9)

א וַיַּעַשׂ בְּצַלְאֵל אֶת־הָאָרֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אַמָּתַיִם וָחֵצִי אָרְכּוֹ וְאַמָּה וָחֵצִי רָחְבּוֹ וְאַמָּה וָחֵצִי קֹמָתוֹ׃ ב וַיְצַפֵּהוּ זָהָב טָהוֹר מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ זֵר זָהָב סָבִיב׃ ג וַיִּצֹק לוֹ אַרְבַּע טַבְּעֹת זָהָב עַל אַרְבַּע פַּעֲמֹתָיו וּשְׁתֵּי טַבָּעֹת עַל־צַלְעוֹ הָאֶחָת וּשְׁתֵּי טַבָּעֹת עַל־צַלְעוֹ הַשֵּׁנִית׃ ד וַיַּעַשׂ בַּדֵּי עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וַיְצַף אֹתָם זָהָב׃ ה וַיָּבֵא אֶת־הַבַּדִּים בַּטַּבָּעֹת עַל צַלְעֹת הָאָרֹן לָשֵׂאת אֶת־הָאָרֹן׃ ו וַיַּעַשׂ כַּפֹּרֶת זָהָב טָהוֹר אַמָּתַיִם וָחֵצִי אָרְכָּהּ וְאַמָּה וָחֵצִי רָחְבָּהּ׃ ז וַיַּעַשׂ שְׁנֵי כְרֻבִים זָהָב מִקְשָׁה עָשָׂה אֹתָם מִשְּׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת׃ ח כְּרוּב־אֶחָד מִקָּצָה מִזֶּה וּכְרוּב־אֶחָד מִקָּצָה מִזֶּה מִן־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עָשָׂה אֶת־הַכְּרֻבִים מִשְּׁנֵי קצוותו (קְצוֹתָיו)׃ ט וַיִּהְיוּ הַכְּרֻבִים פֹּרְשֵׂי כְנָפַיִם לְמַעְלָה סֹכְכִים בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו אֶל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת הָיוּ פְּנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים׃

(1) **Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high.**

(2) **He overlaid it with pure gold, inside and out; and he made a gold molding for it round about.**

(3) **He cast four gold rings for it, for its four feet: two rings on one of its side walls and two rings on the other.**

(4) **He made poles of acacia wood, overlaid them with gold,**

(5) **and inserted the poles into the rings on the side walls of the ark for carrying the ark.**

(6) **He made a cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide.**

(7) **He made two cherubim of gold; he made them of hammered work, at the two ends of the cover:**

(8) **one cherub at one end and the other cherub at the other end; he made the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at its two ends.**

(9) **The cherubim had their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They faced each other; the faces of the cherubim were turned toward the cover.**

The Table (37:10-16)

י וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אַמָּתַיִם אָרְכּוֹ וְאַמָּה רָחְבּוֹ וְאַמָּה וָחֵצִי
קֹמָתוֹ: יא וַיְצַף אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ זֵר זָהָב סָבִיב: יב וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ
מִסְגֶּרֶת טֹפַח סָבִיב וַיַּעַשׂ זֵר־זָהָב לְמִסְגַּרְתּוֹ סָבִיב: יג וַיִּצֹק לוֹ אַרְבַּע
טַבְּעֹת זָהָב וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַטַּבָּעֹת עַל אַרְבַּע הַפֵּאֹת אֲשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּע רַגְלָיו:
יד לְעֻמַּת הַמִּסְגֶּרֶת הָיוּ הַטַּבָּעֹת בָּתִּים לַבַּדִּים לָשֵׂאת אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן:
טו וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַבַּדִּים עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וַיְצַף אֹתָם זָהָב לָשֵׂאת אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן:
טז וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַכֵּלִים | אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַשֻּׁלְחָן אֶת־קְעָרֹתָיו וְאֶת־כַּפֹּתָיו וְאֵת
מְנַקִּיֹּתָיו וְאֶת־הַקְּשָׂוֹת אֲשֶׁר יֻסַּךְ בָּהֶן זָהָב טָהוֹר:

(10) **He made the table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high;**

(11) **he overlaid it with pure gold and made a gold molding around it.**

(12) **He made a rim of a hand's breadth around it and made a gold molding for its rim round about.**

(13) **He cast four gold rings for it and attached the rings to the four corners at its four legs.**

(14) **The rings were next to the rim, as holders for the poles to carry the table.**

(15) **He made the poles of acacia wood for carrying the table, and overlaid them with gold.**

(16) **The utensils that were to be upon the table — its bowls, ladles, jugs, and jars with which to offer libations — he made of pure gold.**

The Menorah (37:17-24)

יז וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה זָהָב טָהוֹר מִקְשָׁה עָשָׂה אֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה יְרֵכָהּ
וְקָנָהּ גְּבִיעֶיהָ כַּפְתֹּרֶיהָ וּפְרָחֶיהָ מִמֶּנָּה הָיוּ: יח וְשִׁשָּׁה קָנִים יֹצְאִים
מִצִּדֶּיהָ שְׁלֹשָׁה | קְנֵי מְנֹרָה מִצִּדָּהּ הָאֶחָד וּשְׁלֹשָׁה קְנֵי מְנֹרָה מִצִּדָּהּ
הַשֵּׁנִי: יט שְׁלֹשָׁה גְּבִעִים מְשֻׁקָּדִים בַּקָּנֶה הָאֶחָד כַּפְתֹּר וָפָרַח וּשְׁלֹשָׁה
גְּבִעִים מְשֻׁקָּדִים בְּקָנֶה אֶחָד כַּפְתֹּר וָפָרַח כֵּן לְשֵׁשֶׁת הַקָּנִים הַיֹּצְאִים
מִן־הַמְּנֹרָה: כ וּבַמְּנֹרָה אַרְבָּעָה גְבִעִים מְשֻׁקָּדִים כַּפְתֹּרֶיהָ וּפְרָחֶיהָ:
כא וְכַפְתֹּר תַּחַתּ שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמֶּנָּה וְכַפְתֹּר תַּחַת שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמֶּנָּה
וְכַפְתֹּר תַּחַת־שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמֶּנָּה לְשֵׁשֶׁת הַקָּנִים הַיֹּצְאִים מִמֶּנָּה:
כב כַּפְתֹּרֵיהֶם וּקְנֹתָם מִמֶּנָּה הָיוּ כֻּלָּהּ מִקְשָׁה אַחַת זָהָב טָהוֹר:
כג וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־נֵרֹתֶיהָ שִׁבְעָה וּמַלְקָחֶיהָ וּמַחְתֹּתֶיהָ זָהָב טָהוֹר: כד כִּכָּר
זָהָב טָהוֹר עָשָׂה אֹתָהּ וְאֵת כָּל־כֵּלֶיהָ:

(17) **He made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand — its base and its shaft — of hammered work; its cups, calyxes, and petals were of one piece with it.**

(18) **Six branches issued from its sides: three branches from one side of the lampstand, and three branches from the other side of the lampstand.**

(19) **There were three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on one branch; and there were three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on the next branch; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand.**

(20) **On the lampstand itself there were four cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals:**

(21) a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches; and a calyx, of one piece with it, under the second pair of branches; and a calyx, of one piece with it, under the last pair of branches; so for all six branches issuing from it.

(22) Their calyxes and their stems were of one piece with it, the whole of it a single hammered piece of pure gold.

(23) He made its seven lamps, its tongs, and its fire pans of pure gold.

(24) He made it and all its furnishings out of a talent of pure gold.

The Altar of Incense and the Anointing Oil (37:25-29)

כה וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־מִזְבַּח הַקְּטֹרֶת עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אַמָּה אָרְכּוֹ וְאַמָּה רָחְבּוֹ
רָבוּעַ וְאַמָּתַיִם קֹמָתוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ הָיוּ קַרְנֹתָיו: כו וַיְצַף אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר
אֶת־גַּגּוֹ וְאֶת־קִירֹתָיו סָבִיב וְאֶת־קַרְנֹתָיו וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ זֵר זָהָב סָבִיב:
כז וּשְׁתֵּי טַבְּעֹת זָהָב עֲשָׂה־לוֹ | מִתַּחַת לְזֵרוֹ עַל שְׁתֵּי צַלְעֹתָיו עַל שְׁנֵי
צִדָּיו לְבָתִּים לְבַדִּים לָשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ בָּהֵם: כח וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַבַּדִּים עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים
וַיְצַף אֹתָם זָהָב: כט וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־שֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה קֹדֶשׁ וְאֶת־קְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים
טָהוֹר מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֵחַ:

(25) He made the incense altar of acacia wood, a cubit long and a cubit wide — square — and two cubits high; its horns were of one piece with it.

(26) He overlaid it with pure gold: its top, its sides round about, and its horns; and he made a gold molding for it round about.

(27) He made two gold rings for it under its molding, on its two walls — on opposite sides — as holders for the poles with which to carry it.

(28) He made the poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them with gold.

(29) He prepared the sacred anointing oil and the pure aromatic incense, expertly blended.

(25) **He made the incense altar**: The description of the incense, a component of Aaron's Temple (correction of evil), appears here among the elements of Moses' Temple (meeting with the Almighty for Divine revelation). This suggests that in the process of its actual realization, both aspects of the Temple must be integrated. A meeting with the Almighty is impossible unless there is first a correction of evil.

The Altar of the Burnt Offering and the Laver (38:1-8)

א וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים חָמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת אָרְכּוֹ וְחָמֵשׁ־אַמּוֹת
רָחְבּוֹ רָבוּעַ וְשָׁלֹשׁ אַמּוֹת קֹמָתוֹ: ב וַיַּעַשׂ קַרְנֹתָיו עַל אַרְבַּע פִּנֹּתָיו
מִמֶּנּוּ הָיוּ קַרְנֹתָיו וַיְצַף אֹתוֹ נְחֹשֶׁת: ג וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־כָּל־כְּלֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
אֶת־הַסִּירֹת וְאֶת־הַיָּעִים וְאֶת־הַמִּזְרָקֹת אֶת־הַמִּזְלָגֹת וְאֶת־הַמַּחְתֹּת
כָּל־כֵּלָיו עָשָׂה נְחֹשֶׁת: ד וַיַּעַשׂ לַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִכְבָּר מַעֲשֵׂה רֶשֶׁת נְחֹשֶׁת
תַּחַת כַּרְכֻּבּוֹ מִלְּמַטָּה עַד־חֶצְיוֹ: ה וַיִּצֹּק אַרְבַּע טַבָּעֹת בְּאַרְבַּע הַקְּצָוֹת
לְמִכְבַּר הַנְּחֹשֶׁת בָּתִּים לַבַּדִּים: ו וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַבַּדִּים עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וַיְצַף
אֹתָם נְחֹשֶׁת: ז וַיָּבֵא אֶת־הַבַּדִּים בַּטַּבָּעֹת עַל צַלְעֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לָשֵׂאת
אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם נְבוּב לֻחֹת עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ:

ח וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת הַכִּיּוֹר נְחֹשֶׁת וְאֶת כַּנּוֹ נְחֹשֶׁת בְּמַרְאֹת הַצֹּבְאֹת אֲשֶׁר
צָבְאוּ פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:

(1) **He made the altar for burnt offering of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide — square — and three cubits high.**

(2) **He made horns for it on its four corners, the horns being of one piece with it; and he overlaid it with copper.**

(3) **He made all the utensils of the altar — the pails, the scrapers, the basins, the flesh hooks, and the fire pans; he made all these utensils of copper.**

(4) **He made for the altar a grating of meshwork in copper, extending below, under its ledge, to its middle.**

(5) **He cast four rings, at the four corners of the copper grating, as holders for the poles.**

(6) He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with copper;

(7) and he inserted the poles into the rings on the side walls of the altar, to carry it by them. He made it hollow, of boards.

(8) He made the laver of copper and its stand of copper, from the mirrors of the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

(8) **He made the laver of copper and its stand of copper, from the mirrors of the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting**: The Midrash describes what happened as follows:

> The Israelite women possessed mirrors of copper into which they would look when they adorned themselves. Even these they did not hesitate to bring as a contribution to the Tabernacle. Now, Moses was about to reject those mirrors, since they were made to pander to vanity and passions, and were thus not appropriate to be accepted as gifts to the Tabernacle. Or so Moses believed.
>
> But the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Accept them; these are dearer to Me than all the other contributions, because through them the women reared huge hosts in Egypt, and thereby preserved the Jewish nation!"
>
> For when the Jewish men in Egypt were exhausted from their crushing labors, their wives would bring them food and drink, and induce them to eat. Then they would take the mirrors, and each would gaze at herself in her mirror, and adorn herself, and incite her husband's desire for her. They would then have relations, and she would become pregnant, and give birth, and so did the Jewish nation not perish.
>
> The laver of the Tabernacle was made from these same mirrors.
>
> Thus, the essence of the laver is in the purification of natural passions, including sexual passions, in order to redirect one's energies to holiness – to bear children, and to correct the world.

The Courtyard (38:9-20)

ט וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הֶחָצֵר לִפְאַת | נֶגֶב תֵּימָנָה קַלְעֵי הֶחָצֵר שֵׁשׁ מְשִׁזָּר מֵאָה
בָּאַמָּה: י עַמּוּדֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרִים וַאֲדָנֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרִים נְחֹשֶׁת וָוֵי הָעַמּוּדִים
וַחֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף: יא וְלִפְאַת צָפוֹן מֵאָה בָאַמָּה עַמּוּדֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרִים
וַאֲדָנֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרִים נְחֹשֶׁת וָוֵי הָעַמּוּדִים וַחֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף: יב וְלִפְאַת־יָם
קְלָעִים חֲמִשִּׁים בָּאַמָּה עַמּוּדֵיהֶם עֲשָׂרָה וַאֲדָנֵיהֶם עֲשָׂרָה וָוֵי הָעַמֻּדִים
וַחֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף: יג וְלִפְאַת קֵדְמָה מִזְרָחָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה: ידקְלָעִים
חֲמֵשׁ־עֶשְׂרֵה אַמָּה אֶל־הַכָּתֵף עַמּוּדֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה וַאֲדָנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה:
טו וְלַכָּתֵף הַשֵּׁנִית מִזֶּה וּמִזֶּה לְשַׁעַר הֶחָצֵר קְלָעִים חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה
אַמָּה עַמֻּדֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה וַאֲדָנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה: טז כָּל־קַלְעֵי הֶחָצֵר סָבִיב
שֵׁשׁ מְשֻׁזָּר: יז וְהָאֲדָנִים לָעַמֻּדִים נְחֹשֶׁת וָוֵי הָעַמּוּדִים וַחֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם
כֶּסֶף וְצִפּוּי רָאשֵׁיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְהֵם מְחֻשָּׁקִים כֶּסֶף כֹּל עַמֻּדֵי הֶחָצֵר:
יח וּמָסַךְ שַׁעַר הֶחָצֵר מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֵם תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ
מְשֻׁזָּר וְעֶשְׂרִים אַמָּה אֹרֶךְ וְקוֹמָה בְּרֹחַב חָמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת לְעֻמַּת קַלְעֵי
הֶחָצֵר: יט וְעַמֻּדֵיהֶם אַרְבָּעָה וַאֲדָנֵיהֶם אַרְבָּעָה נְחֹשֶׁת וָוֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף
וְצִפּוּי רָאשֵׁיהֶם וַחֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף: כ וְכָל־הַיְתֵדֹת לַמִּשְׁכָּן וְלֶחָצֵר סָבִיב
נְחֹשֶׁת:

(9) **He made the enclosure: On the south side, a hundred cubits of hangings of fine twisted linen for the enclosure —**

(10) **with their twenty posts and their twenty sockets of copper, the hooks and bands of the posts being silver.**

(11) **On the north side, a hundred cubits — with their twenty posts and their twenty sockets of copper, the hooks and bands of the posts being silver.**

(12) **On the west side, fifty cubits of hangings — with their ten posts and their ten sockets, the hooks and bands of the posts being silver.**

(13) **And on the front side, to the east, fifty cubits:**

(14) **fifteen cubits of hangings on the one flank, with their three posts and their three sockets,**

(15) **and fifteen cubits of hangings on the other flank — on each side of the gate of the enclosure — with their three posts and their three sockets.**

(16) **All the hangings around the enclosure were of fine twisted linen.**

(17) **The sockets for the posts were of copper, the hooks and bands of the posts were of silver, the overlay of their tops was of silver; all the posts of the enclosure were banded with silver. —**

(18) **The screen of the gate of the enclosure, done in embroidery, was of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen. It was twenty cubits long. Its height — or width — was five cubits, like that of the hangings of the enclosure.**

(19) **The posts were four; their four sockets were of copper, their hooks of silver; and the overlay of their tops was of silver, as were also their bands. —**

(20) **All the pegs of the Tabernacle and of the enclosure round about were of copper.**

WEEKLY PORTION [11]

PEKUDEI

CHAPTER 30

THE COMPLETION OF THE TABERNACLE, AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

30.1. THE ACCOUNTING OF THE MATERIALS USED IN CREATING THE TABERNACLE (38:21-31)

כא אֵלֶּה פְקוּדֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדֻת אֲשֶׁר פֻּקַּד עַל־פִּי מֹשֶׁה עֲבֹדַת
הַלְוִיִּם בְּיַד אִיתָמָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן: כב וּבְצַלְאֵל בֶּן־אוּרִי בֶן־חוּר
לְמַטֵּה יְהוּדָה עָשָׂה אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: כג וְאִתּוֹ אָהֳלִיאָב
בֶּן־אֲחִיסָמָךְ לְמַטֵּה־דָן חָרָשׁ וְחֹשֵׁב וְרֹקֵם בַּתְּכֵלֶת וּבָאַרְגָּמָן וּבְתוֹלַעַת
הַשָּׁנִי וּבַשֵּׁשׁ:

כד כָּל־הַזָּהָב הֶעָשׂוּי לַמְּלָאכָה בְּכֹל מְלֶאכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וַיְהִי | זְהַב הַתְּנוּפָה
תֵּשַׁע וְעֶשְׂרִים כִּכָּר וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ:
כה וְכֶסֶף פְּקוּדֵי הָעֵדָה מְאַת כִּכָּר וְאֶלֶף וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת וַחֲמִשָּׁה וְשִׁבְעִים
שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ: כו בֶּקַע לַגֻּלְגֹּלֶת מַחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ
לְכֹל הָעֹבֵר עַל־הַפְּקֻדִים מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וָמַעְלָה לְשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף
וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים וַחֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁים: כז וַיְהִי מְאַת כִּכַּר הַכֶּסֶף
לָצֶקֶת אֵת אַדְנֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֵת אַדְנֵי הַפָּרֹכֶת מְאַת אֲדָנִים לִמְאַת הַכִּכָּר
כִּכָּר לָאֶדֶן: כח וְאֶת־הָאֶלֶף וּשְׁבַע הַמֵּאוֹת וַחֲמִשָּׁה וְשִׁבְעִים עָשָׂה וָוִים
לָעַמּוּדִים וְצִפָּה רָאשֵׁיהֶם וְחִשַּׁק אֹתָם: כט וּנְחֹשֶׁת הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעִים
כִּכָּר וְאַלְפַּיִם וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת שָׁקֶל: ל וַיַּעַשׂ בָּהּ אֶת־אַדְנֵי פֶּתַח אֹהֶל

מוֹעֵד וְאֵת מִזְבַּח הַנְּחֹשֶׁת וְאֶת־מִכְבַּר הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־כְּלֵי
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: לא וְאֶת־אַדְנֵי הֶחָצֵר סָבִיב וְאֶת־אַדְנֵי שַׁעַר הֶחָצֵר וְאֵת כָּל־
יִתְדֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֶת־כָּל־יִתְדֹת הֶחָצֵר סָבִיב:

(21) **These are the records of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of the Pact, which were drawn up at Moses' bidding — the work of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest.**

(22) **Now Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, had made all that the Lord had commanded Moses;**

(23) **at his side was Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, carver and designer, and embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns and in fine linen.**

(24) **All the gold that was used for the work, in all the work of the sanctuary — the elevation offering of gold — came to 29 talents and 730 shekels by the sanctuary weight.**

(25) **The silver of those of the community who were recorded came to 100 talents and 1,775 shekels by the sanctuary weight:**

(26) **a half-shekel a head, half a shekel by the sanctuary weight, for each one who was entered in the records, from the age of twenty years up, 603,550 men.**

(27) **The 100 talents of silver were for casting the sockets of the sanctuary and the sockets for the curtain, 100 sockets to the 100 talents, a talent a socket.**

(28) **And of the 1,775 shekels he made hooks for the posts, overlay for their tops, and bands around them.**

(29) **The copper from the elevation offering came to 70 talents and 2,400 shekels.**

(30) **Of it he made the sockets for the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; the copper altar and its copper grating and all the utensils of the altar;**

(31) **the sockets of the enclosure round about and the sockets of the gate of the enclosure; and all the pegs of the Tabernacle and all the pegs of the enclosure round about.**

(21) **These are the records of the Tabernacle … which were drawn up at Moses' bidding — the work of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar**: The need to account for the materials used suggests an air of suspicion. Since they had to verify how much gold was actually used, we can infer that there was an actual suspicion of embezzlement.

Such an atmosphere of suspicion is consistent not with Moses' approach, but with Aaron's: Man is fundamentally a sinner. Accordingly, "Ithamar son of Aaron the priest" manages the accounting, but the Torah emphasizes that he does so under Moses' command. Thus, portion *Pekudei* is Aaron's portion, but, as we shall see, supplemented with aspects of Moses' approach.

The Tabernacle of the Pact: More literally, "The Tabernacle of the Testimony." This refers to the two tablets, the Tablets of Testimony, that were stored inside the ark (25:21).

(24) **Came to 29 talents**: Each talent is approximately 27 kg (60 lb).

And 730 shekels: Each shekel is about 9 grams (.3 oz). One talent is equal to 3000 shekels.

(26) **For each one who was entered in the records, from the age of twenty years up**: For the purposes of the census, one half-shekel of silver was collected from each adult male. (See 30:11 16).

(27) **The 100 talents of silver were for casting the sockets**: The sockets are the foundation of the entire structure, ensuring its stability, and they are constructed from the half-shekels, collected as a mandatory contribution from all the Children of Israel equally. But beauty and splendor are created from the voluntary gifts of gold, fabrics, and precious stones.

(29-30) **The copper from the elevation offering came to … Of it he made … and all the utensils of the altar**: The copper laver is not mentioned in the accounting of the copper used for creating the Tabernacle. As mentioned earlier, the laver was made "from the mirrors of the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (see 38:8, and our comment there). The copper for the laver was therefore considered an "extraordinary contribution," and was thus not included in the "general expense report."

30.2. CREATING THE PRIESTLY GARMENTS (39:1-31)

א וּמִן־הַתְּכֵלֶת וְהָאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי עָשׂוּ בִגְדֵי־שְׂרָד לְשָׁרֵת בַּקֹּדֶשׁ
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־בִּגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר לְאַהֲרֹן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

ב וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הָאֵפֹד זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר:
ג וַיִּרְקְעוּ אֶת־פַּחֵי הַזָּהָבׂ וְקִצֵּץ פְּתִילִׂם לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּתָוֶךְ הַתְּכֵלֶת וּבְתָוֶךְ
הָאַרְגָּמָן וּבְתָוֶךְ תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וּבְתָוֶךְ הַשֵּׁשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֵׁב: ד כִּתֹּפֶת
עָשׂוּ־לוֹ חִבֹּרֶת עַל־שְׁנֵי קצוותו (קְצוֹתָיו) חֻבָּר: ה וְחֵשֶׁב אֲפָדָתוֹ
אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו מִמֶּנּוּ הוּאׂ כְּמַעֲשֵׂהוּ זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ
מָשְׁזָר כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

ו וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־אַבְנֵי הַשֹּׁהַם מֻסַבֹּת מִשְׁבְּצֹת זָהָב מְפֻתָּחֹת פִּתּוּחֵי חוֹתָם
עַל־שְׁמֹות בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ז וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתָם עַל כִּתְפֹת הָאֵפֹד אַבְנֵי זִכָּרוֹן
לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

ח וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֵׁב כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֵפֹד זָהָב תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן
וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר: ט רָבוּעַ הָיָה כָּפוּל עָשׂוּ אֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן זֶרֶת
אָרְכּוֹ וְזֶרֶת רָחְבּוֹ כָּפוּל: י וַיְמַלְאוּ־בוֹ אַרְבָּעָה טוּרֵי אָבֶן טּוּר אֹדֶם
פִּטְדָה וּבָרֶקֶת הַטּוּר הָאֶחָד: יא וְהַטּוּר הַשֵּׁנִי נֹפֶךְ סַפִּיר וְיָהֲלֹם:
יב וְהַטּוּר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לֶשֶׁם שְׁבוֹ וְאַחְלָמָה: יג וְהַטּוּר הָרְבִיעִי תַּרְשִׁישׁ
שֹׁהַם וְיָשְׁפֵה מְוֻסַבֹּת מִשְׁבְּצֹת זָהָב בְּמִלֻּאתָם: יד וְהָאֲבָנִים עַל־שְׁמֹת
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵנָּה שְׁתֵּים עֶשְׂרֵה עַל־שְׁמֹתָם פִּתּוּחֵי חֹתָם אִישׁ עַל־שְׁמוֹ
לִשְׁנֵים עָשָׂר שֵׁבֶט: טו וַיַּעֲשׂוּ עַל־הַחֹשֶׁן שַׁרְשְׁרֹת גַּבְלֵת מַעֲשֵׂה עֲבֹת
זָהָב טָהוֹר: טז וַיַּעֲשׂוּ שְׁתֵּי מִשְׁבְּצֹת זָהָב וּשְׁתֵּי טַבְּעֹת זָהָב וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת־
שְׁתֵּי הַטַּבָּעֹת עַל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן: יז וַיִּתְּנוּ שְׁתֵּי הָעֲבֹתֹת הַזָּהָב עַל־
שְׁתֵּי הַטַּבָּעֹת עַל־קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן: יח וְאֵת שְׁתֵּי קְצוֹת שְׁתֵּי הָעֲבֹתֹת נָתְנוּ
עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַמִּשְׁבְּצֹת וַיִּתְּנֵם עַל־כִּתְפֹת הָאֵפֹד אֶל־מוּל פָּנָיו: יט וַיַּעֲשׂוּ
שְׁתֵּי טַבָּעֹת זָהָב וַיָּשִׂימוּ עַל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַחֹשֶׁן עַל־שְׂפָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר אֶל־
עֵבֶר הָאֵפֹד בַּיְתָה: כ וַיַּעֲשׂוּׂ שְׁתֵּי טַבָּעֹת זָהָבׂ וַיִּתְּנֵם עַל־שְׁתֵּיׂ כִתְפֹת
הָאֵפֹד מִלְּמַטָּהׂ מִמּוּל פָּנָיו לְעֻמַּת מַחְבַּרְתּוֹ מִמַּעַל לְחֵשֶׁב הָאֵפֹד:
כא וַיִּרְכְּסוּ אֶת־הַחֹשֶׁן מִטַּבְּעֹתָיוׂ אֶל־טַבָּעֹת הָאֵפֹד בִּפְתִיל תְּכֵלֶת לִהְיֹת
עַל־חֵשֶׁב הָאֵפֹד וְלֹא־יִזַּח הַחֹשֶׁן מֵעַל הָאֵפֹד כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

כב וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־מְעִיל הָאֵפֹד מַעֲשֵׂה אֹרֵג כְּלִיל תְּכֵלֶת: כג וּפִי־הַמְּעִיל
בְּתוֹכוֹ כְּפִי תַחְרָא שָׂפָה לְפִיו סָבִיב לֹא יִקָּרֵעַ: כד וַיַּעֲשׂוּ עַל־שׁוּלֵי
הַמְּעִיל רִמּוֹנֵי תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי מָשְׁזָר: כה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ פַּעֲמֹנֵי
זָהָב טָהוֹר וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת־הַפַּעֲמֹנִים בְּתוֹךְ הָרִמֹּנִים עַל־שׁוּלֵי הַמְּעִיל סָבִיב
בְּתוֹךְ הָרִמֹּנִים: כו פַּעֲמֹן וְרִמֹּן פַּעֲמֹן וְרִמֹּן עַל־שׁוּלֵי הַמְּעִיל סָבִיב
לְשָׁרֵת כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

כז וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַכָּתְנֹת שֵׁשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה אֹרֵג לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו: כח וְאֵת
הַמִּצְנֶפֶת שֵׁשׁ וְאֶת־פַּאֲרֵי הַמִּגְבָּעֹת שֵׁשׁ וְאֶת־מִכְנְסֵי הַבַּד שֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר:
כט וְאֶת־הָאַבְנֵט שֵׁשׁ מָשְׁזָר וּתְכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֵם
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

ל וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־צִיץ נֵזֶר־הַקֹּדֶשׁ זָהָב טָהוֹר וַיִּכְתְּבוּ עָלָיו מִכְתַּב פִּתּוּחֵי
חוֹתָם קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה: לא וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלָיו פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת לָתֵת עַל־הַמִּצְנֶפֶת
מִלְּמַעְלָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

(1) **Of the blue, purple, and crimson yarns they also made the service vestments for officiating in the sanctuary; they made Aaron's sacral vestments — as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(2) **The ephod was made of gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen.**

(3) **They hammered out sheets of gold and cut threads to be worked into designs among the blue, the purple, and the crimson yarns, and the fine linen.**

(4) **They made for it attaching shoulder-pieces; they were attached at its two ends.**

(5) **The decorated band that was upon it was made like it, of one piece with it; of gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen — as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(6) **They bordered the lazuli stones with frames of gold, engraved with seal engravings of the names of the sons of Israel.**

(7) **They were set on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the Israelites — as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(8) **The breastpiece was made in the style of the ephod: of gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen.**

(9) **It was square; they made the breastpiece doubled — a span in length and a span in width, doubled.**

(10) **They set in it four rows of stones. The first row was a row of carnelian, chrysolite, and emerald;**

(11) **the second row: a turquoise, a sapphire, and an amethyst;**

(12) **the third row: a jacinth, an agate, and a crystal;**

(13) **and the fourth row: a beryl, a lapis lazuli, and a jasper. They were encircled in their mountings with frames of gold.**

(14) **The stones corresponded [in number] to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, corresponding to their names; engraved like seals, each with its name, for the twelve tribes.**

(15) **On the breastpiece they made braided chains of corded work in pure gold.**

(16) **They made two frames of gold and two rings of gold, and fastened the two rings at the two ends of the breastpiece,**

(17) **attaching the two golden cords to the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece.**

(18) **They then fastened the two ends of the cords to the two frames, attaching them to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at the front.**

(19) **They made two rings of gold and attached them to the two ends of the breastpiece, at its inner edge, which faced the ephod.**

(20) **They made two other rings of gold and fastened them on the front of the ephod, low on the two shoulder-pieces, close to its seam above the decorated band.**

(21) **The breastpiece was held in place by a cord of blue from its rings to the rings of the ephod, so that the breastpiece rested on the decorated band and did not come loose from the ephod — as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(22) **The robe for the ephod was made of woven work, of pure blue.**

(23) The opening of the robe, in the middle of it, was like the opening of a coat of mail, with a binding around the opening, so that it would not tear.

(24) On the hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, twisted.

(25) They also made bells of pure gold, and attached the bells between the pomegranates, all around the hem of the robe, between the pomegranates:

(26) a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe for officiating in — as the Lord had commanded Moses.

(27) They made the tunics of fine linen, of woven work, for Aaron and his sons;

(28) and the headdress of fine linen, and the decorated turbans of fine linen, and the linen breeches of fine twisted linen;

(29) and sashes of fine twisted linen, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, done in embroidery — as the Lord had commanded Moses.

(30) They made the frontlet for the holy diadem of pure gold, and incised upon it the seal inscription: "Holy to the Lord."

(31) They attached to it a cord of blue to fix it upon the headdress above — as the Lord had commanded Moses.

(1) **The service vestments**: These were used to cover and protect the vessels of the Tabernacle when they were being transported.

They made Aaron's sacral vestments: The creation of the priestly garments is described in this portion, *Pekudei*, because this is Aaron's portion. (The creation of the Temple and its vessels has already been covered in *Vayakhel*, Moses' portion).

As the Lord had commanded Moses: This phrase is repeated many times in these paragraphs. It emphasizes Aaron's connection with his source, which is rooted in Moses.

(3) **They hammered out sheets of gold and cut threads to be worked into designs among the blue, the purple, and the crimson yarns, and the fine linen**: Here for the first time we are told how the

gold thread was made for use in the Tabernacle's canopy and curtain. This is relevant here, in light of the foregoing accounting of the expenditures of gold.

(28) **And the decorated turbans of fine linen**: All the priestly garments are designed to have an aesthetically pleasing and inspiring effect on those who come to the Temple.

30.3. THE TABERNACLE, NOW COMPLETE, IS BROUGHT TO MOSES (39:32-43)

לב וַתֵּכֶל כָּל־עֲבֹדַת מִשְׁכַּן אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר
צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה כֵּן עָשׂוּ׃

לג וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָאֹהֶל וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו קְרָסָיו
קְרָשָׁיו בְּרִיחוֹ וְעַמֻּדָיו וַאֲדָנָיו׃ לד וְאֶת־מִכְסֵה עוֹרֹת הָאֵילִם הַמְאָדָּמִים
וְאֶת־מִכְסֵה עֹרֹת הַתְּחָשִׁים וְאֵת פָּרֹכֶת הַמָּסָךְ׃ לה אֶת־אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת
וְאֶת־בַּדָּיו וְאֵת הַכַּפֹּרֶת׃ לו אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן אֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְאֵת לֶחֶם הַפָּנִים׃
לז אֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה הַטְּהֹרָה אֶת־נֵרֹתֶיהָ נֵרֹת הַמַּעֲרָכָה וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלֶיהָ וְאֵת
שֶׁמֶן הַמָּאוֹר׃ לח וְאֵת מִזְבַּח הַזָּהָב וְאֵת שֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְאֵת קְטֹרֶת
הַסַּמִּים וְאֵת מָסַךְ פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל׃ לט אֵת | מִזְבַּח הַנְּחֹשֶׁת וְאֶת־מִכְבַּר
הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֶת־בַּדָּיו וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו אֶת־הַכִּיֹּר וְאֶת־כַּנּוֹ׃ מ אֵת
קַלְעֵי הֶחָצֵר אֶת־עַמֻּדָיהָ וְאֶת־אֲדָנֶיהָ וְאֶת־הַמָּסָךְ לְשַׁעַר הֶחָצֵר אֶת־
מֵיתָרָיו וִיתֵדֹתֶיהָ וְאֵת כָּל־כְּלֵי עֲבֹדַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד׃ מא אֶת־
בִּגְדֵי הַשְּׂרָד לְשָׁרֵת בַּקֹּדֶשׁ אֶת־בִּגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְאַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶת־בִּגְדֵי
בָנָיו לְכַהֵן׃ מב כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה כֵּן עָשׂוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת
כָּל־הָעֲבֹדָה׃ מג וַיַּרְא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־כָּל־הַמְּלָאכָה וְהִנֵּה עָשׂוּ אֹתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר
צִוָּה יְי כֵּן עָשׂוּ וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה׃

(32) **Thus was completed all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. The Israelites did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses, so they did.**

(33) **Then they brought the Tabernacle to Moses, with the Tent and all its furnishings: its clasps, its planks, its poles, its posts, and its sockets;**

(34) the covering of tanned ram skins, the covering of dolphin skins, and the curtain for the screen;

(35) the Ark of the Pact and its poles, and the cover;

(36) the table and all its utensils, and the bread of display;

(37) the pure lampstand, its lamps — lamps in due order — and all its fittings, and the oil for lighting;

(38) the altar of gold, the oil for anointing, the aromatic incense, and the screen for the entrance of the Tent;

(39) the copper altar with its copper grating, its poles and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand;

(40) the hangings of the enclosure, its posts and its sockets, the screen for the gate of the enclosure, its cords and its pegs — all the furnishings for the service of the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting;

(41) the service vestments for officiating in the sanctuary, the sacral vestments of Aaron the priest, and the vestments of his sons for priestly service.

(42) Just as the Lord had commanded Moses, so the Israelites had done all the work.

(43) And when Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks — as the Lord had commanded, so they had done — Moses blessed them.

(33) **Then they brought the Tabernacle to Moses**: Although many people created the Tabernacle's individual components, only Moses himself can assemble and install it. No one else is capable of that.

30.4. THE DEDICATION OF THE TABERNACLE (40:1-33)

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: ב בְּיוֹם־הַחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ
תָּקִים אֶת־מִשְׁכַּן אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: ג וְשַׂמְתָּ שָׁם אֵת אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת וְסַכֹּתָ
עַל־הָאָרֹן אֶת־הַפָּרֹכֶת: ד וְהֵבֵאתָ אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן וְעָרַכְתָּ אֶת־עֶרְכּוֹ
וְהֵבֵאתָ אֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה וְהַעֲלִיתָ אֶת־נֵרֹתֶיהָ: ה וְנָתַתָּה אֶת־מִזְבַּח הַזָּהָב

לִקְטֹרֶת לִפְנֵי אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת וְשַׂמְתָּ אֶת־מָסַךְ הַפֶּתַח לַמִּשְׁכָּן׃ ו וְנָתַתָּה
אֶת מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה לִפְנֵי פֶתַח מִשְׁכַּן אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד׃ ז וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־הַכִּיֹּר
בֵּין־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּבֵין הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְנָתַתָּ שָׁם מָיִם׃ ח וְשַׂמְתָּ אֶת־הֶחָצֵר סָבִיב
וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־מָסַךְ שַׁעַר הֶחָצֵר׃ ט וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת־שֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וּמָשַׁחְתָּ
אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְהָיָה קֹדֶשׁ׃
י וּמָשַׁחְתָּ אֶת־מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְהָיָה
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים׃ יא וּמָשַׁחְתָּ אֶת־הַכִּיֹּר וְאֶת־כַּנּוֹ וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתוֹ׃
יב וְהִקְרַבְתָּ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְרָחַצְתָּ אֹתָם
בַּמָּיִם׃ יג וְהִלְבַּשְׁתָּ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶת בִּגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּמָשַׁחְתָּ אֹתוֹ וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ
אֹתוֹ וְכִהֵן לִי׃ יד וְאֶת־בָּנָיו תַּקְרִיב וְהִלְבַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם כֻּתֳּנֹת׃ טו וּמָשַׁחְתָּ
אֹתָם כַּאֲשֶׁר מָשַׁחְתָּ אֶת־אֲבִיהֶם וְכִהֲנוּ לִי וְהָיְתָה לְהִיֹּת לָהֶם מָשְׁחָתָם
לִכְהֻנַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתָם׃ טז וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֹתוֹ כֵּן עָשָׂה׃

יז וַיְהִי בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בַּשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הוּקַם הַמִּשְׁכָּן׃
יח וַיָּקֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־אֲדָנָיו וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־קְרָשָׁיו וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־
בְּרִיחָיו וַיָּקֶם אֶת־עַמּוּדָיו׃ יט וַיִּפְרֹשׂ אֶת־הָאֹהֶל עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וַיָּשֶׂם
אֶת־מִכְסֵה הָאֹהֶל עָלָיו מִלְּמָעְלָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה׃

כ וַיִּקַּח וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הָעֵדֻת אֶל־הָאָרֹן וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַבַּדִּים עַל־הָאָרֹן וַיִּתֵּן
אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עַל־הָאָרֹן מִלְּמָעְלָה׃ כא וַיָּבֵא אֶת־הָאָרֹן אֶל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן
וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת פָּרֹכֶת הַמָּסָךְ וַיָּסֶךְ עַל אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־
מֹשֶׁה׃

כב וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד עֵל יֶרֶךְ הַמִּשְׁכָּן צָפֹנָה מִחוּץ לַפָּרֹכֶת׃
כג וַיַּעֲרֹךְ עָלָיו עֶרֶךְ לֶחֶם לִפְנֵי יְי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה׃

כד וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד נֹכַח הַשֻּׁלְחָן עַל יֶרֶךְ הַמִּשְׁכָּן
נֶגְבָּה׃ כה וַיַּעַל הַנֵּרֹת לִפְנֵי יְי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה׃

כו וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־מִזְבַּח הַזָּהָב בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי הַפָּרֹכֶת׃ כז וַיַּקְטֵר עָלָיו
קְטֹרֶת סַמִּים כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה׃

כח וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־מָסַךְ הַפֶּתַח לַמִּשְׁכָּן׃ כט וְאֵת מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה שָׂם פֶּתַח
מִשְׁכַּן אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד וַיַּעַל עָלָיו אֶת־הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־הַמִּנְחָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְי
אֶת־מֹשֶׁה׃

ל וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַכִּיֹּר בֵּין־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּבֵין הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיִּתֵּן שָׁמָּה מַיִם
לְרָחְצָה׃ לא וְרָחֲצוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם וְאֶת־רַגְלֵיהֶם׃

לב בְּבֹאָם אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּבְקָרְבָתָם אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ יִרְחָצוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
יְיָ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה׃

לג וַיָּקֶם אֶת־הֶחָצֵר סָבִיב לַמִּשְׁכָּן וְלַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־מָסַךְ שַׁעַר הֶחָצֵר
וַיְכַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמְּלָאכָה׃

(1) **And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:**

(2) **On the first day of the first month you shall set up the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting.**

(3) **Place there the Ark of the Pact, and screen off the ark with the curtain.**

(4) **Bring in the table and lay out its due setting; bring in the lampstand and light its lamps;**

(5) **and place the gold altar of incense before the Ark of the Pact. Then put up the screen for the entrance of the Tabernacle.**

(6) **You shall place the altar of burnt offering before the entrance of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting.**

(7) **Place the laver between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it.**

(8) **Set up the enclosure round about, and put in place the screen for the gate of the enclosure.**

(9) **You shall take the anointing oil and anoint the Tabernacle and all that is in it to consecrate it and all its furnishings, so that it shall be holy.**

(10) **Then anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils to consecrate the altar, so that the altar shall be most holy.**

(11) **And anoint the laver and its stand to consecrate it.**

(12) **You shall bring Aaron and his sons forward to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and wash them with the water.**

(13) **Put the sacral vestments on Aaron, and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve Me as priest.**

(14) **Then bring his sons forward, put tunics on them,**

(15) **and anoint them as you have anointed their father, that they may serve Me as priests. This their anointing shall serve them for everlasting priesthood throughout the ages.**

(16) **This Moses did; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did.**

(17) **In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up.**

(18) **Moses set up the Tabernacle, placing its sockets, setting up its planks, inserting its bars, and erecting its posts.**

(19) **He spread the tent over the Tabernacle, placing the covering of the tent on top of it — just as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(20) **He took the Pact and placed it in the ark; he fixed the poles to the ark, placed the cover on top of the ark,**

(21) **and brought the ark inside the Tabernacle. Then he put up the curtain for screening, and screened off the Ark of the Pact — just as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(22) **He placed the table in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain, on the north side of the Tabernacle.**

(23) **Upon it he laid out the setting of bread before the Lord — as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(24) **He placed the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting opposite the table, on the south side of the Tabernacle.**

(25) **And he lit the lamps before the Lord — as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(26) **He placed the altar of gold in the Tent of Meeting, before the curtain.**

(27) **On it he burned aromatic incense — as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(28) **Then he put up the screen for the entrance of the Tabernacle.**

(29) **At the entrance of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting he placed the altar of burnt offering. On it he offered up the burnt offering and the meal offering — as the Lord had commanded Moses.**

(30) **He placed the laver between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing.**

(31) From it Moses and Aaron and his sons would wash their hands and feet;

(32) they washed when they entered the Tent of Meeting and when they approached the altar — as the Lord had commanded Moses.

(33) And he set up the enclosure around the Tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen for the gate of the enclosure. When Moses had finished the work,

(2) **On the first day of the first month**: That is, on the first of Nisan – just two weeks short of a year since the Exodus from Egypt. The actual construction of the Tabernacle was completed over a period of five and a half months.

You shall set up the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting: "You" appears here in the singular: *takim*, meaning, "you, Moses." Only Moses could set up the Tabernacle and consecrate it.

(9) **You shall take the anointing oil and anoint the Tabernacle and all that is in it to consecrate it and all its furnishings, so that it shall be holy**: Only olive oil is used for anointing, because it is used for illumination, and therefore symbolizes enlightenment.

(13) **Put the sacral vestments on Aaron, and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve Me as priest**: Moses does the anointing of the Tabernacle and he also anoints Aaron and his sons. That is, Moses appears here as the "chief High Priest," consecrating Aaron for his permanent service that is about to begin. But Aaron will only be acting as Moses' deputy.

(27) **On it he burned aromatic incense — as the Lord had commanded Moses**: Moses, besides setting up the Tabernacle, also initiates its service. Aaron and his descendants only continue the work begun by Moses.

Moreover, as soon as Moses assembles any one individual component of the Tabernacle, he immediately sets it in motion, without waiting for the completion of the entire production. He places the tablets of the Pact into the Ark, lays out the setting of bread, pours the oil into the lamps of the menorah and lights them, burns the aromatic incense,

and, without yet having hung the entrance canopy, he is already bringing sacrifices.

We can compare this to the process of human birth: The heart and the circulatory system already function even in a body that is not yet fully formed.

Or we can compare it to the creation of the universe: The stars and the planets do not wait for the entire cosmos to be completed; they just get right down to performing their assigned tasks.

The Tabernacle is like a living organism, whose every member begins to function, simply because it is in their nature to do so.

(31) **From it Moses and Aaron and his sons would wash their hands and feet**: Moses too performs the role of a priest.

30.5. THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS (40:34-38)

לד וַיְכַס הֶעָנָן אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּכְבוֹד יְ֞הוָה מָלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן׃ לה וְלֹא־
יָכֹל מֹשֶׁה לָבוֹא אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי־שָׁכַן עָלָיו הֶעָנָן וּכְבוֹד יְ֞הוָה מָלֵא
אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן׃ לו וּבְהֵעָלוֹת הֶעָנָן מֵעַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל
מַסְעֵיהֶם׃ לז וְאִם־לֹא יֵעָלֶה הֶעָנָן וְלֹא יִסְעוּ עַד־יוֹם הֵעָלֹתוֹ׃ לח כִּי
עֲנַן יְ֞הוָה עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לַיְלָה בּוֹ לְעֵינֵי כָל־בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּכָל־מַסְעֵיהֶם׃

(34) The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.

(35) Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.

(36) When the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out, on their various journeys;

(37) but if the cloud did not lift, they would not set out until such time as it did lift.

(38) For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the Lord rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys.

(34) **The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting**: The following two concluding verses of the Book of Exodus lead to two books of Torah, which follow, Book of Leviticus and Book of Numbers:

- (35) **Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting**: When the cloud is there, Moses cannot enter unless invited by God. This is a transition to the Book of Leviticus, which begins with God inviting Moses to enter the Tent. This line continues the theme of holiness.

- (36) **When the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out, on their various journeys**: This is the transition to the Book of Numbers, which begins with the cloud lifting and the people going on their way. This line continues the theme of the history of the Jewish people.

Thus, in the logical sense, Leviticus and Numbers – the third and fourth books of the Torah – run in parallel to each other, and not in succession, as they appear to do. And after them, the fifth and final book, Deuteronomy, will again – like the Book of Exodus – combine three themes into a single complex: sanctity, Jewish history, and God's covenant with Israel.

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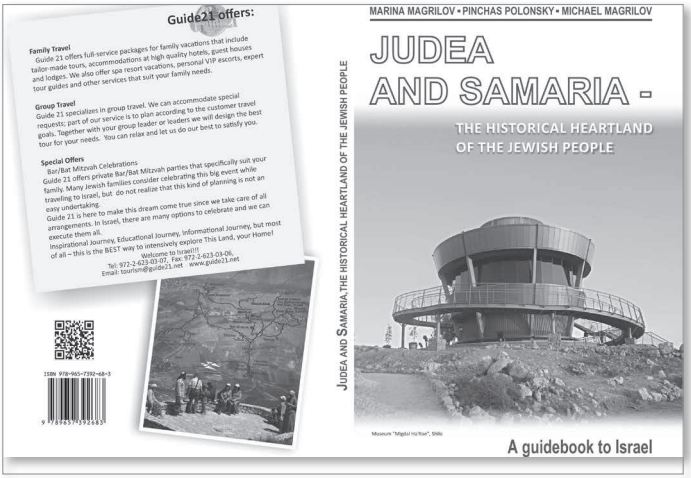

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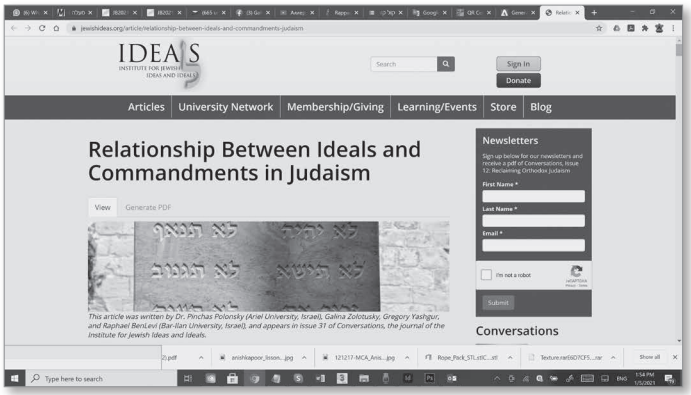

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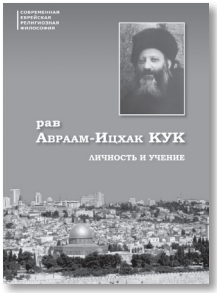

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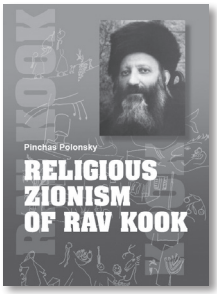

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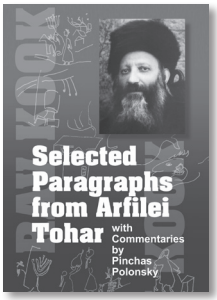

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