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R. OBADIAH SFORNO: COMMENTARY TO THE BOOK OF NUMBERS --

AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

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of the requirements for Ordination

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## DIGEST

This study endeavors to provide a greater familiarity with the exegetical methodology employed by Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno. To this end the purport here is two-fold:

- 1) To achieve full understanding of Sforno's commentary by translating it into English.
- 2) To create an aid for other students of the Torah.

Sforno, an eminent physician, philosopher, mathematician, halakist and exegete lived during the Italian Renaissance. His recognition has resulted primarily from two of his works. The first of these is Or Ammim, an expositional discourse in which Sforno attempted to refute the dominant philosophical doctrines of his day.

Sforno's other principal writing was his Biblical exegesis, of which his Pentateuchal commentary is the most famous. An examination of his exegetical process reveals that Sforno's main concern was the literal meaning of the text. Nevertheless, throughout his commentary there occur various homilies and allegories which mark a departure from his usual confinement to the plain sense of the text. Sforno does not involve himself with mystical or Kabbalistic motifs. Also to be noted are

his occasional philological discussions which vary in their technicality. Another theme characteristic of Sforno's commentary is his periodic reference to medical matters; insights which emanated from his profession as a physician.

To facilitate the understanding of Sforno's interpretative approach to the Bible, an annotated translation of his commentary to the Book of Numbers herewith follows.

2/10  
~Jed

To my dear wife, Kathryn, whose understanding, patience, support and boundless love constantly fill my life with abundant blessing.

"Can a woman forget her baby,  
Or disown the child of her womb?  
Though she might forget,  
I never could forget you."

(Isa 49:15)

"Was du ererbt von deinen Vatern hast, erwirb es, um  
es zu besitzen."

---- Goethe

"Let a man not say: 'I shall read that I may be  
called wise and study that I may be called a scholar,'  
but do it out of love, and honor will come at the end,  
as it is written, 'Bind them on your fingers, write  
them on the tablet of your heart,' (Prov 7:3); and  
it is also said, 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness,  
and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to  
those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are  
called happy.' (Prov 3:17-18)."

(Ned. 62a)

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## PREFACE

The English translation of Scriptural passages were taken from the following sources:

- 1) The Torah--The Five Books of Moses, A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962.
- 2) The Prophets--Nevi'im, A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978.
- 3) The Book of Psalms, A New Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972.
- 4) The Five Megilloth and Jonah, A New Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969.
- 5) The New Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha--Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Use of the RSV was limited to verses not contained in the other aforementioned sources.

In addition, the translation of the passage Num 5:11-31 was taken from Herbert Chanan Brichto's "The Case of the Sota and a Reconsideration of Biblical 'Law'" contained in Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. 46, Cincinnati, 1975.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that occasionally it was necessary to deviate from the printed translation and render the text in a more literal fashion to preserve the continuity of Sforno's comment. One example of this occurs in 24:6, which reads as follows in the 1962 edition of the JPS Torah:

"Like palm-groves that stretch out, Like gardens beside a river,...."  
Sforno's comment here is contingent upon understanding the text as saying,

"Like streams that stretch out, Like gardens beside a river,...."

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I should like to acknowledge my sincere appreciation to the following people whose assistance was instrumental in the successful completion of this study:

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and my dear parents to whom I owe more than can ever be repaid; nonetheless, I can still thank them for getting me started, and accord them honor, as it is written,

"There are things whose fruits a man enjoys in this world while the capital is laid up for him in the world to come: honoring his father and mother."

(m. Pe'a 1:1),

and similarly,

"The Rabbis say: Three combine [in the making of] a man--God and father and mother. When a man honors his father and mother, God says, 'I impute it to you as if I were dwelling among you and you honored Me.'"

(Qidd. 30b)

R. Obadiah Sforno:

Commentary to the Book of Numbers--

An Annotated Translation

## INTRODUCTION

I. Sforno - His biography and importance.

Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno, mathematician, philosopher, physician, halakhist and exegete, was born in Cesena, Italy around 1470.<sup>1</sup> Although little is known of his background it seems that his brother Hananel provided financial support while Obadiah was pursuing his medical career in Rome. During his stay in Rome, from 1496-1525, he was exposed to the vast throngs of cultural learning, philosophical inquiry and religious fervor that was rife and characterized the Italian Renaissance.

The period of the Renaissance witnessed the growth and spread of Jewish physicians throughout Italy, and Sforno attained considerable prominence in his medical profession.<sup>2</sup>

During this interval Italian humanism flourished in Northern Italy. Upon the recommendation of the humanist Cardinal Domenico Grimani, Sforno became acquainted with and subsequently the Hebrew instructor of the German Christian humanist Johann Reuchlin. Sforno's influence upon Reuchlin was especially significant; when the Talmud was later denounced in Germany, Reuchlin acted as a staunch advocate in defense of Hebrew literature, a stand prompted by his enlightening experience with the Hebrew language.

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1. Scholars are not in agreement as to the year of Sforno's birth. The EJ gives 1470; the JE and Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, Vol. 4, p. 94, says 1475.

2. Zinberg, op. cit., p. 94

Sforno ultimately took up residence in Bologna in 1525, where he assumed leadership of the Jewish community. In addition, he revived operations at a Hebrew printing house, and he established a Talmudic academy which he led until his death in 1550.

Sforno has achieved considerable eminence for his scholarly works. His primary writings were Or Ammim ("light of the peoples"), a philosophical discourse, and his commentary to selected books of the Bible. Or Ammim (first published in Bologna in 1537), constitutes Sforno's response to the encompassing fealty to Aristotle by the majority of Jewish scholars. In this work Sforno strives to refute the philosophical doctrines that were in contradiction with the Torah, which not only were expounded by Aristotle, but even accepted to some extent by Maimonides and other Jewish minds as well. In Or Ammim Sforno endeavors to instill people with the reassurance that any sought-after spiritual security would be found not in any secular, inherently contradictory Aristotelian philosophy, but in the Torah's eternal truths.

Sforno's other major scholarly enterprise is his commentary to the entire Torah. Since its first publication in Venice, 1567, Sforno's Pentateuchal commentary has enjoyed a wide-spread popularity as is evidenced by its inclusion in editions of Bibles that contain Rabbinic commentary.

Further, Sforno wrote commentaries to Jonah, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Psalms, Job (his commentary to Job is called, "Mishpat Tsedeq"), Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Pirke Abot. In addition, he translated the eight books of Euclid from Arabic to Hebrew, composed a Hebrew grammar and wrote several responsa.

## II. Nature of his commentary.

Sforno's commentary to the Torah constitutes a significant contribution to Biblical exegesis. Written in a lucid, cohesive manner, the nature of his commentary is characterized by his continuous use of the exegetical method known as פשוט , or literal meaning of the text. Often his remarks consist of merely a restatement of the Biblical text with little or no embellishment.

That Sforno lived centuries after such famed exegetes as Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Nachmonides enabled him to avail himself of his predecessors' commentaries. In this aspect Sforno did not hesitate to incorporate their remarks in his own commentary, although he never refers to these earlier commentators by name. The integration of commentaries by exegetes did not constitute plagiarism, indeed, Biblical commentary was viewed as a process of expansion wherein later commentators incorporated in their own works as they saw fit the exegesis which had accumulated up to their own time. As a result of all earlier exegesis being "public domain," Sforno's comments include apt, inspirational homilies which themselves represent an on-going chain of Rabbinic wisdom through the ages.

However, whenever Sforno quotes from earlier Rabbinic literature, such as the Talmud, the citation is usually introduced by the remark, "...as the Sages have said...." Mention to a specific place of reference is often provided.

Still, on other occasions, Sforno presents highly profound and original insights which demonstrate his creative genius as an exegete.

It is here that Sforno indicates his independence from the commentaries of his predecessors.

Throughout his efforts to elucidate the text, Sforno generally restricts himself to the ווד method of exegesis. However, to impart a homily he will resort to allegory as fits the situation.

Sforno almost entirely avoids mystical and Kabbalistic allusions. For the most part his comments are confined to the plain sense of the text or allegory.

At the same time Sforno does not restrict himself from entering a philosophical discussion where he deems it appropriate. His remarks concerning God's self-consciousness (7:89), and man's ultimate purpose being to adopt the mean in his effort to be virtuous (19:2 ff.), clearly reflect the Aristotelian influence prevalent among philosophers contemporary with Sforno.

While not overly concerned with grammatical forms, Sforno, nevertheless, at times presents a linguistic explanation of a specific philological matter. Comments of this genre vary in technical degree, and this reveals his penetrating insight as to textual anomalies of a particular linguistic nature.

Another theme distinctive of Sforno's style is his occasional reference to medical matters. Although infrequent, they contribute yet another dimension to this exegete's greatness, whose primary profession as a physician inspired his cogent insights.

### III. Intention of this study

Although Sforno is the more "recent" of the traditional Bible commentators, only a minuscule amount of literature exists about this

esteemed Rabbi, physician and exegete. Hithertofore only his Pentateuchal commentary to Deuteronomy has been rendered into English.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the purport of my work has been two-fold:

- 1) To achieve full understanding of Sforno's commentary by translating it into English.
- 2) To create an aid for other students of the Torah.

#### IV. Procedure

My procedure has been to work from the oldest available text of his Torah commentary, which would increase the possibility of preserving the authenticity of Sforno's original commentary. I have been fortunate in this respect to have had access to the first printed edition of Sforno's באור על התורה (Venice, 1567), made available by the library of Hebrew Union College.

#### V. Textual Variations

Concerning this edition of באור על התורה it must be mentioned that it contains a few passages of commentary which are missing in later editions of Sforno's commentary. (Specifically within 19:2 ff.; 24:17; and 24:20). Further, in later editions of his commentary these latter two passages are rendered with textual variants.

Similarly, selected words in Sforno's commentary have been lined through in this Venice, 1567 edition (24:17; 24:20). Such effacing possibly reflects a later editor's attempt at censorship. The precise location of these passages is indicated in the notes.

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3. Rabbi Samuel M. Stahl, "A Translation of Sforno's Commentary on The Book of Deuteronomy" (D. H. L. diss., Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, 1975).

Also to be noted is that even though a source is often provided to Sforno's frequent citations of Rabbinic literature (i.e., the Talmud), on numerous occasions the specific reference given in parentheses is erroneous. Since later editions of Sforno's commentary contain the same incorrectly identified sources, one is left to conclude that the authenticity of these references was never ascertained by the editors who printed his commentary.

In this study all Rabbinic quotations have been verified. There are a few references to Rabbinic literature which could not be identified with certainty, and these have been indicated in the notes. Such omissions are attributed to the lack of their being a direct quotation, whose subject matter could not be found in standard reference indices.

## CHAPTER ONE

## פרשת במדבר

1:1-2 The Lord spoke to Moses; Take a census of the whole Israelite community: Organize them in order that they might enter the [promised] land immediately, "... each with his standard, ..." (2:2, infra), without war.<sup>1</sup> Rather, [with the hope that] the nations would move out away from them like some of them had done, as Scripture testifies, "(In that day, their fortress cities shall be) like the deserted sites which the Horesh and the Amir<sup>2</sup> abandoned because of the Israelites; ..." (Isa 17:9).<sup>3</sup> [Now] perhaps they were of the Girgashite clan about which the Sages, of blessed memory, have said that it [i.e., the clan] got up and moved out on its own accord.<sup>4</sup> But because of the ruination caused by the spies the seven nations [V. Deut 7:1] continued to do evil for forty years, and thus had to be destroyed.<sup>5</sup>

Listing the names: For at that time everyone from the same generation was reckoned by a name that indicated his personal qualities according to his degree, in the manner of, "And I have singled you out by name." (Exod 33:17). Such was not the case for those who entered the [promised] land, and therefore they were neither enumerated by name, nor were they mentioned [at all], except for the tribal heads, and their number. With this [i.e., such an enumeration], Scripture made known its intention, namely, that those very people by themselves would live and possess the land, and no man would be excluded [of his inheritance in the promised land].

- 1:4 Each one the head of his ancestral house: The reason [for the words], "associated with you" is that every one of them was the head of his ancestral house, and [therefore, the intent of Scripture was] not to deny anyone his genealogical record.
- 1:18 Who were registered by the clans of their ancestral houses: Because the purpose of their number was [necessary] to determine who would be able to bear arms, the intent was to note their lineage, for the "merit of their fathers" aids them, and the Sages have already said, "We make no investigation of one who was recorded in the King's list of officers." (m. Qidd. 4:5; Qidd. 76a,b; cf. Yer. Qidd. 4:5).<sup>6</sup> They also have said, "The Divine Presence rests upon only families of pure birth in Israel." (Qidd. 70b).<sup>7</sup>
- 1:20 Israel's first born: [In that] he did not fall from his high status<sup>8</sup> by God's decree because of the repentance that he effected,<sup>9</sup> as it is stated [of Reuben], "Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number. The sons of Leah: Reuben--Jacob's first born, ..." (Gen 35:22-23).<sup>10</sup> Although he lost [his status of being the first born] according to men.<sup>11</sup>
- 1:44 Those are the enrollments: Everyone of these was numbered by Moses and Aaron, etc.
- 1:45 All the Israelites,...enrolled (by ancestral houses), all those in Israel who were able to bear arms: Not to exceed those who were over sixty years old; such people were not to bear arms, as the Sages have cited concerning Yair, son of Manasseh and those

like him.<sup>12</sup> Apart from them the total amount [of Israelites] came to that which is written in the next verse.

1:47 Were not recorded: They were not enumerated by the counters, nor were they recorded by themselves as they had not prepared themselves like the rest of the people [who had] to be assembled and inscribed in genealogical lists. This preceded God's dictum to Moses, "Do not on any account enroll the tribe of Levi,..." (verse 49, infra), for indeed, they [i.e., Moses and Aaron] deferred [inclusion of the Levites in the census in order] to see just what God would command concerning them since He did not mention the tribe of Levi with the rest of the tribes when He said, "Associated with you shall be a man from each tribe,..." (verse 4, supra).

1:49 The tribe of Levi: Even though I have said, "Take a census of the whole Israelite community..." (verse 2, supra), including the counting of the Levites among them. Nevertheless--they [the Levites] are to be separate from the rest of the Israelite people [in three matters]. Firstly, with respect to the counting, so that the number of Levites is not included within the sum of the rest of the people. Do not on any account enroll: So as not [to record] the number of Levites from the age of twenty years up as was the case for the rest of the people. Or take a census of them: When you compute the sum of the enrolled tribes, do not include among it the sum of the tribe of Levi.

- 1:50 You shall put the Levites in charge: Secondly, they are to be separate from the rest of the people with respect to function, for service in the Holy Temple will be theirs alone.
- 1:53 The Levites, however, shall camp around (the Tabernacle of the Pact): Thirdly, they are to be separate from the rest of the people in their encampment, for they alone shall camp around the Tabernacle, and the rest [of the people] shall camp "...each with his standard,..." (2:2, infra).
- 2:17 Then midway between the divisions, the Tent of Meeting...shall move: Between the two standards mentioned. As they camp: When half of all the standards have arrived the Tabernacle will be set up exactly in the midst of all of them, for immediately following Reuben's standard traveled the Kohathites, who carried the sanctuary, which is the main part of the Tent, which is borne out by the account in Scripture, as He said, "There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you--from above the cover,...(all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people." Exod 25:22). As they camp: And thus, it was then in the midst of all the camps at the time of the traveling.
- 2:33 The Levites, however, were not recorded: Nor were they included in the sum total of the Israelites. <sup>13</sup> As the Lord had commanded Moses: When He said, "Do not... take a census of them with the Israelites." (1:49, supra).
- 3:1 This is the line of Aaron and Moses at the time that the Lord spoke with Moses: At the time that He distinguished the tribe of

Levi, some of them to transport [the sanctuary], and some of them to service it and invoke God's blessing. Included among them were Nadab and Abihu.

3:2 These were the names of Aaron's sons: Each of them was reckoned by his own name [and] not merely because he was Aaron's son alone.

3:3 The anointed priests: Such did not occur to the [successive] generations, for in actuality no common priest after them was anointed during the lifetime of the high priest. And the reason [for the Biblical dictum], "who were ordained for priesthood" was that that the anointment was necessary then, for without it there would not have been any priests at all since they were born before Aaron was elected to be ordained for the priesthood. In a like manner was that which occurred to Phinehas before he slew Zimri. <sup>14</sup>

3:4 When they offered alien fire: That this alone [came] upon them. And they left no sons: Had they left sons to succeed them they [i.e., their sons] would have been the ones to inherit the status that their father deserved. <sup>15</sup> So it was Eleazar and Ithamar that served as priests: He imparted to them position and authority [with respect to matters] in the Tabernacle in accordance with the decree of God, may He be exalted. In the lifetime of their father Aaron: The anointment of his sons occurred in Aaron's lifetime, but the death and rule of some of them was not by his dictum even though he was the high priest. Yet this whole [procedure of election and succession in the priesthood] was not to be continued throughout future generations, for not [only was

there] to be no anointment of a common priest, but neither would he have an appointment except by the sanction of the high priest during his lifetime.

3:6 To serve him: For he was responsible for the guarding of all [the matters involving sanctity], as Scriptures say, "You with your sons and the ancestral house under your charge shall bear any guilt connected with the sanctuary; you and your sons alone shall bear any guilt connected with your priesthood." (18:1 infra). Thus the service of the Levites was assistance to the high priest in part of his responsibility in [both] the safeguarding of the Tabernacle and its utensils, and [also] the safeguarding of the priesthood so that no outsider encroaches, [this latter responsibility being one] which rested solely upon Aaron and his sons.

3:7 Duties...for the whole community before the Tent of Meeting, doing the work of the Tabernacle: [They were] to assist in the requirements of the sacred service, for this [appointment] would have been suitable for the Sanhedrin were it not for the sin of the golden calf.

3:8 A duty on behalf of the Israelites--doing the work of the Tabernacle: To carry [the Ark of the Pact] and to sing, for this [function] was suitable for all of the Israelites.

3:9 They are formally assigned to him: [In] that all of the service [rendered by the Levites would be performed only] by the dictum of Aaron and his sons; [such ministerial duties were to be executed only by the Levites, and by] no others. From among the

Israelites: Who were [thus] obligated to give to them [i.e., the Levites] the first tithe in recompense for their services.<sup>16</sup>

3:10 For observing their priestly duties: [With respect] to all matters involving [both] the sacral altar and [the area] behind the Ark-curtain so that the Levites not infringe [upon responsibility that belonged solely to Aaron and his sons, as stipulated in 18:1-6, infra]. And any outsider who approaches: Either in [the exclusive] Levitical service, or the priesthood "(shall be put to death)."

3:12 In place of all the first-born: For redemption.<sup>17</sup>

3:13 For every first-born is Mine: For originally sacral functions [were reserved] for the first-born. At the time that I smote every first-born in Egypt, I consecrated every first-born in Israel: Indeed, [they were punished] with the smiting of the first-born because the first-born deserved to be punished [being part of] the sinful generation. Because they [i.e., the first-born] were [already] accorded a more honored status than [that of the other Israelites] and [because they participated in the idolatrous act involving the golden calf, how much the more so] were they unworthy of being saved [from being stricken in the like manner experienced by the Egyptians] from the plague of the land, as it is stated [concerning Lot who was urged by the angels to flee from Sodom], "...lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city." (Gen 19:15). [Nevertheless], I saved them [i.e., the first-born] in that I consecrated them to Me in

3:13 (cont.) the matter that they are forbidden to engage themselves in un-  
 consecrated work in accordance with [the law governing] every-  
 thing that is holy, for [example], it is forbidden to shear [the  
 wool of a consecrated animal, or to use that animal] for labor,<sup>18</sup>  
 but in order that [such animals] be permitted for these uses I  
 required that they be redeemed in accordance with the law that  
 applies to anything which is consecrated [i.e., sacred] that  
 becomes ordinary [i.e., profane], when He said, "And you must  
 redeem every first-born among your sons." (Exod 34:20), for  
 without this redemption they would have been exempted from [par-  
 ticipation in] sacred service. Now, however, [because] they  
 have sinned I have rejected them and took the Levites instead with  
 respect to redemption.

3:12 The Levites shall be mine: For sacred service [in lieu of the  
 first-born].

3:13 Man and beast, to Myself: [At this juncture] to be applicable now  
 and henceforth [the statute is:] the first-born among men is to  
 be redeemed; the first-born among a clean animal is to be sacri-  
 ficed.<sup>19</sup> To be Mine, the Lord's: I, [in effect], did not  
 change [My desire] in My rejection of the first-born [effective  
 immediately], for such a shift [i.e., the preference given to the  
 Levites over the first-born] was not brought about by Me, but  
 [rather, was prompted] on their part [in] that they sinned [and  
 thereby merited My disfavor]; therefore, I desired that the  
 Levites of this generation redeem their first-born. Such, how-  
 ever, was not [a stipulation] for the future, for indeed, among

3:13 (cont.) this generation they [i.e., the Levites] were worthy of this [i.e., redemption], but this was not [automatically] applicable for the future. <sup>20</sup>

4:5 At the breaking of camp: [only] after the [pillar of] cloud had departed, for prior to this [happening, i.e., the progression of the Israelite camp] it would have been forbidden [for anyone] to enter [the Holy of Holies].

4:10 Which they shall then place on a carrying frame: [It is only] then that the Levites will merit to carry [the Tent of Meeting],

4:16 Responsibility shall rest with Eleazar: To command who would carry and what everyone would carry. Responsibility for the whole Tabernacle: And [in addition to his responsibility of the Tabernacle's constituents] during their traveling and camping, he was responsible for commanding their making and breaking camp, and periods of respite in the most suitable place for them.

4:18 Do not let (the group of Kohathite clans) be cut off: Do not place their burdens in [such] a manner that will be successful for them, not like the past for in such a manner it will happen that [everyone] will push each other [and drop their burden, thus] defiling the Holy, and such would be the grounds for their extirpation, as our Sages have said (Yoma 22a), that occurred with removal of the ashes.

4:19 And assign each of them to his duties and to his portage: And not [that] anyone who comes first would merit, but [rather that] everyone would wait to be ordered [before he would] act.

4:20 But let not [the Kohathites] go inside and witness (the dismantling of the sanctuary): In such manner, let them not go inside and witness the priest covering the holy vessels so that one man does not advance upon his companion and does not act irreligiously in a manner that would consign them to death [as a penalty].

## CHAPTER TWO

## פרשת נשא

- 4:24 (As to) labor and portorage: To work in their camps and to carry the load during the travel, for according to [what was expressed] above when He said, "The duties of the Gershonites in the Tent of Meeting comprised: (the tabernacle, the tent, its covering, and the screen for the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; the hangings of the enclosure, the screen for the entrance of the enclosure,... the cords thereof, and the altar,..." 3:25-26, supra), He spoke of their duties at the time of their encampment. [But] here He said that everything that was under their service involving camp duties was likewise included in the duty of transportation during the travel.
- 4:26 And they shall perform the service: [It is] during the camping [that] their duties [elaborated by the text apply] to all these utensils, and to all the utensils which he would make for them and for their sake so that they could serve [properly], for example, pliers and hammers to plant and uproot the tent-stakes.
- 4:27 All their portorage: During the traveling. And all their service: During the camping.
- 4:49 Each one was given responsibility for his service and portorage..., and each was recorded: He [i.e., Moses] appointed everyone [from the three Levitical families] as to his [specific, individual] work to be performed in the sacred service during

4:40 their encampment. And his portorage: During the travel in that  
 (cont.) he knew the weight of [each] one's load in addition to [that individual's] particular duty, namely that the ones charged with them know the names of the utensils in accordance when He said [of the Merarite clans], <sup>21</sup> "You shall list by name the objects that are their portorage tasks." (4:32, supra).

5:6 Thus breaking faith with the Lord: The [Rabbinic] Tradition has already explained this; [that is, the subject of "breaking faith with the Lord"] is mentioned with respect to the robbery of a resident alien, for surely, one who plunders him desecrates the name of his God in the eyes of the resident alien who has come to take shelter beneath His [protective] wings. Therefore, [this offense] is called, "breaking faith with the Holy," and [anyone who commits such an offense] is obligated to bring a guilt offering in accordance with all that pertains to one who breaks faith.

5:8 (The amount) repaid shall go to the Lord: For when the owners are not to be found, it is [then] proper to restore the stolen goods to the Master of the owners, which is God, may He be exalted, as in the instance mentioned by the Sages, of blessed memory, "(If one has taken a pledge from a slave, he should return it to him, or), if he dies, to his master." <sup>22</sup>

5:9 So, too, any gift: The [Rabbinic] Tradition has [already] come [and explained] that the offering mentioned here is [in reference to] the first-born which are offered to God, may He be exalted,

5:9 (cont.) as is the custom to offer the first fruits to the owner of the land, as it has said, "I acknowledge this day before the Lord your God that I have entered the land which the Lord swore (to our fathers to give us." Deut 26:3).<sup>23</sup> But here He is saying that just as [in the instance concerning the] robbery of a resident alien [whereby, in the event of his death] restitution [could be made only] to the Lord, he [i.e., the penitent robber] gives it [i.e., whatever bounty it is] to the priest of the watch.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the first-born, which are offered to God, may He be exalted, are given to the priest of the watch.

5:10 And each shall retain his sacred donations: But, as concerning the rest of the sacred items [including] offerings and tithes, even though they are consecrated to the Lord, they are not [available] for just any priest, but [only] to that particular priest to whom the owner [i.e., the one who donates] has given them [i.e., the sacred items]. Each priest shall keep what is given to him: However, when one of the owners gives something holy to a priest, it no longer is included among his [i.e., the owner's] sacred possessions; it [now] belongs to him[i.e.], the priest who accepts [the gift], and neither the other owners nor the rest of the priests can confiscate it from him.

5:12 Whose wife may go astray [i.e., commit adultery]: [In that] she has strayed from the ways of chastity. Breaking faith with him: [In that] she has desecrated the holiness of the Lord [by being unfaithful to her husband], Who loves the holiness of marriage, [but she has broken faith with him] by a hug and a kiss with someone other than her husband, and [other behavior] like this.

5:13 In that a man beds her in sexual intercourse: For such is the way of the "evil inclination" -- [it causes one] to move from one kind of iniquity to another. Her husband having no knowledge: Even though all these [actions of the wife's infidelity] have already transpired, it could happen that her husband may have no knowledge of the incident, as though his eyes were dimmed from seeing, <sup>25</sup> for had he known [of his wife's unfaithfulness] and remained silent the waters [of portent] would not [have served as a means of] examination of the woman at all, <sup>26</sup> as the Sages, of blessed memory, have explained. <sup>27</sup> It being done clandestinely: After [her act of infidelity, expressed in four clauses: 1) going astray; 2) breaking faith with him; 3) in that a man beds her in sexual intercourse; 4) ...so that she becomes defiled] and [then] it became known to her husband.

5:14 If such a man in a passion of suspicion: A spirit of [ethical] purity [overcame him and motivated him] to warn her [of the impending consequences] after he learned of her straying from the ways of chastity. Suspects his wife: [but he, in effect, had given] her a warning and said [to her], "Do not seclude yourself with a strange man!" Or in a passion of suspicion: [Inspired by] madness [or foolishness] with no [apparent] reason deserving [to arouse] his jealousy. And [the reality is that] she has not become defiled [i.e., is not guilty]: But if she [indeed] violated [her husband's] warning and secluded herself [with another man] even though [in actuality she may be innocent].

5:15 That man may hale his wife (to the priest): [The text] does not say that since in all these [various expressions for infidelity], wherein his wife has strayed from the ways of chastity and broken faith with him [and] he remained silent, [such] could only be [the intention of a husband who is inclined] toward malice, and even though [the incident of another] man having intercourse with his wife [may have] escaped him, [we shall not say that] we shall ignore his passion of suspicion. Similarly, if he suspects [his wife] without reason, on account of [all] this, should we not say that [therefore], his suspicion is to be [considered] annulled, for indeed, even though [we contend that there is no validity in the husband's claim], <sup>28</sup> we [still] dissolve the scroll, <sup>29</sup> and offer the sacrifice, as specified [infra] in the text.

5:19 (Solemnly) charge: He [i.e., the priest] informed her that she will [have to] take upon herself the curse-charge in accordance with this [particular] stipulation. No man has bedded (you): In this particular instance. If you have not strayed: At other times. Be immune to effect: Since the Torah has already stated, "...for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name." (Exod 20:7), in a manner [whereby] even though a man may swear concerning the veracity [of something] employing an oath of adjuration, take note that if the matter is non-essential, as in the case where one swears concerning something that is [clearly] known [ipso facto], he will not be innocent [i.e., deriving credence] from the oath. <sup>30</sup> But here, you [i.e., the accused wife], who have caused a circumstance filled with doubt

- 5:19 (cont.) for us, and have committed yourself by this oath. [Therefore], it would have been proper that [had] you, too, sworn concerning the truth about a matter, you [also] would have been guilty. In any event, accept the curses under this condition [i.e., the charges brought against you], that you may be [declared] innocent by them providing that you have not strayed.
- 5:20 But, look you now: [But] you must also accept [the charge that you might be guilty]. If you have strayed, with other than your husband, if you have become defiled: [Thereby causing] the curse [to effect itself] on the grounds that you have strayed and become defiled [i.e., guilt being established]; it is for no other reason [that the curse would be effective]. And if [the] reason [for the husband's suspicion] is unjustified, lacking true substance, there will be no validity to the curse.
- 5:22 So be it, so be it: I assent to the two conditions that you have stipulated: If I have not strayed I shall be [declared] innocent, and if [indeed] I have strayed the oath will apply itself.
- 5:28 She shall be immune: From the punishment [evoked by] the oath which she caused [by her suspect behavior], even though [the text] says, "...for the Lord will not clear (one who swears falsely by His name," Exod 20:7). Note that in this instance it was God's desire, may He be exalted, to vindicate the wife, for He knows our [evil] inclination.
- 5:29 Such is the prescription for cases of suspicion: [For both] the suspicion that is justified, and the suspicion that is not jus-

5:29 (cont.)      tified. The text explained this <sup>31</sup> when it stated, "(In the case of any man) whose wife may go astray, with other than her husband, and becomes defiled, etc." This is [an example of] a valid suspicion. [The text, however, continues] and adds [the following circumstances in which the husband may similarly raise the issue of his wife's fidelity], as it states, "Or if a man in a passion of suspicion (suspects his wife..., " verse 30, infra) [without reason]. This would be [an example of] an unfounded suspicion. <sup>32</sup>

5:30      Suspects his wife: [The husband] will warn her not to seclude herself [with any other man] in any circumstance. And the priest is to carry out with her this entire procedure: [On the assumption that she is innocent], he will not worry about the dissolved scroll.

5:31      The man gets off scot-free: Even though he suspected her innocence, for she caused him [to bring the charge against her] in that she disregarded [her husband's] warning and created [the circumstance in which] there lay foundation in [her husband's suspicion], as the Sages have said, "David did not pay heed to slander, [for] he saw self-evident things in him, For [sic] it is written, 'Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul, also came down to meet the king ...'" (2 Sam 19:25, quoted in Shabb. 56a). <sup>33</sup>

Though the woman suffers punishment for her crime if she is guilty: If she has defiled herself she will die; if however, she has not defiled herself she will [still] be publicly depised in

in that she disgraced herself, disregarding her husband's admonition and secluding herself with another man.

- 6:2 Explicitly: [With intention] to separate himself from the vanities and pleasures of man. Utters a nazirite's vow: To become a nazirite and [therefore] be separate from [man's] customary pleasures. To set himself apart for the Lord: To separate himself [completely] from all these [pleasures], in order that he may be totally dedicated to the Lord, occupying himself with God's Torah, "...walking in [all] His ways, and holding fast to Him," (Deut 11:22).
- 6:3 He shall abstain from wine and any other intoxicant: He must not, [however], take upon himself a fast which [weakens the body and thereby] detracts [one] from service to God, as the Sages have said, nor is he to chastise himself with makkot perushim as is customary of hypocrites. <sup>34</sup> Rather, let him abstain from wine, for [surely the influence] of this [intoxicant] acts as a significant detraction from [one's] worship and overpowers one's intentions. [Therefore], let him not weaken his strength [through liquor's influence] at all.
- 6:5 No razor shall touch his head: For through this, he is rejecting any thought concerning beauty and hair style. It shall remain consecrated: He shall remain apart from material desires.
- 6:6 He shall not go in where there is a dead person: He must not desecrate the matters of his sanctity by involving himself in

6:6 (cont.) honoring the dead, as in a [similar] situation involving the high priest,<sup>35</sup> and as the Sages have said, "Would there have been a lack of graves in Tiberias I would have sent you to Nisibis."<sup>36</sup>

6:8 He is consecrated to the Lord: He will merit light in the light of [eternal] life, and be prepared to understand and instruct as was fitting for the holy ones of [this] generation. It is to this that Elkanah [refers] when he said, "May the Lord fulfill His word." (1 Sam 1:23),<sup>37</sup> meaning: I [hereby] vow to consecrate [him to the Lord] as a nazirite, and I request nothing else from God, may He be exalted, for my son except that He fulfill His word--that he remain consecrated to the Lord.

6:13 He shall be brought: The Sages have already explained (Num. Rab. 10:17) [that the phrase, "He shall be brought" means that] he will bring himself [in addition to his offering], for here, [concerning] one who approaches [the priest who] will effect a renewal in him, it is stipulated that [such a person] is to be brought to him who effects the renewal, [and] is to be accompanied by one who is superior, as one who is tied up cannot untie himself. Instances of this [type of release] are cited [in Scripture. For example], concerning one who is leprous, in his [initial] state of uncleanness, and, "...at the time he is to be cleansed, he will be brought to the priest." (Lev 14:2); concerning the suspected adulteress, [it is written], "That man may hale his wife to the priest." (5:15, supra); similarly, concerning a slave [it is written], "His master shall take him to the judges."

6:13 (Exod 21:6). Indeed, concerning Joseph who experienced renewal,  
 (cont.) he was shaved and thus became another man.<sup>38</sup> Surely there is  
 no one superior [in holiness than this nazirite] that could  
 bring him. Thus [the nazirite] brings himself [along with his  
 offering].

6:24 (The Lord) bless you: With wealth and possessions, for, "If  
 there is no meal there is no Torah,..." (Abot 3:21). And keep  
you: [May He] guard [you] from robbers.

6:25 Deal kindly: May He reveal to you the light of His face, [en-  
 abling you] to behold wonders from [both] His Torah and His  
 deeds after your needs have been satisfied through God's  
 blessing.

6:26 The Lord bestow His favor upon you: [Granting you] eternal  
 life, as indicated in Scriptures, "With You is the fountain of  
 life;... etc." (Ps 36:10), and as the Sages have said, "The  
 righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the  
 brightness of the divine presence." (Shabb. 17a).<sup>39</sup> And  
grant you peace: The rest of absolute peace which is eternal,  
 without any punishment mixed with it for all those who are whole  
 and perfect, deserving eternal life.

7:1 As well as the altar and its utensils: [After Moses had set up  
 the Tabernacle], he set up the altar and its utensils; every  
 thing in its proper place.

7:1 When he had anointed and consecrated them: [Only] after he  
(cont.) had set up everything properly.

7:2 The chieftains of the tribes, those who were in charge of enrollment: Insofar as they filled this role, each of them offered a sacrifice for his tribe and its people<sup>40</sup> because, insofar as they were in charge of enrollment, each [chieftain] was concerned about his tribe, a part of which was suspected of transgressions. [Therefore], insofar as they were the chieftains, they agreed to step in the breach and offer sacrifices, making expiation on their behalf [i.e., the suspected members of the tribes].

7:3 A cart for every two chieftains: [To demonstrate] the kinship among them, [thus] making themselves worthy [to cause] the Divine Presence to dwell among them, as it is written, "Then He became King in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people assembled, (the tribes of Israel) together." (Deut 33:5). The opposite [of close ties among men is also expressed in Scriptures], "Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt." (Hos 10:2).

7:5 Accept these from them: For Moses thought that the entire portage of the Levites [i.e., the transporting of all the parts of the Tabernacle] was to be carried on their shoulders, as was the case with the portage of the Kohathites.<sup>41</sup>

7:9 But to the Kohathites he did not give any; since theirs was the service of the [most] sacred objects: [Theirs] was not the

7:9 service of the Tent [of Meeting], but of the sanctuary. Indeed,  
 (cont.) God, may He be exalted, said concerning the carts that they were  
 for the service of the Tent of Meeting, whose portage was the  
 responsibility of the Gershonites and Merarites.<sup>42</sup> However,  
 the portage of the Kohathites had nothing whatsoever to do  
 with the building of the Tent of Meeting. Instead, their por-  
 terage was of its holy furnishings which were called, "sacred  
 objects," as it is written, "Then the Kohathites, who carried  
 the sacred objects would set out;..." (10:21, infra).

7:10 The chieftains also brought the dedication offering for the  
altar: They consecrated it. As the chieftains were presenting  
their offerings before the altar: [Only] after they had conse-  
 crated the offering did they place it before the altar.

7:13 His offering: one silver bowl: Thus [we see that] each of  
 them [i.e., the chieftains] presented every kind of offering, in-  
 cluding: a burnt offering, a meal offering, a sin offering, a  
 peace offering and incense to dedicate the altar and its  
 [various] functions with every kind of offering except the guilt  
 offering. This is because the sin offering and guilt offering  
 are mutually inclusive for them. [The Torah] enumerates the  
 sacrifices for each of them individually to show that each chief-  
 tain was careful to make expiation for [all the] details of the  
 many sins in his tribe.<sup>43</sup> This [repeated enumeration] by each  
 of them listing the particulars of his offering was to gain favor  
 for them [all] before the Lord. [Each chieftain] would lay his  
 hands on and lean on [the animals he was presenting] on behalf of

7:13 his tribe, just like in the instance of the ma'amadot [when  
(cont.) presenting] the communal offerings.<sup>44</sup>

7:84 This was the dedication offering for the altar: Note that the dedication of the altar was then, [even with all of the offerings presented], an insignificant event in comparison with the dedication of the First Temple, with its lavish furnishings, wealth and abundant sacrifices.

7:89 When Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him he would hear the Voice: Although [the dedication of the altar was] an insignificant event in comparison with Solomon's dedication [of the Temple],<sup>45</sup> nevertheless, when Moses went into the Tent of Meeting he heard the same Voice that he heard before the incident of the golden calf. This [intense level of communication between God and man] did not occur [at all] during the time of the First Temple, and certainly not during the time of the Second Temple, in that no prophet could go the sanctuary [and expect] to prophesy in the [same] manner [as Moses, thus] receiving prophecy immediately. This is [borne out by two reasons: firstly], because this dedication [of the altar] with its sacrifices was [performed entirely as an offering of] free will, and [secondly, because], "...Moses [was] tending the flock..." (Exod 3:1). Addressing (Himself): [He overheard God] talking to Himself. For [as it says], "The Lord has made everything for its purpose,..." (Prov 16:14), [or: Every act of the Lord is for Himself], and for His own intellectual experience, and by this He will know and will cause good to someone else. With the

7:89 grace of [His] influence which has no end [i.e., is infinite],  
(cont.) He will see purpose [i.e., results] in the object of this  
activity according to his [i.e., man's] preparation, and with  
this is explained the nature of every word [or speech] mention-  
ed in the Torah when it says, "The Lord spoke...." <sup>46</sup>

## CHAPTER THREE

## פרשת בהעלותך

8:1-2 The Lord spoke to Moses, (saying): When you mount the lamps:  
When you kindle the six lamps. At the front of [i.e., toward]  
the lampstand: Which is the central shaft, and this is [so]  
 when you turn the flames [i.e., the wicks] of each of the six  
 [other] candles toward the central shaft. Then let [i.e., will]  
the seven lamps give light: All seven will shine and impart Heav-  
 enly light on Israel, that they will teach [something]; being  
 [that] the light of those who tend to the right, and the light of  
 those who tend to the left is directed and points to the light of  
 the central shaft, which is the main part of the lampstand. Fur-  
 ther, being that it is proper [to interpret] that those who serve  
 on the right stand for eternal life, and those who serve on the  
 left stand for temporal matters, who support those who serve on  
 the right, as [the Sages] have said, "(Let the clusters pray for the  
 leaves), for were it not for the leaves the clusters could not  
 exist." (Hul.92a), <sup>47</sup> in a manner that an aspect of God's inten-  
 tion, may He be exalted, be attained among all of them, and [as a  
 result] they exalted His name together, as in the instance when  
 they accepted [God's intention] as evidenced by their statement, "All  
 the people answered as one, saying, 'All that the Lord has spoken we  
 will do!'" (Exod 19:8), meaning, "all of us shall fulfill His will."

8:4 Now this is how the lampstand was made: it was hammered work:  
 This [was] the intended goal in and of itself--the lighting of the  
 lamps toward the lampstand [was], in itself, intentional in  
 an obligatory sense being that the lampstand was hammered [from

8:4 one piece] to show the intended unity of the end result  
 (cont.) itself. 48

8:14 Thus you shall set the Levites apart: Separate by encampment those Levites who are still living [at the time of this appointment]. And the Levites shall be mine: They and their descendants will be qualified to serve Me.

8:15 Thereafter the Levites shall be qualified: [As well as] those who exist now.

8:16 They are formally assigned to Me: They assigned themselves in that they gave themselves over to My service as the Torah testifies, [in response to the charge of Moses], "'Whoever is for the Lord, come here!' And all the Levites rallied to him." (Exod 32:26). And they are assigned [for function] also from among the Israelites who sustain the Levites with the first tithe. [This] is in exchange for their service in order that all of them perform My service. In place of all the first issue of the womb: For [prior to this appointment] the holy services were their responsibility [i.e., of the first-born].

8:17 For every first-born is Mine: For originally the holy services were performed by the first-born, since being the most worthy in their house, the right of holy services [was assigned] to them [as the text reads], "I consecrated (them to Myself) at the time that I smote every first-born...." But the reason that I required redemption for them [was] because at the time that I

8:17 smote [every first-born] I consecrated them to Me in order  
 (cont.) that they would not become involved at all with common labor. Similarly, I have forbidden [both the] shearing and use for labor of the first-born among cattle. (V. Deut 15:19). I have done this to protect their sanctity since they were not deserving to be saved from the dispatch of the evil angels, being they were the most worthy among the people, and the burden of everyone was dependent on them. [Thus] I decreed that they be redeemed so that they be [qualified in] secular matters, being permitted [to engage] in lay service.

8:18 Now I take the Levites instead of every first-born: [But of] only this generation, as is elaborated above, <sup>49</sup>

8:19 I assign the Levites: Since they gave themselves over to My service, I have assigned them to Aaron and his sons [to perform] My service. To perform the service for the Israelites in the Tent of Meeting: To perform the same service which had been [hitherto] designated for their first-born. And to make expiation for the Israelites: When they received the tithes from Israelites, enabling them to serve God, may He be exalted, they would make expiation for the Israelites, who, as an aggregate body, caused My rejecting their first-born because [of the sin] of the golden calf. So that no plague may afflict the Israelites: Among the Levites and the rest of the Israelites. For coming too near the sanctuary: For in so doing any outsiders who approach [the sanctuary] would be sinning, (V. 18:1ff., infra), and the

- 8:19 Levites who permit the approach of outsiders would be liable  
(cont.) for them all, as in the instance, "...lest both they and you die." (18:3, *infra*).
- 8:20 Moses, Aaron, and the whole Israelite community did with the Levites accordingly: They acted and aided the Levites [in the matter of [their purification, which involved] being shaved, clothes washed and a sacrifice. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses in regard to the Levites: As He commanded Moses [who would] instruct the Levites that they should act accordingly. So the Israelites did with them: The Israelites eagerly performed [these stipulations] for them in order to fulfill the Divine instruction.
- 8:22 As the Lord had commanded Moses in regard to the Levites: He stipulated above (3:7; 4:24), that their duties consisted of labor, portage and singing<sup>50</sup> at the directive of Aaron and his sons. Thus did Aaron and his sons do to them, arranging them according to their duties.
- 9:1 On the first new moon: After he appointed soldiers and arranged the standards and [assigned] the transporters of the Tabernacle to bring them into the [promised] land. He also purified their camp from unclean ones, as it says, "...let your camp be holy," (Deut 23:15), and from mamzerim,<sup>51</sup> just as in the instance of the suspected adulteress to ensure that the Divine Presence would dwell among them in the camp of the hosts of Israel. Now the text enumerates four meritorious acts performed by Israel

9:1 through which they would have merited entering the [promised]  
 ( cont.) land immediately without [any] military struggle, were it not  
 [for the incident concerning] the spies, as Moses, our Teacher,  
 testified when he said to Hobab, "We are setting out for the  
 place (of which the Lord has said, 'I will give it to you....'"  
 10:29, infra). [Here are Israel's four meritorious acts]:  
 Firstly, [the text] mentions the dedication of the altar (7:10ff.).  
 Secondly, their eagerness with respect to the installation of the  
 Levites (8:5-23). Thirdly, their eagerness to offer the paschal  
 sacrifice (9:4ff.). Fourthly, their following after God, may He  
 be exalted, in the wilderness (cf. Jer 2:2), even though the  
 cloud lifted [from the Tent] without any [prior] announcement  
 [as to whether their subsequent journey] would be long or short,  
 and in this manner, [God deemed] it worthy that [both] the en-  
 campment and the march be extremely difficult for them, and to  
 make known all of this, He told them according to their degree  
 of being favorable before Him; not according to the time in  
 which they were in.. Thus the text enumerated here the matters  
 of the altar's dedication, [the installation of] the Levites and  
 the Passover [sacrifice] which occurred in the first month.  
 [Now] the beginning of the Book [of Numbers] was, [in actuality],  
 in the second month, and the matter of their camping and journey  
 by God's directive from the day of their departure from Egypt.  
 Concerning matters like this the Sages have said, "There is no  
 chronological order [Lit., "earlier and later"] in the Torah."  
 (Pesah. 6b). This [axiom] is [cited by the Rabbis] when the end  
 result is chronologically outside [or: different from] the re-  
 corded sequence.

9:2 Let the Israelite people offer the passover sacrifice: In addition to what they did on the eighth day of the ordination [of Aaron and his sons, V. Exod 29; Lev 9], and the dedication [offering] of the chieftains (7:1-88, supra), they should also offer the passover sacrifice that they not die because of it, [that is], on account of their observance of other religious duties, as was the case in the construction of the First Temple, about which the Sages said that Solomon annulled the Day of Atonement in [his] joy of the dedication of the Temple. 52

9:7 Unclean though we are by reason of a corpse, why must we be debarred: Since our uncleanness was incurred through a mitzvah,<sup>53</sup> why should it [i.e., our offering the passover sacrifice] cause transgression?!<sup>54</sup> At its set times: For observance of this mitzvah may [cause one to] transgress. 55

9:14 There shall be one law for you: [Applicable] here in the wilderness. Whether stranger or citizen of the country: In the Land of Israel.

9:17 Would set out accordingly: After the cloud lifted they would journey in the same direction in which the cloud pointed. And at the spot where the cloud settled, there (the Israelites) would make camp: Recounting the merit of the Israelites who followed Him in the wilderness. (V. Jer 2:2). [Several examples now follow]: Firstly, they would make camp at the spot where the cloud settled, even though the place might be an empty, howling desolation.

- 9:19 The Israelites observed the Lord's mandate: Secondly, it is mentioned that they tarried [in accordance with God's mandate], waiting [in one spot] for a lengthy duration even though it was an extremely undesirable area. And did not journey on: In search of a more suitable place for their camp.
- 9:20 At such times as the cloud rested (over the Tabernacle) for but a few days: Thirdly, it is mentioned that occasionally their camp was in a place pleasant for both them and their herds; there the cloud stayed for yet a few days. They remained encamped on a sign from the Lord: And not because of [any] love for that [particular] place. And broke camp on a sign from the Lord: Even though [they were content] with a particularly good place, they would [break camp and] journey on.
- 9:21 And at such times as the cloud stayed from evening until morning: Fourthly, it is mentioned that the cloud occasionally camped for an insufficient period [preventing the progression of the Israelites] in a manner that it was only for the night, for it [i.e., night] is an unsuitable and insufficient period of time to [attend to] the necessities of both the camping and the journey. Indeed, with this it tells that no journey commenced at night.
- 9:22 Whether it was two days or a month or a year: Fifthly, it is mentioned that in some of these instances [of irregular departure] they did not have [adequate] time to make preparations,

9:22 both personal and for their cattle, while at other times they  
 (cont.) had [sufficiently] prepared, and in an instant they would depart immediately and take down all of their preparations [i.e., break camp].

9:23 On a sign from the Lord they made camp: Even on short notice without their having arranged their affairs. And on a sign from the Lord they broke camp: When the cloud lifted [from the Tent], even after a lengthy [encampment] when they would have already made their arrangements there.

10:2 Have two silver trumpets made: Being [that] His intention now was to journey, to bring them into the land immediately, He commanded concerning the trumpets for a trumpet blast for the King <sup>56</sup> while both the Tabernacle and the sanctuary were en route, and upon their engagement in battle, as the Torah states, "When you are at war in your own land against an aggressor who attacks you, you shall sound short blasts on the trumpets,..." (v 9, infra). They shall serve you to summon the community: Since the summoning of [both] the community and the chieftains occurred at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord, He desired that such a summoning on the trumpets be in honor of the King [i.e., God].

10:5 But when you sound short blasts, the divisions encamped on the east shall move forward: For with them journeyed the porters of the Tabernacle. <sup>57</sup>

10:6 And when you sound short blasts a second time, those encamped on the south shall move forward: For with them journeyed the porters of the sanctuary. Thus short blasts shall be blown for setting them in motion: That in their journey they had [established both] a sustained blast and a trilling blast [as signals]. This [was purposeful], for the trilling blast was associated with the travel of the sanctuary, and the sustained blast accompanying it was for their journeys that [all of them] were to assemble, as was the case in summoning the community,<sup>58</sup> whereas the chieftains [were summoned] with [only] a sustained blast without a trilling blast [accompanying it].

10:11 In the second year, on the twentieth day of the second month: After those who were defiled had offered their passover sacrifices on the 14th day of the second month [i.e., Iyar], the trumpets were made and through them [both] the community and the chieftains were designated for Moses. He, then, informed them of the order of their journey by means of the trumpets, and the order of the trumpets with respect to the sanctuary and battle. And so the cloud arose, [directing them] to go to Kadesh-Barnea, for it would be the first city in the Land of Israel that they would reach along that way, which was by way of the great and terrible wilderness, as the text indicates, "We set out from Horeb and traveled the great and terrible wilderness....When we reached Kadesh-Barnea,..." (Deut 1:19).

- 10:30 (I will not go,...) but will return to my native land: So that I, in my old age, do not suffer either from the atmosphere or the food of a different country.
- 10:31 Please do not leave us: At the very least, let your sons go with us. Inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness: For if your sons, too, abandon us, you will, [by such action], profane the Lord in the sight of the nations who would [surely] say, "Had Jethro seen in them [any] godly aspect [at all], certainly neither he nor his sons would have abandoned them." With this [reasoning] Moses, Jethro and his sons came to an agreement, for indeed, Jethro returned to his native land as the Torah states, "Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way to his own land." (Exod 18:27). Now his sons undoubtedly accompanied the Israelites, as is borne out by the testimony in the Book of Judges where it states, "The descendants of the Kenite, the father-in-law of Moses, went up with the Judites from the City of Palms (to the wilderness of Judah;..." Judg 1:16).
- 10:33 A distance of three days: Until the Land of Israel, for indeed, in three journeys they came to the vicinity of Kadesh-Barnea in the wilderness of Paran. [It was] from there that the spies were dispatched, as explained by Moses, our Teacher, when he said, "Then all of you come to me and said, 'Let us send men (ahead...'" Deut 1:22). It is the place of their encampment in the wilderness of Paran that is mentioned here, as it states, "After that the people set out from Hazeroth (and encamped in the wilderness

10:33 of Paran." 12:16, infra), for the spies came there when they  
 (cont.) returned as it states, "... they returned (from scouting the  
 land). They went (straight to Moses and Aaron and the whole  
 Israelite community) at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran,..."  
 (13:25-26, infra). It is the place they called Rithmah as it  
 states, "They set out from Hazeroth and encamped at Rithmah."  
 (33:18, infra), and there [the text] mentioned three journeys  
 from the Sinai wilderness to there, and they [i.e., the places  
 of their journeys] are Kibroth-hatta'awah [i.e., "the graves  
 of lusting," 11:34, infra], Hazeroth (11:35, infra), and  
 Rithmah (33:18, infra), as the incident of Taberah (11:3, infra)  
 occurred along the way [of their traveling], and not during  
 their encampment. The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord traveled  
in front of them on that three days journey: In those very  
 three days during which they went on those three journeys [enu-  
 merated supra] by way of the great and terrible wilderness, the  
 Ark traveled in front of them as assurance that their route  
 [was safe] from serpents, scorpions and similar creatures. How-  
 ever, in the rest of their journeys the Ark traveled in the  
 center of the marching divisions as [comprised] the rest of the  
 portage of the Kohathites (V. 3:31, 7:9, supra), while  
 scouting for them a safe, tranquil [place for] encampment in the  
 terrible wilderness.

10:34 And the Lord's cloud kept above them by day: [It] did not go  
 in front of them, as was the case during the rest of [their]  
 journeys, because the Ark then [i.e., in this instance] guided

- 10:34 them sufficiently while it traveled in front of them. But the  
(cont.) Lord's cloud hovered over them by day at the time that they moved on.
- 10:35 When the Ark was to set out: To procede and enter the Land of Israel. Advance, O Lord! May Your enemies be scattered: For indeed, had they not dispatched the spies, they would have entered [the Land of Israel immediately] without [having had to resort to] war, for the [other] nations would have fled [before them, as it is written], "... their fortress cities shall be) like the deserted sites which the Horesh and Amir abandoned because of the Israelites;..." (Isa 17:9). <sup>59</sup> And may Your foes flee before you!: Lest the Israelites come and wipe them out.
- 10:36 Return: May your tranquillity be here with us as in the way of, "This is my resting-place for all time; (here I will dwell,..." Ps 132:14). And even though you manifest your Divine Presence before the Israelites, [thereby] driving away their foes, may the tranquillity of your Divine Presence abide among us. O Lord, you who are Israel's myriads of thousands!: [He paraphrases] as [if to say]: "O Lord of the hosts of Israel's thousands," as the Sages have said, "He is called Zebaoth [i.e., hosts] on account of the hosts of Israel (as it is said, 'And I will bring forth My hosts, My people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt.' Exod 7:4)." <sup>60</sup> And when it says, "myriads of thousands" [it is rendered in the same sense] as in the occurrence, "...myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands;"

10:36 (Ps 68:18). Now perhaps the Israelites arrived at this [high]  
(cont.) number through the inclusion of men, women and children in  
[their] counting.

11:1 Complaining: In reality they were not complaining to themselves  
about the difficulty of the way [of their march], for they had  
no valid reason to complain, but voiced their complaints as a  
challenge.

11:2 And the fire died down: [Suddenly, which is] contrary to the  
nature of fire. [This was its purpose]: That they would re-  
cognize that it was a wondrous event and not a natural phenom-  
enon; that it was an unnatural fire lacking a natural cause.

11:4 (And the Israelites,) moreover, wept: They continued to com-  
plain [and] to challenge, and now they were crying about their  
leaving Egypt [in such a manner] as to reject the merit of  
having the Divine Presence [dwell] among them, as is borne out  
[by the text] when it says, "For you have rejected the Lord who  
is among you, by whining before Him and saying, 'Oh, why did we  
ever leave Egypt!'" (v 20, infra).<sup>61</sup> If only we had meat to  
eat!: Challenging [Moses] as to whether or not he would provide  
food for his people as testified by the Psalmist who said, "To  
test God was in their mind when they demanded food for them-  
selves." (Ps 78:18).

11:11 Why have You dealt ill with Your servant: To send me against my  
will to free this people from Egypt.<sup>62</sup> And why have I not

11:11 enjoyed Your favor: When I requested, "Please, (O Lord), make  
(cont.) someone else Your agent." (Exod 4:13). That You have laid the  
burden of all this people upon me: And this You did in order to  
lay the burden of all of them upon me as if You had no [other]  
leader [for them] besides me, at least for him to share with me  
[the responsibility] so that it would be better for them.

11:12 Did I conceive (all this people): Indeed, a father is able to  
guide his children even though they have diversified views. This  
is because all of them consider him as one who loves [them], who  
will act for their benefit with all his efforts. But these  
[people] have no confidence in me at all; further, they are  
suspicious [of me] and [constantly] challenge [me] to see what  
I shall do on their behalf.

11:13 Where am I to get meat: Indeed, they unquestionably know that  
I have no meat to give them. So, when they whine before me  
saying, "Give us meat!," as if it were within my power [to pro-  
vide them], and that by means of their whining I would satisfy  
their desire, [obviously] this is nothing but a challenge [to de-  
termine] whether or not I am acting in accordance with Your in-  
struction, and [to see] what I shall get from You in their  
behalf.

11:14 I cannot (carry all this people) by myself: It is necessary  
that you [appoint] others [to share the responsibility] with me  
in whom the people voice confidence.

- 11:15 If You would deal thus with me: If You, who are complete, are lacking perfection in the leadership becoming of You, and You lead them thusly in a manner which is deficient, as, [for example], the leadership of a woman <sup>63</sup> for my sake and honor, and do not [appoint] others to share [the responsibility] with me so that my honor not be blemished, [continues in the next verse], Kill me rather, I beg You: In order that You may appoint other men by whom the leadership of the people will be complete, as the Sages, of blessed memory, have said concerning Samuel, who died before his time in order that the kingdom of David be established. <sup>64</sup> And let me see no more of my wretchedness: The wretchedness [involving] the lack of leadership which encompasses [us] because of me, for this is [far] more difficult for me [to endure] than death. <sup>65</sup>
- 11:17 They shall share (the burden of the people) with you: Once they will be authorized as prophets the people will have confidence in your leadership; when they see the elders [acting] with you and agreeing with your actions.
- 11:20 And becomes loathsome to you: In that you will eat of it until it produces an excess in you that sickens [you], as borne out [by the text] which reads, "(He) struck down the youth of Israel." (Ps 78:31). Oh, why did we ever leave Egypt! For [there] we had many kinds of food, not just manna. <sup>66</sup>
- 11:21 Six hundred thousand men: An abundance of meat will be necessary to satisfy them. Yet You say, 'I will give them enough meat to eat for a whole month': If this be true, [then] the

11:21 [amount of] meat that You will give them must be tremendous,  
(cont.) as it is written, "He rained meat on them like dust, and winged birds like the sands of the sea," (Ps 78:27).

11:22 Could enough flocks and herds be slaughtered to suffice them?:  
How will [all of] this suffice to eliminate their complaining, since they are asking for meat only to challenge, as it says, "To test God was in their mind," (Ps 78:18).<sup>67</sup> Thus there is no doubt that just as they challenged in this instance [i.e., demanding meat, surely] they will [also] challenge incessantly about other foods, and You will not remove their preference. Our Sages, of blessed memory, have said, "Everything is in the hand of heaven except for the fear of heaven." (Ber. 33b; Meg. 25a; Nid. 16b).

11:23 Is there a limit to the Lord's power?: From finding the way [to satisfy them], in that they will despise all the food of [their] lust, as it says, "...until it comes out of your nostrils (and becomes loathsome to you." verse 20, supra). You shall soon see whether what I have said happens to you: You shall see that [indeed], they shall chance to continue eating the meat, which was their preference, [even] after the enjoyment, until it comes out of their nostrils and they despise it without My removing their choice at all, for indeed, they may repent [for their lust] out of love and reverence [for Me] if they are willing, [as in the instance of Job] who said, "I know that You can do all things and that no purpose is beyond You." (Job 42:2).

- 11:28 My lord Moses, restrain them!: He felt that [since] they had not gone out to the Tent, [it was therefore improper] to show that they were prophesying without [having been] commissioned from Moses, our Teacher. <sup>68</sup>
- 11:29 That the Lord put His spirit upon them: Without my having to impart [it].
- 11:31 From the sea: From the Sea of Reeds which was south of them, and this is [based on the reasoning] that the quail came across the southern extremity of the sea.
- 11:32 Even he who gathered least had ten homers: For all of them were craving to eat a great quantity.
- 11:33 The meat was still between their teeth: They had not as yet arrived to [their] limit [of tolerance after which] they would despise it. Not yet chewed: The amount of time allotted them [for eating the quail], a whole month (verse 20, supra), had not as yet expired. And the Lord struck the people: Those among them who were craving, who requested the meat as a challenge, and they were stricken [with a very severe plague] because of their challenge. For He did not say that they would eat [the quail] for a whole month, but rather [only] those who [merely] whined without lusting, who said, "Oh, why did we ever leave Egypt'" (verse 20, supra); they would cry in their suffering [from surfeit] as it says, "(You shall eat [the quail]...until it...) becomes loathsome to you." (verses 19, 20, supra). <sup>69</sup>

11:35 When they were in Hazeroth: They tarried there for some time, as in the instances, "... and they were there about ten years." (Ruth 1:4), <sup>70</sup> [and] "...Where they still are, as the Lord had commanded me." (Deut 10:5). [This reference to a delay] is mentioned [here], for at the same time that they were delayed there [the incident] of Miriam's castigation of Moses transpired, and since the Tent of Meeting was set up at that time, God, may He be exalted, summoned them to come out of their tents [and appear] at the Tent of Meeting.

12:2 Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?: Is it really so that only Moses merits that the Lord would speak solely to him alone, apart from that which he merited along with the rest of the Israelites when the Torah was given?! The Lord heard it: As the Sages, of blessed memory, have said, "A Rabbinical student is different, because the Holy One, blessed be He, avenges his insult." (Ber. 19a). <sup>71</sup>

12:4 Come out, you three: [He] desired that Moses well know that it is God, may He be exalted, who insists that his [i.e. Moses'] honor [be upheld].

12:6 When a prophet (of the Lord) arises among you: Whether or not Moses were a prophet of that degree that you assume [he] is when you say, "Has He not spoken through us as well?" (12:2, supra). I (the Lord) make Myself known to him in a vision: I do not make myself known to him or reveal Myself by this designation, but by a vision [the word נִרְאָה ] being feminine in gender, [a word

12:6 which suggests] "not while awake," as was the case involving  
 (cont.) Isaiah when he said, "...I beheld my Lord seated on a high and  
 lofty throne;" (Isa 6:1). Similarly, concerning Micaiah [the  
 text reads], "I saw the Lord seated upon His throne..." (1 Kgs  
 22:19). Now all this prophecy [which transpired] in a vision  
 unquestionably [did] not [occur] while one was awake. Now con-  
 cerning Balaam--even though the word of God was [transmitted] to  
 him while [he was] awake, it was not [communicated] to him by  
 means of the Divine Name as he had anticipated when he said,  
 "Perhaps the Lord will grant me a manifestation," (23:3, infra),  
 for indeed, he did not experience this [kind of revelation]. In-  
 stead, it is said concerning him, "God manifested Himself to  
 Balaam." (23:4, infra).

12:7 Not so with My servant Moses: In that the Divine Word [was im-  
 parted] to him by means of the Tetragrammaton [while] he was  
 awake, and this He explains in His [following] statement.

12:8 With him I speak mouth to mouth: Prophecy with Moses does not  
 necessitate his senses falling asleep. Plainly: [The word  
 מִרְיָאָה ] is of masculine gender; [such a term] was called a  
 mirror <sup>72</sup> by the Rabbis [which allowed one] to see clearly. (V.  
 Sanh. 97b). And not in riddles: The Divine Word was clarified  
 [for him] without riddles. [Such] was not the case with  
 Zechariah and those like him who beheld riddles and parables.  
 [For example], an angel [of God] said to him [i.e., to  
 Zechariah], "'Do you not know what those things mean?' (asked  
 the angel who talked with me); and I said, 'No, my Lord.'"

12:8 (Zech 4:5). Then the angel explained the parable to him. And  
 (cont.) there were some who saw the parables who understood them, as in  
 the instance, "...You have seen right," (Jer 1:12), and in the  
 instance of Balaam, as it says, "He took up his theme," (23:7  
 et al.), for at the outset he related the parable that he saw,  
 and afterwards explained it. And he beholds the likeness of  
the Lord: And all of this [prophetic] revelation that he ex-  
 periences comes to him with the Tetragrammaton, which was not  
 the case with Balaam--[in his experience] he apprehended it  
 only by means of a parable; his perception [was accompanied]  
 with the name of "Elohim" only; not with the Tetragrammaton. <sup>73</sup>  
How then did you not shrink (from speaking against My servant  
Moses!): It is inescapable that this [i.e., the words of  
 Miriam and Aaron] is anything other than evil-heartedness, as  
 if you thought that I take note of [only] his actions. If so,  
 you have reasoned mistakenly about Me, that I have affection  
 for the wicked, [which] is [the] opposite of what you should  
 have thought; that I would not entitle him to this merit unless  
 he deserved it. Therefore, you should have "shrunk" [i.e.,  
 stood in awe of him and refrained] from speaking against a  
 man like this, and if you perhaps thought that I do not take  
 note of his deeds, and that you know him better than I do in  
 that I thought that he was deserving of such [familiarity of Me],  
 this is not correct [i.e., that God preferred it]. Then you  
 imagine even more an erring God, which, as the Sages have said,  
 is even worse than the earlier [sin]. <sup>74</sup>

- 12:9 Still incensed with them, the Lord (departed): In that they did not humble themselves immediately as David had done [upon realizing his error] when he said to Nathan, "I stand guilty (before the Lord." 2 Sam 12:13).
- 12:10 As the cloud withdrew: Similar is the removal of one who is leprous, so that they would send her outside of the camp to her shame.
- 12:12 Let her not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away: [Consider] here the [instance of a] fetus which died in this manner, that upon emerging from its mother's womb half of its flesh was eaten away and rotten. Even though it appeared that wholeness had been added [to it] in birth over what it [i.e., the fetus] had in its mother's womb, when it emerged from there to complete life, in that sense, rather, it had added deficiency since half of its flesh had been eaten away during that birth. Thus it is with you who leave the wilderness and enter the chosen land. By doing so you will improve "your dwelling place," (Exod 15:17). Do not, pray experience that same death, leaving half of your flesh behind in the wilderness. <sup>75</sup>
- 12:13 O God, pray heal her!: Please, I beseech [You] that You heal her now, that she need not experience shame by being sent out of the camp. <sup>76</sup>
- 12:14 Would she not bear her shame...?: She deserves this embarrassment.

12:15 And the people did not march on: Even though the cloud had departed from over the Tent, and [although] it is written, "Whenever the cloud lifted from the Tent, the Israelites would set out,..." (9:17, supra) in all their journeys, nevertheless, [in this instance] they did not march on as they knew that [the cloud] was not lifted except to remove the one who was leprous.

12:16 (After that the people set out from Hazeroth) <sup>77</sup> and encamped in the wilderness of Paran: <sup>78</sup> In a place in the wilderness that had no specific name, but which was facing Kadesh-Barnea and in close proximity to it, in order to arrange their matters and enter it [i.e., the promised land] there, as it constituted the first city in the Land of Israel that they would come upon along that way as is testified [in Scripture] when it says, "When we reached Kadesh-Barnea, I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorites which the Lord our God is giving to us.... Go up, take possession, ...etc.'" (Deut 1:19-21). The same place has been called Rithmah, as explained in the section אלה מסעי (33:18, infra).

## CHAPTER FOUR

## פרשת שלח

13:12 The Lord spoke to Moses, "Send men...": Do not assume that they sent them [in the right manner, even without God's dictum] for they had [already] decided to do this when they said, "Let us send men ahead (to reconnoiter the land for us and bring back word..." Deut 1:22), lest lay people, ignorant of the land's excellence, be sent [who return] and denigrate [the land] in such a manner that the Israelites would think [that] the Lord had erred, and [thereby] not repent [for doubting the Lord], as they did afterwards, saying, "We stand guilty before the Lord." (Deut 1:41). And this is because the spies sent by Moses, even though they wickedly gave a false report <sup>79</sup> [about the land] to sway the people from belief in [the promise of] Almighty God, nevertheless, recognized the land's goodness and reported it, saying, "It does indeed flow with milk and honey," (verse 27, *infra*). A similar testimony [i.e., a favorable report] is [contained] in the statement, "They took some of the fruit of the land with them....And they gave us this report, 'It is a good land...'" (Deut 1:25). However, they [also] had said that it was impossible [for them] to conquer it. Now, when the Israelites recognized their error, in that they had not believed in [either] God's saving power, may He be exalted, or His conquest [even] after He had wrought wonders for them, they repented and said, "We stand guilty before the Lord. We will go up now and fight..." (Deut 1:41). They [also] prayed [because of the consequences of their sin], as it says, "Again you wept before the

- 13:1-2 Lord;..." (Deut 1:45), but God, may He be exalted, did not (cont.) accept their prayer because they had profaned His name, [an offense] for which there is no expiation other than death. In like fashion [Scripture] testifies concerning them as it says, "But when I make an accounting, I will bring them to account (for their sins." Exod 32:34).
- 13:2 Each one a chieftain among them: The one who was [deemed] the most praiseworthy throughout his entire tribe to appreciate [the importance surrounding] the task of [scouting] the land.
- 13:3 All the men: Brave men, as in the instances, "'You are a man, aren't you?'" (1 Sam 26:15), and "...be strong and show yourself a man." (1 Kings 2:2).
- 13:4 And these were their names: All of them were considered important men by name with respect to their merit, and they are recounted by age because at that time they were [all] equal in individual rank with respect to mission. [Therefore, they are enumerated] neither in sequence by tribe, nor in sequence by [their] standard.
- 13:16 But Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua: He said that he [i.e., Hoshea] was known in his tribe as a brave man named Hoshea, and [for] this he is later named Joshua because Moses, our Teacher, called him that [both] to honor [him] and to pray for him--that [not only] he be saved, but [also] that he save others.

- 13:17 Go up there into the Negeb: <sup>81</sup> From this side on which we are stationed, and see if you find it as being a good [place] to enter [the land], and [thus] not necessitate [further] encircling to another place.
- 13:18 And see what kind of country it is: Whether it is an inhabited land with many cities and open habitations. Are the people who dwell in it (strong or weak, few or many?): To determine whether settling in the land is good [i.e., beneficial; a policy] which is advocated by the most intelligent doctors [as being vitally necessary] in the consideration of a dwelling place. [They recommend] that we look at the inhabitants of the land [to see] if they are strong and of wholesome body, or [if they are] the opposite of this. Further, we see if they are abundant or sparse for indeed, a large, strong population indicates [that both] the climate and the food [grown in] the land are of good quality, while the opposite [i.e., a sparse, weak people] indicates the opposite [assumption, accordingly]. <sup>82</sup>
- 13:19 Is (the country in which they dwell) good?: With ample good [quality] water, as it says, "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams (and springs and fountains..." Deut 8:7). Are (the towns they live in) open?: Whether or not they dwell safely in open settlements without any fear of war. Or fortified: Whether or not they dwell in fortified cities prompted by fear of war, as in the instance, "Deliverance ceased, Ceased in Israel," (Judg 5:7). <sup>83</sup>

13:20 Is (the soil) rich?: With wealth and riches as it states, "A land where you may eat food without stint," (Deut 8:9). Is it wooded?: [Thereby providing] vines, figs, pomegranates, olive trees and honey [i.e., date-honey; see Deut 8:8] by which [the land] is praised. And take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land: Take the fruit, and do not worry that you will be viewed as being spies. Now it happened to be the season of the first ripe grapes: [Even though] the fruit by which [the land] is praised was not wholly ripe, nevertheless, Moses, our Teacher, was confident that [both] the size and taste of the fruit [even] at this season would suffice to testify to the land's excellence and fertility.

13:24 Because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down there: The Canaanites were surprised that the cluster which [the Israelites] cut constituted something new and wondrous to the Israelite perspective, for there were many [other] clusters as large or even larger throughout the land. So it did not constitute [anything] at all wondrous from the Canaanite perspective. [After all], they were the inhabitants of the land. And because of the [Cannanite] astonishment, they named that place "the wadi Eshkol."

13:26 At Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran: [It] being that part of the wilderness opposite Kadesh-Barnea.

13:27 It does indeed flow with milk and honey: Not only is it good, but it also flows with milk and honey producing many flocks without difficulty, which provide much fat, honey and delicacies. <sup>84</sup>

- 13:28 However, the people (who inhabit the country) are powerful: But it is impossible for us to conquer it [i.e., the country] because the people are strong, and the cities are fortified. Further, the land-dwellers are our enemies, the Amalekites, who will [surely] fight us to ensure that we do not approach their border.
- 13:30 Caleb hushed the people: He silenced the people who were then <sup>85</sup> beginning to cry as they did afterwards, <sup>86</sup> as it says, "The whole community broke into loud cries,..." (14:1, infra).  
Before Moses: [Caleb hushed the people] so that they might hear the response of Moses [to the spies' report], and perhaps it was at that time that Moses replied that which is recorded later on, when he stated, "I said to you, 'Have no dread or fear of them.'" (Deut 1:29), but Caleb's words were stronger when he spoke. Let us by all means go up: We are worthy [enough] to go up [and conquer them] for they will not stand up against us to prevent our coming up. And we shall gain possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it: For after we go up there, they will flee before us, for already, "...All the dwellers in Canaan are aghast." (Exod 15:15).
- 13:31 We cannot attack (that people): In that they will stand up against us and not allow us to go up [to that land], as occurred after the sin, as it says, "And the Amalekites and the Canaanites ...came down (and dealt them a shattering blow..." 14:45, infra).
- 13:32 (The country) is one that devours its settlers: Even though the people who dwell there are mighty, this cannot be attributed to

13:32 the richness of the land, but that none other than the mighty  
(cont.) could survive for they are of a strong constitution, while the  
others died because of the poor climate [there].

13:33 The Anakites are: From the father's side. Part of the Nephilim:  
From the mother's side. And so we must have looked to them: Like  
grasshoppers, or even less [significant] than that. Because of  
this, they did not rise up against us for they did not consider  
us important, and it seemed despicable to them to harm us.

14:2 (All the Israelites) railed against Moses and Aaron: In that  
they were God's agents to bring them out of Egypt and save them  
from every threat of death in the wilderness, they [i.e., the  
Israelites] claimed that all of these [actions of rescue] was pre-  
paratory to being handed over to the Amorites.

14:3 Why is the Lord taking us?: Wherein have we sinned that He has  
striven to bring us here under your leadership? For they [now]  
assumed that this entire [expedition] was His deceptive scheme  
prompted [either] by His hatred for them because of their idola-  
trous practices in Egypt, or for some other reason, as the text  
indicates, "You said, 'It is because the Lord hates us that He  
brought us out of the land of Egypt, to hand us over to the  
Amorites to wipe us out.'" (Deut 1:27).

14:5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces: When they realized  
[the graveness of the situation, they knew it was as] "A twisted  
thing that cannot be made straight," (Eccl 1:15), as in the in-

stance in Sanhedrin wherein they hid their faces in shame, for they did not know how to respond to the King's threat. (Sanh. 19b).

14:7 The land that we traversed and scouted: To scout the place and its inhabitants, as it says, "And see what kind of country it is. Are the people who dwell in it (strong or weak, few or many?" 13:18, supra). A good land: Here with respect to the land's quality we affirm that it is an exceedingly good place without blemish, [and] not as our colleagues have testified when they said that along with [the land] being [one that], "flows with milk and honey, is one that devours its settlers," (13:27, 32, supra). And with respect to, "what kind of people dwell in it," (13:18, supra), we affirm that, "they are our bread," (verse 9, infra); they will not defiantly oppose us, [which] contradicts the testimony [provided by] our colleagues when they said, "The people (who inhabit the country) are powerful." (13:28, supra).

14:8 If the Lord is pleased with us: Indeed, for it is an exceedingly good [land given to us to enjoy] on the condition that the Lord is pleased with us, as He said, "It is a land which the Lord your God looks after,...If, then, you obey...(Every spot on which your foot treads shall be yours;" Deut 11:12, 13, 24). He will bring us into that land: [which again] contradicts our colleagues' testimony when they said, "We cannot attack that people," (13:31, supra), for indeed, the inhabitants of the land will not rise up against us at all, as it says, "(All the dwellers in Canaan)...are as still as stone--Till Your people cross over, O Lord," (Exod 15:15, 16). Further, they will neither make a wall [to impede us] nor [engage in] any preparation to prevent [our]

14:8 people from coming up on them. And give it to us: For we have  
 (cont.) [already] seen that no one becomes inspired to oppose us [when  
 God is with us]; [indeed], their tendency is to flee. A land  
 that flows with milk and honey: It does [this] by itself, without  
 tilling the soil as [occurs] in forests, as in the instance,  
 "Everybody came to a stack of beehives where some honey had  
 spilled on the ground." (1 Sam 14:25); <sup>87</sup> this would not be pos-  
 sible in either a land or climate of poor quality.

14:9 Only you must not rebel against the Lord: Indeed, if you wish  
 to have a land of this excellent quality [for your own], you  
 must not rebel against the Lord, as it says, "If, then, you  
 obey (the commandments that I enjoin upon you),...I will grant  
 the rain for your land....You shall gather in (your new  
 grain..." Deut 11:13, 14). Have no fear then: Note well the  
 [double] negation: If you do not rebel against God, He will  
 bring us [into the land], and you need not fear "(the people of  
 the country)," For they are our bread: For we have seen that  
 they have no intention whatsoever to stand up against us any  
 more than a [piece of] bread would to the one who would con-  
 sume it. Similarly Rahab testified when she said, "...and no man  
 had any more spirit left because of you;" (Josh 2:11). Their pro-  
 tection has departed from them: We have seen that they concurred  
 to abandon all their means of defense [i.e., shields and breast-  
 plates] to hasten their flight from us, as in the instance,  
 ("They...found) the (entire) road full of clothing and gear which  
 the Arameans had thrown away in their haste;" (2 Kgs 7:15).

- 14:11 How long will (this people) spurn Me?: To what degree must I tolerate their [continual] rejection of Me? And how long will they have no faith in Me? [And] how much longer must I work wonders before they will trust Me and rely on My word?!
- 14:12 I will strike them with pestilence: As in the instance, "Indeed, the hand of the Lord struck them, to root them out from the camp to the last man." (Deut 2:15). And disown them: I shall arrange for them to leave their belongings [i.e., their assets] to others and thus they will inherit them as in the instance, "...the dead were heirs to the living." (B. Bat. 117a), which occurred when the land was apportioned.<sup>88</sup> With this He fulfilled that which He vowed to those who left Egypt when He said, "And I will give it to you for a possession." (Exod 6:8).
- 14:13 When the Egyptians hear the news: Moses had assumed when God, may He be exalted, said, "I will strike them with pestilence," (verse 12, supra), that He intended to strike them all immediately. [Therefore], he responded by inquiring [of God] as to what would happen to His great name [were He to effect this]. He [i.e., Moses] said [to God]: Indeed, the Egyptians will hear immediately that You killed [all] these [people] in an instant. Then they will [surely] say that You did this, "because You were powerless," (verse 16, infra) over the inhabitants of this land. And this [claim will have basis] for indeed, "(When the Egyptians), from whose midst You brought up this people in Your might," learn [of this "(They will tell it to the inhabitants of the land," verse 14, infra)]. With this [it follows that], "Now

14:13 they have heard that You, O Lord, are in the midst of this people,"  
 (cont.) (verse 14, infra), and thus they [i.e., the other nations] will  
 not think that the [Israelite] disaster would be the result of  
 your abandoning them because of their iniquity. <sup>89</sup>

14:14 That (You) appear in plain sights: [Evidence of] Your Providence  
 over them has already appeared in plain sight. When Your cloud,  
(O Lord), rests over them: Normally, as it states, "For over the  
 Tabernacle a cloud of the Lord rested by day, and fire would appear  
 in it by night, etc." (Exod 40:38).

14:17 (Therefore), I pray, let my Lord's forbearance be great: Subdue  
 Your attribute of Justice [and invoke Your attribute of Mercy]. <sup>90</sup>

14:18 But visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children: Extending  
 unto the fourth generation, for were they to seize upon an act  
 of their forefathers, and continued to act wickedly, their  
 measure would be filled in the third generation, and hope for  
 their repentance would be lost and He would exact payment from  
 them. But were they to seize upon an act of their forefathers  
 and ceased to do evil, He would wait until the fourth generation  
 [even if they began to do evil again], and then their measure  
 would be filled with no hope for repentance, and they would  
 perish.

14:20 I pardon, as you have asked: When I said, "I will strike them  
 with pestilence,..." (verse 12, supra), I had already pardoned  
 [them] in the manner that you have [just now] asked, for it was not

- 14:20 My intention to kill them all together, but rather [to effect  
(cont.) this same result] by wiping them out gradually in the wilderness,  
so that none of them would enter the land.
- 14:21 Nevertheless, as I live and as the Lord's Presence fills the  
whole world: Indeed, I hereby swear that just as it is true  
that I live, and that My Presence fills the whole world, so it is  
true that "none of the[se] men..." (verse 22, infra), namely,  
from the age of twenty years up [are those included in the lists  
on which are recorded all the names from the age of twenty years  
up. V. 1:3, supra].
- 14:23 (None) shall see the land: [The Hebrew אִם implies] that they  
shall not see the land. Such is the meaning of every [occurrence  
of the word] אִם after which there is no double stipulation,  
as in, "I will not take so much as a thread [ אִם מִחוּט ]  
or a sandal strap of what is yours;..." (Gen 14:23), [and]  
"(...and Saul swore), 'As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to  
death!'" [ אִם יָחַד, 1 Sam 19:6]. None of those  
who spurn Me shall see it: Even from among their children who were  
not included in this decree [of extinction, verse 29, infra], who  
have not attained twenty years of age--any of them who spurn Me  
will not be destined to see it [the land], as in the deaths which oc-  
curred in the matters of Korah (chapter 16, infra); Peor (25:1-9,  
infra); and the seraph serpents (21:4-9, infra). <sup>91</sup>
- 14:24 And his offspring shall hold it as a possession: He will possess  
it for his offspring, which [will] not be the case for the rest of  
the wilderness generation, for even though their children will take

14:24 possession [of it], they will not leave [it] as a legacy, but  
 (cont.) [only] take possession [of it] by the arrangement of God, may  
 He be exalted, in accordance with His commandment concerning  
 those who will bequeath the land, as He testified, saying, "I  
 will disown them," (14:12, supra). <sup>92</sup>

14:27 How much longer shall that wicked community (keep muttering  
 against Me?): Even though, "I pardoned [them], as you have  
 asked," (verse 20, supra), allowing them to live longer and not  
 killing all of them together at once, nevertheless, I have not  
 pardoned the community of spies. Keep muttering against Me:  
 Since they are the ones who are causing others to sin, the guilt of  
 the multitudes rests upon them, and I shall not allow them to  
 live at all, and not only that, but, "Very well, I have heeded  
 the incessant mutterings of the Israelites [and] the spies  
 against Me." Therefore, I shall punish them.

14:28 Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord: [Here God affirms]  
 two negative interpretations in lieu of a positive one, meaning:  
 Indeed, "Just as you have urged Me," when you said, "...or if only  
 we might die in this wilderness!" (verse 2, supra). And when  
 you said, "Our wives and children will be carried off!" (verse 3,  
 supra). And also with respect to the spies when they said, "The  
 country is one that devours its settlers." (13:32, supra). ["'As  
 I live,' says the Lord,"], all of these [negative statements] will  
 be fulfilled through you. I will do to you: When times change,  
 and with this He swore that which the Psalmist affirmed when he  
 said, "So He raised his hand in oath to make them fall in the

14:28 wilderness, to disperse their offspring among the nations..."  
(cont.)

(Ps 106:26, 27), Similarly, Ezekiel said, "However, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations..." (Ezek 20:23).

14:34 The number of days: They are increased at your command to see if it is possible [for you] to conquer it. A year for each day: The ninth of the month of Av in every year, as explained in the last perek of tractate Ta'anit. (Ta'an. 29a). To thwart Me: You will [soon] know how bad [the outcome will be from your] disrespect of My directive, when you [intentionally] deviated from it, as it says, "...and you will fall by the sword, inas- much as you have turned from following the Lord..." (14:43, infra).

14:33 Suffering for your faithlessness: In that you rebelled against Me when you said, "Let us head back (for Egypt." verse 4, supra). 93

14:36 As for the men whom Moses sent: Those whom he [originally] trusted had [now] become his enemies. Those who came back and caused the whole community to mutter against him: For they were the Sanhedrins and chiefs of the people, when they said, "(We cannot attack that people), for it is stronger than we." (13:31, supra). They achieved this [discontent among the people] "by spreading calumnies about the land," so that while the elders were occupied in their complaining, they [the spies] spread calumnies among the masses about the land. They would have been unable to accomplish this in the presence of [those] elders who were well familiar with their lying tendencies.

- 14:37 Those who spread such calumnies about the land died of plague:  
By that same plague which they said would occur in, "The country that devours its inhabitants." (13:32, supra). For indeed, they were stricken by the [severe desert] climate which was loathsome to them, and they died quickly. <sup>94</sup>
- 14:41 Why do you transgress the Lord's command? This will not succeed:  
For in this manner you are [continuing] to sin, not [even] to [satisfy] your own appetite or pleasure, but to provoke [God to an even greater degree].
- 14:44 Yet defiantly: Their hearts stiffened, as in the instances, "Yet Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them." (Exod 7:13, 22; 8:15).
- 14:45 And the Amalekites...came down: Who would not allow them to march up [to the land].
- 15:3-4 Producing an odor pleasing (to the Lord, cf. Lev 1:9): The person who presents the offering: Indeed, until [the incident of] the golden calf the offering [consisted of merely] a pleasing odor [to the Lord] <sup>95</sup> without [either] meal offerings [or] libations, as in the instances of Abel (Gen 4:4-5; Noah (Gen 8:20-21); and Abraham (Gen 15:9-10), and in the instances [of the ratification of the Covenant with a sacrifice], "He designated some young men among the Israelites, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as offerings of well-being to the Lord." (Exod 24:5). When they sinned with the golden calf it was necessary to include with this a meal offering with

15:3-4 [its proper] libations [in addition] to the regular burnt offering,  
(cont.)

since it was the congregational sacrifice. And from the time that the spies sinned it was necessary [to present] a meal offering with [its proper] libations to allow even the sacrifice offered by individuals.

15:20 You shall set aside a loaf as a gift: After the sin of the spies it was necessary [to present] in addition [to the meal offering with its proper libation] a loaf which would effect them as being worthy so that a blessing would descend upon their homes, as it says, "...You shall further give the first of the yield of your baking to the priest, that a blessing may rest upon your home." (Ezek 44:30). Similarly, in the instance of Elijah [it is stated], "...and bring it out to me from what you have there, a small cake;... For thus said the Lord,...The jar of flour shall not give out..." (1 Kgs 17:13-14). 96

15:22 If you unwittingly fail: The Rabbinic Tradition has already explained that the text refers to idolatry committed unwittingly. [That] this is [so can be substantiated from the fact that] after He decreed to them that He would cast down their children to the [other] nations, He did not prevent their straying to idolatrous practices in their return to their land. Fail to observe any one of the commandments which the Lord has declared to Moses: Since they unwittingly failed in committing idolatry. Indeed, even though you perform all the actions surrounding the commandments, [if you engage in idolatry], you are not [actually] performing [any] of the commandments that God imparted to Moses, for He, may He be

15:22 exalted, preceded all of them [with] the knowledge of His  
 (cont.) Godhead, as He said, "I the Lord am your God..." (Exod 20:2).  
 Similarly, the Sages have said, "He who admits to idolatry is as  
 though he denied the entire Torah." 97

15:30 Reviles the Lord: That person may never be expiated in this  
 lifetime on earth [for his guilt], even [were he to engage] in  
 repentance, [presumably] inspired from fear of punishment, until  
 he dies. Therefore, the repentance of the Israelites in connec-  
 tion with the spies was ineffective, as it says, "Again you wept  
 before the Lord; but the Lord would not heed your cry..."  
 (Deut 1:45). 98

15:39 Look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord: You will  
 remember that you are servants of God, may He be exalted, in that  
 you have accepted His commandments by oath and vow, and [you will  
 be reminded of] this when you look at the fringe, for it is as a  
 seal of the King to his servants, and by means of this you will  
 cease to follow your heart's inclinations in stubborn pursuit of  
 wealth and glory, even through robbery. And eyes: To attain the  
 lusts on which you have fixed your attention. In your lustful  
urge: You incline your intellectual souls towards them--from  
 the ways of life eternal to the ways of destruction and death.

15:40 Thus you shall be reminded: In order that you will be turned  
 away from vain thoughts, and in so doing you will be reminded of  
 God's greatness and steadfast love [for you]. To observe all My  
commandments: And thereby you will observe all of My command-  
 ments out of love and awe [of Me]. And be holy to your God:

15:40 And thereby you will be holy before Him [meriting] the world to  
(cont.) come, since He said, "But you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests  
and a holy nation." (Exod 19:6).

15:41 I the Lord am your God, who brought you out, etc: I am the Lord  
from the vantage point that I am your God, and that it is [incum-  
bent upon] you to understand that I am the First, deserving of  
worship, and [that] you [should] pray to Me. Brought you out of  
the land of Egypt: In order that you merit that I shall be your  
God, [and that you know] that the continuity of your existence  
emanates from Me without intermediacy, for such existence does  
not change nor diminish in any sense, as is the case with respect  
to the existence of the rest of eternal matters. I, the Lord your  
God: I now have commanded you this particular precept for this  
purpose alone--in order that you merit this intended end as it  
says, "You shall be holy to your God." (verse 40, supra). <sup>99</sup>

## CHAPTER FIVE

## פרשת קרח

16:1 Now Korah...betook himself: [The] phrasing and arrangement of [this] text is as if it said: "Now Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On, son of Peleth, took two hundred fifty Israelites, chieftains of the community, to rise up against Moses." After this [it should read]: "They combined against Moses and Aaron." [For] Korah Dathan and Abiram had convened to complain against Moses and Aaron in the presence of two hundred fifty chieftains of the community who had assembled there at the urging of these complainers, at the [specific] time during which [certain] Israelites had come before Moses for judgment. Now those same two hundred fifty men assembled there, as in the instance, "...and went in good faith," (2 Sam 15:11), to Moses to stand with him there so that afterwards, when Korah, Dathan and Abiram would combine against Moses and Aaron, all of them [present] would unanimously agree [to oppose Moses and Aaron] in the presence of those same [certain] Israelites already there. They [i.e., Korah, Dathan and Abiram] chose a time when the multitudes of people would be present to publicize and proclaim [their contention] throughout the camp in order to multiply the numbers who would rise up with them.

16:3 For all the community: Every one of them. Are holy all of them: "From head to foot..." (Isa 1:6), [they are all holy] as it says, "Thus you shall be holy to your God." (15:40, supra). Why then

16:3 do you raise yourselves: In matters of holiness in that you have  
(cont.) prohibited the sacred worship to the first-born, while Moses  
already had officiated during all seven days of the installation  
[of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood], while Aaron and his  
sons are priests for all time.

16:5 Then he spoke to Korah and all his company: He announced to them  
that he felt that [Korah was using] wile [with him], and with  
[all] his [i.e., Korah's] company. Who is His: He who speaks on  
His behalf, may He be exalted. And who is holy, and will grant  
him access to Himself: He will make known whom [He deems] holy  
and privileged to offer sacrifices to Him. <sup>100</sup> He will grant  
access to the one He has chosen: He alone shall gain access to  
the Lord [meaning, the one] who remains [alive] after the revolt,  
as in the [impending] instance, "Stand back from this communi-  
ty..." (verse 21, infra).

16:7 He shall be the holy one: [And] he alone, so that only one [man]  
merit this [closeness]. He stipulated this [dictum] in order that  
they revere [Him] and repent and [thus] not perish, for it is not  
God's desire that anyone shall die. (V. Ezek 18:32). You have  
gone too far, sons of Levi!: [Since] you are the congregation of  
Korah, you are taking upon yourselves something big [i.e., a big  
responsibility], for the Lord will be angrier with you since you  
[Levites] were already consecrated to His sacred service.

16:9 And to minister to the community and serve them: To serve God,  
may He be exalted, by singing, and His Tabernacle by transporta-

- 16:9      tion, and nothing else. And He desires that you perform this  
(cont.)      service before the community to inform them of their deficiencies  
                 through which they have become disqualified from the sacred wor-  
                 ship. You are chosen in their stead.
- 16:11      Truly, you and all your company have banded together: I say to  
                 you. Against the Lord: Know that I have cast my burden on the  
                 Lord, that He will avenge His honor, and that it is not I who  
                 opposed you.
- 16:14      Even if you had (brought us to a land flowing with milk and  
                 honey), and given us: Not only have you maltreated us by bringing  
                 us out of a land flowing with milk and honey to [this] wilderness,  
                 but you even ridicule us in that you have, in fact, not brought  
                 us to the land about which you have spoken; [indeed], your words  
                 are as if you have [already] given us possession of fields and  
                 vineyards in your imparting [to us] commandments that are con-  
                 tingent upon [occupation of] the land. [For example], you have  
                 said, "(When you reap the harvest of your land), you shall not  
                 reap all the way to the edges of your field,...(You shall not  
                 gather) the fallen fruit of your vineyard," (Lev 19:9-10), as if  
                 it [i.e., the possession] were already ours, and [as if] we had  
                 fields and vineyards. Should you gouge out those men's eyes?:  
                 Do you [really] suppose to gouge out our eyes in a manner so that  
                 we shall not realize your fraud?!
- 16:15      Pay no regard to their oblation: Pay no regard to any aspect of  
                 the expiatory offering that they present on their behalf; [indeed],

16:15 on the contrary, may [their] meal offering be malodorous [to You],  
 (cont.) and [my feelings for] this [stand] is because I shall not forgive  
 [them] for insulting me. Further, only I can forgive them as  
 [the Sages] have said, "There is no expiation made on Yom Kippur  
 for transgressions <sup>101</sup> that a man commits against another man"  
 until the slighted man is willing to forgive the offender. (Yoma  
 87a). In a similar vein Jeremiah said, "...Do not pardon their  
 iniquity. Do not blot out their guilt from Your presence. For  
 they have dug a pit to trap me, Remember how I stood before You  
 to plead in their behalf," (Jer 18:23, 22, 20). I have not taken  
the ass of any one of them: I have not enjoyed from them [the  
 smallest kind of] pleasure that even a layman would derive from  
 his fellow man in that I have not taken a single ass from them,  
 even as a loan. Thus my authority over them has been light and  
 for their benefit, to arrange their affairs; [it certainly was]  
 not for my benefit or enjoyment at all, as is customary with  
 everyone who rules. <sup>102</sup> So, they are not [really] complaining  
 about my authority, but rather from the aspect that they are in-  
 grates. Nor have I wronged any one of them: [Nor] can they hold  
 against me any animosity that would result from a court's  
 conviction [against them], for nothing arose that necessitated  
 their appearing before me in such a manner that I would find  
 them guilty.

16:16 You and all your company appear before the Lord: You are sum-  
 moned for judgment before Him.

- 16:21 Stand back!: So that your merit does not spread to them, as in the instance, "He delivers the innocent man." (Job 22:30).
- 16:22 When one man sins: Because of him has the community convened against us, as it says, "Korah gathered the whole community against them..." (verse 19, supra).
- 16:24 Speak to the community and say: Withdraw from about (the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram): He explained [now] that [when] He had said, "Stand back from this community (that I may annihilate them in an instant!" verse 21, supra), He spoke of only Korah's faction.
- 16:26 Lest you be wiped out: If you remain with them, you deem yourselves unworthy of being saved when they are stricken.
- 16:30 You shall know that (these men) have spurned (the Lord): They are unworthy, [even] to experience the death [of other mortals] and be buried among the people.
- 16:32 And the earth opened its mouth: The [earth's] splitting expanded to the place of their houses. All Korah's people: All of Korah's people who joined his dissention. And therefore, his sons did not die in that they were not dragged in this [splitting] after him. <sup>103</sup> And all their possessions: So that they [i.e., Korah and his followers] would derive no merit in their misery, in that righteous men might derive pleasure [from their possessions left behind after their death], as in the matter of a sela' that

- 16:32 would fall from someone's bosom and a poor man would find it, and  
(cont.) sustain himself by it.
- 16:33 The earth closed over them: It is mentioned that [this] occurrence of the [earth's] opening up is unlike that which happens in an ordinary earthquake; [in this latter instance the earth] does not close itself up immediately. But here [the earth] closed up immediately, as an open mouth that swallows something and [totally] envelopes it after being swallowed.
- 17:2 And scatter the coals abroad: [But] not toward the ash heap<sup>104</sup> because it was "foreign" incense.<sup>105</sup> For they have become sacred: And [thereby] it would be improper to put them aside in a disgraceful fashion.<sup>106</sup>
- 17:3 For once they have been used for offering to the Lord, they have become sacred: For he had made them sacred as being vessels of service also in other ministries aside from their disqualified ministry, and with this they are suited to be made into plating for the Holy.
- 17:6 You (two) have brought death (upon the Lord's people!): In that you told them that they could be tested through [offering] incense, [knowing full well] that only he who presents the regular burnt offering is qualified to offer incense. You should have tested with sacrifices that are suited for many priests together.
- 17:13 He stood between the dead and the living: After he had already stationed himself there to prevent [the plague from spreading,

- 17:13 thus] championing [the cause of] the ill so that they not die,  
(cont.) [which was] the opposite [of God's dictum], "Stand back from this community....!" (16:21, supra). Until the plague was checked: So that no more of them would be stricken with the plague.
- 17:15 Since the plague was checked: Those who were ill from the plague recovered.
- 17:24 Each identified and recovered his staff: According to the identification of their [ancestral] houses, lest it become exchanged [with another staff].
- 17:25 So that their mutterings against Me may cease: This is the lesson [for the rebels], namely, that their mutterings [against Me] will cease; let them add no further complaining.
- 18:1 You with your sons and the ancestral house under your charge shall bear any guilt connected with the sanctuary: So that neither an unclean person nor a stranger encroach to enter the sanctuary, for [the responsibility of guarding its sanctity] is incumbent upon all of you. Now should he [i.e., such a disqualified person] encroach [to enter] through your negligence, you [Levites] shall incur his guilt. You and your sons alone shall bear any guilt connected with your priesthood: It is solely your responsibility to guard [its sanctity], that no stranger <sup>107</sup> encroach upon the priestly functions.
- 18:2 And to minister to you: With respect to the duties of you and your sons only. You and your sons under your charge before the Tent of the Pact: This shall be the [prescribed] arrangement [of

- 18:2 Tabernacle service]: You and your sons shall guard [the area]  
(cont.) before the Holy of Holies in that it is the Tent of the Ark which contains the [two] tablets of the Pact. <sup>108</sup>
- 18:3 They shall discharge their duties to you and to the Tent as a whole: The Levites will discharge their duties to you, which consist of guarding [both] the Holy of Holies and the rest of the Tabernacle. <sup>109</sup> But (they must not have any contact) with the furnishings of the Shrine: Which are inside the Tabernacle, including the lampstand, the table and the golden altar. Or with the altar: [This refers to] the external [altar] which [was used for] burnt offerings, even though it lay outside [of the Tabernacle]. <sup>110</sup>
- 18:4 And discharge the duties of the Tent of Meeting: Within the <sup>111</sup> Temple enclosure, including the entire court-yard.
- 18:5 As you discharge the duties connected with the Shrine: You priests discharge the duties of the Tabernacle from the inside. <sup>112</sup>
- 18:6 They are assigned to you in dedication to the Lord: At your command they are committed to any kind of service necessary to the Tent of Meeting.
- 18:7 Shall be careful (to perform) your priestly duties: So that no outsider encroaches upon [your] priestly duties, as was the case with Uzziah. <sup>113</sup> To perform: Similarly, it is absolutely essential that you guard against any outsider encroaching upon your particular service as indeed, I [have] made your priesthood a service of dedication: [For] priestly service is solely your responsibility;

- 18:7 I hereby designate it a position of honor and privilege in every-  
(cont.) one's eyes and surely they will all desire it [for themselves as well]. Therefore, it is imperative that you guard [it] well.
- 18:8 I hereby give you (charge): You will [verily] guard the duties connected with the Shrine as I have enjoined upon you, and [in return] I shall provide you with the gifts [i.e., provisions; certain parts of the sacrifices] of the priesthood [among your tribe], mentioned in this section.
- 18:9 The offerings by fire: All [these sacrifices] go up in smoke [i.e., are completely burned]; the priests receive a portion of them only after the burning of the fire that is sent up [in smoke]. Thus they receive their merit. Therefore: [the next verse indicates this].
- 18:10 You shall partake of them as most sacred donations: Within the Temple enclosure.
- 18:11 The heave offerings of their gifts:<sup>114</sup> [This refers to those parts] of minor sacrifices which are given to the priests by their owners, who also receive a portion of them.
- 18:19 All the sacred gifts: For example, that which is contributed as a gift from the loaves of thanksgiving, the two loaves [of the Sabbath eve meal] and the loaf [that comprises the dough given to the priest as his share; V. 15:20, supra].
- 18:27 This shall be accounted to you as your contribution: "...that a blessing may rest on your home." (Ezek 44:30); even though it has

18:27 [already] been measured, and [the Sages] have said, "If he  
(cont.)

measured it off and after that recited the blessing, it is  
then a useless prayer." (Ta'an. 8b; B. Mes. 42a). <sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, giving terumah <sup>116</sup> [to the priest] out of the  
tithe [that you Levites receive] will gain a good blessing  
[not for the terumah, which you have measured out, but] for the  
rest of the tithe which is not sacred [i.e., permissible] in  
the possession of the Levites.

## CHAPTER SIX

## פרשת חקת

19:2 This is the ritual law that the Lord has commanded:

When He said, "(This is what you shall do to cleanse them):  
sprinkle on them water of purification,..." (8:7, supra).

Now the Sages have already said about this: [Since] it is written as חקת [i.e., statute], it is a decree from before Me, and [therefore] you are not at liberty to question its validity.<sup>117</sup> [Even] King Solomon [was unable to explain the nature of the red heifer regulations, for he] said concerning it, "...I thought I could fathom it, but it eludes me." (Eccl 7:23), and the essential lack of understanding it is that it [i.e., this ritual law] renders ritually impure those who are clean, [while simultaneously] it purifies the impure. Indeed, for us to understand all the nuances of [this] commandment, perhaps something can be taken from it stealthily,<sup>118</sup> and we can receive a whisper of it. Firstly, we discover that all those who involve themselves in it [i.e., the ritual of the red heifer] from the time of the burning [of the cow] and onward become ritually unclean, including he who does the burning; the casting of the cedar wood, hyssop and crimson stuff into the fire consuming [the cow]; the gathering [of the ashes]; the one who has come into contact with a corpse; and the one who carries [the ashes to be mixed in water and sprinkled on the unclean person, vv 14-19, infra]. Indeed,

19:2 the one who sprinkles and the one being cleansed is clean!  
(cont.)

Secondly, from the basis that it must be a completely red cow, the prophet [Isaiah] has already explained that sin can be likened to redness, as he has stated, "...Be your sins like crimson, They can turn snow-white;" Isa 1:18). Thus the Sages have said that, "[originally] they could tie the thread of crimson wool on the entrance [of the Hall leading to the interior] of the Temple. If it became white they rejoiced; if it did not become white, they were sad." (Rosh Hash. 31b; Yoma 67a).<sup>119</sup> Thirdly, it is worthwhile to understand that since all of God's words are pure (cf. Ps 18:31), unquestionably [each of God's statements is intended] to straighten actions to a mean,<sup>120</sup> for each one of two extremes is despicable [i.e., unsatisfactory], as it is stated, "...But he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once." (Prov 28:18). Fourthly, it is worthwhile to understand that there is no adequate way to straighten out one whose ways have become crooked, restoring him to the mean, except by bending him to the opposite extreme, as occurs with bodily illnesses, as it is stated, "Sharp wounds cleanse away evil." (Prov 20:30), even though such bending toward an extreme is of itself to be despised, [for] it damages the state of him who [prefers] the middle road. For instance, a cathartic benefits the one who is ill, but has adverse effects to a healthy person. Fifthly, it is important to understand that the ashes of the red heifer have no connection whatsoever with cleansing from the various kinds of uncleanness except for ritual defilement from the dead. It is already understood that with respect to the Torah and commandments, they are life for those who derive mean-

19:2 ing from them, and occupy themselves in them, as it is stated,  
 (cont.) "(This Teaching)... is your very life..." (Deut 32:46, 47), and  
 he who deviates from these [paths] to dangerous vanities [either]  
 goes to his death, or is [already] totally dead, as the Sages  
 have said, "Even during their lifetime, the wicked are called,  
 'dead.'" (Ber. 18b). Sixthly, it is worthwhile to consider what  
 the Sages have said: The cedar wood symbolizes pride, the hyssop  
 symbolizes the opposite [i.e., fawning; V. Exod. Rab. 1:36; 17:2;  
 Num. Rab. 19:3], and the crimson stuff combined with these other  
 two [kinds of wood] represent the both of them as sin, as the  
 Sages have said, "[A disciple of the Sages] who possesses [haugh-  
 tiness of spirit] deserves excommunication, and if he does not  
 possess it he deserves excommunication." (Sota 5a).<sup>121</sup> This  
 particularly applies to one who feels compelled to act with  
 authority for the benefit of the multitudes. And the Sages have  
 already said that Saul was punished in that he did not insist  
 upon his honor, as it is stated, "...So they scorned him and  
 brought him no gift. But he pretended not to mind." (1 Sam  
 10:27).<sup>122</sup> Similarly the prophet [Samuel] touched upon this when  
 he said, "...You may look small to yourself, but you are the  
 head of the tribes of Israel..." (1 Sam 15:17). Thus it is  
 said that with the commandment being a statute, one is not at  
 liberty either to question its validity or doubt its worth, for  
 all of God's words are pure (cf. Ps 18:31), and contain subtle-  
 ties. Unquestionably [such meaning] was known to the King who  
 commanded it [i.e., God], and probably also to Moses, our Teacher,  
 and others like him. And herein lies an allusion to the way of  
 repentance, required of all sinners for indeed, it is a system

19:2 [which prompts one] to the opposite extreme from his [evil] deeds  
 (cont.) that defile all honest men, so that he will attain the mean and become pure. This way [i.e., such an inclination], along with being good, purifies the sinner who, indeed, is despicable and evil [in that] he defiles every pure heart, as [the Sages] have said, "Against which soul did he sin? [It must refer to the fact that] he denied himself wine." (Ta'an. 11a). Indeed, the waters of cleansing in which is combined ashes from the fire and fresh water is [in and of itself a mixture of] two extremes from which one can restore oneself to the mean. This teaches that at the mean a sinner can make amends which is [itself] called a "purification," as [the text] says, "...You shall be clean before the Lord." (Lev 16:30). And from that, which is fitting to consider, that which the Speaker [i.e., God] decreed that whoever touches a corpse defiles the Lord's Tabernacle (verse 13, *infra*), and whoever enters the tent [in which there is a corpse, verse 14, *infra*], defiles the Lord's sanctuary. This means that whoever draws near to the vanities of corruptible things undoubtedly defiles the pure heart [i.e., the mind] which is the seat of the Lord's sanctuary, since it [i.e., he, man] is called the Divine image (V. Gen 1:27), and its [i.e., his] defilement consists in going astray after privations [i.e., evils, inappropriate for the mind].<sup>123</sup> And whoever enters a tent in which there is a corpse is like what is intended by, "...those who dwell in houses of clay," (Job 4:19), [i.e., of matter, and material things], who have only their bodies before them [i.e., before their faces] with respect to a poor, temporal life, whose feet descend to

19:2 death. Unquestionably he defiles the afore-mentioned sanctuary of  
 (cont.) the Lord through which both the people and the individual will be  
 holy to their God as it says, "...and that you shall be (as He  
 promised), a holy people to the Lord your God." (Deut 26:19), but  
 then he defiles the sanctuary of the Lord by going astray after  
 possessions which are opposite to what is intended. And to such  
 a one it is not fitting that anyone else in the tent defile apart  
 from the dead Israelite, for indeed, its matter alone is selected  
 and prepared above all others for the worship of God, may He be  
 exalted, just as it alone sins against that which is noble [i.e.,  
 the pure mind].<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the teachers who instruct sinners in the  
 right way are as if they were the ones who sprinkled [the water of  
 lustration] and [thus] the sanctifiers. [And by filling this capa-  
 city] defilement will not come upon them at all. And so it is in  
 the details of the observance of this commandment as it is written,  
 and like that which occurs in the Tradition does all of this allude  
 to. For undoubtedly they are what the Torah intended.

20:3 The people quarreled with Moses: Note that the quarrel occurred  
 when they said, "Why have you brought the Lord's congregation into  
 this wilderness...?" (verse 4, infra). Further, it [i.e., their  
 quarrel] extended against God, may He be exalted, as well, as borne  
 out by His statement, "...meaning that the Israelites quarreled  
 with the Lord..." (verse 13, infra), and this is [evidenced] when  
 they said, "Why did you make us leave Egypt...?" (verse 5, infra).

20:8 Take the rod...and order the rock (to yield its water): There  
 have already been many opinions concerning the sin of Moses in-  
 volving the waters of Meribah, and for many there remains uncer-

20:8 tainty as to how Moses and Aaron sinned, of whom it is written,  
 (cont.) "(Because) you did not trust me..." (verse 12, *infra*); "For you broke faith with Me..." (Deut 32:51) and, "...you disobeyed..." (verse 24, *infra*; 27:14, *infra*). Now were it the intention of God, may He be exalted, that they only speak to the rock, what was the purpose of [their] taking the rod? Further, if the sin consisted of Moses' striking the rock which [admittedly], was not His specific instruction, wherein has Aaron sinned? Indeed, as we consider the matter of the quarrel we ought to understand that God's commandment in this matter [was directed to them] in such a manner so as to awaken them to the evil of their quarrel, and that they would [then] confess and repent for their sin, thus ameliorating their own situation, for [God] does not desire that anyone shall die. (cf. Ezek 18:32). Thus we can [now begin to] understand that herein Moses and Aaron sinned against God's intention, may He be exalted, and because of this He punished them. Indeed, the quarrel against Moses is expressed in their statement that his leadership was ineffective in that he had brought them to that bad place in the wilderness. Their quarrel against God, may He be exalted, is [seen] in their utterance that He brought them out of a good land and dwelling place to a desert, and to inform them of their wickedness. Now in so doing, He committed Himself [to demonstrate to them] that the miracle <sup>125</sup> should indicate that [their] emissary [i.e., Moses] was an effective leader, and that the Sender [i.e., God] had chosen the right emissary and not acted maliciously whatsoever [in His mission, i.e., in selecting the emissary], being that there are various types of miracles recounted in the Bible [that transpire] in one of three degrees. The first degree

20:8 is the hidden miracle, such as the falling of rain, and escaping  
 (cont.) from disease and afflictions. This is the type of miracle  
 [which] righteous people attain through their prayers, as in the  
 instance, "Abraham then prayed to God, and God healed  
 Abimelech..." (Gen 20:17), and similarly, "And Moses interceded  
 for the people." (21:7, *infra*). The second degree is the open  
 [i.e., revealed] miracle; nature cannot produce it in the same  
 manner, but may produce it after many turns in the course of time.  
 This is the kind of miracle that is effected by God, may He be  
 exalted, through His servants, accompanied by the advancement of  
 some ordered turn [i.e., action] before Him, as in the instances,  
 "Cast it on the ground." (Exod 4:3); "Lift up your rod..."  
 (Exod 14:16); "Strike the rock..." (Exod 17:6); "(Elisha said),  
 'Shoot!' and he shot..." (2 Kgs 13:17), and in other similar  
 occurrences. The third degree of miracle cannot be produced by  
 nature in any way. Such a variety [as this] is wrought by God,  
 may He be exalted, through His servants by means of Divine com-  
 munication alone, for it is an intellectual experience, and [as  
 such], is more honored than His material changes [of nature], as  
 in the instance when the earth opened its mouth, as it says,  
 "Scarcely had he finished speaking...when the ground (under them)  
 burst asunder." (16:31, *supra*), and similarly in the instance  
 when the sun stood still for Joshua--it is written, "Joshua ad-  
 dressed the Lord;...(stand still, O sun," Josh 10:12). Now in  
 this instance the quarrel was [precipitated] from the need to  
 declare as sinful the evil of the Israelite's complaining, and

20:8 that the effected miracle might explain the virtue and goodness  
 (cont.) of both the King who sends [the emissary], and also the virtue and effectiveness of His emissary. And that he [i.e., Moses] is ready [to act in such a way] that God [appears] as improving [the lot] of His people through him. The virtue of the Sender is clarified by means of the miracle of the third degree; that which is not affected by nature at all, either in manner or at any time, while the virtue of the emissary is clarified by means of the miracle of the second degree; which is performed by the actions of the emissary who is worthy enough [to effect it]. And thus God, may He be exalted, commanded that the rock be transformed to water, as He said, "...[order the rock] to yield its water," meaning that the water coming to him from the rock would not be extracted from another source. This would have been prevented without it being transformed from a rock to water, as proven afterwards when He said, "...who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock;" (Deut 8:15), for were the water brought forth from another source there [also] by means of a miracle, there would be no differentiation between a flinty rock and any other kind [of rock]. This is the type of miracle which cannot be replicated by nature in any form or at any time. Nevertheless, He commanded that this [third kind of miracle] transpire at the bidding of His servants, as He said, "...order the rock (to yield its water)," so that the Israelites would realize that such [an occurrence] was a miracle of the third degree, as has been stated, so that the water would not be pouring out from another source. With this [manifestation of a miracle] they would

20:8 recognize the Sender's greatness and goodness, and they would  
 (cont.) keep in mind that even though He brought them out of Egypt to the wilderness, it was entirely without malice of purpose since He was with them, being that He has the power "to turn the desert into ponds." (Isa 41:18), a feature nature could not replicate. Further, [they would understand that] if He was here [with them], they had everything [that they needed], as He said, "Have I been like a desert to Israel,..." (Jer 2:31). He further commanded that after the rock had been changed to water, Moses was to bring out that water for them by means of his rod for their tribes, as it is written, "...with maces, with their own staffs." (21:18, *infra*). For this [purpose He intended] the [third] degree of miracles [when] He said, "Take the rod...and produce water for them from the rock, etc." Now here, Moses and Aaron decided to produce a miracle of the second degree and pour out the water toward the rock from another source as they did at Rephidim, as it is stated, "Strike the rock and water will issue from it,..." (Exod 17:6), for they did not trust that God, may He be exalted, would fulfill His promise to work a miracle of the third degree for the Israelites. They [i.e., Moses and Aaron] assumed that the Israelites were much embittered at that time to the extent that they were unworthy for Him, and that the Lord would regret His kindness. And so they worked a miracle of the second degree, using the miracle with the rod through which they emphasized the virtue of the emissary; they did not perform a miracle of the third degree through which they would have demon-

20:8 strated the Sender's virtue and goodness to the Israelites.  
(cont.)

Because of this it is written concerning them, "You did not trust Me," (verse 12, infra), in the sense of [God saying], "You did not trust Me that I would fulfill My promise; you have broken faith with Me in that you have profaned My honor, and have not demonstrated to the dissenters their foolishness, and you have rebelled against Me in that you did not follow My command." <sup>126</sup>

20:13 Through which He affirmed His sanctity: The same water [through which God] was sanctified later in connection with the wadi Aaron, which He showed to the Israelites at that time as being unnatural water, as they have taught in their song when they said, "...and from Nahaliel to Bamoth," (21:19, infra), where the water would rise higher from the place of its source, which is the opposite of what is expected of natural water.

20:17 The King's highway: <sup>127</sup> By the same road upon which the King would command us to traverse, in accordance with every King who would grant passage to his armies, [provided they are] his allies, sending along a guide with them [i.e., with those who requested passage] so that as they pass through [the foreign land] the soldiers, or some of them would not do harm to the inhabitants.

20:18 Else we go out against you with the sword: For the multitudes of the Edomites were murderers, and for the [most] trifle reason that might arise out of a quarrel or similar misunderstanding between an Edomite and one who is passing through, the Edomites

20:18 were likely to remonstrate with lethal intent against the one  
(cont.) traveling through [Edom].

20:19 We will keep to the beaten track: Such [violence, described  
in the comment to verse 18] might possibly occur were we to pass  
through [your main] cities, but [rest assured that] we shall  
journey only by way of the beaten path, thereby causing no rea-  
son for your people to rise up against us with the sword. We  
ask only for passage on foot--it is but a small matter: We have  
no reason to stir up a quarrel. Please let us pass through:  
Since you do not refuse to allow us to pass through except for  
this [one thing] that you have stated, indeed, we shall be able  
to pass through, for there is no reason to worry at all.

20:20 And Edom went out against them: At the boundary [of the  
Edomite territory]. 128

20:26 Strip Aaron of his vestments: Those [of his] garments as befit-  
ting a high priest rather than that of a common priest. 129 And  
put them on his son Eleazar: Since he [i.e., Eleazar] was [pre-  
sently] wearing [the] four garments characteristic of a common  
priest, and thus Aaron [after his death] remained clothed in the  
fabrics of the four garments characteristic of a common priest, as  
was his business when he entered [the Tabernacle and the Holy of  
Holies] with respect to the appearance of God's messengers to His  
servants.

21:1 And he took some of them captive: But he did not kill any of  
them.

- 21:3 And they and their cities were proscribed: At that time they vowed to proscribe [the Canaanite cities] upon their entering the land, and they did so, as elaborated at the outset of the book of Judges (1:16ff.).
- 21:8 Make a seraph figure: So that the serpent made from substance may serve as a fiery reminder in order that they would turn [this] fiery seraph figure with [all their] spoken vanities, the likes of which being their sin, and [resulting in] their punishment, and they would repent.
- 21:9 A copper serpent: After he realized his Maker's intention, he agreed to make it not out of gold, but copper, so that it would serve as a reminder of their sin to them from the aspect of its material appearance, its name and its shape. So he made it out of copper because of their vain utterances that they spoke against the Lord, His work and His servant.
- 21:13 Beyond the Arnon, (that is, in the wilderness) that extends (from the territory of the Amorites): <sup>130</sup> [Only] in that part of the Arnon and the wilderness that extended [from Amorite territory]. For the Arnon is the boundary of Moab: For the boundary of Moab was only in that part [of the wilderness] that lay between it [i.e., the Arnon] and the Amorites, and [the Israelites] did not enter the part [of the Arnon] that was opposite the territory of Moab.
- 21:14 The Book of the Wars of the Lord (speaks of)...Waheb in Suphah: [In which] the rest of the wars of the Lord on behalf of the gen-

- 21:14 erations [faithful to Him] is recounted--Waheb in Suphah, and the  
(cont.) wadies: the Arnon: This was the same part of the Arnon through which the Israelites crossed peacefully; Sihon did not rise up [against them] at that time (V. vv 21ff., infra). He [i.e., God] gave them Waheb in Suphah, and the wadies which God, may He be exalted, produced then [by creating] a great wind [to blow] and scatter the many wadies. This prevented Sihon from acting aggressively [against Israel].
- 21:15 With its tributary wadies: Similarly mentioned in the same book is the account of the dispersion of those same wadies, "stretched along the settled country of Ar, hugging the territory of Moab." [Then] He reached the city called Ar, which the Israelites [now] faced. In any event, it did not extend to the Israelite settlement, but hugged and pushed against the territory of Moab.
- 21:16 And from there to Beer: And from there the same dispersion of wadies stretched to the place of "the well where the Lord said to Moses, 'Assemble the people (that I may give them water).'" We find that the place of the same well, that was situated there as a deep well, [whose water] did not rise, was much lower from the same place where the Israelites now were at the time of [their] song (vv 17-18, infra), and since the same well went up with them beyond the lofty Arnon from where the wadis were spread at a lower level, they saw that God, may He be exalted, granted power to those same waters enabling them to rise up. Thus they commenced their song, saying, "Spring up, O well,..." (verse 17, infra). Indeed, according to what the Sages have said,

21:16 (Ber. 54a, ff.), it appears that the Book of Wars of the Lord  
(cont.) alludes to the Amorite war of that time, but the text does not elaborate on the details of the miracles [that occurred] out of respect for Moses and Aaron, for indeed, they were required only to show the Israelites that which was proper for Moses and Aaron to make known--whether or not their activity was in complete accordance with God's command, may He be exalted. And this they knew--that the same water which He brought forth from the rock was not natural water wondrously drawn from a spring or a river, but rather extraordinary [water resulting] from the rock being changed into ponds at the will of its Maker in a manner unlike the nature of all other waters whose flow is inclined to the center. And so [the water] went up with them from its source to a lofty place, and certainly [the water was exalted] when it brought up in its flow the limbs of the deceased, as the Sages have said (Num. Rab. 19:25). And concerning this Moses, our Teacher, did not involve himself with this song whose purpose was to clarify that which was deficient about his work that his Creator had requested [from him; work] which He Himself, may He be exalted, completed, as it says, "...through which He affirmed His sanctity." (20:13, supra), which illustrates the matter of those very same waters which contained a force contrary in nature to that of all other water, as has been explained. (V. 20:8, supra).

21:18 The well which the chieftains dug: In that the well was not full as is customary [for it] to be flowing from a lofty place. And from Midbar to Mattanah: With this [mention] it is clear that He

- 21:18 gave it existence from that same rock in the wilderness.  
(cont.)
- 21:19 And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: And with this [mention] He neither added nor detracted from its [i.e., the water in the well] rise or fall, as is expected in accordance with the nature of water that were to flow [in] from another source.
- 21:25 In all the towns of the Amorites, in Heshbon and all its dependencies: For all of the towns that Sihon conquered, [together] with the rest of the cities of his kingdom, were dependencies of Heshbon, which [itself] had been the city of his kingdom since antiquity, in the sense of, "...and I give them to you as daughters,..." (Ezek 16:61).
- 21:26 Now Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites: The reason why we have stated that all of the Amorite towns are dependencies of Heshbon is because Heshbon was the city of rule for the Amorite king Sihon before he conquered the Moabite towns. 131
- 21:27 Therefore the bards would recite: Those who would speak with the light of parables, who beheld visions in dreams, as was experienced by Balaam, as it is said, "He took up his theme,..." (23:7, et al.). 132
- 21:27 Come to Heshbon: You dwellers of Moabite towns, Come to Heshbon and submit to Sihon, for he will vanquish you and rule over you.

- 21:30 Their dominion is at an end: [With reference to] the dominion and kingdom of Sihon. As for his fire and flame [mentioned in verse 28, supra], they are the princes of his hosts. [Nonetheless], he will perish, for after they [i.e., the bards] told of Sihon's victory, they similarly related the destruction of his kingdom by the Israelites.
- 21:31 So Israel occupied the land of the Amorites: This entire narrative established that Israel did not dwell in [any part of] Moab at that time, but rather occupied [only] the land of the Amorites, [a fact] further clarified by Jephthah, who said, "...Israel did not seize the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites." (Judg 11:15).
- 21:32 And they captured its dependencies: The spies dispatched by Moses captured the dependencies of Jazer. And dispossessed (the Amorites who were there): After [Jazer's dependencies were captured], Moses [alone] drove out the Amorites from Jazer. 133

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## פרשת בלק

- 22:2 Balak saw: [Balak was] famous for being experienced in war, in accordance with [Jephthah's] statement, "(Besides), are you any better than Balak son of Zippor?, etc." (Judg 11:25). Balak saw that Israel had requested to cross Sihon's land, and that upon his refusal they decreed a ban on him. Balak further realized that they did not resort to military strategy in emerging victorious.
- 22:3 Moab was alarmed: [Even] the mighty ones of Moab who did not allow Israel to pass through [their country], as borne out by Jephthah's statement, "They also sent a mission to the land <sup>134</sup> of Moab, and he refused...." (Judg 11:17). Was so numerous: [This is the principal reason why Moab was so alarmed, and] not because of Israel's military strategy. Moab dreaded (the Israelites): The multitudes of Moabites were in absolute dread of the Israelites, [fearing that] they would be plundered by them. <sup>135</sup>
- 22:4 Now: [After] they [had already] conquered the land of Sihon and Og. This horde will lick clean all that is about us: To expand and secure their borders. <sup>136</sup> Balak son of Zippor: Who was [already] known as a mighty warrior. Who was king of Moab at that time: Nonetheless, he had no desire to wage war with Israel, as [Jephthah] said, "...Did he [i.e., Balak] start a quarrel with Israel or go to war with them?" (Judg 11:25). And Joshua said, "Thereupon

- 22:4 (cont.) Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, made ready to attack Israel..." (Jos 24:9). He said this because [Balak] had hired Balaam [specifically] to curse [Israel], as is explained when he said, "...He sent for Balaam (son of Beor to curse you," Josh 24:9).
- 22:6 Perhaps I can: After you curse them, Thus defeat them: I shall use military means, and you will invoke a curse. He whom you bless is blessed indeed: Here [we see that] he was empowered not to bless, but to curse with the mention of a sin, or to determine the time [for this], according to the Rabbis (Ber. 4a; Abod. Zar. 4a-4b), and thus [Balak] did not ask him to bless him for all time, nor that he be able to oppose [them]. Rather, he said, "I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed," which is to Balaam's credit, showing that he was not solely occupied with the idea of wreaking destruction.
- 22:7 Versed in divination: [They took along] implements of magic as Balaam was a sorcerer in selecting the hour, as is [proven] by the statement, "Together with the others that they slew, the Israelites put Balaam son of Beor, the augur, to the sword." (Jos 13:22).
- 22:8 As the Lord may instruct me: [Stay with me] as I prepare myself to receive prophecy.
- 22:9 What do these people want of you?: Who are these people with you, on whose behalf you have prepared yourself to receive prophecy, to find out how you will respond to them? Are they really with

- 22:9 (cont.) you to ask about the future, thus prompting you to inquire about the future so that you can answer them, or are they with you seeking to acquire the nature of your curse, and [if this latter aspect be the case], now you are asking permission to grant their desire?!
- 22:12 Do not go with them: Even though you would not curse them, do not accompany them so that you do not look disfavorably upon them in the manner of which the Sages have spoken, "One who looks disfavorably at another reduces him to mere skin and bones." <sup>137</sup>
- 22:20 If these men have come to invite you: [You are permitted to go] only for consultation purposes, as in the instance, "...chosen in the assembly,..." (26:9, *infra*), or in the instance, "...So I have called you to tell me what I am to do." (1 Sam 28:15).  
You may go with them: To warn them against sinning.
- 22:22 At his going: For it was not his business to be in the road as one being led by others, as in the instance, "...So he arose and followed her." (2 Kgs 4:30), but he was going as the party concerned [with this matter], and as one who was acting against the will of God, may He be exalted, for [in reality], they did not come to seek his advice at all. As an adversary: [The language employed here suggests that] it is a matter of enmity that is involved [here], where there is opposition to some kind of activity, as in the instance, "(And when they dug another well), they disputed over that one also; so he named it Sitnah [i.e., 'enmity,' Gen 26:21]. Here, the angel was stationed to oppose Balaam whose

22:22 intention was not proper before Him. Perhaps he might [only]  
(cont.)

augur, as was his practice, and not [try] to force an issue.

This [i.e., the angel's purpose here] was to prevent Balaam from sinning, thus inducing his own destruction. He was riding on his she-ass, with his two servants alongside: As a result he did not see the angel, as the Sages have said, "The three of them neither saw [the angel], nor were harmed." 138

22:23 And went into the fields: It was then that he abandoned the two servants and the Moabite dignitaries. As a result, they did not apprehend his experience with the ass [and the angel].

22:28 Then the Lord opened the ass's mouth: He granted it the ability to speak, as in the instance, "O Lord, open my lips,..." (Ps 51:17). All of this was intended to arouse Balaam to repent when he would remember that, "...the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." (Pro 16:1), even to the unfit. [Therefore], all the more so He can remove it [i.e., speech] at His will [even] from the fit. This entire episode was to prevent someone like him from [rushing headlong to his] destruction.

22:30 Have I been in the habit of doing thus to you?: You should have considered that since I am not accustomed to behave in the [strange] manner that you have experienced on this road, it is surely an indication that you will fail [in your mission]; even though this is not augury, it is to be reckoned as an omen.

22:32 Why have you beaten your ass?: For when you saw these signs you should have realized that your mission was undesirable and would not succeed. These three times: How could you be [so] stubborn [these] three times [trying] to precipitate matters? It is I who came out as an adversary: It was I who did everything possible to oppose you in this manner for your own benefit. For the errand is obnoxious to me: [The word] טר' is [understood] in the sense of, "Trembling has seized her," [i.e., Damascus; Jer 49:24, and is derived from the root טטר ]. Similarly, [the word] ותר' [in the passage], "(...and a woman...) cracked his skull." (Judg 9:53), is desired from the root וצר . [The sense of what] he is saying is: 'It is I who came out as an adversary, and the matter of [My] opposition was to cause a panic in the way of anyone who would oppose Me, as in the instance, "(...for the men who were with me) did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them,..." (Dan 10:7), and yet this entire experience was insufficient to instill fear in you as you had stiffened your heart!'

22:33 And when the ass saw me, she shied away because of me: Further, how could you not take it to heart when you experienced the ass veering away from me [those] three times?! If she had not shied away from me: You should have considered that perhaps she shied away from Me, for you already knew that there is before God, may He be exalted, someone who speaks in Israel's favor. You are the one I should have killed while sparing her: And the reason

22:33 that I asked, "Why have you beaten (your ass these three times?"  
 (cont.)  
 verse 32, supra) was to declare [you] guilty; indeed you now understand that I came to slay you while sparing the ass in such manner that you [now] realize that this [experience] was no chance happening at all. Nonetheless, you are permitted to go as one who delivers himself to death by transgressing God's will, for there is no greater offense than this. <sup>139</sup>

22:34 I erred: By being stiff-necked. Because I did not know (that you were standing in my way): I should have perceived this. If you still disapprove: For perhaps you are Israel's advocate-angel. I will turn back: So that I shall not execute anything against your wish, even though God, may He be exalted, granted me permission [to make the journey].

22:35 Go with the men: But do not go as the spokesman, but rather go only as one who is accompanying them at their request, so that you do not perish. But you must say nothing except what I tell you: <sup>140</sup> [Nonetheless], even with all of these [warnings], I suspect that you will [still] endeavor to act against my wishes. However, you [will discover that you] will be able to do only that which I command you.

22:36 He went out to meet him: To show respect [for Balaam], for he [i.e., Balak] knew that [Balaam] was arrogant [and demanded this], as indicated by the Rabbis, (Num. Rab. 20:19).

- 22:38 And now that I have come to you: Were I to have come to you earlier as you had requested, how could I have been useful to you? And the same is true even now. Have I the power to speak freely? Can I possibly say anything freely as is the custom of anyone who speaks freely?! I can utter only the word that God puts into my mouth: As in the instance, "The spirit of the Lord has spoken through me, (His message is on my tongue;" 2 Sam 23:2), and in manner I am not [really] the speaker.
- 22:40 And had them served to Balaam: As a meal offering in [Balaam's] honor, apart from his [regular] meal to satisfy [Balaam's] pride.
- 22:41 From there he could see a portion of the people: In order that he might see them [before cursing them], as in the instance, "He turned around and looked at them and cursed them (in the name of the Lord." 2 Kgs 2:24), which is opposite [the intention of the following verse], "...and the Lord showed him the whole land,..." (Deut 34:1), [where Moses is allowed to view the promised land] so that he could bestow blessings before he died.
- 23:1 Build me (seven altars) here: For it is a [high] place from which I can see them.
- 23:3 Stay here beside your offerings: To determine the offering up of every part of it, as in the instance, "...it is the blood, as life, that effects expiation." (Lev 17:11). Perhaps the Lord will grant me a manifestation: While I am alone, even though I am not going up to the light of the King's face [i.e., in God's favor],

- 23:3 (cont.) as was the case involving Moses, [of whom] He said, "...he is trusted throughout My household." (12:7, supra); perhaps He will come and grant me a manifestation in the same way as experienced by Moses at the outset of his receiving prophecy [even] before he rose to the perfection which he later attained, as it says, "When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him..." (Exod 3:4).
- 23:7 He took up his theme: He related the same parable that he envisioned in his prophetic experience. And said: From Aram (has Balak brought me): After he had recounted the parable, he interpreted it and said that the parable's meaning was concerned with how Balak brought him from Aram, etc.
- 23:9 There is a people that dwells apart: They [are a people who] will [always] dwell alone [from others] in their land, [as indicated] at the end of the matter, "The Lord alone did guide him,..." (Deut 32:12). How then can I annihilate them?
- 23:10 May I die the death of the upright: Were I to die now, would that my soul experience the death of the upright, that thereafter it merit eternal life. May my fate be like theirs: Provided that my end and that of my descendants be like Israel. For indeed, a man's sons and his other descendants are referred to as being "his posterity," as in, "May his posterity be cut off; (may their name be blotted out in the next generation." Ps 109:13), and similarly, "(...his kingdom shall be broken and divided...,) but not to his posterity,..." (Dan 11:4).

- 23:12 I can only repeat faithfully what the Lord puts in my mouth: You already know that it is He, the God of Israel [who is prompting these utterances], and [that] He speaks only favorably of Israel.
- 23:13 From which you can see them: [Perhaps now] you will be able to cast dispersion upon them. You will see only a portion of them; you will not see all of them: Do not look at all of them [at once], for you will be unable to execute [your] intention [to curse them], as it is written, "...I will make an end of all the nations...But I will not make an end of you!" (Jer 30:11).
- 23:20 When He blesses: And God has already blessed [them].
- 23:21 And their King's acclaim in their midst: During the marching of the camps [and] while the sanctuary moves forward, they sound the trumpets out of festive joy in their God.
- 23:22 Is for them like the horns of the wild ox: For Israel does not prey upon nor consume in the manner of a lion, but rather pushes away [that which opposes it] with its horns like a wild ox, for Israel's intention is [first] to drive out the [heathen] nations and [then] to enter the promised land, without having had to resort to annihilating those peoples, as it is written, "...You expelled nations and planted it." (Ps 80:9), for [God] does not desire that anyone shall die. (Cf. Ezek 18:32). Similarly, the Sages have said, "Joshua sent three choices [to the heathen nations]. Those who wished to move out could do so; those who wished to make peace could do so; and those were inclined to engage in battle

23:22 (cont.) could do so. However, they stubbornly insisted on fighting, and thus it was necessary to wipe them out." (Yer. Shebu. 7, 36c). And so [Israel] did not deal with these nations at all, as would a lion with his prey. Rather, they dealt with them in a manner like a wild ox, which pushes away or subdues [that which confronts it] without devouring it at all.

23:23 Lo, there is no augury in Jacob: The reason that God freed them from Egypt, drove out the [opposing] nations for Israel and gave Israel the horns of the wild ox was that they comprised a generation which sought Him, and did not resort to augury, as He said, "Those nations (that you are about to dispossess) do indeed, resort to soothsayers and augurs; to you, however, (the Lord your God) has not assigned the like." (Deut 18:14). At once: Whenever they want to know future events. <sup>141</sup> Jacob is told (at once), Yea Israel, what God has planned: [Either] by direct prophecy or by some prophet, Israel is told what God, may He be exalted, has decreed. They are not told what the stars indicate or about the movement of their arrays, as the Israelites are not governed by astronomical patterns.

23:24 Rises like a lion: To go to war against an unwilling adversary. (Rests not) till it has feasted on prey: They will devour and consume those very nations which, from now on, are prey for the both of them [i.e., the "lion" and the "king of beasts," terms denoting Israel, cited in this verse], as it is written, "...for they are our prey,..." (14:9, supra).

23:27 Perhaps God will deem it right that you damn them for me there:

Perhaps [from your new vantage point] those [whom you see] will [now] be more deserving of [your] curse.

24:1 Go in search of omens: He ceased to set aside a fixed period for this purpose that a curse would come upon them, for he saw that it pleased God to bless them and [therefore], there was no reason [for him] to believe that he could curse them. But turned his face toward the wilderness: To bestow limited blessings with injury contained in them, as the Sages have said, "Better is the curse wherewith Ahijah the Shilonite cursed Israel than the blessing wherewith the wicked Balaam blessed them." (Ta'an. 20a; Sanh. 105b).

24:5 How fair are your tents, O Jacob: [He alludes to] houses of study, as in the instances, "(...but Jacob was a mild man), who stayed in [his] tent." (Gen 25:27); "And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;..." (Gen 9:27); and "...and whoever sought the Lord would go out to the Tent of Meeting..." (Exod 33:7). Your dwellings: Synagogues and designated sanctuaries in which [not only] God would dwell, but also accept the worshipers' prayers. And he said, "How fair,..." because they benefited not only those who occupied themselves with them, but the entire nation as well, as the name Jacob indicates that he will remain for all posterity; [the House of Jacob] shall never be annihilated. Similarly, the name Israel indicates that he will prevail with God and man.

- 24:6 Like streams that stretch out: For indeed, as synagogues and houses of study are to the multitudes of Jews like streams that stretch out to water the fields, similarly, those who sit in their tents and hold on to the Torah are [in effect] drawing [the waters of] the Torah and giving the multitudes to drink. Likewise, those who worship are "like gardens beside a river" that do not cease producing fruit,<sup>142</sup> as the Sages have said, "A covenant has been made with the thirteen attributes (V. Exod 34:6-7) that they will not be turned away empty-handed,..." (Rosh Hash. 17b).
- 24:8 They shall devour enemy nations: In the distant future, as it says, "(For He'll avenge the blood of His servants), wreak vengeance on His foes,..." (Deut 32:43). And smash their arrows: As it says, "I will make drunk My arrows with blood,..." (Deut 32:42).
- 24:9 Blessed are they that bless you: As in the instance with Abraham, for indeed, the remnants of Israel will attain the same [lofty] degree of our Father, Abraham, as it is written, "For the Lord will again delight in your well-being, as He did in that of your fathers." (Deut 30:9).<sup>143</sup>
- 24:10 (Balak) struck his hands together: He abandoned any hope of having his desire fulfilled in that he [i.e., Balaam] had just cursed those who would curse [i.e., Balak and his princes].

24:11 Back with you (at once)!: In every instance of fleeing [based on the root פָּרַח] such "flight" is not from one who pursues, but rather entails the departure from an area to circumvent some future disaster. <sup>144</sup>

24:12 But I even told the messengers: You ought not to be surprised that I have not done your bidding in the hope that you would greatly honor me, for I even told your messengers who spoke in your behalf [saying], "I will reward you richly,..." (22:17, supra), that the matter [of cursing] was out of my hands.

24:14 Let me inform you: [He] advised that women be dispatched [to induce the Israelites to harlotry, and later idolatry], as is explained when it says, "Yet they are the very ones who, at the bidding of Balaam, induced the Israelites (to trespass against the Lord..." 31:16, infra). Of what this people will do to your people in days to come: Indeed, the harm that this people will wreak upon your people will not occur in your lifetime; therefore, you need not worry [about yourself]. It will transpire, however, only in the distant days to come, as he said, "(What I see for them is not yet, what I behold will not be soon: a star rises from Jacob, a meteor comes forth from Israel); it smashes the brow of Moab,..." (verse 17, infra), and similarly, it says, "...Edom and Moab shall be subject to them,..." (Isa 11:14).

24:17 What I see for them: [This refers to] what this people [i.e., Israel] will do to your people [i.e., Moab]. A star rises (from

24:17 Jacob): [To be understood as being both] corporeal and eternal,  
 (cont.) as it says, "...and those who turn many to righteousness, like  
 the stars for ever and ever." (Dan 12:3). It smashes the brow  
 of Moab: Even though all the heathen nations came into existence  
 by God, [nonetheless], they will [all] perish, as He said,  
 "...I will make an end of all the nations...(But I will not make  
 an end of you!" Jer 30:11, 46:28). To be sure, [God] will  
 exact vengeance upon Edom<sup>145</sup> and Moab through Israel, since these  
 two nations<sup>146</sup> have always been Israel's enemies, "and evil  
 neighbors (in Jerusalem." Sanh. 96b).

24:18 Edom becomes a possession: [Worthy of habitation only] for wild  
 beasts and birds of the wilderness, as it says, "Jackdaws and  
 owls shall possess it;..." (Isa 34:11). Yea, Seir a possession:  
 Of Israel, for it includes, "the Kenites, the Kenizzites and  
 Kadmonites." (Gen 15:19). Of its enemies: The reason that  
 vengeance shall be executed more stringently against Moab and  
 Edom than for the rest of the nations is because these [two par-  
 ticular nations] have always been Israel's enemies. But Israel  
 is triumphant: For at that time Israel shall emerge triumphant,  
 as He said, "...One people shall be mightier than the other,..."  
 (Gen 25:23).

24:19 A victor issues from Jacob: Each of his descendants will have  
 dominion over the heathen nations, as it says, "...and the  
 feeblest of them shall be in that day like David,..." (Zech

24:19 12:8), and it [also] says, "The remnant of Jacob shall be among  
(cont.) the nations, in the midst of the many peoples, like a lion among  
the beasts of the wild, like a fierce lion among flocks of  
sheep,..." (Mic 5:7). To wipe out what is left of Ir: As it  
says, "...Which tramples (wherever it goes) and rends, with  
none to deliver. Your hand shall prevail over your foes, and all  
your enemies shall be cut down!" (Mic 5:7-8).

24:20 (But its fate is) to perish forever: Even though the kingdom[s]  
of all these heathen nations are destined to doom, as it is  
written, "As for the rest of the nations and languages, their  
dominion was taken away." <sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, <sup>148</sup> only these two  
among the heathen nations will be totally wiped out, and these  
are [the nations of] Amalek which commenced war with Israel.  
(V. Exod 17:8 ff.). And of [the inhabitants of] Kittim, who  
completed the destruction of Israel, he said, "...They, too,  
shall perish forever." (verse 24, infra).

24:21 Though your abode be secure: You have settled among the Israe-  
lites in a secure land in the wilderness, though in a land not  
yet sown. And your nest be set among cliffs: And therefore, at  
a time when they will be strong and mighty your nest [i.e., abode]  
will be among them, as the Sages have said, "He that lives with  
you in your poverty will fall upon you in your prosperity." <sup>149</sup>

24:23 Alas, who can survive (except God has willed it!): As in the in-  
stance, "There is no Messiah, nor has he manifested himself." <sup>150</sup>

- 25:1 The people profaned themselves by whoring: At the outset of their involvement [with Baal-Peor] they participated only in acts of harlotry without committing idolatry. Nevertheless, they [ultimately] became steeped in [unmitigated idolatrous acts] which the Torah testifies when it forbade intermarriage with the heathen nations. It said, "...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 lust (after their gods) and will cause your sons to lust after their gods." (Exod 34:15, 16).
- 25:2 The people partook of them and worshiped that god: Such is the nature of the evil inclination [in man]. It becomes increasingly easier to progress from one kind of evil to another, as the Rabbis have indicated. (Shabb. 105b).
- 25:4 Publicly: So that [all] the people could witness the execution of the idolators [and thus not be induced to commit idolatry], and not be wiped out. By such means they would be expiated in that they would not be destroyed along with the [public] transgressors.
- 25:8 Then the plague (against the Israelites) was checked: For God, may He be exalted, had already decreed [concerning the Israelites], "...none of those who spurn Me shall see it. [i.e., the land." 14:23, supra].

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## פרשת פינחס

- 25:10-11 The Lord spoke to Moses,...by displaying among them his passion for Me: For he publicly exacted My retribution so that when they see this and do not interfere, they will be forgiven for not having interfered, with sinners. In so doing he has turned back My wrath from them.
- 25:12 My pact of friendship [Lit. peace]: [Protection] from the the Angel of Death, as in the instance, "He makes peace in his high heaven." (Job 25:2). Indeed, the loss [of My pact of friendship] will not transpire except by reason of opposition to the opposite extremes. Indeed, this [promise] was fulfilled in Phinehas, in that he lived much longer than all the rest of his contemporaries [even] until he served in the Tabernacle of Shiloh during the time of concubine of Gibeah (V. Jos 22:9-34; Judg 20, esp. vv 27-28), which unquestionably had to occur after the death of Joshua and the rest of the elders who lived long after him, and even more so if it were during [i.e., that Phinehas had lived up to] the time of Jephthah, as it is written concerning the king of the Ammonites, "While Israel has been occupying Heshbon and its dependences,...for three hundred years,..." (Judg 11:26). And the Sages have already said that Phinehas was not willing to go to Jephthah to absolve him from his vow. (V. Ta'an. 4a). [And his longevity would be] even more [amazing if those are right] who identify Elijah with Phinehas, [as it is written] ,

25:12     "(Phinehas) is still alive at the present time." (Num. Rab.  
(cont.)     21:3). <sup>151</sup>

25:13     Because he took impassioned action for his God: Since he fought his God's battles [in His behalf] against all opposition [to Him and His commandments, God] will give him [His pact of] peace. Thus making expiation for the Israelites: When he publicly executed punishment [on the couple] so that [all] the others might be expiated and not be wiped out for sinning. As a result he was deemed worthy to receive eternally priesthood [for himself and his descendants] through which he could [continue to] make expiation on their behalf.

25:14     The name of the Israelite who was killed: [His name is given] for in his expiating this way, he [i.e., Phinehas], endangered his life in that he killed [Zimri] before the eyes of every chieftain and a King's daughter.

26:2     From the age of twenty years up: Moses and Eleazar told the Israelites that they [i.e., the Israelites] were to do the counting and [then] declare all the regulations concerning those who were [at least] twenty years old. <sup>152</sup>

26:4     As the Lord had commanded Moses, [and] the descendants of the Israelites who came out of the land of Egypt: He said at that time [that the census should be taken] by the clans of their ancestral houses.

26:54     With larger groups increase the share: [With respect to] the amount of land for indeed, the land was to be apportioned into twelve parts equal in value, but not in geographic size.

26:54  
(cont.)

Rather, a kor of bad [growth] as opposed to a seah of good [growth], <sup>153</sup> and the tribe with the greatest population was allotted the largest share of land [i.e., the kor of bad growth]; the least tribe received the smallest share [i.e., the seah of good growth, but] equal in monetary value to the largest share, as it is stated, "With larger groups increase the share." In this manner [the tribes of] Manasseh and Ephraim received two portions of land because [their father] Joseph was the first-born [of Rachel. V. Gen 30:22-24], as it says, "...I give you one portion more than to your brothers..." (Gen 48:22), and it is explained [in connection with this], "...of Reuben, the first-born of Israel, but because he polluted his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph..." (1 Chr 5:1), <sup>154</sup> while the [tribe of] Simeon, which had the least amount of people of all the tribes when it entered the land, received the smallest, but most valuable portion of land. Now since no portion of land as a unit sufficiently equal in value was found for Simeon, they examined that very portion in various places within the land of Judah as it says, "The portion of the Simeonites was part of the territory of the Judites..." (Jos 19:9), and with such apportioning [Jacob's prophecy] concerning the Simeonites' partaking [in Judah's inheritance] is fulfilled when he said, "...I will divide them in Jacob..." (Gen 49:7. V. also Josh 19:1ff.).

26:55     Apportioned by lot: Even though they made up large and small portions according to the needs and quantities in the tribes, only by order of the Lord were the portions [of land] assigned to each [particular] tribe.

- 26:56 Each portion shall be assigned by lot: So that when each tribe distributed its portion head by head, each one would be assigned its portion by lot.
- 27:3 He was not one (of Korah's faction): Among Korah's company of whom Moses, our Teacher, ruled that they forfeited their assets [and shares] by imposing a ban when he said, "Move away from the tents of these wicked men and touch nothing that belongs to them, least you be wiped out..." (16:26, supra). They were similarly indicted by God as it says, "...and all their possessions." (16:32, supra). But died for his own sin: [And thus] his punishment consisted only of his dying in the wilderness [with the rest of his generations], but not the loss of inheritance rights for his heirs.
- 27:17 Who shall go out before them: In battle. And who shall take them out: In controlling the [internal] affairs of the nation.
- 27:18 An inspired man: [Joshua is now] prepared to talk directly to God, as in the instance, "...and I have also granted skill to all who are skilled,..." (Exod 31:6).
- 27:19 And commission him in their sight: Appoint him publicly to be their leader and spokesman so as to instill the people with loyalty to him. For [this purpose] use of [the word] צוה is employed in the appointment, as in the instances, "...and [the Lord] has appointed you (ruler of Israel," 1 Sam 25:30), [and], "Ever since I appointed chieftains (over My people Israel..." 2 Sam 7:11).
- 27:20 Invest him with some of your authority: Imbue him with

- 27:20 [some of] your authority while you are alive so that they might  
(cont) begin to accord him [and his leadership] respect. So that (the whole Israelite community) may obey: The reason for his public appointment with [your] investment of authority in him in your lifetime is so that the whole community, comprising the Sanhedrin and elders, would obey him. <sup>155</sup>
- 28:6 The regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai: Which preceded the incident of the golden calf and [therefore] did not require an accompanying libation. <sup>156</sup>
- 28:8 Preparing the same meal offering and libation as in the morning--an offering by fire of pleasing odor: Even though you have already prepared the morning burnt offering on the same day in the same way, and the second [lamb prepared] in exactly the same manner. Nevertheless, it too will be pleasing odor [to the Lord].
- 28:11 On your new moons: Now in [ancient] Israel it was a custom that the new moon was somewhat of a festival [i.e., a minor festival], like that which was conveyed in Scripture, "(...Tomorrow will be the new moon;...So the day after tomorrow, go down all the way to the place) where you hid the other time,..." (1 Sam 20:18-19). This indicates that they did not consider the new moon as a working day, and thus He linked it to Israel, as it says, "on your new moons." Such was not the case with the other festivals; it is not written, "on your Sabbaths," or "on the day of your first-fruits," or "on the day of your Feast of Booths." Now the reason for this, their

28:11  
(cont.)

custom [i.e., why they did not institute the new moon as a major festival] was because Israel's prospering in this world is somewhat like the moon: [The moon] has no light whatsoever of its own, apart from what it receives from another [star]. And even though this [injunction] preceded the incident of the golden calf, [the Midrash which stated, "Do not read it as] 'incised' on the tablets, [but rather] 'freedom' from the servitude by foreign nations forever," [was valid. Cf. Exod. Rab. 41:7]. Now after they sinned [with the golden calf] they apologized for not constantly making use of the Divine Sovereignty, as was the case with the rest of the nations [who likewise did not]. However, it [i.e., the Divine Sovereignty] was for them frequently like the emanation of Heavenly light on them, and without it they would have walked in darkness with no light for them [at all], as happens to the moon when it does not receive any light from the sun. "There is no mazzal (i.e., planetary influence) to Israel," (Shabb. 156a), nor do they produce their own [light. Their light comes] only from God, may He be exalted, when they please Him. Therefore, God, may He be exalted, is designated by the prophets as, "the Light of Israel," as it is written, "Yea, the Light of Israel will be fire,..." (Isa 10:17), and similarly, [this concept of God being light] is borne out by the statement, "The Lord is my light and my help;..." (Ps 27:1). And since their sins became barriers, as it says, "But your iniquities have been a barrier between you and your God, your sins have made Him turn His face away and refuse to hear you." (Isa 59:2), [the result was that] they walked in darkness, confused and oppressed among the nations. From here there unquestionably followed God's name being profaned, [as it says], "(...they caused My holy name to be profaned), in that it was said of them, 'These are the people of the

28:11 Lord, (yet they had to leave His land.'" Ezek 36:20). This  
 (cont.) was in a manner typical of all their trouble, as the Sages have  
 said, "The spoiler is come, if one may say so, upon Me and upon  
 thee." (Git. 58a). And being that the sin offering of the new  
 moon provides expiation for Israel, who caused the prevention of  
 light or its reduction, as the Sages ordained when they said  
 that goats brought as a sin offering provide expiation for them  
 as a memorial for all of them,<sup>157</sup> [and] they will attain salva-  
 tion from their enemies. This expiation will bring about somewhat  
 of an exoneration for [the guilt associated with their] profana-  
 tion of His name. Therefore, they [i.e., the Sages] have said  
 that for this [purpose] it specifies that on the new moon there  
 will be a goat as a sin offering to the Lord because as an expia-  
 tory offering it functions to sanctify His name, may He be ex-  
 alted.<sup>158</sup> This is what the Sages intended when they said, "The  
 Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'Bring an atonement for Me for  
 making the moon smaller.'" (Hul. 60b; cf. Shebu. 9a), that is to  
 say, 'Bring an atonement for Me so that My name might be sanc-  
 tified which was profaned among the surrounding nations in that  
 I diminished the moon when I exiled Israel, and hid My face  
 from them,'

28:26 Your Feast of Weeks: For the sake of the Feast of Weeks; [on that  
 day that you are observing] the laws of the harvest that I have  
 prepared for you. Now the reason for the letter ך in the word  
 "בַּשָּׁבִיעִת יִכָּם" [is that it has the sense of, "for the sake  
 of"]. Similar in meaning [is the letter ך in the following

28:26 usages]: "... (it is the blood), as life, that effects expiation."  
 (cont.) (Lev 17:11); "...for shedding the blood of Asahel,..." (2 Sam  
 3:27); [and], "(Men once sated) must hire out for bread;..."  
 (1 Sam 2:5).

29:35 You shall hold a solemn gathering: As is explained in the Torah  
 portion אמור (V. Lev 23:36).

## CHAPTER NINE

## פרשת מטות

- 30:2 Moses spoke to the heads of the Israelite tribes, (saying):  
This is what the Lord commanded: When He stipulated at Mount Sinai, "You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning (the name of your God,...)" Lev 19:12). [Here], the import concerns a man who [either] makes a vow or swears [by God's name and] breaks his pledge, for when this occurs he profanes the Lord. However, in the instance of a woman who is not her own master [i.e., who is prevented from fulfilling her vow by her father, verse 5, infra], she is not considered to have profaned God's name if it has been annulled.
- 30:6 And the Lord will forgive her: In that she vowed for that which she was unable to fulfill. But if her father restrains her: For she was unaware of what her father's reaction would be when she vowed; her intention was to fulfill her vow [when she made it].
- 30:15 If (her husband) offers no objection: For silence by one who has the authority to annul implies consent, for the one who is silent is like one who consents to what has transpired.
- 30:16 But if he annuls them after [the day] he finds out: After the day that he finds out, for he is no longer able to change his mind and annul [them]. He shall bear her guilt: In accordance with anyone who forces someone to transgress or employs a lie to lead him astray. 159

- 31:5 Were furnished: [Delivered] to Moses from each tribe [to be placed at his disposal].
- 31:6 Moses dispatched them on the campaign, a thousand from each tribe: He dispatched a thousand from every tribe that they would assemble together for the campaign. With Phinehas: After they assembled he dispatched all of them as a unit, and sent Phinehas with them. (Serving as priest) on the campaign, equipped with the sacred utensils and the trumpets for sounding the blasts: He [i.e., Moses] sent him on the campaign as [their] leader, the one "Anointed for Battle" [i.e., the high priest, cf. Deut 20:2], with the sacred utensils and the trumpets for sounding the blasts in his jurisdiction.
- 31:15 You have spared every female!: Even though it is written concerning war with any nation, excluding the seven nations, (V. Deut 7:1), "You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town--all its spoil,..." (Deut 20:14), you should not have spared, at the very least, those women whom you recognized as being your source of disaster, "...at the bidding of Balaam, (...in the matter of Peor,..." verse 16, infra).
- 31:17 Slay every male among the children: Even though they were incapable of having carnal relations. Such vengeance as this [was administered to Midian] so as to eliminate descendants among them.

- 31:21 This is the ritual law: What Moses said to you, [namely that],  
 "(...every one among...) shall cleanse himself on the third and  
 seventh days." (verse 19, supra); that is the ritual law of the  
 Torah pertaining to the red heifer, which renders clean the im-  
 purity associated with the dead.
- 31:22 Gold: But only metal vessels [were to undergo] this method of  
 purification which [also] necessitated their being rinsed in  
 boiling water [after they have been passed through the fire].
- 31:23 And they shall be clean: From their interiors being rinsed in  
 boiling water.[?] Except that they must be cleansed with water  
of lustration: For [after] being heated, they [still] retain  
 their impurity associated with the dead, even though their ap-  
 pearance is [as clean as something] new.
- 31:27 And divide the booty equally: Being that the [Midianite] war  
 was prompted by retribution for what they had done against Israel  
 as a whole, the intention was that it [i.e., the booty] would be  
 preserved among all of them [as it is written], "(You may)...enjoy  
 the use of the spoil of your enemy..." (Deut 20:14), [and] as in  
 the instance involving David and the spoil of Amalek, as it says,  
 "...This is a present for you from our spoil of the enemies of  
 the Lord." (1 Sam 30:26).
- 31:32 Other than the spoil that (the troops) had plundered: For the  
 troops kept for themselves [all] the household items that they  
 had plundered.

- 31:50 That expiation may be made for our persons:<sup>160</sup> Concerning the incident of Peor, that we not be wiped out among the sinners.
- 31:51 Moses (and Eleazar the priest) accepted (the gold): It was taken and weighed. All kinds of wrought articles: All the different kinds of jewelry [worn] by the women at the incident of Peor.
- 31:54 So Moses (and Eleazar the priest) accepted (the gold): After weighing it, he brought it to the Tent of Meeting. As a reminder in behalf of the Israelites: Of the expiation [granted] in the sin of Peor.
- 32:3 Ataroth, Dibon: Each of them separately is cattle country.
- 32:6 Are your brothers going to war?: Do you really think that your brothers desire to wage war to conquer?! While you stay here: [You wish to remain behind] in territory already conquered! It is obvious that you do not believe that this [i.e., crossing the Jordan] will be a successful endeavor. This is nothing but an attempt [on your part] to dissuade your brothers [from crossing the Jordan].
- 32:7 Why will you turn the minds? How can you not remember the extent to which those who turned the minds [of the Israelites] back in the previous generation were severely stricken?! [i.e., How is it possible for you to have forgotten so quickly the resulting catastrophe?!]

- 32:17 Until we have established them (in their home): So long as we have not established them ("in their home,...we will not return to our homes..." verse 18, infra). Similar is [the usage of the word <sup>79</sup> as it occurs in Proverbs], "Before He had made the earth with its fields,..." (Prov 8:26), [and in Genesis], "...until they finish (drinking." Gen 24:19).
- 32:23 You will have sinned against the Lord: By this [failure to honor your word] you will be making known then [i.e., in the future], that you have sinned now, in that you will be making known [then] that your intention [now] was to wreak evil.
- 32:25 Your servants will do (as my lord commands): In accordance with what you have requested [us]--that we cross [the Jordan] as shock-fighters.
- 32:28 Then Moses gave instructions (concerning them): Moses instructed "(Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the family heads of the Israelite tribes)" that the land of Sihon and Og was not to be assigned to them [i.e., the Gadites and the Reubenites] until they [i.e., these same two tribes] returned from helping to subdue the land, and not before, as it says, "And the land has been subdued,...and then you return...and this land shall be your holding...." (verse 22, supra). So they did not receive [their requested share until they crossed over and returned], as it says, "We ourselves will cross over as shock-troops,...and we shall keep our hereditary holding (across the Jordan." verse 32, infra).

32:28 That is, [all the land of Gilead] will be under our authority once  
(cont.) we have crossed the Jordan [and returned].

32:33 So Moses assigned to them: To avoid becoming engaged in an  
argument, Moses agreed to their request.

## CHAPTER TEN

## פרשת מסעי

- 33:1 These were the marches: It was God's desire, may He be exalted, that Israel's marches be recorded to make known their merit, "...how they followed Him in the wilderness, in a land not sown." (Jer 2:2), in such a [steadfast] manner, they deserved to enter the promised land.
- 33:2 Moses recorded: He listed [the names of all their] destinations and places of departure, as occasionally a destination represented the ultimate in adversity, while a [particular] point of departure was a good place. The starting points of their various marches: And occasionally the opposite was true [i.e., their destination being a far better place than their origin]. He also recorded [that] the nature of a march was to go from one place to another while lacking foreknowledge as to the difficulty [of the intended march. Nonetheless], all of this [uncertainty] did not prevent them [from marching]. As a result, for each [march of theirs] it is recorded that they set out from one given place and encamped at another, for every departure and encampment was difficult for them.
- 33:40 And the Canaanite,...learned (of the coming of the Israelites): And this also is to their merit, for unlike their fathers they had not said, "Let us head back (for Egypt." 14:4, supra), even when they realized [that conquest necessitated] war. Instead, they made a vow to the Lord, and kept their promise.

- 33:53 And you shall take possession of the land: [Only] when you clear out the natives will you merit to bequeath the land to your children, for if you do not drive them out, you will not merit to bequeath it to your children, even if you subdue the land.
- 33:56 So that I will do to you what I planned to do to them: Because there is no question that you will be seduced to idolatry [if you allow them to remain. Thus you must drive them out].
- 34:2 This is the land that shall fall to you as your portion: Before you subdue all the land, [your portion] shall fall to you by lot, for [the term] "by lot" is an appropriate expression [that suggests] "a falling," as in, "...casting lots for my garments." (Ps 22:19), and similarly, "...Pur—which means 'the lot'—was cast,..." (Esth 3:7). He said this because it was not necessary to divide by lot that [land] which was subdued outside of the [promised] land. Thus Moses did not apportion the land of Sihon and Og by lot, as indicated in the book of Joshua (13:10 ff.). This is because the land of Sihon and Og lacked the sanctity of the land of Israel, as it said, "If it is because your land is unclean, (cross over into the land of the Lord's own holding,..." Josh 22:19), <sup>161</sup> and [thus] it was not fitting to be assigned by lot which implies Divine Spirit.
- 35:3 For their cattle: [Use] for wagons and burdens. [That] they own: Cattle and sheep. And all their other beasts: Such as bees in a beehive, doves in a dove-cot and others like these.

35:8 Take more from the larger groups: Because when they evaluated it, [they found that] the lesser [gift] of that tribe which had a smaller section was equal in value with the larger portion, which was to be given to the Levites by that tribe whose section was greater in size.

35:25 Until the death of the high priest: It has already been explained that [this] banishment applies [only] to unintentional manslaughter, and since there are different kinds of unintentional manslaughter unequal [in intent], for among them [there are] those close to being sheer accident, and close to being intentional [and they are all grouped together], he [therefore] prescribes a period of time that is not equal for all those who commit unintentional manslaughter. For among them [there are those] whose unintentional manslaughter will warrant [their banishment to a city of refuge] for just a small [period of time] before the death of the high priest. And [also] among them [are those] where the accused person will die [while he is] in banishment before the death of the high priest. [All of] this is decided by God, may He be exalted, who knows what the future will bring. One who has committed an unintentional manslaughter will be punished according to the degree of his unintentional manslaughter, [i.e., according to the extent of his act of manslaughter being committed with intent], as it says, "...but it came about by an act of God,..." (Exod 21:13).

36:2 As shares by lot: And in the case where one tribe has a portion within the boundary of another, the lot will not come out perfectly

36:2 for the tribe that has the lesser amount when it [i.e., the lot]  
 (cont.) falls on the whole boundary of the tribe. Similarly for [the tribe  
 that has] the larger portion--it [i.e., the lot] will not come out  
 perfectly if he will not add to his boundary that portion which  
 belongs to the other.

36:4 And even when (the Israelites) observe the jubilee,...and their  
 share will be cut off: <sup>162</sup> And in view of the fact that we shall  
 not subdue all of the land at once, as it says, "I will drive  
 them out before you little by little,..." (Exod 23:30), each  
 tribe will have to conquer its own portion. Therefore, even  
 though it might happen that an individual would perchance sell his  
 portion to someone else from another tribe, the seller will not  
 refrain from striving with his tribe to conquer, since it [i.e.,  
 his share] will return to him in the jubilee. However, [concern-  
 ing] the portion belonging to [Zelophehad's] daughters that would  
 not return [to them] in the jubilee, [were they to marry outside  
 of their ancestral tribe], the men of [their] tribe [either] would  
 not strive to conquer it, or they would [simply] allow the natives  
 to stay there since it would become part of another tribe. Thus,  
 their conquered inheritance would be less than the lot for the  
 ancestral [portion] of our tribe. <sup>163</sup>

36:10 The daughters of Zelophehad did (as the Lord had commanded Moses):  
 When they performed the will of their Maker as He had commanded  
 Moses, [and] not because they had a passion for those whom they  
 [ultimately] married.

36:12 Into clans of descendants of Manasseh (son of Joseph): [They married into clans of descendants of Manasseh, son of Joseph] when they realized that it was God's intention, may He be exalted, "...that no inheritance pass over (from one tribe to another,..."  
 vv 7, 9, supra). Although He had permitted them to choose whom-  
 ever they pleased from within their entire tribe, they selected the sons of their uncles from out of all the clans because they [i.e., the sons of their uncles] were their closest relatives.  
And so their share remained in the tribe of their father's clan:  
 And thus there was no reason for [their] hereditary holding [being transferred] even among [their] clans. <sup>164</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Thus we have seen that Sforno makes continuous use of the וּוּו or the plain meaning of the text throughout his commentary. Almost completely eschewing mystical and Kabbalistic motifs, Sforno's primary exegesis remains the וּוּו.

Occasionally he will present homiletical interpretations which have often occurred in the strata of earlier Rabbinic literature. Examples of this allegorical method are seen in 8:2; 24:5; 24:6; and 28:11.

Perhaps the most noteworthy example of his usage of allegory is found in 19:2ff. In this section involving the red heifer Sforno provides an extensive, continuous commentary on the passage as a whole. After discussing the question of this intricate rite's purport, Sforno ultimately concludes that the ritual surrounding the red heifer serves as a therapeutic process for man which heightens his consciousness as to what constitutes proper living. By striving to attain the mean (see *infra*) will his existence be fraught with purpose. Sforno's capacity for creative thought is displayed here with undeniable authority.

Equally impressive is Sforno's allegorical interpretation of the sin of Moses. Once again he presents a lengthy discourse as to the nature and circumstances of Moses' sin (commencing with 20:8). Sforno contends that, insofar as Moses was God's emissary who acted in His behalf, it was incumbent upon Moses to instill in the people a reverence for the Supreme Being. To achieve this God commissioned him to work a public wonder through which God's sanctity would be affirmed. The emergence of water from the rock immediately after being ordered to

yield its water (20:8), would have effected this. However, by striking the rock in lieu of speaking to it Moses performed a different kind of wonder; the water still flowed, but now the people attributed such a feat to Moses' greatness rather than to God's unlimited power. Thus the eminence of producing a marvel was unsurped by Moses, and herein lies the explanation of the guilt associated to him, asserts Sforno.

Sforno's commentary is replete with discourses which at times reflect the dominant philosophical opinions of his predecessors. For instance, in 15:41 he re-affirms the concept of God's unity and uniqueness as the Supreme Being, a theological premise already expounded by Maimonides in his Guide For the Perplexed.

However, he often clarifies the text with apt, innovative commentary indicative of his creative genius for profound, original insights. For example, in 13:18 Moses charges the spies to note carefully the physical qualities of the Canaanites. Sforno reasons that a people's physical prowess or weakness is determined by location, and hence he emphasizes the importance of environment in the consideration of a dwelling place. Such advice, he insists, is highly recommended by intelligent doctors; an insight prompted by his own profession as a physician.

Another occurrence which reflects Sforno's penetrating discernment of the text is seen in 14:37. At this juncture the spies, who earlier had given their fabricated account of the land's enervating qualities (13:28ff.), now succumb to a plague. Sforno adds that they were stricken by the indentical sickness which they had announced would befall all who would strive to dwell in Canaan. This punish-

ment, claims Sforno, clearly exhibits a divine application of the Rabbinic principle, "measure for measure."

While not overly preoccupied with grammatical forms, Sforno occasionally enters a discussion of philology of varying technical nature, citing proof-texts appositely in support of his contentions. In 12:6 and 12:8 he differentiates between מִרְאָה and מִרְאֵה to distinguish different levels of prophetic vision. In 24:11 he illustrates the usage of the imperative "to flee" in a special sense without the connotation of immediate pursual. In 22:32 Sforno comments upon a specific infrequently encountered verbal pattern.

Another theme characteristic of Sforno is his periodic allusions to medical matters. For example, after Miriam is stricken with leprosy as punishment for railing against Moses (12:10), Aaron implores Moses to act on their sister's behalf, "Let her not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away." (12:12). To this graphic description Sforno compares the delivery of a macerated fetus, an occurrence he likely encountered as a physician.

In his exposition involving the red heifer Sforno stressed the importance of attaining the mean, i.e., a mode of existence whereby one's lifestyle reflects a conscious effort to walk on the middle ground between extremes, a policy first advocated by Aristotle and later Maimonides. To this end he admonishes against any course of action involving extremes, excepting the instance wherein one is already at some kind of limit; only then is it considered therapeutic to prescribe action that entails the opposite extreme to restore one to the mean. He illustrates this principle through his medical

erudition; a cathartic, he purports, will benefit one who is ill, but will have an adverse effect on one who is healthy.

This last point necessitates further clarification. Sforno's "prescription" of a cathartic was wholly in accordance with medical procedure as was practiced in the Middle Ages. The assumption on the part of doctors that proper treatment for both physical and spiritual maladies required a purging seems to have prevailed.

In conclusion, Sforno has awakened in me a greater appreciation for Biblical commentary in its ultimate essence; its resourcefulness, depth and piquancy. The commentaries are thus to be viewed as treasure troves abundant in wealth, brimming with creativity and flowing with inspiration.

Sforno's commentary is highly enlightening; it helps to illuminate the eternal verities which were imparted to our ancestors of antiquity in the Torah, and comprise our religious heritage. Sforno's insightful commentary is the result of a monumental application of the Rabbinic dictum, "Turn the Torah and turn it again, for all things are in it...." (Abot 5:25).

May Sforno's efforts to elucidate the teaching of our sacred Torah infuse our lives with a sense of the Holy, as expressed so succinctly by the prophet Micah nearly 3,000 years ago,

"He has told you, O man, what is good,

And what the Lord requires of you:

Only to do justice

And to love goodness,

And to walk modestly with your God;

Then will your name achieve wisdom."

(Mic 6:8-9).

NOTES

1. Though everyone came in his military unit, originally there was to be no occurrence of battle involving the conquest of Canaan. Such a peaceful settlement could be effected by the voluntary departure of the opposing nations. See *infra*, notes 4 and 5.
  2. The Septuagint renders these two words as, "the Amorites and the Hivites."
  3. Traditionally the Amorites and the Hivites were autochthonic to Palestine along with other peoples, including the Girgashites, Canaanites, Perrizzites, Hittites and Jebusites. See Deut 7:1.
  4. Originally inhabitants of Canaan, this clan is not cited among those peoples whom the Israelites demolished in their ultimate conquest. Cf. Jos 12:7-8. From this the Sages concluded that the Girgashites had voluntarily departed from the area to avoid being routed out of the region. See Lev. Rab. 17:6.
  5. Amicable settlement was not to be. Were it not for the fabricated account returned by the spies, immediate and peaceful conquest would have ensued. Even the ultimate process of settlement was not achieved without struggle, nor was it the outcome of a total Israelite victory, as evidenced by the narrative in Judges 1.
  6. Sforino's text is different from the Talmud which reads,  

"אין בודקין...אף מי שהיה מוכתב באסטרטיא של מלך."
  7. The Talmudic source reads,  

"כשהקב"ה משרה שכינתו אין  
משרה אלא על משפחות מיוחסות שבישראל."

"When the Holy One, blessed be He, causes His Divine Presence to rest, it is only upon families of pure birth in Israel."
  8. Reuben's status of having the birthright.
  9. The repentance of Reuben is cited in Gen. Rab. 84:19, viz.,  

"AND REUBEN RETURNED UNTO THE PIT (Gen 37:29). Where had he been? R. Eleazar said: He was taken up with his fasting and sackcloth [in penitence], and when he became free he went and looked into the pit. Hence it is written, AND REUBEN REPENTED."
- From this account it is understandable to see how the Rabbis derived that Reuben had repented. The Hebrew וישב can mean, "And he returned," and, "And he repented."
10. Reference here is made to the cohabitation of Reuben with Bilhah, his father's concubine. See Gen 35:22.

11. The distinction of being the first-born was lost to Reuben by human reckoning, as indicated by the following narrative:

"The sons of Reuben, the eldest of Israel's sons--He was, in fact, the first son born, but because he had committed incest with a wife of his father's the rank of the eldest was transferred to the sons of Joseph, Israel's son, who, however, could not be registered as the eldest son."  
(1 Chr 5:1)

From this it is clear that Reuben still remained the first-born in the eyes of God.

12. The location of the Rabbinic reference is not certain.
13. Not only were the Levites excluded from the sum total of the rest of the Israelites, but as an aggregate group the Levites had not been counted. This latter fact is the purport of Sforno's intention as the text explicitly stipulates that the Levites were not to be included in the Israelite census.
14. It is assumed that Phinehas was himself consecrated for priesthood before the incident involving the slaying of Zimri occurred. His fervent zeal for the Lord enabled him to act brazenly as God's surrogate. The Midrash accordingly devotes attention to the lineage of Phinehas; see Num. Rab. 21:3.
15. The progeny of Nadab and Abihu would have been the expected successors to the high priesthood of Aaron. Nadab and Abihu were childless, however; see Num 3:4. Consequently this privileged status of succession to the high priesthood was transferred to Eleazar and Ithamar, the two surviving brothers of Nadab and Abihu.
16. The first tithe was the allocation of one tenth of the total Israelite produce, including both the yield of the earth and the fruit of the tree. Such a consignment was prescribed to the Israelites for the Levites annually as a perquisite for services rendered. See 18:21-26, *infra*.
17. Scriptures here indicates that the privilege of holy ministrings, hitherto enjoyed by the first-born, has now been transferred to the Levites who did not act licentiously, as did the others in the incident of the golden calf, but remained faithful to the Lord.
18. See Deut 15:19.
19. On the evidence of the Biblical dictum, "Consecrate to Me every first-born; man and beast; the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine." (Exod 13:2), it should theoretically be possible to maintain even today the system involving the sacrifice of the first-born among clean beasts, and the redemption from the priest of the first-born among unclean beasts. (See Exod 13:12-15; 34:19-20; Num 18:15-18; and Deut 15:19-22). Yet

with the destruction of the Temple the sacrificial process was abolished and it became necessary to remit these animals to the priest who would watch over them. He himself was not permitted to derive any benefit whatsoever from them unless these beasts either died a natural death while under his jurisdiction, or suffered a blemish which disqualified them for sacrificial purposes. Were this to occur, the animal, in its state of being profane, could then be used for any purpose including consumption by an Israelite. An ass was considered to be the sole unclean beast to be redeemed, a statute from which both the Levites and the priests were exempted; see Exod 13:13,15; and 34:19,20.

20. According to the Mishnah (Bek.2:1) neither priests nor Levites were obligated to redeem their first-born. After the privilege of cultic service was conveyed from the firstborn to the Levites, the latter's sons were redeemed, but this example was particular to this very generation; successive generations of Levites were not required to observe this as a precedent.
21. The service of the Merarite clans comprised the transport duties of the Tabernacle foundation and its accessories. See vv 4:29-33; 7:8.
22. The Talmud refers to a resident alien who dies without leaving any heirs. With regard to an Israelite, it is highly unlikely that any relative, whether close or distant, could not be found.

The source of this Talmudic reference as indicated in the text is incorrect. The quote is contained in B. Qam. 51b, and not in B. Meş., perek "Ha-Mafqid." Apparently all texts cite the wrong place of this quote, suggesting that the authenticity of this reference was never ascertained by the editors who printed Sforno's commentary.

23. The context of this Scripural reference (Deut 26:1-3), describes the presentation of both the tithe and the first-fruits at the sanctuary. Such was a celebration of thanksgiving to God, by whose beneficence were the Israelites enabled to enjoy the product of the land.
24. The term mishmar (a "watch" or "guard") referred to a division of priests and Levites for duty in the sanctuary. Because there were so many of them dispersed throughout ancient Israel, it was physically impossible for all of them to serve in the Temple simultaneously. Therefore, it was determined that the total number of priests and Levites was to be divided into twenty-four geographical divisions. Each mishmar actively served in the Temple for one week after which it was replaced by another mishmar on a rotating basis. This division also applied to the Israelites. Scattered throughout Palestine, they could not appear in Jerusalem as an aggregate body at any time. Therefore, one of the twenty-four mishmarot among them would journey to Jerusalem weekly, representing not only themselves, but also the entire populace of Israelites who were not in attendance at the Temple.

The mishmar in Jerusalem was present when the daily sacrifices were offered at the Temple.

25. The phrase, "one's eyes being dimmed" also occurs in Gen 27:1. In this context Isaac bestows his innermost blessing upon Jacob, instead of Esau who deserved it. Such an occurrence was caused by Issac's eyes being dimmed. It is noteworthy that this verb in both instances connotes deceit.
26. The test by water (vv 17ff.) was valid only in cases of doubt; not so where there was tangible evidence confirming the validity of the husband's claim of his wife's infidelity.
27. See Num. Rab. 9:10.
28. The husband's claim may lack both proof and reason. Nonetheless, its authenticity was not challenged by the priest. Thus the trial by the waters of portent, an ordeal intended to allay the doubt of marital unfaithfulness in Israel, was clearly instigated at the husband's discretion.
29. Upon the scroll was written the curse-charge with usage of God's ineffable name.
30. Such a statement essentially constitutes a false oath in that it lacks purport. As a result one who renders this kind of vain oath violates the Third Commandment (Exod 20:7). See also m. Shebu. 3:8.
31. The text indicates the circumstances out of which the husband may, if so inclined, raise the issue of his wife's fidelity into question, specifically, vv 14, 29-30.
32. Even in a circumstance where the husband's assertion lacks genuine grievance, the charge is equally binding.
33. Once again, all editions cite the Talmudic reference incorrectly. The correct source of the quote is from Shabb. 56a, which is in perek "Bameh Behemah," and NOT "Bameh Ha-Ishah."
34. The phrase makkot perushim (Lit., "wounds of the Pharisees") is defined in the Talmud as an act of hypocrisy (Yer. Sota 3:4; Yer. Pe'a 8:8). This term circulated in Palestine up through the third century carrying such a connotation. For a more elaborate delineation of makkot perushim, see Guttman, pp. 202-219 in Jacob, Schwartz and Kavalier, Essays.
35. Honoring the dead was to be eschewed by the high priest, upon whom the prohibition to avoid the ritual defilement associated with a corpse was continuously applicable.
36. Nisibis was in the north-east corner of Mesopotamia; it contained an important Jewish community. The source of this quote is Yer. Pesah. 3:7 which reads:

"מבלי אין קברות בקסרין שלחתיך לסבריא."

"Would there have been a lack of graves in Qisrim I would have sent you to Tiberias."

37. With reference to the birth and dedication of Samuel.
38. Joseph, when he was brought to the Pharaoh, was shaved and dressed in different garments and was essentially a new man. V. Gen 41:14ff.
39. The source of this quotation is cited incorrectly. It is found in Shabb. 17a, and NOT in perek "Haiya Qore" of tractate Berakot.
40. Such sacrifices were offered on behalf of the entire tribe in a collective sense, and for the people in it, thus comprising an individual sense as well.
41. See v 9, *infra*.
42. See vv 7-8, *supra*.
43. Sforno addresses himself here to the question as to why the sacrifices of all twelve chieftains had to be enumerated in the text. Being identical, it might have been expected for the text to have read, "Each chieftain presented his offering on his respective day. Each chieftain offered: ...." Concern for expiation was the motivation for presenting their offerings, and Scripture wished to illustrate the piety of their intentions. This was its purport in repeating the list of offerings for each tribe.
44. In the mishmarot, those priests, Levites or Israelites who actually stood by and performed the sacrifices in the Temple comprised a ma'amad. (See m. Ta'an. 4:2). Those people who did not accompany the Jerusalem delegation assembled at the times of the appropriate sacrifices and recited portions of Genesis 1. See *supra*, note 24.

As a custom that arose during the latter period of the Second Temple, the mishmarot and ma'amadot provided the foundation for a viable alternative mode of worship for the Jews of the Diaspora. The institution of the Synagogue served as the spiritual center for those who were not present in Jerusalem. Thus with its establishment everyone could participate in the cult by his attendance at one of many local Synagogues. Even after the destruction of the Second Temple the custom of daily worship remained among the Jews, for whom the institution of the Synagogue was the nucleus of their religious community. It was here that prayer replaced the sacrifices of the Temple. See Zeitlin, pp. 117-118; 169-172; 263-264.

45. See 1 Kgs 8:5, 62-64; 2 Chr 5:6; 7:5,7.
46. This philosophic outlook clearly reflects Aristotelian influence on Sforno, who, in his treatise Or Ammim, energetically endeavored to refute the philosophical doctrines of Aristotle which conflicted with Judaism's tenets.

In this verse Sforno addresses himself to the issue of God's self-consciousness. He avers that God is speaking to Himself. Occasionally someone is privileged to overhear this "conversation" and thus becomes enabled to execute God's good intention. In his comment the word **מַחֲשֵׁב** is reflective and refers to the one who is listening. The outcome is God seeing results in the object of this activity.

47. The Talmud cites a homily whose proposition is that everyone in a society contributes to its welfare. For example, a community's scholars ought to be appreciative of the laity's presence in that the House of Study, while financially supported by both groups, could not exist without the aid of the masses. Similarly in Sforno's illustration--those who concern themselves only of temporal matters make it possible for others to derive benefit for eternal life.
48. The motif of unity is emphasized here. All the candles contribute light to create an effect of totality, highlighted by the lampstand which, itself, was hammered out of gold into a structure containing no other components except itself.
49. Cf. 3:12, *supra*, and the note *ad loc*.
50. See 3:8, *supra*, and Sforno's commentary *ad loc*.
51. The term mamzer refers to a child born a prohibited union, with the penalty of excision. Included here would be a child of any incestuous or adulterous relationship. Regarded as the lowest on the social scale, a mamzer was prohibited from entering the Lord's congregation (Deut 23:3).
52. Mo'ed Qat. 9a; Shabb. 30a; Sanh. 107b; Num. Rab. 17:2.
53. The term mitzvah refers to a Biblical or Rabbinic injunction. It may also mean good deed or an act of charity.
54. Reference here is made to Ben Azai's statement in Abot 4:2, "...for precept [*i.e.*, mitzvah] leads to precept, and transgression to transgression."
55. One who was ritually defiled by a corpse was prohibited from offering the paschal sacrifice at its set time, namely, the 14th of Nisan. It was prescribed that such individuals instead present their passover sacrifice on the 14th of Iyar. See v 11, *infra*.
56. The phrase **מִלֵּךְ מְרֹמֵת** occurs in Num 23:21 and denotes God. Its usage here in 10:2 has the same meaning.
57. There were three camps on the eastern side of the Tabernacle comprising Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. The standard of Judah marched in front. See 2:1-9, *supra*, and 10:14-16, *infra*.
58. Both trumpets were sounded to convoke the community, whereas only one trumpet was used to summon the chieftains. In both these instances the trumpet call was a sustained blast.

59. Cf. Sforino's commentary to 1:2, and notes 1, 2 and 5 ad loc.
60. Here the paraphrase is rendered by reading צבאות ("hosts") for רבבות ("thousands").
- The reference to Qiddushin cited in the text is wrong. The quote is from Shebu. 35b.
61. It is quite obvious that the Israelites were not complaining due to deprivation, but rather were giving voice to their dissatisfaction. Undoubtedly nothing would have completely placated the people.
62. The language employed here by Moses suggests his abject resignation.
63. Sforino constructs his comment to include an indirect reference to Hebrew text wherein God is addressed by Moses as "אַתָּה" which is the feminine form of the masculine pronoun "you;" the lack of the letter hē (ה) in the word אַתָּה ("you," masculine) transforms it to the feminine form אַתְּ. Moses remarks that for the Israelites to journey in the wilderness without God's supervision would be tantamount to being subjected to a woman's leadership. The purport of his argument is that were the Israelites to march unaided by God, this would result in God's state of completeness (or wholeness) being reduced to a state of deficiency. Thus God would no longer be approached as אַתָּה, but אַתְּ and this would connote not only a lack of wholeness (owing to the missing letter hē), but also the association of feminine leadership.
64. The reference of this statement is given as perek "Bameh Behemah" in tractate Shabbat, but this is not correct. The exact location of its source is not certain.
65. Such a request was prompted by the inability of Moses to contain his despair of failure. He will not or cannot abandon the divinely assigned task; nor can he bear the encompassing disappointment which currently confronts him in his mission.
- For similar accounts of complaint resulting from failure in one's efforts cf. 1 Kgs 19:4 (involving Elijah) and Jer 15:10.
66. The reference is to their statement in verse 5, supra.
67. Moses asserts that even all of the cattle that they possessed would be insufficient to satisfy their cravings. His statement reflects a skepticism of God's power. Surely this utterance was an impulsive response to Moses' desperation, and did not reflect a genuine disbelief either in God or His ability to act.
68. Joshua was concerned that the authority and dignity of Moses would be compromised by allowing prophecy from those who had not been directly commissioned by Moses.
69. Cf. Pss 78:26-31; 106:13-15.

70. The text of Sforno is different from that of Ruth. Sforno says, " ויהיו שם כעשר שנים ", whereas Ruth reads, " וישנו שם כעשר שנים ", which means, " ... and they lived there about ten years."
71. The context of this Talmudic quote concerns the response to derogatory remarks. In our text God champions the innocence of Moses in his meekness.
72. The term אספקלריאה המאירה connotes a bright mirror. The prophecy apprehended by Moses was compared to the reflection produced by such a bright mirror. By contrast, the prophecy of all others was said to be like the unclear images given off by a dim mirror.
73. Yet v 23:16 apparently contradicts Sforno's statement, for it is written, "The Lord manifested himself to Balaam ...," employing the Tetragrammaton.
74. This seems to be an indirect quote whose source could not be identified.
75. Herein Sforno compares the situation of the Israelites with that of the delivery of a macerated fetus. Such an observation originates from Sforno's personal experience as a physician wherein he undoubtedly witnessed this phenomenon.
76. This prayer, the shortest ever recorded, manifests Moses' genuine pity and concern for his sister, stricken with leprosy. Though he had been verbally abused by Miriam, Moses acts in full accordance with the Levitical injunction, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk ..." (Lev 19:18).
77. Hazeroth remains an unidentified camping place of Israelites after the incident of Kibroth - hatta'awah. The Israelites were obligated to remain here for the duration of Miriam's exclusion from the camp. (V. 11:35 and Sforno's commentary ad loc.). The text of 12:16 forms a logical continuation from 11:35.
78. From the text it is apparent that Paran was the place of Israelite settlement after their departure from the Sinai wilderness (V. 10:12). Paran was north of the Sinai Peninsula. From here the spies were dispatched to scout the southern boundary of Canaan. Thus Kibroth - hatta'awah (11:35), and Hazeroth (12:16), constituted intermediate halting places before their arrival at the wilderness of Paran.
79. The word הרשיעו connotes here more than just acting wickedly. An additional nuance of this word is "to accuse falsely." In the Biblical text the spies acted wickedly in that they maliciously shattered the spirit of the people by their spurious assertion that the land would be impossible to conquer. In effect this

greatly depreciated God's image as being their advocate in any future conquest. Thus Sforino's usage of this word הַרְשִׁיעַן (rather than הִטָּן, for example) is wholly appropriate in this context.

80. The change of Hoshea's name to Joshua had already occurred by the time of the first encounter with Amalek; V. Exod 17:9ff.
81. I.e., southern Canaan.
82. Such a cogent observation emanates from Sforino's primary profession as a physician.
83. The citation from Judges 5:7 allows Sforino to engage in a play of words. Here he equates the word פִּרְיוֹן ("deliverance") in the text with "open cities."
84. This initial assessment of the land's quality constitutes the response to Moses' query about the land in 13:20.
85. Before the spies had announced their inability to achieve a successful conquest of Canaan.
86. After the people had heard the entire dismal report of lies contained in vv 32, and 33.
87. The word זָרַח does not occur in 1 Sam 14:25. It is found in 1 Sam 14:26 which reads, "When the troops came to the beehives and found the flow of honey there,...."
88. The context of this Talmudic citation concerns the method of land apportionment to be utilized in conjunction with the stipulations contained in Num 26:53ff. The Talmudic discussion specifically pertains to determining the proper recipient of the land shares. The question has arisen: Is the land divided according to those who came out of Egypt, or who entered Canaan? This discussion commences with the Mishnah in B. Bat. 116b, and entails several pages.

Sforino's reference to this Talmudic passage, "...the dead were heirs to the living," removes it from its context, and hence necessitates further clarification. Land apportionment upon arrival in Canaan was to be determined by a specific procedure. Essentially, shares were distributed according to the number of those who entered Canaan. In some instances the sum total of allotted shares is measured by the number of fathers who left Egypt, but died in the wilderness. Under such circumstances, "the dead are heirs to the living," because then the shares are assigned according to their [i.e., the deceased fathers'] number. Only then do their descendants know how much their shares [i.e., that of the descendants] comprise. See B. Bat. 117a,b.

89. Once again the meekness of Moses comes to the fore. Not only does he decline the Divine offer for eminence, but also hastens to remind God that the honor of His Divine name would be irreparably jeopardized were he to act in full accordance with His intention to obliterate the Israelites by disease. For now the other nations would disclaim God's reputation of omnipotence, as evidenced by the destruction of the Israelites. Hence, God must deliver them to the promised land, "for the sake of His name." Cf. Blank, pp. 117-137.
90. Moses now implores God to pardon the Israelites out of deference to His own self-revealed Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy and Forgiveness. Cited in Exod 34:6-7, they are repeated here in Moses' effort to stay God's intended punishment of the Israelites.
91. Sforno might also have mentioned the plague inflicted upon the Israelites for converging against Moses after the deaths of Korah and his faction; see 17:6-15, *infra*.
92. In his comment Sforno makes use of both meanings conveyed by the Hebrew root **וָרַח** in its causative sense: 1) to bequeath, and 2) to dispossess.
93. Their children under the age of twenty would escape the fateful destiny of their erring parents by hearkening to God and not breaking faith with Him. Thus, by their own merit will they be judged, in accordance with the dictums of Jer 31:29-30 and Ezek 18:2. See Num 14:23 and Sforno's commentary *ad loc*.
94. According to Sforno, the spies, who circulated the calumnious report of Canaan's incompatible climate, were themselves stricken with the identical plague which they asserted would befall those who attempted to dwell in the promised land. From this he derives the observation that the spies' punishment reflects the application of the Rabbinic principle, **מִדָּה כְּנִגּוּד מִדָּה**, ("measure for measure").
95. The "odor pleasing to the Lord" resulted from burnt offerings and bulls sacrificed as offerings of well-being. V. Exod. 24:5.
96. The order of words in the MT reads as follow:  

"...אַךְ עֲשֵׂי-לִי מִשֶּׁם עֵגֶה קֶטְנָה...וְהוֹצֵאתָ לִּי..."

 "... (but first) make me a small cake from what you have there, and bring it out to me;..."
97. Sforno paraphrases the Talmudic statement which, in our editions, reads, "Idolatry is so heinous that he who rejects it is as though he admits [the truth of] the whole Torah." This phrase occurs in Ned. 25a; Qidd. 40a; Shebu. 29a; and Hul. 5a.
98. Such repentance was not motivated by a sense of contrition on the part of the Israelites, but prompted by fear of the consequences of their sin. Therefore, no amount of atonement would be efficacious.
99. The ultimate purpose of vv 39-41 was to instill the meaning of holiness upon the Israelites. The motif of the Tzitzit was to effect in the Jew a spiritual conformity with God's laws.

100. I.e., is qualified to be high priest.
101. Our editions of the Talmud read "...עבירות שבין". The sense of the passage remains unchanged.
102. See 1 Sam 8:11-17 which describes that which an autocrat had within his power.
103. Sforino wished to explain here the fact that, "The sons of Korah, however, did not die." (infra, 26:11).
104. I.e., not in the proximity of the altar.
105. The phrase זרז זרז may reflect a play on the words: זרז ("foreign"), and זרז ("scatter"). Thus when the text says, "scatter the coals abroad," Sforino hastens to use the similar expression in his commentary, "because it was foreign," which captures this play on words.
106. Once the censers had been consecrated for sacred service they could never be utilized for any secular purpose. Even though the oblation of Korah and his faction was rejected by God, the vessels, nonetheless, maintained their state of sanctity because of their usage for a holy function.
107. Meaning lay people and common (i.e., non-priestly) Levites.
108. Thus only Aaron and his sons would minister in the inner sanctuary. The other Levites could not gain access to this area.
109. In accordance with the stipulation: "They [i.e., the Levites] shall perform duties...before the Tent of Meeting, doing the work of the Tabernacle." (3:7, supra).
110. Since the altar used for burnt offerings was situated within the court-yard, the Levites were forbidden to approach it.
111. Excepting the brazen altar upon which the burnt offerings were laid; see verse 3, supra.
112. Thus the priests were responsible for all duties within the sanctuary, and in addition, were in charge of the brazen altar used for burnt offerings in the temple court-yard. The Levites, on the other hand, were assigned to functions outside the sanctuary except for the brazen altar.
113. With total disregard to the particular sanctions, King Uzziah arrogated to himself priestly ministries. He entered the Temple in hubristic fashion to light incense. For his brazenness he was immediately stricken with leprosy. V. 2 Chr 26:16-21; 27:2.
114. The regulations governing the heave offering and wave offering are enumerated in Lev 7:29-34.
115. The Talmud emphasizes that once a blessing has been recited over something that has been measured, its dimensions cannot be altered without annulling the efficacy of that blessing.

116. Terumah was the donation of part of the land's produce to the priest as a perquisite for services rendered.
117. Sforno appears to have combined two Rabbinic dictums:  
 "I have decreed it גזרתיך and you are not permitted to criticize it." (Yoma 67b), and  
 "I, the Lord have made it a statute חקקתיך and you have no right to criticize it." (Yoma 67b).  
 The intent of the Rabbis was to assert that God enacted specific decrees whose validity and application was not to be questioned by man.
118. I.e., indirectly. Cf. Job 4:12 where this same phrase occurs.
119. The Rabbis equate "whiteness" with becoming pure from sin. Accordingly, they cited at this juncture the same passage from Isa. 1:18 which Sforno had also quoted.
120. For a comprehensive and insightful background for this and what follows, see Aristotle's "Nichomachean Ethics," and Maimonides' "Eight Chapters."
121. The Rabbis reasoned that excessive haughtiness reflected poorly on one, while its total absence also created problems in that a Rabbi would be unable to exert any kind of authority. Thus, this context reflects the prevailing attitude of the Rabbis in their advocating the mean as the proper mode of existence.
122. The source of this Rabbinic citation is Yoma 22b, which is included in the second perek of tractate Yoma, and not the first as the Venice, 1567 edition of Sforno's commentary indicates. The corrected reference appears in later editions of his commentary.
123. See Maimonides, Guide, Part III, chapters 12, 54.
124. This last sentence comprises a section which has been omitted in subsequent editions of Sforno's commentary. The Hebrew text of this later omission commences with

"ולזה אין ראוי...החוטא בנכבד."

125. I.e., the miracle was to vindicate God.

126. Thus Sforno presents a highly imaginative and wholly plausible explanation surrounding the circumstances involving the sin of Moses. As God's emissary Moses, along with his brother Aaron, filled a specific capacity; to instill the Israelites with a religiousness and reverence to the Deity. To facilitate this end Moses was endowed with the ability to work a specific wonder in God's name. However, because he elected to perform a miracle of the second degree, in full cognizance that it was not God but he, Moses, who would be acclaimed for this feat, God's response was immediate. For were Moses to have worked a miracle of the third degree, God's power and merit would have been confirmed beyond all doubt, with His name and reputation duly sanctified. For this sin of omission and commission Moses and Aaron forfeited their right to enter the promised land.

## a

127. The King's Highway was/well-known and traversed road that spanned the length of eastern Palestine from Damascus to the Gulf of Aquabah. It's route extended over the territories of Bashan, Gilead, Ammon, Moab and Edom, while joining with roads that crossed the Negeb in the direction of the coastal route from Egypt to Phoenicia.

Early in the second century (106 C.E.), the Roman emperor Trajan had the road rebuilt after he had conquered the Nabataeans, who themselves had used this thoroughfare as a main trading route.

128. As a result of their being denied permission to pass through Edom and Moab, the Israelites found it necessary to skirt these two countries and they traveled the desert route northward around the east borders of Edom and Moab. Then they turned westward to cross the Jordan to enter the promised land at Jericho and Gilgal.

129. As high priest Aaron attired himself in eight garments, enumerated in the Priestly Code (Exod 28), and m. Yoma 7:5. These vestments consist of:

- 1) A coat; 2) A girdle; 3) A headdress; 4) Breeches; 5) The ephod;
- 6) The breastplate; 7) The robe of the ephod and 8) A crown.

The first four are undergarments worn by common priests as well, but those of Aaron were ornamented to a greater degree. The latter four garments specifically belonged to the office of the high priesthood.

For a more extensive discussion of the priestly attire, See Menahem Haran, "Priestly Vestments," EJ, vol. 13, cols. 1063-1069.

130. The Israelites encamped north of the Arnon.

131. It was necessary to indicate that when the Israelites captured

Heshbon, the capital city of Sihon, it was governed under Amorite rule. Hitherto, Heshbon had belonged to Moab, and the Israelites were forbidden to acquire this territory while it was occupied by the Ammonites, as it is stated, "...for I will not give any part of the land of the Ammonites to you as a possession; (I have given it as a possession to the descendants of Lot." Deut 2:19).

132. See, in addition 23:18; 24:3,15,20,21,23, infra.
  133. Sforino addresses himself to commenting on the use of the verb **וַיִּוְרֹשׁ**. Here it occurs in the singular although it is preceded by the verb **וַיִּלְכְּדוּ** which is a plural form, and whose antecedent must be the spies dispatched by Moses. To reconcile the grammatical inconsistency, Sforino espouses that the latter verb in this verse pertains to Moses, who, by himself, was able to expel the Amorites from Jazer.
  134. The MT reads, **"וַיִּגְמַל מֶלֶךְ מוֹאב שְׁלַח..."**  
**"...They also sent a mission to the King of Moab...."**
  135. A similar abhorrence experienced by the Egyptians is expressed in Exod 1:12.
  136. Although Israel was forbidden to attack them (Deut 2:19), Moab nonetheless feared that Israelite expansion around Moab would leave them vulnerable to attack from their other neighbors. In addition, the possibility existed that ultimately Moab would be driven to vassalage under Israel.
  137. Ber. 58a; Shabb. 34a; B. Bat. 75a; Sanh. 100a.
  138. The source of this Rabbinic citation is Shabb. 43b, which is included in the sixth perek of tractate Shabbat, and not in the first as the Venice, 1567 edition of Sforino's commentary indicates. The corrected reference appears in some later editions of his commentary.
- The passage given by Sforino differs from our edition of the Talmud which reads,
- "(לֹאֶחָד נִרְאָה וּמִזִּיק לְשְׁנַיִם נִרְאָה וְאִינוּ מִזִּיק לְשִׁלְשָׁה אִינוּ נִרְאָה"**
- "(To one person an evil spirit may show itself and harm him; to two it may show itself, but without harming them); to three it will not even show itself."**
139. Balaam did not sin because he was stiff-necked; rather his sin was that he was stiff-necked.
  140. The MT reads, **"...וְאֵפֶס אֶת-הַדָּבָר..."** whereas Sforino's text repeats the wording of verse 20, supra, which reads,

**"...וְאֵפֶס אֶת-הַדָּבָר..."**

141. Because the Israelites neither solicited the services of soothsayers nor engaged in any forms of necromancy, Israel merited the revelation of future events upon the inquiry of God.
142. Here, the "tents" are associated as being "tents of Torah," while the "dwellings" convey the concept of Israel's Synagogues being "houses of study." Such imagery depicts these two institutions of scholarly endeavor as sources of unlimited intellectual inspiration and spiritual strength.
143. The purport of the Deuteronomic citation was to presage the impending prosperity for Israel.
144. See, for instance, Judg 9:21; 1 Kgs 2:39; Amos 7:12; and Cant 8:14 for usage of the word ברח in reference to flight without pursuit.
145. This entire passage commencing with "אף על פי שכל...באדום" ("Even though all the heathen nations... upon Edom") does not appear in later editions of Sforino's commentary. This may reflect later censorship because the words

"האמות מנשמת"; "יאבדו"; "באדום"

(" the heathen nations that came into existence...will perish, " and, " upon Edom ")

have been lined through in my copy of Sforino's commentary (edition: Venice, 1567, the first published edition of his commentary). Such effacing also occurs in 24:20, infra.

146. Later editions read here,

"שזה האומה..."

"for this is the nation (that has always been his [i.e., Israel's] enemy...)."

147. Sforino has combined parts of Dan. 3:4, passim, with Dan. 7:12 to form his verse.

148. This entire passage commencing with

"אף על פי שמלכות...מכל מקום"

(" Even though the Kingdom[s] ...nevertheless")

- does not appear in later editions of Sforno's commentary. This may reflect later censorship because the word "האמנות" ("the heathen nations") has been lined through as in the instance mentioned in note 145, *supra*, in reference to 24:17.
149. The source of this quotation could not be identified, as Sforno provided no reference.
  150. The proper translation of this quote is contingent on its context which is not readily identifiable. All editions cite perek "Helek" of tractate Sanhedrin, but the statement is not found in this perek in neither the Babylonian, nor the Yerushalmi Talmud. The quotation seems to originate from the Yerushalmi as is evidenced by usage of the verb חמה ("to see") which is the Western Aramaic characteristic of the Yerushalmi.
  151. According to the Midrash, Phinehas is identical to the prophet Elijah in that his duty was to make expiation for Israel. Being immortal, he continuously discharges the duties of his eternal priesthood until the resurrection of the dead. Daily he offers two sacrifices for the Israelites. Phinehas, like Elijah, was destined to be the forerunner of the Messiah, and to herald his coming. Phinehas strove to establish peace on earth. See Batte Midrashot, IV, 32; Num. Rab. 21:3; and Tg. Yer. Num 25:13.
  152. Since a tremendous number of Israelites died by plague at the instance of Peor (25:9), it was necessary to institute a second census for purposes of land allotment and conscription. Rashi likens this census, which occurred nearly forty years after the first one (1:2ff.), with the situation involving a shepherd who has lost part of its flock to animals of prey. After the disaster is over, the shepherd counts his sheep to learn how many of the flock remain.
  153. The terms kor and seah apply in the measurement of area. The space of one kor is 75,000 square cubits. The space of one seah is 2,500 square cubits. Thus the tribes were apportioned such ground that would suffice for the sowing of a kor or seah of seed respectively. Cf. Lev 27:16.
  154. Reuben had lain with Bilhah, his father's concubine, Gen 35:22. For this act he forfeited his privilege associated with being the first-born to Joseph. See note 11, *supra*.
  155. Sforno states here that the word עדה ("community") does not refer to the people at large, but its two ruling bodies.
  156. Such an offering was identical to the sacrifice stipulated in

Exod 29:38-42. In that instance the burnt offering occurred after Aaron and his sons had been ordained into the priesthood.

157. The source of this Rabbinic citation could not be identified with certainty.
158. It seems that this statement occurs in Hul. 60b, and Shebu. 9a.
159. Her husband can annul her vows only on the day that she vows. Should he insist that her vows not be fulfilled, or misleads her to assume that her vows were nullified, when, in actuality, they were still binding, then he shall be culpable while she remains blameless.
160. This phrase is employed in connection with the law of the shekel, Exod 30:15. In the Numbers passage the Israelites, triumphant in their devastation of the Midianites, reposit the jewelry they have taken as booty in the Tabernacle treasury. (For this identical doing see Josh 6:24). Such action was motivated from a collective desire to effect expiation for themselves.
161. Sforino's text differs from the MT which reads:  

"וְאֵךְ אִם-טִמְאָה אֶרֶץ אֲחֻזַּתְכֶּם עָבְרוּ לָכֶם..."

"If it is because the land of your holding is unclean, cross over,..."
162. In Sforino's text the "entry-word" contains a portion of vv 3 and 4. Sforino's text contains the phrase וְנִגְרַעָה נַחֲלָתָן ("and their share will be cut off"), which occurs in verse 3 of the MT.
163. Hereditary rights emanate from paternal association. Thus male issue resulting from the intermarriage of two tribes assumes the inheritance of its father's tribe.

Were Zelophehad's daughters to marry outside of their ancestral tribe (Manasseh), their hereditary holding would be transferred from their own tribe to that into which they would marry.

The import of property transferal presents itself in the jubilee year. In accordance with Levitical injunction, (Lev 25, esp. v 28), purchased land is restored to its original owner during the jubilee; inherited land is exempt from this provision. Thus men of an ancestral tribe whose hereditary holding is transferred by intermarriage with another tribe would lack any impetus whatsoever in an effort to conquer the land, as their gains would be assimilated into another tribe upon the advent of the jubilee.

164. This ensured the full hereditary rights of each tribe.

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