

Chapter Thirty-One

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah’ [vss. 1-2] (Vs. 1 consists of ‘The Lord said to Moses’). Bezalel is the son of Hur, who with Aaron, had held up Moses’ arms during the battle with Amalek so that Joshua could prevail. He is mentioned in 1Chron 2.20 as well as in 1Chron 1.5 with respect to the bronze altar that he had fashioned. For the Lord to call Bezalel “by name” means direct communication minus human mediation which undoubtedly pleased his father Hur. If Bezalel were like Hur, surely the Lord had in mind a gifted person. In a way, Bezalel resembles Noah who had fashioned the ark at the Lord’s command (Gen 6.14-16) and may have had a special love of that story knowing someday he would imitate him.

“And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship” [vs. 2]. These five gifts may have been lacking in Bezalel; rather, they were latent and became manifest once that Lord had called him “by name.” This is the second time *ruach* (‘spirit’) is mentioned in Exodus, the first being in 6.3, and is the first where *ruach* is identified something not unlike a person on equal footing with the Lord. It testifies to the importance of Bezalel’s work directed toward construction of the tent of meeting. Up until now or when Moses was taking in the detailed instructions from the Lord about the elements of worship, he must have wondered to himself who would be worthy for this task. Aaron and his sons were logical choices for priests, but the chief craftsman? Moses may not even have heard of Bezalel until this point who possibly picked up his skills in Egypt...not just in conventional craftsmanship but work on their temples, etc. Thus it would be a waste of talent to ignore Bezalel.

The second gift bestowed upon Bezalel is “ability” or *chakmah*, normally translated as wisdom but applicable more to skill in fashioning things such as the women and Aaron’s priestly garments in 28.3: “And you shall speak to all who have ability, whom I have endowed with an able mind, that they make Aaron’s garments.” The third gift is “intelligence” or *tevunah*, this being the first mention of the term in Exodus and found in 35.31 and 36.1. “To him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever” [Ps 126.5]. The fourth gift is *dahath* or “knowledge,” from the verbal root *yadah* which means to know intimately, and is the only use of this term in Exodus. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it” [Ps 139.6]. The fifth and final gift given to Bezalel is “craftsmanship” or *mela’kah*, work proper to an artisan and the natural outflow of *chakmah*. *Mela’kah* is used with regard to the Lord and the work of creation, for example, Gn 2.2: “And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had done.”

“To devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting and in carving wood, for work in every craft” [vss. 4-5]. Now all five gifts bestowed upon Bezalel are to be put to use for the purposes stated in these two verses. *Chashav* is the verb for “devise” which means to think, invent, compose and sometimes connotes being devious.

“He who winks his eyes plans perverse things, he who compresses his lips brings evil to pass” [Prov 16.30]. The object of *chashav* is “artistic designs” or *machasheveth* which derives from this verb and again, connotes a certain cunningness and applies to “craft” in vs. 5. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” [Gn 6.5]. Undoubtedly this cunningness came from Bezalel’s training in Egypt and must have been a wonder to behold. The five gifts from the Lord just described take up his innate skill and transform it to something he had never experienced before. At the same time, his work was on a relatively small scale...not just this but it is portable...not a massive temple as found in Egypt. This smallness did not detract from Bezalel’s workmanship; rather, the detailed and refined work that went into the tent of meeting’s construction was all the more spectacular.

“And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you” [vs. 6]. Oholiab is mentioned four other times, all in Exodus, so apart from his innate talent, nothing is known of him. However, Oholiab is identified with the tribe of Dan whereas Bezalel with the tribe of Judah. The renown both men gained from application of their skill must have redounded well for both tribes. In addition to these two men of high caliber but not as gifted as Bezalel the Lord turns attention to “all able men,” that is, those who have a heart (*lev*) which is wise (*chakam* or endowed with *chakmah* as in vs. 3). As with Bezalel, these men may have worked on Egyptian temples or at the least, were in charge of designing and constructing the store-cities of Pithom and Raamses (cf. 1.11). The words “that they may make all that I have commanded you” are vital, of course, for after Moses leaves the divine presence he must have close interaction with Bezalel, Ohliab and the able men. The way they must have worked together was unique in all history. Never before nor ever since have men received instructions as how to build a structure directly from God. These men must have marveled at the way Moses spontaneously spoke out the details he had received whereas they were responsible for translating them from words into physical structures, quite unlike Egyptian temples.

After the Lord had spoken with Moses about these skilled craftsmen and the work they are to do as outlined in vss. 7-11, he turns attention to the people. “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to the people of Israel, ‘You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you” [vss. 12-13] (As with vs. 1, vs. reads ‘And the Lord said to Moses’). The reason for this separation of verses? To stress the importance of the divine speaking or *davar* which takes precedence over the content which, however, important, remains secondary. Besides, it reminds Israel of the close connection between the divine *davar* and the physical temple before their eyes. The day of rest or Sabbath had been laid out in 16.22-30 when the Lord rained down bread or manna but now receives formal institution as to its observance. The high value placed on Sabbath is found in vs. 14: “everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.” The verb for “profanes” is *chalal* and is found in 20.24 with regard to the construction of an altar by tools. As for the

Sabbath, *chalal*, with its connotation of losing or breaking, can apply to the transgression of any of the laws received from Moses on Mount Sinai. Doing work on the Sabbath is close to *chalal* or perhaps even worse, for it entails being cut off (*karath*; cf. 30.33) from the people, and this in the immediate context means wandering about alone in the desert.

“It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed” [vs. 17]. *Oth* as “sign” is first noted in 3.12: “And this shall be the sign for you.” What is unique about the Sabbath is its rest which the Lord stresses so many times because he sees supreme value in it, a vantage point from which those who participate in it can look back with satisfaction on the six days of creation/work. Since the chapters of Exodus at hand pertain to fashioning the place of divine worship and all that involves, the very act of creating it is reminiscent of the *’oth* of the rainbow: “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations” [Gn 9.12]. While the rest taken by the Lord on day seven is well documented, his being refreshed is not that well known, for the verb in vs. 17 is *naphash* which forms the root of *nephesh* (‘soul’). “But on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your ass may have rest and the son of your bond-maid and the alien may be refreshed” [23.12].

“And he gave to Moses, when he had made an end of speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone written with the finger of God” [vs. 18]. *Kalah* is the verb for “made an end” and connotes a sense of completion and accomplishment. “When Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king’s house” [1Kg 9.1]. This *kalah* pertains to the Lord’s *davar* or speaking with Moses which began all the way back with Chapter Twenty-Five. The “tables of the testimony” were mentioned even before this, back in 24.12 or just at the point where Mount Sinai had been enveloped by a cloud, the very cloud that Moses entered leaving behind Aaron and Hur. As for the testimony (*heduth*) itself, there is no specific mention of it being written down. The *heduth* of Exodus pertains to the ark which originally contained the manna in a jar (cf. 16.34). So with this lack of writing in mind as subsequent chapters reveal, the *heduth* could pertain to images in the sense of sketches along with lists, for the verb *katav* (to write) can imply the latter. Since the *katav* was of divine origin, there was no limit as to the detailed marks which were inscribed. As for the stone, the Lord had to hew off some of Sinai’s rock after which he engraved the tables with the testimony. Finally, nothing is said of Moses’ experience during the past forty days and forty nights, but he must have descended Sinai with a radically different frame of mind. The same lack of mention pertains to Aaron and Hur who accompanied Moses.

Chapter Thirty-Two

“When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, they gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, ‘Up, make us gods who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what

has become of him” [vs. 1]. *Bush* is the verb for “delayed” which fundamentally means to be ashamed, be confused (piel: the doubling of the middle root consonant). For the only other piel form which carries the same definition, see Judg 5.28: “Why is his chariot so long in coming?” The “seeing” (*ra’ah*) of this delay by the people implies that the forty days and forty nights Moses was absent was felt as an interminable amount of time that dragged by. It was easy to view the cloud Moses had entered—and this was “in the sight of the people of Israel” [24.17]—as a gateway into another world from which it would be impossible to return. The people may have consented to wait forty days and nights, quite understandable, but soon gave up hope of seeing their leader. Even if this time span is figurative and applies to a much shorter period, the people must have been itching to get Moses out of sight so they could give into their idolatrous inclinations. Surely if Moses disappeared forever on Mount Sinai, it was a sign that the Lord had forsaken his people as well. The first step was to get together or assemble, *qahal* being the verb, this and 35.1 being the only instances of its occurrence in Exodus. However, the noun (same spelling) is noted earlier as in 12.6: “when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening.” It was natural for the people to rally around Aaron to whom Moses had entrusted them prior to his ascent on Sinai (cf. 24.14). Aaron had been privy to why the Lord has summoned Moses on the mountain, and it was his failure to communicate this to Israel that led to his shame. With regard to the *qahal* of the people, it was “to Aaron,” *hal* being the preposition prefixed to his name meaning something like “on Aaron.” In other words, the people pressed “on” him with urgency to resolve the situation...and when you figure the Israelites numbered six hundred thousand men excluding women and children, that was a lot of people which posed a dangerous situation.

What’s revealing about this part of the Exodus narrative is that the people had become spoiled without realizing it. They beheld divine wonders in Egypt, traversed the Red Sea, saw the Egyptian army get swallowed up, were victorious against Amalek, had water in the desert plus quails and manna to eat. All this had been effected directly by the Lord despite Israel murmuring against him and Moses. Their first words to Aaron? “Up!” In other words, rouse yourself from your concern over your lost brother and get to work leading us. But before that is done, they demand of Aaron that he make (*hasah*) not just a god but gods. The simplicity and directness of this demand reveals how desperate the people had become after not having experienced any divine intervention. The plural “gods” shows how shallow their trust had been all along, something that would haunt them ever after as in Psalms 105 and 106. “But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel” [Ps 106.13]. Later when the Lord showed his wrath, the words that must have been especially bothersome—in addition to the *hasah* of gods—were “who shall go before us.” This going-before Israel is in imitation of the Lord leading Israel through the Red Sea (technically he did not) and through the desert to Mount Sinai. A further insult was the way the people disregarded Moses, despite acknowledgment of his leadership role: “we do not know what has become of him.”

“And Aaron said to them, ‘Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your

sons and your daughters and bring them to me” [vs. 2]. This removal of decorative ornaments stands in sharp contrast to how the ark and items of worship had been fashioned. Aaron must have singled out Bezalel and Oholiab (cf. 31.1 & 31.6), the two chief artisans whether willingly or otherwise, to figure out what to do with the material gathered.

“And he received the gold at their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a molten calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” [vs. 4]! Note that here as well as in vs. 2 Aaron requests jewelry fashioned from gold, not other precious materials. It was as though the golden image he was to fashion were an image of the tabernacle’s gold, a counter-tabernacle of sorts. Aaron used a “graving tool” or *cheret*, a type of stylus used by scribes which suggests a rather fine, pointed instrument used for detailed work on the soft surface of gold. One other biblical reference exists, Is 8.1: “Take a large tablet and write upon it in common characters, Maershalal-hash-baz.” With this *cheret* Aaron made a “golden calf,” *hegel* being the first time this word occurs not just in Exodus but in the Bible and echoed in Ps 106.19: “They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a molten image.” For over four hundred years the Israelites had been exposed to Egyptian religion practices before being re-introduced to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which despite the prolonged residence in Egypt, they had kept alive. However, one of the more immediate objects of religious worship was a calf named Apsis or Hapsis, so it was natural for Aaron or any Israelite to associate the divinity with this representation. Although Aaron (with the help of the above mentioned Bezalel and Oholiab) did fashion the calf, he did not attribute divinity to it. As soon as he completed it, the people exclaimed, “These are your gods”—plural—not one god. And so the people recognized this image of Apsis (Hapsis) immediately and considered it as representing other divinities.

“When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord” [vs. 5]. *Mizbeach* is the word for “altar,” the same one used in other occasions as belonging to the Lord. The text doesn’t say whether or not Aaron did this willingly. Faced with six hundred thousand men, excluding women and children, he relented, figuring that instead of using the *mizbeach* to sacrifice to the molten calf the people would ask a sacrifice to the Lord, something familiar to them. Objectively it was weak response but an understandable one. *Chag* is the word for “feast” as in 13.6: “and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord.” Note how coy Aaron reacted, “tomorrow.” That might give the people sufficient time to reconsider their request. The twenty-four hours between this incident and the time of sacrifice must have been very long. Aaron must have stayed up all night regretting what he had done and may have consulted Bezalel and Oholiab. Not surprisingly he kept the molten calf inside his tent, tucked away safely from prying eyes, a difficult object to be with during the night hours.

“And they rose up early on the morrow and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play” [vs. 6]. Like Aaron, the people must have spent a restive night in anticipation of what would happen and at the

crack of dawn crowded around Aaron's tent. Two types of offerings are mentioned: *holah* and *shelem* in imitation of those Moses had offered in 20.24. Note that Aaron did not partake in these offerings nor do we have mention of those who did. One gets the impression a few just climbed up to the altar and started slaughtering away, a genuine cacophony amid blood and gore. Chances are they had a great time doing this, for they ate and drank (another way of saying they got drunk) after which they "rose up to play," *tsachaq* being the verb which means to laugh as well as to make sport of anyone...and obviously Aaron was powerless to stop what was transpiring before his very eyes. In addition, he must have wished that his brother Moses were present to do something about all this. For a reference showing the sense of mocking proper to *tsachaq*, see Gn 39.14: "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us."

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go down; for your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves' [vs. 7]. One gets the impression that Moses made himself quite at home in the cloud; finally the Lord bade him to return to his people "whom you brought up," not the Lord, as though he were shifting responsibility away from himself onto Moses. Surely Moses must have been affronted by this statement but realized something was up, and it wasn't good. It turned out that they "have corrupted themselves," *shachat* also meaning to act wickedly. "When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male of female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free for the eye's sake" [21.26].

Vs. 8 continues seamlessly with "they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them" and continues with the fact that Israel had made a molten calf which they worshiped. In other words, the Lord lets Aaron off the hook, at least his direct involvement. Rightly does the Lord observe how quickly Israel abandoned him, *derek* being the "way" which is more than a passage through the desert but the revelation on Sinai. The second half of vs. 8 has the Lord quoting Israel, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" That's why in the previous verse the Lord said to Moses, "your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt." So Moses has to leave the security of the cloud on Mount Sinai and deal with this near mutiny.

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people and behold, it is a stiff-necked people' [vs. 9]. "I have seen" suggests that after spending some time with Moses concerning the ark, the Israelites grabbed his attention rather suddenly. In fact, he seems shocked at this sudden apostasy put as "stiff-necked" or *qasheh*, an adjective meaning hard as well as heavy. The Lord repeats this in Dt 9.6: "for you are a stubborn people."

"Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation" [vs. 10]. The words "now let me alone" come from the Lord who is both hurt and angered, a mood which can have ominous consequences. The verb here is *nuach* last noted in 23.12 with respect to resting on "day seven" after six days of work. Instead of this use of *nuach*, the Lord wishes to be let alone that he may vent his "wrath" or *'aph* which fundamentally means nostrils. "The anger of the

Lord was kindled against Moses” [4.14]. *Charah* is the verb for “may burn hot” as also found in 4.14...so hot that they will be cooked for eating (‘consume’). In this verse the Lord is making a distinction between the Israelites and Moses (‘of you I will make a great nation’). That means all the Israelites will be exterminated leaving Moses alone with his wife and son, Zipporah and Gershom, going back to the days when he had been in the same area of Sinai at the service of Jethro. Surely the Lord had this in mind, that Moses would not have to migrate, just stay where he was at the foot of Mount Sinai. After all, it was the place he besought Pharaoh to go in order to make sacrifice. Perhaps the Lord might even invite him to return to the cloud along with his family.

“But Moses besought the Lord his God and said, ‘O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand” [vs. 11]? *Chalah* is the verb for “besought” which has multiple meanings such as to be sick and to stroke. The general sense of *chalah* is related to rubbing. Another reference with a related meaning is 45.12: “The people of Tyre will sue your favor with gifts.” Moses obviously had first hand experience with the Israelites all the way back when they had been in slavery and disorganized. He had overcome those obstacles as well as having led the people into the desert where they tried him sorely. If the Lord went back on his word, so reasoned Moses, not only would Israel be destroyed, but he would be an object of mockery among the Egyptians. That’s why the next verse (12) continues with “Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them forth, to slay them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth.’” The Hebrew text lacks “intent” and has the adjective “evil,” *rahah* which is more a forceful and direct threat of being insulted, if you will. Vs. 12 continues with a second sentence: “Turn from your fierce wrath and repent of this evil against your people.” *Nacham* is the verb for “repent” as noted in 13.17: “Lest the people repent when they see war and return to Egypt.”

“Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel your servants to whom you swore by your own self.” This first half of vs. 13 contains the argument on Moses’ part which won over the Lord, even more so than the fear of being mocked by the Egyptians. Such an appeal goes all the way back to before the Israelites had migrated to Egypt, of mentioning the three patriarchs with whom the Lord had dealt. Note that Moses slyly uses the name Israel instead of Jacob; while both are interchangeable, the latter was more commonly used in Exodus. In this way Moses would be mentioning the patriarch and the people in one breath. As for swearing (*shavah*) “by your own self,” the Hebrew reads simply *bak* or “in you.” Vs. 13 continues with the promise the Lord himself had made in Gn 22.17: “I will indeed multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. As for this plea by Moses, its location should not be forgotten, the desert or an in-between-land, neither Egypt nor Canaan but in a place where anything can happen. With all that in mind, “the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people” [vs. 14]. As for the verb “thought,” it is the familiar *davar* used throughout Exodus which means to speak. So Moses succeeded in “silencing” the Lord for the very first time, far more significant than any miracle or deed done thus far or that he will ever do. In fact, to silence the divine *davar* by

presenting a formidable, cogent argument is Moses' victory and the real secret, if you will, that the Book of Exodus contains.

“And Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tables of the testimony in his hands, tables that were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other were they written” [vs. 15]. This point of turning (*panah*, last noted in 16.10) is another way of saying that Moses left the cloud on Mount Sinai, this after forty days and forty nights. He was so taken a-back by his victory and having escaped with his life that he was barely aware of the length of time that had transpired. In fact, the only hint that it was lengthy is intimated in vs. 1, “as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” For the people to so utterly forget such a leader means not just that he had been absent for an extended period of time but had been swallowed up by that cloud on Sinai. This incident is important, for it is the first recorded one showing the relationship between a person and long delays when the Lord's presence was apparently absent. Jesus Christ himself takes up this theme of watching and waiting with frequent exhortations to be on the look out and not fall asleep. “But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour” [Lk 12.39-40].

As for the “tables” or *luach*, they were mentioned first in 24.14 prior to Moses' ascent to Mount Sinai and his prolonged stay there. For the first time we get a better picture of them: two in number, light enough to carry and written on both sides. Note that the verse stresses this point: “on the one side” and “on the other.” That means the tables were jammed packed with divine writing or *katav*; all the instructions as to worship were there, finely and exquisitely chiseled on the stone. Vs. 16 amplifies the nature of this *katav* by saying “graven upon the tables,” the verb being *charath* and the only occurrence in the Bible. Although little is known of this verbal root, it is suggestive of fancier work than *katav*...a kind of decoration or elaboration of the *katav* itself thereby making the two tables quite stunning in appearance. Thus when Moses turned (*panah*) or left the cloud on top of Mount Sinai he had not only “overcome” the Lord but walked away with the finest trophy anyone could obtain.

“When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a noise of war in the camp” [vs. 17]. This is the first mention of Joshua since 24.13: “So Moses rose with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God.” Thus Joshua remained faithful to Moses leaving behind the others who had accompanied him, namely, the elders, Aaron and Hur. However, nothing is said of Joshua having entered the cloud; presumably he remained just outside keeping in mind the Garden of Eden before which stood the angel with the flaming sword. By reason of this proximity to the divine presence, Joshua had little consciousness of time's passage (i.e., the ‘forty days and forty night’). When both men made their descent from Sinai surely they must have paused to examine the tables closely but not for long since they wished to return to the camp as quickly as

possible. Besides, they were fearful of an accident, of breaking the tables. Just to be cautious, Joshua carried one table and Moses the other. As for the word “shouted,” it is a noun (*reh*) with two other biblical references, Job 36.33 and Mic 4.9, the latter being cited here: “Now why do you cry (literally, a crying) aloud?”

“But he said, ‘It is not the sound of shouting for victory or the sound of the cry of defeat but the sound of singing that I hear’ [vs. 18]. For “sound” (as in earlier references), the common *qol* is used which often means “voice.” The other words will be listed as follows: the second “sound” is the verb *hanah* which has multiple variations as last noted in 20.16: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Another use is in 1.11: “they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens.” As for “victory,” the noun is *gevurah* which alternately applies to strength, military virtue. “Who can utter the mighty doings of the Lord or show forth all his praise” [Ps 106.2]? As for “defeat,” it is *chalushah*, the only word in the Bible which derives from a verbal root meaning to prostrate, to vanquish. Finally, the word for “singing” is the second use of the verb *hanah*, here in its most basic meaning. As so from a distance Joshua confused the sound he heard with that of war (*milchamah*, vs. 17) but Moses, fresh into the normal environment of space and time after forty days and forty nights on Sinai, could perceive much more clearly and pinned the *qol* down accurately as one of *hanah*, singing.

“And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses’ anger burned hot” [vs. 19]. Even before this Moses knew what the people were doing, he must have spent that time between first perceiving it and actually beholding it in an effort to build up sufficient courage. Chances are he did not speak with Joshua who intuitively knew to remain silent and let his master take the lead. He would learn from Moses again how to comport himself as a leader, useful lessons when he would lead Israel into Canaan. *Mechulah* is the noun for “dancing” usually in a circle as from the root *chul*. *Mechulah* is the spontaneous activity Moses’ sister, Miriam, did when Israel escaped the Egyptians through the Red Sea. “And all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing.” Both instances perhaps were common to the area and even more specific to Egypt, for over four hundred years the people adopted customs and manners of that country. As for Moses’ anger burning hot (*charah*), it is in imitation to the Lord just a little while ago: “that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them [vs. 10].” Vs. 19 continues with the response of this *charah* when he smashed the two tables against the mountain, a sudden action which must have grabbed everyone’s attention.

“And he took the calf which they had made and burnt it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it upon the water and made the people of Israel drink it” [vs. 20]. *Saraph* is the verb for “burnt” which means more an all-consuming fire. “Anything that remains until the morning (of the Paschal lamb) you shall burn” [12.10]. The gold that remained after this *saraph* wasn’t enough for Moses who may have been assisted by Joshua. Nothing is said of Aaron who, although he did not consent to worship of the calf, nevertheless offered no objections. However, he must have stood there silent and dumbfounded. He had to grind

the calf down further after which he scattered its remains upon the water. There must have been sufficient springs at Mount Sinai, else the people could not have remained there for such a long period of time. The water at hand may have included storage containers. Thus the people had to drink what they had fashioned.

“And Moses said to Aaron, ‘What did this people do to you that you have brought a great sin upon them’ [vs. 21]? Aaron knew this question would come and must have been relieved when Moses posed it, almost certainly with considerable anger. Actually this is the first time in Exodus that the noun “sin” (*chata’ah*) is found; the verb is used just once with regard to Israel in 20.20 and interestingly, four times from the mouth of Pharaoh himself. If the verbal root originally applied to missing the mark as a marksman shooting an arrow, the occasion at hand represents a major miss. More specifically, Moses attributes *chata’ah* to Moses, not the people, so he should be held in greater responsibility for having caved into the people’s demands. Without missing a beat, Aaron shifts blame to the people (partially correct) not unlike Adam had done to Eve: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree” [Gn 3.12].

Aaron’s response to Moses runs as follows: “Let not the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are set on evil” [vs. 22]. The Hebrew lacks “are set” and has the preposition *b-* (‘in’) prefaced to “evil” which reads literally “in evil,” thereby making the identity between Israel and evil all the closer. Moses didn’t have to hear this, for he knew well in advance, all the way back in Egypt, that the people were so inclined. However, Aaron is correct when in the next verse he continues with “Make us gods who shall go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” [vs. 23; echos vs. 1]. There’s some truth here, a failure for the Lord and Moses to communicate more fully that the latter would be on Mount Sinai forty days and forty nights. The same blame can be shared with Aaron, Joshua and Hur, the men closest to Moses, who could have done a better job in this regard.

“And I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off;’ so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and there came out this calf” [vs. 24]. Without a doubt, this is one of the best lines ever written which records the shift of blame. It flies in the face of vs. 4: “And he received the gold at their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a molten calf.” Surely the people who had complied would have gone along with Aaron’s half-hearted deceit, but the evidence was clear and set the stage for a violent response from Moses. Though a bit later Moses asks “Who is on the Lord’s side” [vs. 26], surely he was using this as a rally cry to carry out a personal vendetta of sorts, of the people having rejected him, including his own brother, Aaron.

“And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose to their shame among their enemies)” [vs. 25]. Clearly this verse flows into the next but is cited separately. At this point where tension runs high it is helpful to recall the remarks made earlier concerning use of the conjunctive *w-* (variously as ‘and,’ ‘but,’ ‘so’) as prefaced

to the beginning of virtually every sentence in the Book of Exodus. This conjunctive heightens the sense of the action and makes the verses follow each other more quickly without the reader losing his or her attention or bringing to bear a sense of rushing through the text. *Parah* is the verb for “had broken loose” which often has a negative connotation as allowing to go naked. “The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose” [Lev 13.45]. So in the context of the Israelites celebrating their newly found...made...god, they “break out” in the sense of run naked which implies they engaged in all sorts of sexual misdeeds. That’s why the verse has not only “to their shame” but this shame being “among their enemies” who, although not having been mentioned since Amalek, must have been lurking around the Israelites as they made their way through the Sinai wilderness, including some Egyptians who wanted to keep track on them. If the latter found out, they would take some satisfaction at how low the Israelites stooped after the high-sounding demands by Moses to Pharaoh about wanting to worship the Lord. Perhaps Moses’ father-in-law had a positive role to play here, albeit in the background. Since Israel was encamped in his own backyard, he knew the area well and had it under control. He may have silenced other tribes either by force or bribe so Israel would go unmolested. As for “shame,” it is a noun: *shimtsah*, the only occurrence in the Bible which connotes being overthrown (by enemies or literally, those “rising up (*qum*) against them.”

Vs. 26 seamlessly follows from vs. 25 with “then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, ‘Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me.’” Note his position in the gate, not within the camp, which he considered polluted by the molten calf and the people as *parah*, of going naked, in their frenzied worship. Of course, Joshua was by his side, silent but ever observant to see how his master comports himself, another incident he would recall when dealing with the same people. As for the question, it reads literally, “Who to the Lord to me” using two prepositions for the letter “l:” *l-* prefaced to “the Lord” and *’el* prefaced to “me,” the former being an abbreviated form of the latter.

The second sentence in vs. 26 reads “And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.” The verb for “gathered” is *’asaph* (it implies closing ranks around) which this tribe did *’el* (to) Moses. This is the first mention of this particular group since 6.16 when they are mentioned “according to their generations.” Nothing special seems to single out the Levites except that the father of Moses was from that house (cf. 2.1). Though there is no record of any intercourse between them and Moses up to this point in Exodus, chances are that by reason of blood relations they had more in common with him than with people from the other eleven tribes. So when Moses uttered the familiar “Thus says the Lord” in vs. 27 as to ordering the Levites to gird themselves with swords and to slay “every man his brother and every man his companion and every man his neighbor,” the Levites had know doubt as what to do and when to do it. This mention of brother, companion and neighbor brings home the real tragedy at hand; although “about three thousand” [vs. 28] had fallen, that was minor out of a people of six hundred thousand men minus women and children.

“And Moses said, ‘Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the Lord, each one

at the cost of his son and of his brother, that he may bestow a blessing upon you this day” [vs. 29]. *Mala'* is the verb for “have ordained” which is in the present tense, Hebrew text and is the common verb “to make full, to fill.” As for “service,” the equally common “hand” is used reading something like “to fill your hands.” And as for “blessing,” it is *barakah*, the only use of this word in Exodus (from *barak* as in 20.11). Presumably the *barakah* is to fulfil...and this brings out the sense of *mala'* as to fill...the prescriptions of worship recently obtained by Moses on Mount Sinai. Some of the Levites may have wondered if it was worth the price, of being a minister of the Lord after having slain their fellow Israelites.

“On the morrow Moses said to the people, ‘You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin’ [vs. 30]. Moses had taken one day between sending the Levites to slaughter the disobedient Israelites and addressing the people putting worship of the molten calf in terms of a “great sin” (*chata'ah*) which they had sinned. Use of the verb and the noun derived from it serve to emphasize the gravity of the situation, almost by doubling it. In an attempt to rectify the situation Moses says that he “will go up” to the Lord, going up, of course, being Mount Sinai from which he descended just yesterday. Instead of being there forty days and forty nights (the people could have thought the same) he thought he might never return. So after the brief statement to the people he set off: “perhaps I can make atonement,” the verb being *kaphar* a in 29.37: “Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it.” Because Moses had this experience of *kaphar* on Sinai with respect to the altar, he hoped the Lord would be sympathetic to his pleading.

“Alas, this people have sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold” [vs. 31]. Moses doesn't tell-it-as-it-is saying that the Israelites has fashioned “gods of god” instead of a molten calf. Perhaps by using the plural *'elohey* (‘gods’) he wanted to rile the Lord even more, but it didn't work out that way. Then while realizing this almost as soon as he said it Moses adds, “blot me, I pray, out of your book which you have written” [vs. 32]. That is to say, he wishes to be a propitiatory sacrifice by divine *machah* or blotting out, the same verb used with respect to Amalek: “I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven” [17.14]. In other words, treat me as you have treated Amalek, very powerful words indeed. As for the “book” (*sepher*: applies to something that has been inscribed and hence a scroll), most likely it refers to “the book of the covenant” in 24.7 which Moses read “in the hearing of the people.” Interestingly, *sepher* occurs in the verse just quoted with respect to the blotting out of Amalek: “Write this as a memorial in a book.” As for the writing (*katav*), it is the same verb used with regard to the two tables of the testimony: “written on both sides” [vs. 15].

“But the Lord said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book’ [vs. 33]. This response must have disappointed Moses just like it angered the prophet Jonah when the Lord failed to destroy Nineveh: “And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle” [Jon 4.11]? After this

somewhat unsettling statement during their brief exchange—nothing is said about Moses having entered a cloud which probably was the case—possibly Moses regretted having dispatched the Levites on their mission. If he hadn't done that and consulted the Lord beforehand, things might have been better, that is, there may have been less than three thousand casualties. To be sure, Moses came away from this encounter a changed man, more mature in his leadership.

“But now go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you” [vs. 34]. Another disappointment for Moses since after his experience on Mount Sinai and earlier divine urgings in Egypt to go into the desert to offer sacrifice, surely Sinai must have been the place of destiny despite its inhospitable environment. Actually this verse echos 23.20 while Moses was on Sinai: “Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared.” Even before this we have mention of an angel in 14.19 “who went before the host of Israel.” However, this angel had a limited role to play and is different from the one of 23.20 and 32.34. As it had been noted earlier, an angel is a *mal'ak* or messenger whose chief function is to “send messages” or mediate between the Lord and Israel. Reminder of this *mal'ak* must have embarrassed Moses even more who apparently forgot its designated role.

The second sentence of vs. 34 runs: “Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.” *Paqad* is the verb for “visit” which has multiple meanings but in general connotes a one-on-one encounter or putting into action. Its use in 20.5 is similar to the one at hand: “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me.” This *paqad* is carried out apparently in a short time, for the concluding verse (35) of Chapter Thirty-Two spells it out: “And the Lord sent a plague upon the people because they made the calf which Aaron made.” *Nagaph* is the verb for “sent a plague” as in 7.27 (8.2): “But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs.” The type of *nagaph* isn't specified, but mention of this among the Israelites was enough to make them shudder. Without a doubt they recalled the ten plagues Moses brought against Egypt, suggestive of Pharaoh's stubbornness, which Israel unfortunately partook after so many divine interventions. In the verse at hand, the plague refers specifically to the molten calf ('molten' not mentioned) made by both the people and Aaron. And so Moses' brother, his second-in-command, is guilty in the Lord's eyes. Even if Aaron experiences *nagaph*, it isn't fatal, for the next we hear of him is 34.30 when he beheld Moses' shining countenance after he descended from Mount Sinai with a second copy of the two tables.

Chapter Thirty-Three

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Depart, go up (*halah*) hence, you and the people whom you have brought up (*halah*) out of the land of Egypt” [vs. 1]. Note two uses of the same verb inserted within the verse. The first *halah* had been accomplished at Moses' hand guided by the Lord who actually effected the departure. Now it is time for the second *halah*, from

Mount Sinai “to the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it’ (as vs. 1 continues). Attributing this deliverance from Egypt to Moses is a way of bolstering his spirit after the trying experience of the molten calf and being compelled to slay some of his kinsmen. These words must have been both comforting and sad nevertheless: comforting in that Israel was to continue its journey to Canaan and sad in that they were to leave the security of Mount Sinai. It must have been confusing for Moses and the people, trying to sort out the relationship between the ultimate destination of Canaan and the one achieved of Sinai; in other words, how the two relate to each other. However, the final destination of Canaan is what the Lord originally set out to effect, for the swearing (*shavah*) by the three patriarchs is mentioned at the beginning of Moses’ career: “And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob” [6.8]. The verse at hand concludes with “to your descendants I will give it,” implying that Moses and many of the Israelites will not possess it, not unlike Abraham. Thus from here on Moses had an insight that his mission was not far from being completed and so resigned himself. At least he had the example of the three patriarchs to comfort him. Of course, this command opening Chapter Thirty-Three Moses dare not communicate to the Israelites lest they lose hope.

“And I will send an angel before you” [vs. 2], that is, the same *mal’ak* or messenger mentioned in 32.34 as well as the one in 23.23 which specifically mentions the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites in vs. 2. Moses may have had a vague, general idea of these tribes not so much from living in Egypt or from four hundred years of oral tradition when Joseph migrated into Egypt. Rather, when with his father-in-law he was in greater proximity to these tribes and learned how they interacted with each other as well as with neighboring peoples. Thus what they were like was clearer to Moses than any Israelite. As for this angel, we have no further mention of him nor of the relationship he had with Moses and the Israelites. There is nothing about an angel under Joshua’s leadership as well. This might be due to the nature of an angel which, of course, is that of a *mal’ak*, one who communicates messages. Once in Canaan there is no further need of communication, for the people will be in an entirely new situation with different needs. Closely associated with this *mal’ak* is the driving out or *garash* of these tribes effected by the Lord. “For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you” [23.31]. Most likely this angel will communicate to Moses what the Lord is doing with regard to these tribes thereby paving the way forward for Israel’s entry into Canaan.

“Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey” [vs. 3]. Here is a third *halah* or going up, the first two contained in vs. 1, this being the most enticing of them all which hearkens all the way back to 3.3 also in context of the tribes noted in the last paragraph. While the land may be so, it is inhabited by potentially hostile people who are expected to be possessive of this abundance, a fact not beyond Moses’ comprehension. Vs. 3 continues with “But I will not go up among you lest I consume you in the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.” In other words, no *halah* as far as the Lord is concerned. However, note the difference: he will not *halah* “among you” or *beqirbak*, that is, *qerev* prefaced with the preposition *b-* (‘in’) reading

as “in among” you. The Lord has placed a certain distance between him and Israel, most likely due to the molten calf incident, the greatest insult to him thus far. Because of this the Lord is taking precautions against his anger flaring up which is put in terms of *’akal* (the common verb to eat) or consuming the people due to being *qasheh* in the neck as in 32.9: “I have seen this people and behold, it is a *qasheh*-necked people.”

“When the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned; and no man put on his ornaments” [vs. 4]. The noun *davar* (‘word’) is used for “tidings” which the people considered as “evil” (*rah*) because they were in suspense as to the ominous words of 32.34: “Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.” What this “visit” or *paqad* consists of they haven’t a clue, but given the fact that the Levites recently slew three thousand of their fellows, the same could happen to them. Undoubtedly the people kept a constant wary eye upon the Levites who could draw their swords at any moment. As for the Levites, they too didn’t welcome these words since they might be called upon again to execute divine judgment. Rightly and quickly did the people strip off their ornaments (*hady*) which has two uses in the Psalms as “mouth,” one of which is 32.9: “Be not like a horse or a mule without understanding which (whose mouth) must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not keep with you.” Earlier the people eagerly handed over to Aaron their gold ear rings to fashion the calf. Now even more eagerly they divested themselves of other jewelry so as not to fall into the same temptation. This must have formed a substantial treasure from such a large assembly, so Moses saw an opportunity to further embellish the ark as well as use for later on in dealing with the tribes of Canaan.

In vs. 3 the Lord called Israel a “stiff-necked” people” but addressed it to Moses alone. Now in vs. 5 he bids Moses to communicate this to Israel: “if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now put off your ornaments from you that I may know what to do with you” [vs. 5]. *Regah* is the noun for “single moment” and refers to the image consisting of a wink of an eye...in other words, instantly. “For his anger is but for a moment and his favor is for a lifetime” [Ps 30.5]. The Lord’s going-up (*halah*) suggests something like a wave arising suddenly which comes crashing down and does so “among you,” *betok* being the preposition last noted in 29.45: “And I will dwell among the people of Israel.” With that fresh in mind, the people knew its opposite, if you will, will occur before they knew what happened. *Kalah* is the verb for “consume” which differs from *’akal* in vs. 3 in that it means making a full end of something. “Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you and spend my anger against you” [Ezk 7.8]. Without a doubt, these words are cause for great fear and dread than before, for the people thought their end was upon them. So when vs. 6 says that Israel “stripped themselves of their ornaments,” they did so lightning fast. However, that verse clues us in on the fact that any destructive *paqad* as by the Levites was not about to come crashing down (*halah*, vs. 5) because the people effected this “from Mount Horeb onward.” Note that this is the last use of the proper name for Sinai or since 17.6 when the Lord struck the rock to provide water.

“Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; and

he called it the tent of meeting” [vs. 7]. This “tent” or *ohel* as described in 26.7-14 is obviously portable and last used as the “tent of meeting” (*mohed*) in 29.42 (‘where I will meet with you’). It is the first mention of being pitched outside the camp; possibly before the molten calf incident it was inside and honored at the center of the camp. Moses did not wish the Israelites to defile it with any tendency to erect false gods which would result in his summoning the Levites to another purifying slaughter which could turn out to be worse than the three thousand that had been slain. Nothing is said as to how far off this tent was kept; presumably not at a distance. Vs. 7 continues with a second sentence, “And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp.” This seeking or *baqash* (last mentioned in 10.11 as ‘desire’) is not specified, but it suggests a touching or feeling and therefore a desire, however faint, of reaching out to the one (the Lord) who had touched that person. Given Israel’s recent experience of the dramatic revelation on Mount Sinai and the Levites’ vengeance, not too many people seemed to take advantage of this nor do we have details as to how they went about it. Presumably they had to ask Moses, Aaron, Hur, Joshua or one of the elders. All would discuss the matter beforehand—not unlike a form of spiritual direction—followed by making an appointment to exit the camp. The first ones who did this must have been bold indeed. As each person took his turn, many Israelites stood at the camp’s entrance to see what would happen even though the *baqash* took place with the tent and concealed from sight. If the person emerged unharmed, all was well. Chances are that person did not share his *baqash* with other people, not even the camp’s leaders, unless it involved them and his family. As time went on and more people entered the tent of meeting (rather, exited safely), others built up their courage to do the same.

“When Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose up and every man stood at his tent door and looked after Moses until he had gone into the tent” [vs. 8]. This verse implies that Moses visited the tent of meeting on a regular basis, probably several times a day. Clearly it was a major event which compelled every Israelite to stand at attention by his own tent. Since the encampment consisted of such a large number of people (a fact noted several times earlier), some kind of warning, perhaps by trumpet, was employed. Even those who were well out of sight of Moses obeyed...not out of fear but reverence. It would not be surprising that many if not all remained at attention outside their tents. Moses’ purpose was more than the *baqash* or seeking noted in the last paragraph; he did not have to *baqash* but enjoyed that special one-on-one relationship with the Lord. Who knows...perhaps he would exit the tent with new information for the people. They must have kept watch for the duration and eagerly awaited his return to the camp. No one dared inquire of Moses what had transpired, too afraid to ask. Furthermore, this reverence toward Moses could be taken as a ploy to keep the people in suspense, especially after the molten calf incident.

In the verse at hand, *navat* is the verb for “looked” as in 3.6: “And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” As noted there, *navat* suggests more than looking; it is a beholding with respect as in Ps 84.9: “Behold our shield, O God; look upon the face of your anointed!” Even after Moses had entered the tent certainly the people continued their *navat*

until he exited, even more focused as he walked back into the camp. Chances are that Moses said nothing; this proved to be an educational experience for the people after their chastisement for the molten calf. *Navat* would turn out to be a valuable asset for those who had inquired (*baqash*) in the tent, certainly not with the drama of a pillar of cloud as in the next verse but just as real. That is to say, after *baqash* there came to birth *navat*, a more or less habitual beholding for the Lord that would last for the rest of Israel's wanderings. Eventually the two would alternate, a *navat* followed by *baqash* (within the tent) followed by a renewed *navat* outside the tent and in the camp or amid daily life.

“When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses” [vs. 9]. Again, Moses' entry into the tent was accompanied by that close *navat* of the people. As for the *hamud* of cloud, 13.21 says that it was accompanying Israel “to lead them along the way.” Note that a *hamud* of fire did not descend in the verse at hand, that having made its appearance at night. Thus Moses only entered the tent during the day. This *hamud* of cloud did not hover above the encampment but materialized only, as had been suggested, at fixed times such as morning and evening, and possibly noon. Moses' going into the tent was a kind of re-entry to the Garden of Eden. Instead of the angel with the “flaming sword which turned every way” [Gn 3.24], the *hamud* was an inverse protector, if you will, that kept anyone else from entering. As for the “door” of the tent, it is more like a protective flap; in other words, the *hamud* kept this flap from blowing open to conceal Moses. So within the tent the Lord spoke with Moses, that is, the familiar *davar* mentioned so frequently in Exodus. Only this *davar* was more intimate, the contents of which forever remains sealed.

Vs. 10 continues with a description of this divine encounter which involved the people looking on (*navat*) adding that the Israelites “would rise up and worship, every man at his tent door.” In other words, we have a refinement of vs. 8 with the addition of *shachah* (‘worship’) last noted in 24.1. The people did not assemble as for a liturgical event but remain stationary at the place of dwelling.

“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend” [vs. 11]. Certainly Exodus is full of references of this *davar* but now adds the special dimension of “face to face” or *panym 'el-panym*. That means the *davar*, so often associated with imparting commands, directions and counseling, shifts to one of friendship with emphasis on the faculty of vision, one-to-one contact. It might be better to say the Lord leaves aside the familiar form of *davar* and takes up another which is familial, the contents of which remains undisclosed and rightly so. The Israelites must have sensed this and longed to eavesdrop but fortunately could not. Certainly the camp must have been filled with speculation as to what had transpired between the Lord and Moses. *Reh* is the word for “friend” (from the verbal root *rahal*, to pasture, to tend) and connotes a continuous contact which includes more than speaking...a being together under all circumstances. “This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” [Sg 5.16]. Such *reh* was not the case during earlier encounters, including the extended stay on Sinai for forty days and forty

nights. Those cases involved legislation concerning Israel as well as details of worship and the implements required for it. This *reh*, however, is wholly different and signals a new relationship with Moses. Those who “sought the Lord” [vs. 7] or those who engaged in *baqash* were not on this level but participated in it to one degree or another. Those who did *baqash* the Lord must have had this expectation but never could attain it. We don’t know how they felt afterwards, but at least they have some contact with the Lord. Those who did must have been a small minority among the Israelites and later were instrumental in shepherding the people into Canaan under Joshua’s direction.

Vs. 11 continues with a second sentence: “When Moses turned again into the camp, his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tent.” This is the first mention of Joshua since he came down from Mount Sinai with Moses (cf. 32.17). Here he is identified as a “servant,” the verb *sharath* being used as a participle and applicable more to someone who assists priests at their ministrations. In fact, the same verb is used earlier with regard to Joshua in 24.13: “So Moses rose with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain.” As for Joshua’s remaining in the tent after Moses left, we do now know how long he stayed there, but the two must have been in fairly tight quarters, something Joshua felt more so when the Lord was speaking face-to-face with Moses. Joshua couldn’t be but a few feet (or even less) away, almost too close for comfort. So when Moses left the tent, it is not surprising that Joshua tarry there in order to pick up the conversation with the Lord. The Lord tolerated this because, Joshua was in training to succeed Moses as leader of the Israelites.

“Moses said to the Lord, ‘See, you say to me, “Bring up this people;” but you have not let me know whom you will send with me”” This first sentence of vs. 12 must have been spoken when Moses made another trip to the tent of meeting and was surprised to find Joshua still there. His complain might sound a bit surprising given the fact that the Lord had provided admirably for Israel up until this point. He, his brother Aaron, Hur and the elders realized they were getting old. They had accomplished much, bringing Israel from the land of Egypt, a task that remained unfulfilled and in danger of collapse. Moses may have felt that Joshua, who had been victorious over Amalek and a faithful servant, would be the ideal successor. However, the complaint put forth in vs. 12 doesn’t seem that Moses leaned in that direction or at least definitively. The chief argument Moses lays forth was when he put the Lord’s own words to him in the second sentence of vs. 12: “Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.”” Such words are not recorded but stem from that face-to-face, friend-to-friend, conversation in the tent of meeting. Actually the knowing or *yadah* at hand (which implies intimate acquaintance) is put in terms of Moses’ name, that the Lord addresses him pretty much as an equal, someone with whom he is at ease. As for the “favor” or *chen* Moses found in the Lord’s sight, it is noted first in 3.21 or when the Israelites found favor in sight of the Egyptians prior to their departure. Thus we have two instances of in-ness, if you will: a knowing “in” name and a finding of favor “in” the Lord’s sight, the preposition *b-* being prefaced to both words.

“Now therefore, I pray you, if I have found favor in your sight, show me now your ways, that I may know you and find favor in your sight” [vs. 13]. The words “I pray you” are rendered as *‘im-na’*, *na’* being a particle used to express a request or to ask permission (*‘im* is rendered technically as ‘if’). The verse at hand has *na’* a second time rendered in English as “now” (the second use). Use of *hatah* for “now” serves to highlight this request, of Moses drawing close to telling the Lord to pay attention to what he is about to say, expressive of a newly found confidence in their friendship. So without missing a beat, Moses throws back this *chen* to the Lord, using it as an appeal, i.e., as “if.” The aim of his appeal: first to know (*yadah*) the Lord and second, his *chen*. Clearly it is a clever ploy to ask the Lord to fulfill both desires. At the same time Moses is conscious of his leadership role, for the second sentence in vs. 13 follows as “Consider too that this nation is your people.” The verb for “consider” is the common verb *ra’ah* (to see). Moses has in mind the Lord’s earlier hostile attitude towards Israel in 32.10 which he wishes to counter: “that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation.” Moses has in mind that while the Lord is sorely tempted to wipe out Israel, he will have Moses’ descendants take its place.

“And he said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest’ [vs. 14]. The word for “presence” is *panym* as found in vs. 11 (‘face to face’) so can be taken as “My face will go with you.” That means the one-on-one relationship associated with friendship (cf. vs. 11) will go with Moses which is far better than anything he expected. The English text lacks “with you,” so the idea of the Hebrew is “I will go.” *Nuach* is the verb for “will give rest” as found in 20.11: “for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth...and rested the seventh day.” Thus the *nuach* which the Lord has in mind is one proper to the Sabbath. With this in mind, the verse at can be associated with carrying out the Passover, not a permanent cessation from toil.

“And he said to him, ‘If your presence will not go with me, do not carry us up from here’ [vs. 15]. These words come from someone who just experienced intimate divine friendship which seems too good to be true, hence the bold challenge. As for the verb “carry up” (*halah*), it suggests that the Lord will lead Israel in a northerly direction, that is, to Canaan. Should, for example, the Lord not decide upon this *halah*, there’s not doubt that Moses would be content to remain at Mount Sinai. After all, he had dwelt there with his father-in-law, Jethro, after having fled Egypt and was quite familiar with the place. Then again, there was the overwhelming issue of what to do with six hundred thousand Israelites, excluding women and children. This number must have expanded since Egypt with children having been born.

“For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people” [vs. 16]? Such boldness before the Lord reveals some insecurity on Moses’ part going all the way back to 4.13: “Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person.” At the same time Moses’ boldness is not unlike Abraham bargaining over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah in Chapter Eighteen of Genesis. The attitude of both patriarchs is indicative of both the desperation in

which they found themselves which prompted an audacity beyond the ordinary. Moses is cunning by the passive use of *yadah*, “How shall it be known?” instead of the direct “How shall I know?” Besides, he includes “*your people*” which compels the Lord to respond.

Vs. 16 continues with the second sentence where Moses presses the Lord further: “Is it not in your going with us so that we are distinct, I and your people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?” This going (the common verb *halak*) which Moses is talking about intimates that he is not satisfied with the angel of 33.2 which the Lord promised to go “before you.” In other words, after having tasted the divine friendship, Moses wishes it to continue indefinitely into the future. He is right in saying that this *halak* sets Israel apart “from all other people” and their gods. Moses may have had in mind the recent trauma of the molten calf; if the Lord does not consent to his request, Israel might soon revert to idolatry. *Palah* is the verb for “distinct” last noted in 11.7 with reference to the coming Passover: “that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel.” Surely Moses must have brought those very words to the Lord at this juncture which implies that any other nation that may stand in the way will be eliminated.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘This very thing that you have spoken I will do; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name’ [vs. 17]. At last, a confirmation of what Moses had wanted, this despite the intimacy described within the tent of meeting. Note the identity between “very thing” and “have spoken” through the word *davar*.

Still, Moses is not satisfied nor does the Lord show any weariness or anger with his persistency clearly manifest in the next verse (18): “Moses said, ‘I pray you, show me your glory.’” Here is another instance of that particle *na’* (‘I pray you’) to express permission or desire which binds a sense of urgency with politeness. *Kavod* is the noun for “glory” which both he and the people had seen when the Lord rained down manna and quails: “and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord” [16.7]. That incident did not contain any special manifestation of the Lord in and by himself but in the form of nourishment for Israel. Moses did not have that *kavod* in mind, for he had a much clearer picture of it after his recent encounter in the tent of meeting. Thus the Lord responds immediately with “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord’” [vs. 19]. There’s something vaguely uneasy about all this, of asking the Lord to reveal himself after that face-to-face encounter mentioned several times. Uneasy in that a person wouldn’t request this of a beloved, a kind of intrusion upon his or her privacy. Yet this back-and-forth exchange (and the Lord’s willingness to submit) is indicative of the somewhat tenuous relationship with the Lord. While his presence is so real that it is heard and seen, never does it satisfy. As for the difference between hearing the divine *davar* and seeing the divine *kavod*, preference is for the former. At first you’d think it was otherwise but hearing/speaking is more intimate than seeing or visualization, and this due in part to the structure of the Hebrew language and the mentality it represents as played out in the person of Moses and supporting characters, the least of which not being the Lord himself.

As for the “goodness” in the verse at hand, it is *tuv*, the only mention of this noun in Exodus. “I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” [Ps 27.13]! Moses is to remain stationary while this *tuv* is to *havar* or “pass by” meaning that the Lord will catch only glimpses of it. Despite all he sees, vision for him is secondary to *davar* as the last paragraph mentioned. Perhaps lying behind Moses’ request was a desire to see how well the two correspond...whether what he will see is as much as what he has heard but knowing in advance the latter will be more fruitful. While the divine *tuv* is in the process of *havar*, simultaneously the Lord will be proclaiming his name, the verb being *qara’* discussed several times earlier and with the connotation of summoning, not just throwing words to the wind, if you will. As for this name (*shem*), the personal pronoun “my” is lacking in Hebrew; also the preposition *b-* is used (‘in’)... “will call in the name.” While engaged in this two-fold gesture of *havar* and *qara’*, two others are added: *chanan* and *racham* bringing the total to four. *Chanan* is noted with regard to 22.26, the verbal root of *chanun*. As for *racham*, it means to behold (and thus connotes vision to some degree) with tender compassion, to obtain mercy; the noun “womb” is derived from it. “Grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them” [1Kg 8.50]. So while both *havar* and *qara’*, the Lord reserves to himself the choice of showing *chanan* and *racham* to whom he pleases.

All this extraordinary kindness and self-revelation is qualified, however: “But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live” [vs. 20]. At first this seems to contradict the face-to-face relationship already discussed, but the two are complementary. As for the speaking in vs. 11, that takes place within a special place, the tent of meeting, and not anywhere else. Joshua realized it, so no small wonder he “did not depart from the tent” [vs. 11]. The verse at hand doesn’t concern Moses so much as it does with any would-be prophet which is why it reads “man shall not see me and live,” *adam* being anyone who attempts to usurp that privilege. The tent of meeting was a new way of relating with the Lord, pitched outside the camp, and later would be incorporated into the Jerusalem temple with the sacred bounds firmly in place until its destruction by the Romans.

“And the Lord said, ‘Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock’ [vs. 22]. “Behold” or *hineh* (noted above several times) is a way of grabbing one’s attention. Moses was so absorbed in what was being communicated that the Lord had to grab his attention so he could locate himself on that “place” or *maqom* which was a rock (*tsur*). “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink” [17.6]. Perhaps it is the same *tsur*, Moses standing on the very spot where the Lord had been.

“And while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.” This is vs. 22 which continues from the previous verse and continues into the next one. Once Moses stands upon the nearby *tsur*, the Lord hides in a “cleft” or *neqarah*, the only other biblical reference being Is 2.21: “to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs from before the terror of the Lord and from the glory of his

majesty when he rises to terrify the earth.” The verbal root is *naqar* which means to bore, to pierce, and can be a hole of sorts which the Lord himself had fashioned for this very purpose. So if we stay with the verbal root which intimates a drilling downward (*naqar* doesn’t seem to apply to hollowing out cleft commonly understood), it’s easier for the Lord to place his hand over this hole before allowing his *kavod* (‘glory’) to pass by. That means one of two of the Lord’s hands is upon this *neqarah* while his *kavod* passes overhead with Moses down below looking up. The Lord’s free hand was used to effect this passing. Once it has happened, “I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen” [vs. 23]. So Moses, once the Lord’s hand is removed, can crawl out of the *neqarah* and see his “back” or *’achor*. “And the part that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hand over the back of the tabernacle” [26.12]. All this takes place upon a *tsur*, the size of which is not given but presumably not very large. That means the *’achor* Moses had seen passed by in a fraction of a second...from upon the *tsur* to off or down it. And so Chapter Thirty-Three comes to a close, this scene being a prelude, if you will, to the renewal of the covenant in the next chapter.

As a kind of appendix to the incident of Moses upon (within, *neqarah*) the rock, it is reminiscent of Elijah on Mount Carmel given here. “Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord.’ And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind...and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave” [1Kg 19.11-13].

Chapter Thirty-Four

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Cut two tables of stone like the first; and I will write upon the tables the words that were on the first tables which you broke” [vs. 1]. Note the difference between the first and second sets: the latter is to be cut or *pasal* (to carve, to form by cutting) by Moses, this verb having five other biblical references (including vs. 4), one of which is Hab 2.18: “What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies?” As for the first set of tables, presumably the Lord had done it though there is no clear evidence of this. Then again, Moses could have cut...*pasal*...the first just as he will do the second and presented them to the Lord for writing, *katav*. We have no evidence whether Moses had witnessed this divine *katav* which, as vs. states, was written on both sides (cf. 32.15). Chances are the Lord did this in secret, not wishing to reveal the process of actually writing in minute detail on two tables (or in total, four sides). As for the stone used to fashion the second set of tables, Moses must have taken it from the *tsur* or rock on which (rather, the hole in it) he witnesses the Lord’s glory pass by (cf. 33.21). That would add extra value to the tables.

“Be ready in the morning and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain” [vs. 2]. *Kun* is the verb for “be ready” noted several times above and connotes a standing upright, of directing. That must have been a tense

night-before, actually a sleepless one, which in itself formed a type of *kun*. The ascent to be accomplished is familiar to Moses, only more so here, because he knew in advance what the Lord intended to do. Upon reaching the “top” (*ro’sh*: also as ‘head’), Moses is to *natsav* (mentioned several times earlier) or stand there, this verb connoting being ready and being firm in this readiness. Earlier Aaron, Joshua and Hur had accompanied Moses (cf. 24.13-14) but this time is different, making the climb without the trusted Joshua. The Lord wanted to get things just right—should the Israelites rebel (and that was not out of the question)—no more tables and no more Israel. This was the second and only chance, the consequences of which could happen being inconceivable. Surely such a fate would have delighted the Egyptians who, since Israel’s departure, must have prayed to their gods for their destruction. Vs. 3 speaks of the sole ascent by Moses; it adds “let no man be seen throughout (*b-* or ‘in’) all the mountain” as well as having no animals graze at Sinai’s base. In sum, Mount Sinai was to be totally quarantined.

“So Moses cut two tables of stone like the first” [vs. 4]. Just above it was intimated that the Lord had cut the first set of tables whereas here we have him actually doing it from that *tsur* of 33.21.

“And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord” [vs. 5]. Compare with 24.16: “The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days” whereas here the Lord descends in the cloud. You could say this descent is a more abbreviated one—short so as not to have Moses be absent from the people and thus giving them time to fashion another idol—to redo what had been lost. As for the Lord’s descent in the cloud, he “stood with him there.” That is to say, Moses did not enter the cloud but took up the same position or stood right there with the Lord as connoted by the verb *natsav*. Thus the two *natsav*’s became as one. Only on this descent the Lord takes the opportunity to proclaim (*qara*’, ‘to call’) “in (*b-*) the name of the Lord. It may have appeared to Moses that the Lord was boasting to no one except himself which would be quite an impressive display for Israel to witness if it could. It was not unlike Moses being in the hole when “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name “The Lord”” [33.19].

Vs. 6 spells out this proclaiming or *qara*’: “The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Moses already had experienced the divine *havar* or passing by (‘and while my glory passes by’, 33.22) but not in that protective crevice nor covered by the Lord’s hand. This *havar* is “before him” or literally “on his face” (*hal-panayw*) which couldn’t be a more vivid or direct way of putting it. Four elements comprise the divine *qara*’: *rachum* or “merciful;” from the verbal root *racham* last noted in 33.19 which is not unlike the verse at hand. “Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them” [Ps 78.38]. Second is *chanun* or “gracious;” from the verbal root *chanan* as in 33.19. Such *chanun* is *erek* as far as anger goes, this adjective being suggestive of something long and drawn out. Third comes “steadfast love” or *chesed* celebrated when Israel had crossed the

Red Sea and saw the Egyptian host drowned (cf. 15.13). Such *chesed*, wonderful as it is, is even greater: *rav*, an adjective applicable either to mass, weight or expanse. *Rav* also modifies the fourth element or *'emeth* ('faithfulness'), the only other reference in Exodus being 18.21: "men who are trustworthy" or literally "of truth."

Vs. 7 flows as a continuation of vs. 6: "keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." A second mention of *chesed* within the same larger sentence which the Lord keeps or *natsav* just like Moses did on Sinai and the Lord (cf. vss. 2 & 5). So *natsav* is fleshed out more with regard to that most important divine attribute of *chesed*, of being immovable...not just for the current generation or those Israelites in the wilderness but "for thousands," thus projecting *chesed* as *natsav* indefinitely into the future (Canaan). The point of vs. 7 vis-a-vis *chesed* is not that it's a blanket term but a reminder that the Lord is watchful of transgressions. *Nasa'* is the verb for "forgiving" first noted with a different meaning in 20.7, actually its alternate meaning: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." However, the fundamental sense is that of lifting or raising as in Dt 24.15: "for he is poor and sets his heart upon it." In the verse at hand, *nasa'* has three objects: iniquity, transgression and sin (*hawon*, *peshah* and *chata'ah*), words which have been noted respectively in 20.5, 23.21 and 32.30. At the same time or in conjunction with this keeping and forgiving (*natsav* and *nasa'*) are two actions: a maintaining of one's guilt, that is to say, not clearing it or *naqah* noted in 20.7 which refers to being pure or free from punishment. The object of *naqah* is "guilty" or those who lack such *naqah*, this verb being used a second time. The second is "visiting" the iniquity committed by earlier generations, the verb *paqad* which as noted in 3.16 can be translated in multiple ways though the one at hand is close in line to its fundamental meaning. Here *paqad* does not last for the duration of the current generation but extends all the way to the third or fourth which, according to modern standards, is not that long because of a short life span.

"And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth and worshiped" [vs. 8]. *Mahar* or "made haste" causes Moses to be in awe...not that the Lord had revealed something new and unexpected but that he was grateful for divine tolerance and justice. Such is the meaning of *mahar* which connotes a certain unreflective, automatic response. "Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in haste" [10.16].

This sudden response of humility on Moses' part did not preclude him from beseeching the Lord as he now does in vs. 9: "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray you, go in the midst of us although it is a stiff-necked people." This echoes in part the words of 33.13: "If I have found favor in your sight," the word *chen* being used in both instances. The same applies to "I pray you" where the particle *na'* is used. Moses knew that already he had found divine *chen* personally and wishes to extend it to the people whom he knows is stiff-necked, *qasheh* being the adjective as in 32.9 as used by the Lord himself: "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people." So if Moses and the Lord

concur on this point, something positive may come of the situation. The request for the Lord to go “in the midst” or *qerev*, bold as it is, therefore loses its cutting edge. Moses continues in the same verse with “and pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for your inheritance.” Wisely he uses the first person plural, that is, he includes himself while intimating that he as leader of Israel is also *qerev* the people. *Salach* is the verb for “pardon” and is not unlike *nasa’* of vs. 7 as a lifting up or removal as in Jer 33.8: “and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.” The genuine sign of boldness on Moses’ part apart from asking the Lord to be *qerev* Israel is for him to be their “inheritance” or *nachal* (verbal form) as in 23.30 where it means “possess.” Such *nachal* would last beyond the wandering in the wilderness which more properly belongs to the Lord as *qerev* and therefore carries over into Israel’s possession of Canaan: “and they shall *nachal* it forever” [32.13].

The first part of vs. 10 has the Lord’s response which runs as “Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nations.” As for the covenant or *beryth*, already it had been created in 24.7 as a “book” (*sepher*) or after Moses had ascended Mount Sinai and restated in 31.16 (‘perpetual covenant’). However, that *beryth* Moses smashed when he came upon Israel worshiping a molten calf and was re-written by the Lord in 34.1 on “two tables of stone like the first.” The Lord’s willingness to engage in a second *beryth* is put in simple, straight-forward words here prefaced by “behold” or *hineh*. It is used to get Moses’ attention as well as signifying that the Lord desires to forget Israel’s idolatry and start anew. While the Lord doesn’t acquiesce explicitly to Moses’ request to be in their midst and to be their inheritance—technically he remains silent on this—still the proposition of the covenant is just as fine if not better as the rest of Chapter Thirty-Four spells out. As for the “marvels” or *pala’* (verb), Moses must have wondered how the ten plagues of Egypt, Israel’s passage through the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army being drowned there could be surpassed, not including the Lord’s miracles in the desert and his fearful manifestation on Mount Sinai. In fact, *pala’* is used in 3.20 with respect to all these events or at least as pertaining to Egypt. The words “in all the earth” and “in any nations” served to heighten Moses’ curiosity as what would happen. Given his age, his thoughts must have turned to a successor who could handle what seemed to surpass the incredible events just outlined.

Vs. 10 continues with “and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with you.” Here *ham* is used for “people” compared with *goyim* for “nations in the first half of the verse. At this stage the two are pretty much interchangeable but (the former applies more to tribes and those who are kindred and the latter to more or less established nations) later in history *ham* is identified with Israel and *goyim* as non-Israelites. And so the *ham* (and here that can more or less include *goyim*) will see the “work” or *mahaseh* of the Lord...singular...which to Moses was almost too much suspense to bear compared with the multitude of wonders already experienced. If this were not enough, the Lord subscribes the word “terrible” to his future action, this being the verb *yare’* (to fear).

The Lord decides now is the time to relieve all this tension and expectation with the words “Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites” [vs. 11]. The familiar *shamar* is for “observe:” observe in the sense of keeping close watch as to what the Lord commands not tomorrow or sometime in the future but “this day” or right now. That imparts a new urgency to the sense of *shamar* not just for the situation at hand but for anything else the Lord will do later on. The six tribes are mentioned first in 3.8 prior to the Lord’s first and ultimately most important revelation to Moses. There they are not presented as threats but as minders, if you will, of Israel’s original land long-lost for over four hundred years. Surely Israel must have had some contact with them throughout their long stay in Egypt but were well protected living within the borders of that super-state. Now in the desert they were vulnerable by reason of being physically closer to these tribes. As they drew closer to Canaan from Sinai (and the distance was, in essence, negligible) anxiety must have grown considerably. Once there, so the people reasoned, how would they deal with these original inhabitants? What would their memory be of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of how these foreigners attempted to usurp their native land? Just as Israel kept alive memory of Canaan, so these peoples kept alive memory of Israel’s attempted take-over. Surely divine intervention was in order to resolve this, hence a greater manifestation of it than what had just been stated. Ultimately the “terrible thing” would assume the form of *garash* or driving these six tribes from their native soil. “And I will send an angel before you, and I will *garash* the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites” [33.2].

“Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going, lest it become a snare in the midst of you” [vs. 12]. A second used of *shamar* (‘take heed’) only this time with respect to Israel’s own way of comporting herself. Just a few verses above the Lord made a covenant with Israel—rather, renewed it—and to prevent Israel from fashioning a second molten calf or something similar, likens his covenant with one that could exist between Israel and the six tribes of vs. 11. Indeed, this pseudo-covenant would be a “snare” or *moqesh* as in 23.33 where it mentions the gods of these peoples. In sum, the six tribes equal a multitude of foreign gods, something Israel’s patriarchs had to contend with and ultimately was a wearisome task. In the 23.33 we have simple a *moqesh* whereas in the verse at hand it is a *moqesh* “in the midst of you” and that “midst” is the *qerev* reserved for the Lord himself to which Moses begs him to come (‘go in the *qerev* of us,’ vs. 9).

“You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim” [vs. 13]. This is an extended sentence which runs through vs. 16 and contains three verbs of physical destruction: *nachats*, *shavar* and *karath*. The first usually applies to physical structures and the latter is more general. The references are: “And they demolished the pillar of Baal and demolished the house of Baal and made it a latrine to this day” [2Kg 10.27]. “But you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces” [23.24] and

“Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on the outside shall be cut off from his people” [30.33]. As for the altars, the chief one mentioned in Exodus is that of 27.1, the altar of acacia wood, but most likely the Lord had in mind the example of Aaron who built an altar in honor of the molten calf (cf. 32.5). As for the pillars, the word is *matsevah* as used in 24.5, “the twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.” New to this familiar terminology is Asherim or these pillars which symbolized Asherah, the mother goddess of the Canaanites. Actually the Asherim are not found elsewhere in Exodus nor the preceding book of Genesis. After two similar injunctions in Deuteronomy their next appearance is 1Kg 14.15: “and scatter them beyond the Euphrates because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger.” Even though this is the sole reference in Exodus it intimates that some preliminary contact has been made with the inhabitants of Canaan in the Sinai wilderness. Similarly, the Asherim may have worked their way into the Egyptian pantheon or entered that country through traders, etc. Regardless, the main point is that the Asherim are established firmly in Canaan and must be “cut down” just as ruthlessly as the worshipers. Because the verbal root *karath* applies to the cutting of a covenant as pointed out numerous times above, to *karath* one with the Asherim results in being *karath*.

Vs. 14 follows as one sentence and flows into vss. 15 and 16: (“for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God).” The **RSV** has it in parentheses which are left here, indicative that it is a footnote of sorts, albeit an important one, to the destruction of the altars, pillars and Asherim. *Shachah* is the verb for “worship” not just here but earlier; if an other term were used, it would be noted. *Qana’* is given as the proper name for the Lord, that is, vis-a-vis the Asherim and is suggestive of being envious, again, due to the recently erected molten calf of which he had been jealous.

“Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice” [vs. 15]. Here the idea of a covenant that has been cut or *karath* is brought out clearly...not so much with the gods but with the concrete inhabitants of Canaan itself. *Zanah* is the verb for “play the harlot,” one of two uses in Exodus, the next being in vs. 16. Because *zanah* is used in reference to “their gods,” it could refer to sacred prostitutes. “This people will rise and play the harlot after the strange gods of the land where they go to be among them, and they will forsake me and break my covenant which I have made with them” [Dt 31.16]. *Qara’* is the verb for “invites” and fundamentally means to call but here in the sense of being enticed. In the verse at hand, such *zanah* applies to sons and daughters, possibly those who will become of age once Israel reaches Canaan (cf. vs. 16).

Vss. 17 through 35 give details concerning the covenant’s renewal, most of which is found earlier. Because of this, most will be commented upon briefly.

“You shall make for yourself no molten gods” [vs. 17]. Apart from the incident described earlier, one that distressed the Lord more than anything else, this is the only time gods

which are “molten” (*masekah*) are mentioned. That word is derived from the verbal root *kasah* (‘to cover’) and is suggestive not of an idol which is solid gold but one with an outer sheen. In the verse at hand it is applied to gods compared to a calf in 32.4. The words “for yourself” or literally “to you” (*lak*) bring home the supreme importance of this divine command.

“Unleavened bread” or *matsah* [vs. 28] is described for the first time as a “feast” or *chag* which is first mentioned in 10.9: “for we must hold a feast to the Lord,” a request Moses made to Pharaoh where it is pointed out that this word often applies to a sacrificial victim. To it is applied the familiar *shamar* or keeping. As for the month of Abib, it is last mentioned in 23.15: “for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt.”

“All the opens the womb is mine” [vs. 19] where *peter* is the word for “opens,” a noun meaning an opening. It was last noted in 13.12: “you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb.”

“All the first-born of your sons you shall redeem” [vs. 20] and the verb *padah* hearken back to 13.13: “Every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem.” Vs. 20 continues with a second sentence: “And none shall appear before me empty,” *reyq* last appearing in 3.21: “and when you go (from Egypt), you shall not go empty.” As for this appearing (the common verb *ra’ah*, to see), most likely it is at some liturgical celebration such as the altar of sacrifice.

The second half of vs. 21 runs as “In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.” In other words, despite the busiest two times of the year when crops are planted and later when they are harvested, they shall not interfere with the “rest” or *shavat* which is sanctified by the Lord’s own rest after six days of creation: “Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord” [16.23]. Insertion of this *shavat* during spring and harvest, beginning and end, are quite revolutionary in that despite the urgency to plant and to harvest (on it depends one’s survival), the *shavat* is to be kept simply because it transcends all necessity. Such an observance must have been quite difficult to observe and required a lot of faith. However, it is made up by the command to “observe” three feasts (the verb *hasah* or to do is used for ‘observe’ thus indicative of ‘doing’ them) of weeks, wheat harvest and ingathering.

“Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel” [vs. 23]. Here is another use of the verb *ra’ah* (to see) which seems different from occasions of making sacrifice. It could be a tally of sorts, a way to determine Israel’s population with a view to military strength because the next verse has the Lord speaking in such terms:

“For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither shall any man desire your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year” [vs. 24]. Since removal of nations from Canaan is a one time operation, the

appearance of males before the Lord three times a year, here repeated, is a way to commemorate this important event, just as important as crossing the Red Sea. Immediately following the casting out or *yarash* (it means to destroy as found in 15.9: 'I [Israel's enemy, Egypt] will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them') comes an enlarging of borders, *rachav* being suggestive of spacious. "You have given me room when I was in distress" [Ps 4.1]. This *rachav* is with respect to Israel's borders which were not yet known geographically but known according to tribes as vs. 11 says with regard to the six tribes the Lord will drive out, that being far more important. Note that the verb there is *garash* whereas the verse at hand has *yarash*, suggestive of inheriting something. As for the land any man should desire, it seems applicable to a fellow Israelite once the people have entered Canaan and have begun to divide out the territory. It is put in the context of that thrice yearly appearance before the Lord only here it involves a going up (*halah*) to him. Since this appearance is to take place once every four months, it must have a fairly central location, easy to access, though it is not mentioned. However, the verb *halah* suggests it is a mountain or location on a mountain.

Vss. 25-26 concern sacrifice which had been touched upon earlier. Remember, the verses at hand deal with the renewal of the covenant and are intended as points of recollection. As for "first fruits" of the land, the word is *re'shyth*, the only other occurrence being 23.19: "The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God."

"Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel" [vs. 27]. Here the Lord bids Moses to do the writing compared with vs. 1: "I will write upon the tables the words that were on the first tables." However, the two writings (*kata*) are one, for the verse at hand says "in accordance with these words" which reads literally as "on my mouth (*hal-py*) these words." Such words (the familiar *davar*) here appear distinct from the Lord and are thus for the purpose of transmission. If it weren't for the distinction no covenant "with you and with Israel" would be procured.

The first part of vs. 28 runs as "And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights" which is stated in a matter-of-fact way because of Moses' familiarity with this duration of time as a *kairos* event, that is, outside chronological time as well as familiar space. The last time he was on Sinai this duration "the people saw that Moses delayed to come down" [32.1] prompting them to fashion the molten calf. Surely both the Lord and Moses were aware of this; the same must have applied to the people, notably Aaron who fashioned the calf, so they bided their time for the duration of Moses' absence. In brief, a general truce was put in place which lasted. During this second period the text says explicitly that Moses refrained from eating and drinking; in other words, Moses fasted compared with his first forty days and nights. Such fasting intimates a way of him making intercession for the people not to fall back into idolatry. It was only then that Moses "wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten words (the RSV has 'commandments')." Although the number of words (*davar*) were ten, they acted more as chapter headings under which considerably more writing was inserted. After all, the tables were fashioned from that *tsur* mentioned in vs. 4

which formed part of the shelter when the Lord had passed by, thereby allowing his goodness to be seen (cf. 33.19).

“When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” [vs. 29]. The verb *yarad* (to come down) is included twice almost as though to signal that on top of his mind was the experience having entered the came during his previous sojourn on Sinai and finding Israel under Aaron’s direction worshipping the molten calf. Obviously Moses was fearful of smashing the second copy of tables but fortunately that was not the case. *Qaran* is the verb for “shone” which means to radiate, to emit beams and has three other biblical references, two of which are in Exodus, vss. 30 and 35; Ps 69.31 has the participle form as “horns,” the noun *qeren* being derived from this verbal root. In brief, Moses’ face simply did not give off a simple glow but what could have been pulsating beams of light, very active in their manifestation. Such was not the case prior to Moses’ second ascent to Sinai for forty days and forty nights or when he “entered the tent” [33.9] outside the came and spoke “face to face as a man speaks to his friend” [33.11]. There because friendship was the issue no special manifestation was required; here after the second forty days and nights some sign was required, yet another safeguard against the molten calf incident. Moses had been described innumerable times as talking with God, *davar* being the verb. In the verse at hand, the *davar* between the Lord and Moses is brought home in a strikingly visible fashion, hence the beams of light. No small wonder that vs. 30 has Aaron and all Israel fearful of approaching Moses...just what the Lord had wished for. Still, business had to be conducted which is why vs. 31 has Moses summoning Aaron and the leaders: “and Moses talked with them,” that is, he shared the *davar* which caused his face to radiate with words of similar radiance for the leaders.

“And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face” [vs. 33]. This “veil” or *masveh* (it only occurs in vss. 34 and 35) seems to be one made for the face only and had to be strong enough to retain the beams of *qaran*, that shining from Moses’ countenance associated with speaking, *davar*. The *masveh* covered his mouth, obviously, which meant it covered his *davar* as well. Those elders in his presence did witness the *qaran* yet were not blinded or better, speared through with one or more of the beams.

The sentence begun in vs. 33 continues in vs. 34 with: “but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the veil off until he came out; and when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded” (the sentence continues, spilling into vs. 35). “In before” is *lipney* or literally “to the face” meaning that Moses approached the Lord in the spirit of 33.11: “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” That means he had to approach the tent (not mentioned but assumed) with the veil or *masveh* already over his face if not his head. In other words, *masveh* reflects the nature of this face-to-face-ness, if you will. The verse at hand seems to be a one-way conversation (‘and told the people of Israel what he was commanded’). True in one sense but secondary to that intimate conversation of which we will never know the details. That’s why the *masveh* is needed; to

protect not Moses' face nor to keep the people from being afraid but to maintain that special intimacy.

“The people of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone; and Moses would put the veil upon his face again until he went in to speak with him” [vs. 35]. Thus concludes the longest single sentence in Exodus beginning in vs. 33. In other words, the *qaran* or radiance emanating from the face of Moses was not at all frightening to the people but by reason of its obviousness tended to detract from communication of what the Lord had to say, that all-important *davar* of speaking in all its fulness. To see something spectacular thus has less an impact that by hearing something and obeying it. Of course, this off and on of the veil took some practice, hence the reason why it's mentioned in three verses.

Chapter Thirty-Five

“Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, “These are the things which the Lord has commanded you to do.” And so opens a new chapter which shows how the instructions given to Moses in Chapters Twenty-Five through Chapter Thirty-One are to be implemented. Such detailed instructions were lost when Moses came upon the Israelites worshipping the gold calf and had to be re-formulated.

Note two words pertinent to the gathering of people: the verb *qahal* from which the noun is derived and found in 32.1: “When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, they gathered themselves together to Aaron.” That which engaged in this *qahah* is the “congregation” or *hedah* as in 17.1: “All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages according to the commandment of the Lord and camped at Rephidim.” As it has been observed numerous of times, this *hedah* started out some six hundred thousand men strong, not including women and children. So by the time of the *qahal* at hand, it must have been considerably more...this taking into consideration normal births and deaths; as for conflicts with desert peoples, apart from the one with Amalek the Israelites seem to be enjoying relative peace. At the same time neighboring peoples, including Egypt, couldn't help but monitor Israel's movements, hardly something such a multitude could do undetected.

In vs. 2 Moses speaks of the general framework in which Israel has been operating for some time and successfully at that, namely, six days of work and one of “solemn rest to the Lord.” *Qodesh* is the adjective for “solemn” and applies to that which is holy or set apart, the last reference being cited as 30.32: “it (oil) is holy, and it shall be holy to you.” *Shabaton* is the noun for “solemn rest,” an intensification of *shabat* and first found in 16.23: “Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord.” Moses is having the people hearken back to shortly after their crossing of the Red Sea, the crisis at Marah and now the procurement of quails and manna. Now this *shabaton* is intensified to the maximum by “whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.” One can just imagine the Israelites on this *shabaton*

resting in and around their respective tents keeping a tense eye-out for any violations. If there were any notable ones, they went unrecorded. This must have been a favorable sign; none of the Israelites worked on this *shabaton*. That's an amazing record since the *shabaton* came around so quickly or in our terms, once a week.

The next verse (3) follows on the heels of the one at hand and says simply "you shall kindle no fire in all your habitations on the sabbath day." Here the more familiar *shabat* is used compared with the more solemn *shabaton* though the two seem to be the same. The latter probably was used at the beginning of this sacred day's institution to bring home its importance, that the people get it right before they take possession of Canaan where a settled life may lead to forgetfulness more easily than wandering in the desert.

Immediately after this simple yet forceful injunction Moses says "This is the thing which the Lord has commanded" [vs. 4]. He then unpacks this "thing" or the familiar *davar* used so frequently as the verb "to speak," especially when it came to the relationship between the Lord and Moses. The *davar* is spelled out in terms of material for the ephod and breast piece through vs. 9, that is, from a person "of a generous heart" [vs. 5]. *Nadyv* is the adjective meaning more specifically voluntary, ready as well as a prince and found a second time in vs. 32. It is used with *lev* or "heart" in the original text. "And with you in all the work will be every willing man who has skill for any kind of service" [1Chron 28.21].

This *nadyv* is succeeded, as it were, by "every able man," *chakam* meaning wise as well as skilled and similarly modifying *lev*. "I have given to all able men ability that they may make all that I have commanded you" [31.6]. *Chakam* applies to the making of the tabernacle, etc., which is described through vs. 19. Of interest among everything enumerated are "the finely wrought garments for ministry in the holy place" [vs. 19]. *Sarad* is a noun for "finely wrought" and has three other references in Exodus: 35.19, 39.1 & 41. It applies to cloth or material not unlike a coat of mail due to its relative thickness. *Sharath* is the verb for "ministry" and used as a participle in 33.7: "His servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tent."

"Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses" [vs. 20]. That is to say, everyone returns to their tents where heated discussions all about the camp must have taken place. Chief among the discussion was the topic of persons who were generous and able, volunteers who would work on the proposed tabernacle and its furnishings.

"And they came, every one whose heart stirred him and every one whose spirit moved him and brought the Lord's offering to be used for the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments" [vs. 21]. Chances are the time between Moses' address and the coming forth of these people was short, at most overnight. All knew about the tabernacle, especially how the first two tables of stone Moses smashed into pieces followed by a selective killing of violators by the Levites. As for these Levites, it would be interesting to

know how many stepped forth with a heart (*lev*) that had been stirred or *nasa'* first noted in 20.7 as "take" and means fundamentally to lift or to raise up. Note only was the heart of such people "raised" but their spirits (*ruach*) as well which were moved or *nadav* as in 25.1: "from every man whose heart makes him willing you shall receive the offering for me." And so this two-fold inspiration by *nasa'* and *nadav* applicable to *lev* and *ruach* respectively resulted in these people bringing the Lord's "offering" or *terumah* as found in 25.1: "Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me an offering; from every man whose heart makes him willing you shall receive the offering for me." *Terumah* applies to a gift, most often as what is called a "heave-offering" meaning the shoulder or thigh of a sacrificial victim. It was to be used for sacrifice meaning they had to erect the altar quickly in order that the meat does not spoil. Since the two faculties of *lev* and *ruach* have been stirred and raised, this posed no problem. The zeal manifested was sufficient to get the tabernacle and other things ready in no time at all. As for what such people brought, vss. 22-29 gives a list of the items which was impressive by any standard. Then again, the people had despoiled the Egyptians before their departure, so this vast multitude about to move carted off almost the entire treasure of that country.

"See the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah" [vs. 30]. As in 31.1, the Lord calls Bezalel "by name" meaning it is a personal summons for a very special job, a man filled with "the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge and with all craftsmanship" [vs. 31]. All such qualities are noted in 31.1 and are repeated here which as it was noted there, these qualities were latent in Bezalel and became known once the Lord had summoned him through Moses.

"And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan" [vs. 34]. Oholiab is mentioned more or less in the same breath as Bezalel in 31.6, but here both are taught and inspired explicitly by the Lord to "teach" or *yarah* which is the verbal root for Torah and alternately meaning to lay foundations, cast and even sprinkle with water. The text reads literally, "and has put into his heart to teach." This emphasis upon heart or *lev* is important since the context involves the sacred task of fashioning the tabernacle and all the sacred objects associated with it.

"He has filled them with ability to do every sort of work done by a craftsman or by a designer or by an embroiderer" [vs. 35]. *Chakmah* or wisdom is also found in 31.6 which also applies to skill where some cunning is involved by three trades which these two men shared and most likely imparted to their underlings: *charash*, *chashav* and *raqam*. *Charash* applies to an engraver or someone skilled with iron, brass, stone or wood; in sum, a mason or carpenter. "As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel" [28.11]. *Chashav* is found in 31.4 with reference to "work in gold, silver and bronze as well as "every craft." As noted there, the verb for "devise" means to think, invent, compose and sometimes connotes being devious and hence is in line with the implied cunning of *chakmah*. As for *raqam*, it pertains to adorning with colors or the weaving of garments. "And you shall make for the door of the tent, of blue and purple and

scarlet stuff and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework” [26.36].

Chapter Thirty-Five ends here in mid-stream, if you will, and flows seamlessly into Chapter Thirty-Six which continues the theme of construction.

Chapters Thirty-Six through Thirty-Nine

This chapter continues with the construction of the tabernacle under the direction of Bezalel and Oholiab, that is, “every able man in whose mind the Lord had put ability, every one whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work” [vs. 2]. The importance here is that such people committed themselves voluntarily, not under coercion. That’s why vs. 3 speaks of the “freewill offering which “they still kept bringing him every morning” [vs. 3], the *terumah* mentioned in 35.29. The response was so overwhelming that “the people were restrained from bringing” [vs. 6] or from putting their talents to work.

Vs. 9 speaks of just one man who fashioned the curtains and upright frames for the tabernacle without giving his name so presumably it is either Bezalel or Oholiab. However, Chapter Thirty-Seven opens with Bezalel mentioned specifically with regard to the ark, but that is not proof of his tasks in the previous chapter. The same applies to the opening verse of Chapter Thirty-Eight. Then 38.21 has “This is the sum of the things of the tabernacles, the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were counted at the commandment of Moses for the work of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest.” As for Ithamar, he is mentioned in 28.1: “Then bring near to you Aaron your brother and his sons with him from among the people of Israel to serve me as priests: Aaron and Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.” Because Levites are singled out in the verse at hand, that may confirm the observation above that they were a majority of those who stepped forward as volunteers: “Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him” [35.21].

Chapter Thirty-Nine starts out with yet another unspecified person responsible for the ephod, onyx stones and breast piece plus other items. Regardless, the identity of the person or persons so engaged is secondary to that *chakam* or wisdom who is the guiding force as in 35.10. All this finally comes to completion in the last verse (43) of Chapter Thirty-Nine: “And Moses saw all the work and behold, they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, so had they done it. And Moses blessed it.” Such words are reminiscent of the days of creation which the Lord had beheld individually and reflected in the freedom the Lord gave the first man with regard to naming the newly fashioned creatures: “and (the Lord) brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name” [Gen 2.19].

Chapter Forty

This last chapter of Exodus begins with the Lord speaking. He had remained silent for the

past several chapters or during the construction that was going on but certainly not letting it go by unobserved. The Lord has Moses set up the “tabernacle of the tent of meeting” [vs. 1], a task he carries out through the bulk of Chapter Forty or until vs. 33. “So Moses finished the work.” One could sum up the detailed work by a quote from the Song of Songs: “King Solomon made himself a chariot from the wood of Lebanon. He made its post of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; it was lovingly wrought within by the daughters of Jerusalem” [3.9-10]. *Ratsaph* (the only instance in the Bible) is used for “wrought” and more specifically means to arrange stones, to tessellate. Thus the image is one of women taking exquisite care and pleasure laying down small, finely cut stones, an observation made within the context of Chapter Twenty-One (abbreviated).

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” [vs. 34]. Such words are clearly reminiscent of those numerous occasions when the Lord had not so much revealed himself but made his presence known through the medium of a *hanan* or cloud. Now this *hanan* which had covered Sinai covers the tent. Any keen observer of this phenomenon would take it as a desire for the Lord to have that face-to-face relationship enjoyed by Moses: “as a man speaks to his friend” [33.11]. The cloud once again stresses the transcendence of the Lord while at the same time his accessibility or better, his openness to people who may wish to partake of this accessibility. That glory or *kavod* which Moses had requested to see and which the Lord agreed (cf. 33.18-22) is a new factor in the tent of meeting. Though not explicitly identified with divine *kavod*, the shine on Moses’ face must be related to its manifestation (cf. 34.29+).

Vs. 35 takes this *kavod* a step forward by saying that “Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” Despite the face-to-face familiarity, nevertheless the Lord remains supreme and wishes to drive home this fact towards the end of Exodus and before Israel enters Canaan under the direction of Joshua. Note the distinction between *hanan* and *kavod*: the former is “upon” (*hal*) the tent whereas the latter “filled” (*mala’*) it. One’s instinct is to perceive *hanan* as dark and *kavod* as light though not necessarily true because the latter infers heaviness and heaviness infers a kind of “dark” weight. Anyway, the *kavod* seems to come from...descend from...the *hanan* which remains as a protective guard much as it had done on the shores of the Red Sea prior to Israel’s crossing.

The duration of this *hanan-kavod* with respect to the tent of meeting isn’t given, but vs. 36 implies that its removal from over the tent was an indication that Israel should pack up and move on to the next stage of its wandering. Some kind of warning as to the lifting of *hanan-kavod* must have been given. It must have been visible enough for the six hundred thousand men, not to mention women and children (that number must have increased as noted above), to prepare. Then again, it may have lifted swiftly. No problem for the Israelites since they were conditioned to moving out at a moment’s notice, a skill of sorts they acquired going all the way back to their sudden departure from Egypt and practiced to perfection through many such movements in the Sinai wilderness. Vs. 37 is quick to

counter this by saying that on occasions the *hanan-kavod* remained in one place indefinitely. No explanation is given but then again, none is needed since this comes at the pleasure of the Lord. Moses must have felt frustrated on a personal level during such occasions. He could not enter the tent and engage in that face-to-face intercourse with the Lord. The same applied, obviously, when Israel was on the move and the tent was taken up, but that is a different situation.

“For throughout all their journeys the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day and fire was in it by night in the sight of all the house of Israel” [vs. 38]. This concluding verse of Exodus is reminiscent of that pillar of fire and cloud prior to the Red Sea crossing noted above but more pertinently as later when “the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud” [16.10] which is intimately linked with the providing of quails in the evening and manna in the morning...and that provision presumably continued right through to this concluding verse though it is not mentioned beyond its initial appearance. In vs. 38 fire is mentioned as presence within the tabernacle by night, surely an awesome sight that kept people at a distance and rightly so. However, this presence of fire within that which is combustible (tent) is not unlike the bush which “was burning yet it was not consumed” [3.2].

Now what took place prior to Israel’s redemption from slavery in Egypt (the bush from which the Lord revealed himself) is brought around full circle to now in the midst of the Sinai wilderness when the fire does not consume the tent of meeting. However, Exodus closes on a note of suspense. We are left with Israel still wandering and not having entered Canaan. Moses is still in charge of leading Israel just as he had done from the beginning and presumably will for the indefinite future. As for the Lord forbidding him to enter Canaan described in Chapter Thirty-four of Deuteronomy, nothing of the sort is intimated, let alone Joshua succeeding him. In other words, the concluding verses of Exodus leave Israel in mid-stream of her wanderings which is why this book is so intriguing. It ends on an upbeat note of the Lord continually among his people which in many ways is more attractive than when Israel settles down because it runs well the life experience of so many people.

+ **The End** +