

Chapter Twenty

“And God spoke all these words saying.” So begins a new chapter whose basic theme is the Ten Commandments. As for this speaking (the often used *davar*), it lasts through vs. 17 which means the Lord spoke quite a lot and will continue to do so later on, that is, through Moses to the Israelites. The actual location of this speaking appears to be at the foot of Mount Sinai (‘So Moses went down to the people and told them,’ 10.25) but presupposes some notification for the people to assemble to hear Moses. Since they numbered over six hundred thousand men, not including woman and children, the elders and newly appointed judges relayed Moses’ words as he spoke, for most people were out of the range of one man’s voice. These leaders learned how to relay almost instantaneously what Moses uttered from his brother, Aaron, who earlier was his spokesman. “He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you” [4.16]. And so Aaron taught the elders and judges how to act likewise for the benefit of the people.

“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” [vs. 2]. Such is the first and foremost commandment; the number isn’t given to the people, but they intuited the commandments wouldn’t be many, ideal for comporting themselves in a desert environment, more a code from which particulars might be drawn later on. Once they left it, they could expand upon these commandments or even better, expect the Lord to impart more detailed ones which, in fact, he does on Mount Sinai. At first you’d think this statement about the Lord being Israel’s God who brought that people from Egypt would be obvious. However, it was not for the people; they were newly liberated or as some would argue, pushed out into the desert to wander around aimlessly away from the comforts of Egypt despite the “bondage” (*havadyim*) mentioned in the verse at hand. Egypt, too, was home to a multitude of gods and goddesses. At the summit (at least on earth) was Pharaoh himself. And so this emphasis upon the oneness of the divinity is tantamount to Israel’s identity which must be protected at all costs.

You shall have no other gods before me” [vs. 3] is the second commandment, a logical follow-up to the first. *Elohyim* is the word at hand, the same often applied to God himself. The verse can suggest that such *‘elohym* already exist, are not idols *per se*, and are not to be placed “before” the Lord, the preposition being *hal-panay* or literally “upon my face.” This expression infers that the people have a tendency to acknowledge the one true God yet at the same time lean to putting another god in his place, blocking him, if you will, from their view.

“You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth” [vs. 4]. Two things are forbidden to be “made” (*hasah* clearly signifies human origin), the first being *pesel* (‘graven image’) which is derived from a verbal root meaning to cut or to carve and dovetails with the verb *hasah*. “All worshipers of images are put to shame who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him” [Ps 97.7]. The second thing not to be *hasah* is a likeness or *temunah* which means a form or appearance; eight other biblical references exist, five of which are in Deuteronomy. “Beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure” [Dt 4.16]. Such *temunah* represent three parts of creation: heaven, beneath the earth and the water thus referring to birds, animals on earth and interestingly, water...not mere water but that which lays under the earth which intimates the pre-existing waters over which the *ruach* or spirit of God had hovered at creation. As for this water “under the earth,” see Gen 1.9: “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear” over the waters. To make a *temunah* of anything which calls these primeval waters home is far worse than any other, for this is equivalent to capturing something from the original, semi-divine waters and worshiping them. Their existence was as old as God himself and hence poised a special danger, far more than any Egyptian deity, even a threat to the Lord.

The first part of vs. 5 runs as follows: “You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.” *Shachah* is the verb for “bow down” and was first noted in 4.31: “they bowed their heads and worshiped.” This subservient gesture leads naturally to a willingness to be obedience to what a person is reverencing, that is, *havad* or serving it, this verb, as noted several times earlier, implies slavery. *Shachah* has the preposition *l-* (to, toward) prefaced to “them” which is indicative of submission whereas *havad* does not. Both these gestures of bondage stand in contrast to divine jealousy or *qana’* which is an adjective and suggestive of envy. Instead of using an undesirable human trait projected upon the divinity, *qana’*, as opposed

to *shachah* and *havah*, is indicative of the Lord's intense desire for Israel to be free. "For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God" [Dt 4.24]. The verb *qana'* is akin in sound though not in verbal root to the verb *qanah* meaning to acquire. So when hearing one, the other can be substituted and visa versa without out damage to the meaning at hand.

The second part of vs. 5 follows through with this jealousy: "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me." Given the much shorter life span of ancient times, a generation (perhaps around thirty years of age) was less severe, here totaling some one hundred and twenty years (fourth generation). *Paqad* is the verb for "visiting" first noted in 3.16 ('I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt'), is widely used and has multiple means but in general connotes a one-on-one encounter or putting into action. So this personal dealing of guilt (*hawon*) carries over several generations not unlike the results of the "fall" of Adam and Eve with their more immediate offspring. God's jealousy is in response not so much to those who may be guilty but to those who "hate" him, the verb *sane'* being used as a noun in 1.10: "If war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." The nature of this *sane'* isn't spelled out in vs. 5, just stated, with emphasis upon transmission. That means *sane'* is almost biological, a living virus present within a host, but one destined not to last forever. However, if a second generation and those after it submits to idol worship, you end up with a whole interlacing of guilt that becomes contagious and never dies out. Yet this tendency not to worship the Lord is understandable in the harsh desert climate marked by sense deprivation and is a kind of longing after multiplicity, if you will, of desiring to be relieved of what can devolve into monotony. The Lord must have put this injunction lasting several generations to prevent backsliding into worship of Egyptian deities even though this isn't explicit throughout Exodus.

Vs. 6 is not a separate sentence from vs. 5, continuing with "but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." The Hebrew doesn't use a verb pertaining to vision but has *hasah*, the common verb to make, and making something in accord with *chesed*, that indefinable term for divine love last noted in 15.13: "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed." Such *chesed* doesn't extend to future generations but to "thousands" meaning that its manifestation is much more common than jealousy. Then again, perhaps only a few persons are worthy of *chesed* who, in turn, become its transmitters to those around them. *Chesed* is dependent upon *'ahav* (the common verb to love) and the keeping (*shamar*) of divine commandments (*mitsvah*). As for the last term, it is mentioned in 16.28: "How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?" The promise of divine *paqad* or visiting iniquity up to the fourth generation is thus countered by the equal promise of divine *chesed* to "thousands." And these thousands co-exist with that interlacing of various generations guilty of *paqad* and serve to blunt its damaging effects.

The fourth of the Ten Commandments is in vs. 7: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." *Nasa'* is the verb for "take" which fundamentally means to raise, lift up, and the verse at hand is the same as in Dt 5.11. Such *nasa'* can apply to the raising of one's voice in anger or in a curse. And "name," while not mentioned, refers to the one revealed to Moses from the burning bush: "I am who am" [3.14]. In fact, that name which had been abbreviated to YHWH, was forbidden to be spoken. "In vain" (minus the *-l-* prefaced to the noun) is *shawe'* which also means falsehood, nothingness or iniquity and in sum implies a curse. *Shawe'* is also found in Dt 5.11; another reference is Ps 12.3: "Everyone utters lies to his neighbor." Should a person slip and use the divine name as a curse, the Lord will not hold him guiltless or *naqah*, this verb referring to being pure or free from punishment. "I know that you will not hold me innocent" [Job 9.28]. Implied in vs. 7 is that the Lord will keep close watch over his people as to using his name though the punishment, if any, is not spelled out.

The fifth commandment is in vs. 8: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Those to whom this commandment is addressed recently have witnessed the first Sabbath or the seventh day after the Israelites had gathered manna and presumably are still gathering it: "Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord" [16.23]. In other words, the Sabbath is already in place and is to be kept holy or *qadash* (verb), this concept having been introduced for the first time in 13.1 ('consecrate') with regard to all the first-born. And so this injunction to *qadash* the seventh day after having gathered manna (gathering the quails isn't mentioned) is

done in remembrance of having been sustained for what eventually will amount to forty years of eating manna in the desert. Though the manna ceased upon entry into Canaan when the Israelites could get more substantial food, remembrance of all those days of gathering it would be crucial for their religious observances. After all, six hundred thousand men, excluding women and children, were fed on a daily basis, that meaning a huge amount of manna (and quails) and without a doubt, the Lord's greatest miracle.

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work" [vs. 9]. This is a refinement of the previous verse built upon the gathering of manna and is followed by "but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God." Note the distinction between "labor" and work," the verb *havad* and the noun *mela'kah*. *Havad* has been discussed as pertaining to forced labor as under the Egyptians and involves any type of physical work. *Mela'kah* refers to service prescribed to anyone such as an artisan. "In cutting stones for setting and in carving wood, for work in every craft" 31.5]. As noted earlier with regard to counting the seven days which are based on the first chapters of Genesis, "seventh day" reads more accurately as "day seven" which places emphasis upon "day" followed by the respective number it happens to be...only up to seven and not beyond this sacred number. *Shevah* (seven) has as its verbal root *shavah* which means to swear an oath and indicates a solemn agreement. So to violate day seven would not be unlike the fourth commandment of taking the Lord's name in vain. Not just Israelite men are forbidden to cease from their labors, but vs. 10 extends it to one's son, daughter, man-servant, maid-servant, cattle and finally "the sojourner who is within your gates." Such is the hierarchy, if you will, that had been established early on, for apparently non-Israelites attached themselves to the people either before departing Egypt or joined them later in the desert. *Ger* ('sojourner') is mentioned in 12.19 as among those who celebrated as the Passover and who most likely were Egyptians as well as other foreigners, even some Canaanites, dwelling in Egypt. "Within your gates" doesn't apply to the people in the desert, for that refers to a settlement but can be used figuratively as "within your camp."

Vs. 11 provides the reason for keeping the Sabbath day, why it should be kept holy (cf. vs. 8): "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." In other words, those to whom this injunction is committed need to have an appreciation of what came into being on each of the six days ('day one,' 'day two,' etc.). Once this is kept firmly in mind, only then can "day seven" be realized fully, for the six days of work echo those of creation when the Israelites had gathered the manna and quails after they rested, for "Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest" [16.23]. *Nuach* is the verb for "rested" (noted in 10.14 as 'settled' with regard to the locusts in Egypt) and often applies to cessation from labor. "That your man servant and your maid servant may rest as well as you" [Dt 5.14]. Although the Lord is speaking in the verse at hand concerning *nuach*, Gen 1.2 has the verb *shavath* as Moses had described it: "And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done." Thus *shavath* has to do with the cessation of work compared with the resting from work as *nuach* implies.

As a side note, nothing is said about days beyond the seventh meaning that the cycle of six days of work and one of rest resumes as a means of marking time centered around the Sabbath. So without this *shavath/nuach*, time would remain circular and never ending without assuming a linear (historical) direction. Not only did the Lord rest on "day seven," he blessed and hallowed that day, the two verbs being *barak* and *qadash*. The latter had been noted above in vs. 8 and the former being introduced for the first time though it was mentioned in conjunction with Pharaoh and Jethro (cf. 12.32 & 18.10), the Lord. "The Lord your God has blessed you" [Dt 2.7].

The sixth commandment is found in vs. 12: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you." *Kavad* is the verb for "honor" and is mentioned frequently above as in conjunction with the hardening...the becoming heavy (*kavad's* fundamental meaning) of Pharaoh's heart. Judging by the commandment, the Israelites would think their arrival in the land about to be given them was immanent. Strictly speaking this *kavad* of one's parents takes place in the desert whereas the long span of life is not to be there but in Canaan.

"You shall not kill" is the seventh commandment of a general variety occurring in vs. 13 with *ratsach* being the verb which means to dash into pieces. If anyone kills a person, the murder shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses" [Num 35.30; reference is to 'shall be put to death'].

“You shall not commit adultery” [vs. 14] or *na’aph* which is applicable to both men and women. “Because harlotry was so light to her, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree” [Jer 3.9].

The eighth commandment is “You shall not steal” [vs. 15], the verb being *ganav* which intimates deception. “Do not men despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry” [Prov 6.30]?

The ninth commandment runs as “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” [vs. 16]. *Hanah* is the verb for “bear” and was noted in 10.3 as “humble.” Also noted under that verse are the many meanings belonging to this verb. *Sheqer* or “false” is a noun in the Hebrew and like *ganav*, intimates deception. “Put false ways far from me; and graciously teach me your law” [Ps 119.29]. As for this *sheqer*, it is directed not so much as to one’s family but to one’s neighbor and therefore deals with extra-familial relationships.

The tenth and final commandment is the longest: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his man servant or his maid servant or his ox or his ass or anything that is your neighbor’s” [vs. 17]. The verb *chamad* (‘covet’) occurs twice and fundamentally means to desire, take delight in. Thus it necessarily doesn’t have a negative connotation. “He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him” [Is 53.2]. Furthermore, *chamad* applies here to that which belongs to one’s neighbor, not unlike the ninth commandment. As for all ten commandments, the Israelites (the same applies to Moses) didn’t know how many the Lord would impart but must have intimated the general tone as just presented and that these ten would expanded to include more practical applications to human behavior and divine worship. The following of these details would serve well for future generations in Canaan whereas the ten commandments were a quick rule of thumb for moving about within a desert environment, easy to remember without referring to a written text.

“Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off” [vs. 18]. This experience mirrors that of 19.16: “thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.” In other words, a dramatic display of divine power occurs before and after the impartation of the ten commandments. In the verse at hand, the common verb to see (*ra’ah*) is used for “perceived.” *Nuah* is the verb for “trembled” which implies a shaking or staggering and differs from *charad* in 19.6 which more explicitly applies to fear. “The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut” [Is 24.20]. Such a response made the people stand “afar off” or well away from the founts set about the mountain in 19.23.

“You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us lest we die” [vs. 19]. The preposition “to” in Hebrew is *ham* which more commonly translates as “with,” so this changes the people’s request to asking Moses to speak *ham* them instead of God with or *ham* them. Since *ham* involves a being-present, no small wonder that the people were terrified that if the Lord were “*ham* them,” they would perish on the spot. If Moses had done the same successfully with Pharaoh, that is, having brought down those plagues, surely he could speak “*ham* the people.” To this legitimate request Moses responded: “Do not fear; for God has come to prove you and that the fear of him may be before your eyes that you may not sin” [vs. 20]. *Nasah* is the verb for “proved” and was first mentioned in 15.25: “There (Marah) the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he proved them.” Marah was the first such *nasah* but certainly not the last, for a number of similar incidents occurred not long after the Israelites had departed Egypt followed by the dramatic escape through the Red Sea. And so the people were painfully aware of Moses’ words. Actually vs. 20 contains the only use of the noun *yir’ah* (fear) in Exodus though the verb occurs frequently. Moses wishes to concretize the previous experiences of fear (*yare’*) for the first time and place it “before your eyes” to avoid sin. Such face-to-face vision would evolve to assuming the form of inserting the experience at Sinai into Israel’s collective memory. To recall that event was therefore a placing of this *yir’ah* before the eyes of the listeners regardless of how distant they might be from that generation.

“And the people stood afar off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was” [vs. 21]. Compare this fear and hesitation with the injunction in 19.21: “Warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to

gaze and many of them perish.” In the verse at hand there is a contrast between *merachok* (the people) and *nagash* (Moses) or “afar off” and “drew near.” Moses had first-hand experience of being with the Lord whereas the people did not. They only had contact with the Lord from a distance, albeit in very dramatic fashion. For example, they witnessed the divine presence in the pillar of cloud and the Red Sea crossing. While impressive, the situation at Mount Sinai was more personal, for this was the intended destination Moses entreated Pharaoh so many times and which they knew about. Now that they were confronted with the possibility of taking up residence there—at least some if not many assumed that—living on such close terms with the Lord would prove too much to bear. That which Moses approached (*nagash*) was “thick darkness” or *harphel* frequently associated with the presence of God. This verb does not mean that Moses actually entered the *harphel*, just that he came to its threshold, if you will. In other words, how close is not specified but left to be imagined. “The Lord has set the sun in the heavens but has said that he would dwell in thick darkness” (reference to the temple Solomon had just constructed, 1KG 8.12). Here is the only use of *harphel* in Exodus with two similar references in Deuteronomy. Such *harphel* was too much for the people, like being face to face with a dark hole, an unimaginable darkness, yet something familiar to Moses which he simply entered.

“You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven” [vs. 22]. This verse commences a long discourse with Moses on behalf of the people which runs to the end of Chapter Twenty-Three, the bulk of which consists of ordinances which flesh out the ten commandments just delivered. Under normal circumstances, it would be impossible for any person to remember these details. However, Moses was at the very threshold of heaven (*harphel*), thereby enabling him both to intuit these instructions instantly as well as to recount them later to the Israelites. Up to this point Exodus has eight references to heaven (*shamayim*) as consisting of the sky, and the sky in that part of the world was a deep blue in along with the blazing sun which changed to an equally deep black in which were set the stars and moon. So *shamayim* had these two basic elements of total, horizon-to-horizon envelopment from which no one could escape. Thus the total darkness of *harphel* was not unlike *shamayim*, a reality “up there” which had made its presence felt directly upon the earth.

“You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold” [vs. 23]. This echoes the first commandment in vs. 4 (no ‘graven image, likeness of anything that is in heaven,’ etc.) and takes into consideration the spoils Israel had been carrying around in the desert (cf. 12.35). Now would be an ideal time to make representations, a human impulse the Lord recognized was stronger than the Israelites themselves realized and thus puts it at the top of his list. On the other hand, how could anyone make a god or image of *harphel*, an impossible task? Perhaps it is this dynamic between the completely unknown and what is familiar that gives rise to the fabrication (*hasah*, to make) of gods. Note the words “with me” (*ity*) or to be with the Lord in his native habitat, *harphel*. That would not be unlike Moses going right up to the divine *harphel* gods-in-hand, an impossibility.

Instead of fabricating gods, the Lord shifts attention to sacrifice: “An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen” [vs. 24]. This is the second use of “altar” or *mizbeach*, the first being in 17.15 erected after the victory over Amalek, which seems more as a memorial than one used for sacrifice. Nothing is said about it being of stone or of earth. So at last Moses’ intent is fulfilled after many contentious interviews with Pharaoh and his refusal to let Israel depart Egypt to offer sacrifice in the desert. Surely he must have been thinking, fine...but what now? Are we, six hundred thousand men, not including women and children, to take up permanent residence in this barren place? Chances are no because the Lord had promised a land flowing with milk and honey. Some Israelites may have entertained the idea that they or a few representatives would make a yearly pilgrimage to Mount Sinai once they became established in Canaan. As for the *mizbeach*, it is to be made of “earth” or *adamah* which suggests a reddish hue, clay-like, and had formed the substance of the first man, Adam. Similarly, this *adamah* is holy as revealed in 3.5: “Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy *adamah*.” Such material had to be moistened with water to make it bind, not unlike the infamous bricks the Israelites had to make in Egypt, and once hardened by the desert sun, were as solid as any rock.

Two types of offerings are to be made upon this earthen altar: *holah* and *shelem*. The former is first mentioned in 10.25: “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings that we may sacrifice to the Lord

our God.” As for *shelem*, this is the first mention of the word and derives from the well-known verbal root *shalam* and from which *shalom* comes. Many references are found in Leviticus, one of which is the first reference in 3:1: “If a man’s offering is a sacrifice of peace offering...he shall offer it without blemish before the Lord.” Apparently a *shelem* seals the resolution of a conflict between persons or groups of persons. Vs. 24 continues: “in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.” *Maqom* is the noun for “place” and is noted above on several occasions, usually as applied to habitation and *zakar* (‘remembered’) is the verb from which “male” is derived, the agent through whom remembrance of one’s parents and relatives is continued from the present and into the future. Note the form, “cause to be remember” which suggests the presence, if you will, of another agent or go-between God and the person(s) doing the *zakar*. In the present circumstance before Mount Sinai there is no need for the “causing” since the divine presence is so obvious. In fact, it needs to be mitigated or softened which is why in vs. 19 the people said “let not God speak to us lest we die.” Introduction of this distance (for lack of a better term) before the Lord and Israel is necessary, for soon it became evident that the people could not make their permanent home at Sinai but required space in which to live their own lives. Still, the Lord will not be absent but “will come” and “bless” (*barak*) them.

Vs. 24 has construction of an altar of earth (‘*adamah*’) whereas vs. 25 speaks of another type: “And if you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones; for if you wield your tool upon it, you profane it.” The Lord prefers the altar of ‘*adamah*’ but does not forbid one of natural stones or those which have not been hewn, *gazyth* being a noun with five references in the First Book of Kings concerning Solomon’s building of the Jerusalem temple. “At the king’s command, they quarried out great, costly stones in order to lay the foundation of the house with dressed stones” [1Kg 5.17]. *Cherev* is the noun for “tool” which usually applies to a sword of any type. Because a sword represents death and destruction, it...the tool...is not allowed in the erection of this altar of naturally formed stones and these were taken from the desert as having been buffeted by wind and rain. *Nuf* is the verb for “wield” which means to move to and fro or to wander. “And the priest shall take the cereal offering of jealousy out of the woman’s hand and shall wave the cereal offering before the Lord and bring it to the altar” [Num 5.25]. Such “waving” of a “sword” upon a stone with the intent to fashion it is a form of profanation or *chalal* which connotes a laying open or giving access, that is, of allowing what is not proper. “They (priests) shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God” [Lev 21.6].

Finally with respect to this altar of earth or ‘*adamah*’, “You shall not go up by steps to my altar that your nakedness be not exposed on it” [vs. 26]. Implied here is an altar which is raised compared to one which is level with the ground. One of the former type suggests that it is inside a building though not necessarily so. If a priest ascends the altar of hewn stones, chances are the wind could blow up his garments and thus reveal his nakedness. This is the only reference to nakedness in Exodus and suggests the precedence of Noah who lay drunk and unclothed in his tent (cf. Gen 9.-20-24). His three sons (Ham, Shem and Japheth) became aware of this and approached the tent backwards so as to avoid seeing their father in this condition. However, Noah—who had just built an altar after the flood—awoke and cursed his youngest son Canaan, the name of the land to which the Israelites under Moses’ leadership were headed. As for Canaan of Genesis, he is the son of Ham.

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty-One begins the second half of the Book of Exodus. Because of this, the notion of *selah* is re-introduced. That is to say, *selah* (originally as a liturgical pause) was inserted after each paragraph through Chapter Six to remind the reader that it is necessary to pause and reflect upon the verse at hand in light of the comments. This pause is presented in the spirit of *lectio divina* with the intent of resting in God’s presence. If this practice is not followed, there is no purpose in reading this document, for *selah* is the end-product, if you will, of this document.

Much of the remainder of the Book of Exodus goes into great detail about laws governing human relationships, worship and the fashioning of all the components necessary for worship, especially with regard to the ark of testimony. Because of this, please take note of the following observations concerning the remaining chapters of the Book of Exodus. These select verses enable the others to make more sense and be applicable to a reader through the practice of *lectio divina*. The outline of the remaining chapters of Exodus may be presented as

such:

Chapters Twenty-One through Chapter Twenty-Two deal with laws regulation human behavior. Therefore not all verses will be commented upon. As for these select verses in the two chapters at hand as well as those in subsequent chapters, reading them in the spirit of *lectio divina* gives life to those details which otherwise would be considered as not worth reading. If one decides to examine the details laid down by the Lord, they can be read in light of Sg 3.9-10: “King Solomon made himself a palanquin from the wood of Lebanon. He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; it was lovingly wrought within by the daughters of Jerusalem.” The verb *ratsaph* (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.

Approximately the first half of Chapter Twenty-Three contains details about social life and laws whereas most of the second half will be commented upon in the usual fashion.

Chapter Twenty-Four deals with Moses on Mount Sinai. Therefore it will be commented upon in the usual fashion.

Chapters Twenty-Five through Thirty-One deal with the ark’s construction, priestly garments and liturgical items for worship. Therefore a few key verses will be commented upon. One might wonder where the Israelites had obtained both the material and skill. The answer is easy, for they had been in Egypt some four hundred plus years and despoiled the Egyptians prior to leaving that country. The skills acquired, possibly in erecting temples, would be put to use shortly.

Chapters Thirty-Two through Thirty-Four deal with the gold calf, the Lord’s guidance and renewal of the covenant. Therefore they will be commented upon in the usual fashion.

Chapters Thirty-Five through Chapter Thirty-Nine deal with the establishment of the cult of worship. Therefore a few verses will be commented upon.

Chapter Forty (the last chapter) will be commented upon in the usual fashion.

As for Chapter Twenty-One, the opening verse sets the tone for the remainder of the book: “Now these are the ordinances which you shall set before them.” *Mishpat* is the noun for “ordinance” as noted in 15.25 and translates alternately as “judgement:” “There (Marah) the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he proved them.” Such *mishpat* are not simply written down as a code though the verb “set” (*sum*) can refer to this. It also involves those men whom Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, had recommended (cf. 18.13-27) to assist in making decisions for the people. In other words, “let them judge (*shaphat*, the verbal root of *mishpat*) the people at all times; every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves” [18.22]. Though the Lord speaks at great length from Chapter Twenty-One onwards, he is doing so through Moses who, in turn, is imparting the *mishpat* to these trusted men.

“Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee” [vss. 12-13]. The second verse has the Lord allowing a guilty person fall into the hand of a man who had been offended and therefore is guilty. Note that the God “will appoint” (*sum* or ‘place’ as in vs. 1) a “place” or *maqom* of refuge which is reminiscent of divine care concerning Cain: “And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him” [Gen 4.15]. In this way the offended party is freed from revenge. As for the *maqom* in question, it is “for you,” the person to whom wrong had been done.

“But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be punished; for the slave is his money” [vs. 21]. This verse deals with a slave (*heved*) who had been beaten by his master. Though “slave” is mentioned a few times earlier in Exodus—most likely taken from wandering in the Sinai Peninsula, not Egypt—the Lord’s use of this term must have been cause of some embarrassment for the Israelites. After all, they had been slaves in Egypt. In the

verse at hand, a *heved* is equivalent to currency or “money,” *keseph* which more accurately means silver.

“Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” [vss. 24-5]: in other words, a direct correspondence for injury to a body part.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate” [vs. 26]. Reference is to someone who is poor for whom the Lord has special concern because he is “compassionate” or *chanun* (also cf. 34.6). The verbal root (*chanan*) means to be favorably inclined, to pity. “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and repent of evil” [Jon 4.2].

“The first-born of your sons you shall give to me...on the eighth day you shall give it (the mother of oxen and sheep) to me” [vss. 29-30]. *Bekor* is the noun for “first-born” which harkens back to the original consecration of 13.2: “Consecrate to me all the first-born...both of man and of beast.” This happened the same night the Lord slew the *bekor* of Egypt, the night of the Passover, and is a reminder of that event. As to the “giving” to the Lord of *bekor* in the verse at hand, no details are given as to how it is done. However, the same seems not applicable to the *bekor* of oxen and sheep. Seven days are to pass before they are given which most likely means they are physically sacrificed, again, a reminder of the Passover (lamb). “Day eight” is designated for this “giving” which signifies the day after Sabbath or beginning of the new week. This is the first intimation of the concept signified by “eight” (or eighth) in Exodus.

“You shall be men consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs” [vs.31]. *Qodesh* is the adjective “consecrated” as used with respect to the Sabbath: “Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord” [16.23]. Thus the men whom the Lord has in mind—and this seems to refer to the entire Israelites male population—are equivalent to the Sabbath itself.

Chapter Twenty-Three

At the beginning of Chapter Twenty-One the importance of *selah* as a pause had been noted a second time. To refresh the reader, it is inserted after each paragraph here in Chapter Twenty-Three and is expected to be continued to the end of Exodus.

“You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his suit” [vs. 6]. *Natah* is the verb for “pervert” as was first noted in 7.5 with the fundamental sense of extending, of turning aside: “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt.” In the verse at hand, the implied rather straight-forward stretching becomes bent, if you will, when it comes to justice (*mishpat*: cf. 21.1 as ‘ordinances’). At question are the rights of someone who is poor or *‘evyon*, an adjective which connotes being oppressed, not just lacking material possessions. “He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honors him” [Prov 14.31]. Such an *‘evyon* almost always is bound to lose a lawsuit or *ryv* which is the verb at hand.

Selah

“You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” [vs. 9]. This command hits home in a special way, reminding Israel of its past which should never be forgotten. That is to say, at one time Israel has been a “stranger” or *ger* in Egypt. This divine reminder is important on another level, for despite over four hundred years of residency in Egypt extending all the way back to the generosity of the Pharaoh under whom Joseph had served, Israel continued to consider herself as *ger* or alien. To maintain this identity was no small feat, especially because Egypt was noted both for its wealth and multitude of gods. Familiarity with their native land (Canaan) was a remarkable feat and sank deep within Israel’s consciousness most likely helped by contacts with Dinah’s descendants there, the daughter of the twelve brothers who did not go to Egypt. Those faithful persons responsible for this memory allowed Israel to know (*yadah* implies intimate knowledge and intimacy) the very essence of her *ger*-ness, the significance of “heart” in this verse.

Selah

“Six days you shall do your work, 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” [vs. 12]. This verse reminds Israel of the Sabbath which is preceded by six days of “work” or *mahaseh*, this noun being derived from the common verb *hasah* (to do, to work) as opposed to the *havad*, to work as a slave or hired hand. On “day seven” the people are to rest or *shavath*, the reason given in 16.30: “So the people rested on the seventh day.” In addition to this rest (*shavath*, from which ‘Sabbath’ is derived) another kind applies to oxen and asses (*nuach*) which was last noted in 20.11: “for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.” Thus we have two types of rest for “day seven,” the Sabbath. As noted earlier, *shavath* applies to refraining from work and observing the Sabbath whereas *nuach* means to set (or sit) oneself down and be quiet, not necessarily from work but from inner thoughts and turmoil. Another form of cessation is contained in the verse at hand, *naphash* (‘refreshed’), which contains two other references, 31.1.7 and 2Sam 16.14, the latter being quoted here: “And the king and all the people who were with him arrived weary at the Jordan, and there he refreshed them.” *Naphash* is the verbal root for *nephesh*, commonly translated as “soul.”

Selah

“Take heed to all that I have said to you; and make no mention of the names of other gods nor let such be heard out of your mouth” [vs. 13]. The Lord pauses here, as it were, by reminding Israel of all that he had uttered to this point, *shamar* being the verb for “take heed” as in 20.6: “but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” Even the uttering the names of these “other gods” is prohibited. Most likely they pertain to the multitude of gods to which Israel had been exposed over the centuries in Egypt. Recently they had first-hand experience of the one true God at Mount Sinai which, despite the drama of the revelation, would prove insufficient to root out completely this influence as well as that coming from exposure to the deities later encountered in Canaan.

Selah

“Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me” [vs. 14]. The three times are spelled out in the next few verses as the month of Abib (when Israel departed Egypt and hence the most important of them all), the feast of harvest (Israel’s labor) and the feast of ingathering at the end of the year. *Regel* is the noun for “times” which fundamentally means “foot” thereby implying that which is approaching. “For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly” [Gen 30.30]. The keeping of the feast at hand is the verb *chagag* is first noted in 5.14 and is intended as a reminder of Moses’ request to Pharaoh which never should be forgotten: “Let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.” This verbal root means to dance, usually in a sacred or liturgical context as well as festal one. “Behold, they were spread abroad over the whole land, eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah” [1Sam 30.16].

Selah

“You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning” [vs. 28]. Most likely the sacrifice (*zevach*) at hand is the Passover: “It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover” [12.27]. With regard to this, the first and most important of all sacrifices, any remains of it are not to remain until the morning when they shall be burned [cf. 12.10]. Because the Israelites left Egypt in haste, they had no time to make bread in the usual way but had to eat unleavened bread, hence the prohibition to use it during commemoration of the *zevach* (Passover).

Selah

“The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God” [vs. 19]. Here we have two words pertaining to “first:” *re’shyth* and *bikor*, the former signifying that which first with regards to chief, the equivalent of the Latin *principium*, principle of things, whereas the second refers exclusively to first born or that which had been harvested first.

Selah

“Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I had prepared” [vs. 20]. The last mention of an angel or *mal’ak* (fundamentally a messenger) was 14.19: “Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.” That was Israel’s first experience of a “messenger” (in 3.2 a *mal’ak* appeared to Moses), so it must have both frightened and astonished them; neither is any description given, but something relative to a *mal’ak*’s messenger-ness must have revealed itself. The same, of course, easily could be applied to the pillar of cloud and fire prior to crossing the Red Sea. As for the verse at hand, nothing is said if the Lord had in mind the same *mal’ak* that appeared to Moses or at the Red Sea, let alone whether this was

the same *mal'ak* in all three instances. Anyway, the Israelites would perceive the essence of what it means to be a messenger, of having been sent, and retain it throughout the rest of their wanderings in the desert.

Selah

Later in 32.34 and 33.2 we have mention of *mal'ak*, the former being identified as the *mal'ak* of the Lord or "my angel" whereas all the others in Exodus lack this personal touch. Despite the commissioning of the *mal'ak* in 23.20, there's not indication of his interaction with the Israelites. You'd think that when they came to Canaan at the end of forty years he would bid them farewell or even hand them off to the protection of another *mal'ak*. We hear nothing of the sort but can assume that Moses as well as Joshua had something to do with this. The *mal'ak* functions in the wilderness as a being who continually receives information from the Lord, that being a messenger's function. He passes this on to Israel by oral communication (cf. vs. 22, 'his voice') but more importantly by guarding or *shamar* Israel, the importance of that word having been noted last in 23.13, let alone other places in this document. Such *shamar* is effected "before you" or literally in front of Israel. One might ask that if such a divine being is before Israel, does she have need of Moses' guidance? It might be more proper to say that the *mal'ak* was before Moses who, in turn, was before Israel as he had been ever since having departed Egypt. As for the final destination, the Lords designates it as a "place" or *maqom* which more often refers to an inhabited area. Later in vs. 23 this *maqom* is identified as Canaan with the various tribes which Abraham and his descendants had to contend with.

Selah

"Give heed to him and hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him" [vs. 21]. The verb *shamar* is for "give heed" and translates as "to guard" in the previous verse. Here it is used inversely, if you will...of Israel *shamar* the angel, a kind of continuous repayment with *mipanayw* for in the literal sense as "from before (face) him" whereas the second command ('hearken', *shamah*) reads literally "in (*b*-) his voice." As for the verb "rebel," it is *marah* as in Ps 78.8: "and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation." Failure to observe these three injunctions results in the strong possibility of the angel not pardoning (*nasa'*: last noted in 20.7 as 'take') one's transgressions or *peshah* which means a falling away. "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" [Ps 32.5]. The reason for these three injunctions with regard to the angel is due to the divine name (*shem*) being present in him, *qerev* as last noted in 17.7: "Is the Lord among us or not?" Usually a messenger or *mal'ak* is a kind of go-between but that is not intimate enough when it comes to things divine; rather, the Lord's name is *qerev* or in the very midst of the *mal'ak*.

Selah

"But if you hearken attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries" [vs. 22]. The verb *shamah* (to hear) is used twice, a way of expressing the adverb "attentively" and runs something like "If you hear hearing." As with the nature of the *mal'ak* himself or how Israel relates to him from this point on, we have no information. He does have a voice (*qol*) which means he communicates his messenger-nature through audible means. While Israel runs the danger of being remiss, Moses remains faithful which is why he remains leading the people with the *mal'ak* before him. Thus as Aaron had been Moses' mouthpiece, so Moses becomes the *mal'ak*'s mouthpiece. In the voice at hand, the true nature of what it means to be a messenger comes out: "and do all that I say," words uttered by the Lord through the messenger. Here the Lord and his *mal'ak* are presented in a somewhat militaristic context, the two being an enemy and adversary to all those against Israel.

Selah

Even though such resistance may be met with overwhelming divine intervention, there remains the strong allure of worshipping their gods: "you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do according to their works, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces" [vs. 24]. Three negative verbs come first followed by two positive one. That is to say, *shachah* (first mentioned in 4.31), *havad* (this verb suggests becoming a slave) and *hasah* (to do or to make). As for the last verb, *hasah*, it seems to involve fabricating (*mahaseh*; 'works'), from the verbal root at hand and *hasah* (idols...the task of an idol is to make more idols and so forth, thereby creating an endless cycle of illusion. The positive verbs deal with the destruction of such gods, *haras* and *shavar*. Last reference to the former is in 19.21 ('lest they break through to the Lord to gaze and many of them perish') and implies a throwing down. As for *shavar*, it suggests a thorough destruction (hence, 'in pieces') through breaking, utterly beyond repair. "And you shall not break a bone of it" [12.46]. *Shavar* is used with regard to the pillars (*matsevah*) belonging to peoples inhabiting Canaan and could even be phallic symbols as well as images, the latter being referred to in 2Kg 3.2: "He (king

Jehoram) did what was evil in the sight of the Lord...for he put away the pillar of Baal which his father had made" [2Kg 3.2].

Selah

"You shall serve the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of you" [vs. 26]. The verb *havad* ('serve') is used with its familiar connotations of submission and slavery, something the Israelites had experienced under Pharaoh and did not wish to repeat though dealing with the various tribes in Canaan posed that very real threat. The Lord uses this verb with very unpleasant memories deliberately. He does not wish Israel to *havad* (and therefore be *havad*) alien gods. After their experience of this which lies in the future, they will understand that to be *havad* to the Lord is very different from being *havad* to gods. The second half of vs. 26 reads in Hebrew "he will bless" instead of the first person singular.

Selah

"None shall cast her young or be barren in your land; I will fulfil the number of your days" [vs. 26]. *Shakal* is the verb for "cast" which means to be barren or childless and was considered a terrible fate as not to pass on the family name. "Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful" [2Kg 2.19]. *Haqar* is similar (it's an adjective) but refers to both men and women. "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child" [Gen 11.30]. "Your land" (*'erets*) refers not to the desert in which Israel received these words but the land of Canaan.

Selah

"I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you" [vs. 27]. Israel already had this experience first with the Egyptian army having been swallowed up in the Red Sea and later with Amalek (cf. 17.8+). *'Eymah* is the noun for "terror" which alternately means "idol" because of the terror they instill in their worshipers: "For it is a land of images, and they are mad over idols" [Jer 50.38]. If this is kept in mind, perhaps the *'eymah* which goes before Israel can be identified as that *mal'ak*...messenger...the Lord sends before the people in vs. 20. The result? This *'eymah* will confuse all people whom Israel encounters, the verb being *hamam* which means to impel or to drive and thus implies considerable violence. "They were broken into pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress" [2Chron 15.6]. This combination of *'eymah* and *hamam* will not necessarily destroy Israel's enemies but make them flee, hence turning their backs. This enables a better sense of the next verse (28) when hornets will drive out the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites.

Selah

"I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you" [vs. 29]. This may come as a disappointment, but the Lord is more concerned about the land or *'erets* as vital for Israel's future sustenance. *Garash* is the verb for "will (not) drive out"—it also connotes plunder—first noted in 6.1 in a favorable sense regarding Israel as being whisked out of Egypt. In the verse at hand, a *garash* of Israel's enemies within one year will devastate the land, *shemamah* being a noun. "For Gaza shall be deserted, and Ashkelon shall become a desolation" [Zeph 2.4]. So if Israel's enemies seem a to be a scourge, the wild beasts are even more threatening.

Selah

"Little by little I will drive them out from before you until you are increased and possess the land" [vs. 30]. Here the Lord spells out more clearly what he has in mind concerning *garash* ('will drive out') while at the same time Israel increases in numbers, *parah* ('increased') which means being fruitful with regard to offspring). "But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly" as noted in 1.7, a fact that occurred despite Pharaoh's oppression and which will form the pattern by which Israel will take over or better, re-capture, Canaan after over four hundred years. As for the verb "possess," it is *nachal* which means to inherit. "And they shall inherit it forever" [32.13].

Selah

Vs. 31 is fairly lengthy and concerns the future boundaries of Israel: "And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines and from the wilderness to the Euphrates." *Gevul* is the noun for "bounds" noted in 7.26. Of significance is that Israel currently is wandering in part of this territory just east of the Red Sea which they had crossed. In sum, the *gevul* the Lord uses is one of water which will be a threat to Israel's enemies should they attack her, suffering the same fate as the Egyptian army being drowned in the Red Sea. Vs. 31 continues with "For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them

out before you.” Surely in this process the *mal’ak* or angel/messenger plays an important role though that is not recounted. For Israel’s part, it requires sensitivity to his presence before them or better yet, before Moses, which will determine when the land’s inhabitants will be delivered into her hands. *Garash* is used again for this driving out which means Israel’s enemies will go beyond the watery boundaries mentioned in the first half of this verse.

Selah

Vs. 32 is simple and straight-forward: “You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods.” *Karath* (‘shall make’) means to cut or to cut off and is noted above several times. Frequently it is used with *beryth* or “covenant,” that noun first being noted in 6.4: “I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners.” *Beryth* also played an important role with Abraham in Canaan as well as his sons. Their families and associates, as well as the present generation of Israelites, were in constant danger of falling into idolatry, so the Lord is clear here about the same temptation. Israel’s task to drive out (*garash*) the inhabitants similarly applies to their gods. However, history proves that the gods linger on much longer than anticipated. A prohibition about this lingering influence of alien gods is made in vs. 33, that is their dwelling (*yashav*) in “your land” or what is now called the *’erets* of Israel. Failure to drive out these gods will result in them becoming a snare or *moqesh*. The same liability exists with regard to the land’s inhabitants as noted later in 34.12: “Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it become a snare in the midst of you.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

“And he said to Moses, ‘Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel and worship afar off’ [vs. 1]. After the instructions and promise of divine guidance both to and within Canaan in Chapter Twenty-Three, the Lord bids Moses, Aaron, two men, plus elders (these seventy may have been those judges appointed at Jethro’s recommendation in 18.21) to “come up” to him on Mount Sinai. The two mentioned by name are sons of Aaron (cf. 6.23) whom later on the Lord would slay because they “offered unholy fire before the Lord” [Lev 10.1]. It would not be impossible that some of the seventy elders either met the same fate or fell away from their responsibility though nothing is said of this. So ascending Sinai was a kind of family affair whose members must have considered themselves quite important as they discussed the possible leadership roles they would assume later. In other words, these men were more interested in power than worship of God. With the exception of Moses, the others were to worship “afar off” (*merachaq*), the verb being *shachah*, last noted in 23.24. This *merachaq* must not have been far off...a plateau of sorts...despite the limited space of most mountain tops, for it had to accommodate a fairly large group of men.

“Moses alone shall come near to the Lord; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him” [vs. 2]. *Nagash* is the verb applied to Moses, last noted in 20.21 under similar circumstances: “And the people stood afar off (*merachaq*) while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.” Although the people did not ascent Mount Sinai, surely they must have crowded around its base watching their chief representatives ascend and wondering if they would ever return. It was natural that they follow which is why the Lord bids Moses to tell them not to come up.

“Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do’” [vs. 3]. We don’t know whether Aaron, his two sons and seventy elders were privy to what the Lord had communicated to Moses, but the time on the summit seems to have been very brief. The same applies to the length of time the Lord spoke with Moses which should not be measured according to the passage of conventional time. The whole event could have lasted a few seconds or even less, shorter being more likely than longer. Actually it turned out a bit later that Moses did not communicate much to the people; instead, he constructed an altar and made an offering. As for the people’s spontaneous response, it must have been on the spur of the moment without much reflection of what they were willing to do. One can imagine the people thronging about at the base of Sinai and enveloping Moses, Aaron, his sons and the elders, pressing them all with interminable questions.

“And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel” [vs. 4]. As just noted, not much as far

as written directions or commands had been imparted to Moses on his recent ascent. That would come later when he ascended a second time and received detailed instructions as to divine worship. Nevertheless, Moses had to unpack what he was imparted to him in a virtual instance and put it down upon a scroll. While in his tent, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and some of the seventy elders must have stood guard about it so he could accomplish this in peace without the people rushing upon him. This standing guard must have continued throughout the night until the people gave up and retired to their tents which is why Moses “rose early in the morning” or well before they returned. Although Moses had been instructed to build an altar (*mizbeach*) in 20.24, nothing is said of its actual construction, just that such an altar should be erected. The only *mizbeach* we know for sure that Moses had built is in 17.15: “And Moses built an altar and called the name of it the Lord is my banner.” There it was noted that this *mizbeach* could have been more as a monument.

In addition to the *mizbeach*, Moses set up twelve pillars or *matsevah*, this term first found in 13.21: “And the Lord went before them by day in a *matsevah* of cloud...by night in a *matsevah* of fire to give them light.” Actually vs. 4 has “tribes” (*shevet*) for the first time in Exodus. Jacob’s twelve sons had come into Egypt at Joseph’s invitation (plus that of Pharaoh) and dwelt their four centuries. Apparently they retained their tribal identity in a foreign land over an extended period of time, no mean feat, which Moses now wishes to bring to Israel’s attention in the desert at the foot of Mount Sinai. Israel had been assembled together as a unit for some time since the Red Sea miracle and used their tribal division as a form of identity. This identity was a communal reminder of their presence long ago in Canaan as well as a reminder that Israel would re-enter Canaan according to this twelve-fold division. How Moses arranged the twelve pillars is not mentioned, but given the nature of that number, it could have been a square with four pillars on each side with the altar in the center.

“And he sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord” [vs. 5]. Here we have a continuation of that recent revelation on Sinai which Moses wrote down but does not refer to, if you will, as following an instruction manual. Moses just speaks out what needs to be done and it is effected. The means of selecting these young men (*nahar*) is not given, but the seventy elders-judges must have played a role in determining that they came from worthwhile families. After all, these men were close to the people and had intimate acquaintance with their affairs. *Shelem* is the noun for “peace offerings” last noted in 20.24 (NB: there mention is made of an altar to be built compared with the one that actually was built in 17.15, so the altar under consideration is that one comprised of earth, 20.24).

“And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and half of the blood he threw against the altar” [vs. 6]. The noun for “basins” is *agan* which refers to a trough for washing or a cup; two other biblical references exist, one of which is Sg 7.2: “Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine.” *Zaraq* is the verb for “threw” which more properly means to scatter or sprinkle and thus has sacrificial overtones. For another use, see 9.8: “Take handfuls of ashes from the kiln and let Moses throw them toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh.”

“Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient’” [vs. 7]. This is the second reference to “book” (*sepher*) in Exodus, the first being what seems to be a different one: “Write this as a memorial in a book and receive it in the ears of Joshua, that I will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” The *sepher* under consideration applies to the “covenant” or *beryth* as in 6.4 though no identity between the two has been encountered. Perhaps they refer to the words Moses wrote down upon return from Mount Sinai in vs. 4, and the *sepher* obviously is a scroll, not a tablet. They could include the instructions imparted to Moses in Chapters Twenty and Twenty-One. Given the six hundred thousand men, not including women and children, Moses could not have read to them all. That’s where the seventy elders stepped into assist, for they had been on top of Sinai and despite not drawing near to the Lord (cf. vs. 2), were close enough to be eye witnesses. As had been the case when Moses communicated the words and ordinances a short time ago (cf. vs. 3), the people readily consented perhaps more out of enthusiasm than expressing genuine fealty. As for the verb “will be obedient,” it is *shamah* or hear...the people will hear what the Lord had spoken through Moses.

“And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people and said, ‘Behold, the blood of the covenant which

the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" [vs. 8]. Here we have a second instance of *zaraq* (to sprinkle), the first being in vs. 6. *Zaraq* serves to identify the people with the altar, the two being one. Moses deliberately uses the word "behold" or *hineh* (noted above several times) as a way of getting the people's attention. Because of Israel's huge population mentioned in the last paragraph, most could not see this but had to relay upon those towards the front in order to receive the information. Perhaps others got blood from Moses and similarly sprinkled those further back. So in the verse at hand, blood from oxen (cf. vs. 5) is identified with the *beryth* (covenant) and the words Moses has communicated to the people.

"Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel went up." Vs. 9 forms part of vs. 10 and has the same men re-ascending Sinai though it is not mentioned but certainly presumed. It must have been a much different ascent after the people had been bound to the Lord by the *beryth*. Besides, they as the most important members of Israel felt a special bond with the Lord so could ascend with confidence, not fear. This ascent seems to have been immediately after Moses had sprinkled the people. In fact, he and the others may have begun their ascent while the whole multitude of Israel was in the process of being sprinkled with blood, an ideal cover to make their withdrawal.

"And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone like the very heaven for clearness" [vs. 9]. This is the first mention of actually seeing God, including Moses, who earlier had been engaged in conversation with him. In those instances the act of seeing God wasn't mentioned, so the communications that had taken place could have been through an inner or even exterior voice. Its precise form is never disclosed, for the text puts more importance of what the Lord had passed on to Moses. Despite the uniqueness of beholding the Lord, it holds second place to this hearing, for hearing (especially when it comes from God) is more penetrating compared with the external act of seeing. As for this seeing, it seems to refer to God more or less as a whole and emphasizes that which was "under his feet," namely, a "pavement of sapphire." Two words form "pavement:" *mahaseh* ('works' as in 23.24) and *livnah*, the only such word in the Bible yet closely related to *levenah* (brick). Such a "work" which is "bricked" is fabricated of sapphire, the color blue...not just any blue but the deep blue of a cloudless desert sky. In other words, the vault above the desert was this "pavement," and those in God's presence were looking up to it as they normally would look to the sky above. Such a sight was noted for its "clearness" or *toher*. It has two other biblical references, one of which is Lev 12.4 with the alternate meaning of purification: "She shall not touch any allowed thing nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purifying are completed" [Lev 12.4]. As for the verbal root of *toher*, it is fairly common and relates to being clean, hence the notion of purification.

"And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God and ate and drank" [vs. 11]. This not laying hold of those who ascended Mount Sinai intimates the radical difference between the divine and human spheres, that the former is ready to pluck up and destroy the latter. *'Atsylym* is the noun for "chief men" with one other biblical reference being Is 41.9: "You whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corners." There *'atsylym* applies to a corner or side. Once Moses and those with him realized the Lord would allow them to continue gazing, they decided to sit down and eat as well as to drink. The latter may imply a celebration of sorts, even of getting drunk.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and wait there" [vs. 12]. This coming up differs from that of vs. 9 involving Aaron, his two sons and the elders and seems to refer to an ascent down shortly afterwards by Moses alone. Moses is bidden to "wait" on the mountaintop or in the Hebrew, "be there" for an undetermined period of time. It was as though the Lord bade Moses to ascend and wait while he went off to do or get something while in the meanwhile Moses was obviously curious as to what the Lord would bring back. Finally the Lord returned with the words: "I will give you the tables of stone with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." *Luach* is the word for "table" which here is comprised of stone, not wax, which makes anything written upon them more durable. "There was nothing in the ark except the two tables which Moses put there at Horeb where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt" [2Chron 5.10]. So it turned out that Moses had to wait a while for the Lord to write down the "law and the commandment" or Torah and *mitswah*. The latter also means a precept, the last reference being 20.6: "showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." Torah thus seems an umbrella term under which are included *mitswah*. Both are for Israel's

instruction, the verb *yarah* being used as in 4.15: “and will teach you what you shall do.”

“So Moses rose with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God” [vs. 13]. Here we have the second mention of Joshua who later would be Moses’ successor and lead Israel to victory when they entered Canaan, having gained notoriety when he defeated Amalek in Chapter Seventeen. However, Moses alone ascended while it appears that Joshua waited at the mountain’s base. Here Joshua is designated as the “servant,” the verb *sharath* being used as a participle. *Sharath* applies more to divine worship, a function of priests, so in addition to being a military commander of sorts, Joshua assisted Moses at the altar (cf. vs. 4+); it also applies to him in 33.11. In addition to Joshua remaining behind, Moses bids the (seventy) elders to “tarry here for us until we come to you again.” He seems to bring Joshua closer to the mountain’s base apart from the elders where perhaps he offered sacrifices in his master’s absence. Moses entrusts Aaron and Hur. They were to take care of any “cause” (*davar* or ‘thing,’ whose verbal root means ‘to speak’) which intimates that Moses could be gone for an extended period of time. The last time Hur was mentioned was the battle with Amalek, he and Aaron supporting Moses’ arms to achieve victory. Thus Hur and Joshua must have been close friends, certainly valued leaders after Aaron.

“Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain” [vs. 15]. After the parting words of vs. 14 which gets as close to any farewell, the sense of Moses being cut off permanently from Israel seemed as strong as ever with the cloud (*hanan*) covering Sinai. This happened before in Chapter Nineteen with Moses ascending the mountain, but his words which could be taken as a safety precaution of entrusting Israel to Hur and Joshua might make this his final ascent. Chances are those below thought of Enoch in Gen 5.24: “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”

“The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud” [vs. 16]. Last mention of “glory” (*kavod*) associated with a cloud is in 16.10 as located in the wilderness. As noted elsewhere, *kavod* refers to that which is heavy or weighty, and such weighty things often are associated with a dark color. This heaviness sucked the air out from around it which made it stand out in a way that was unmistakable and not comparable with any other experience except perhaps the stillness of an approaching thunderstorm. Not necessarily implied with *kavod* is silence, but a silence that captures one’s attention. The verb *shakan* translates as “settled” which connotes a making a dwelling, a permanent residence, thereby giving credence to the belief that Moses might never return and become as “not” as with Enoch. “O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill” [Ps 15.1]?

The six days during which this *kavod/hanan* settled upon Mount Sinai is, of course, reminiscent of the six days of creation. And those six days were preceded by “the Spirit of God (who) was moving over the face of the waters” [Gen 1.2]. The verb for “moving” is *rachaph* which means to cherish, brood over, an activity easily attributable to the current situation on top of Sinai. Moses was a unique witness to this *rachaph* as it applied not so much to the days of creation but more marvelously to the creation of Torah. Finally on “day seven” or the day when the Lord rested from creation, he did not rest as Moses may have expected but called out to Moses “from the midst” of the cloud, *mitok* intimating from the very center which coincided with the very top of Sinai.

“Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel” [vs. 17]. This “appearance” or *mar’eh* derives from the common verb to see and has one other occurrence in Exodus, 3.3: “I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.” Even though the *mar’eh* resembled a “devouring fire” (*okeleth*: from the common verb ‘to eat’), not necessarily did it make any sound. Furthermore, it was for the people’s benefit, not Moses; they were in a better position to behold the *mar’eh* as a whole because of the distance between it and them at the mountain’s base.

“And Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights” [vs. 18]. *Betok* is used for the preposition “in” the cloud which is lacking in the English translation. Compare *betok* with *mitok* of vs. 16, “the midst of the cloud.” Thus there is a meeting, as it were, between the Lord’s calling and Moses’ entering, *mitok-betok*. So for some time Moses had remained outside the cloud beholding this amazing sight; as with previous instances, his feelings towards it goes unrecorded.

And as for entering *betok* the cloud, he does so straightaway. It is followed by going up the mountain which intimates that at this point he was not on the summit as in vs. 15. Even though the words “up on the mountain” may intimate its summit, it can be taken as being in the general vicinity of that summit, a rather confined area as such places are wont to be. Chances are the cloud reached further down, perhaps even to its base close to the people. The expression “forty days and forty nights” means an extended period of time which here lasts through Chapter Thirty-One and is reminiscent of the flood in Genesis: “And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights” [7.12].

Chapter Twenty-Five

This chapter goes into considerable detail concerning the ark, the table and lamp stand. Because of this, certain verses will be commented upon around which those un-commented ones hang, if you will.

Chapter Twenty-Five opens with the Lord speaking to Moses who had ascended Mount Sinai; rather, he “entered the cloud” and thus for “forty days and forty nights” [24.18] disappeared from the view not only of the people at the mountain’s base but from that of his most trusted advisers. During that time the Lord spoke all the way through 31.17 after which Chapter Thirty-Two recounts the incident of the golden calf. For Moses the span of forty days and nights were a nanosecond but for the people it was interminable which is why they gave up on Moses and the Lord and fashioned the golden calf as their god. Moses had no need to write anything down; that which was written was intended for the Israelites. What had been communicated on Sinai was etched permanently in his heart and soul.

“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” [vs. 1]. *Terumah* is the noun for “offering” which applies to a gift, most often as what is called a “heave-offering” meaning the shoulder or thigh of a sacrificial victim: “And the right thigh you shall give to the priest as an offering from the sacrifice of your peace offerings” [Lev 7.32]. Such a *terumah* is not expected from every man but from those who are disposed or “willing,” this being the verb *nadav* meaning to impel, to urge, to give spontaneously. The next instance is in 35.21: “And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him.” Thus *nadav* intimates divine inspiration to which a person consents freely from the “heart” or *lev*.

Verses 3-7 proceed to list the *terumah* given freely which consist of precious metals and stones, various materials such as cloth, oil and spices. The objects into which they are fashioned are lamps, the ephod and breast-piece...in other words, liturgical and priestly instruments of clothing. As for the institution of priests, that will come later.

“And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst” [vs. 8]. *Miqdash* is the word for “sanctuary,” the last time having been mentioned is 15.17: “You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.” So Moses already intuited that he should fashion a *miqdash*, this having occurred immediately after Israel had crossed the Red Sea. In those words he speaks of “planting” Israel on the Lord’s “own mountain” as though the people were to dwell there forever. However, that did not turn out to be so, for awareness that a physical place is to be made for the Lord took root gradually until it culminated with the temple in Jerusalem. That’s one benefit of Israel’s wandering in the desert. They became weary of forty years of it and longed for a permanent home. It was only natural to transfer this heart-felt desire to the Lord, a sentiment the Lord himself communicated to King David: “I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling” [2Sam 7.6]. As for the *miqdash* at hand, the Lord is to “dwell” in it or *shakan* last noted in 24.16 with the connotation of settling: “The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days.” Perhaps Moses was thinking of the cloud in which he found himself as part and parcel of this *miqdash* which carried over to Solomon’s temple: “And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord...but (the Lord) has said that he would dwell in thick darkness” [1Kg 8.11 & 12]. As for the *miqdash* at hand (there are no further references to it in Exodus by this term), attention shifts to the tabernacle, not a physical, stable building, for this tabernacle is to be portable. Once this *miqdash* is complete (next reference is Lev 12.4), the Lord is to dwell *betok* or in the “midst” of the people, that word last appearing in 24.18 (“And

Moses entered the cloud').

“According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it” [vs. 9]. This verse serves as an introduction, if you will, to the rest of the chapter which deals with the ark. Note the use of “pattern” *tavnyth*, which derives from the verbal root *banah* (to build, to construct) and applies to an image. A negative use of it is found in Ps 106.20: “They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.” Such *tavnyth* is what the Lord is going to show (*ra’ah*, the common verb to see) Moses. One might wonder how he transmitted so many details. However, Moses had “entered the cloud” [24.18] and was in a dimension outside space and time that could be described only by “forty days and forty nights” [24.18]. He didn’t emerge later with a blue print in hand but came out bare-handed as far as *tavnyth* is concerned, and that may have disappointed many people. So when it came to the actual building, all Moses had to do was speak aloud. There was no need for Aaron to act as his mouthpiece as he had done with Pharaoh. In this manner he, without knowing it, was imitating the Lord who had spoken to him so many times. As for the actual construction, that would wait until later. Should Moses die before that, he made sure that he transmitted the information to Aaron and Joshua though that had to be in written form since they had not been inside the cloud.

The *tavnyth* at hand is one of the “tabernacle” or *mishkan* which essentially refers to a habitation or dwelling place, not especially a sacred one though this is the dominant meaning, and is mentioned repeatedly in Chapter Twenty-Six. For an alternate us: “Follow in the tracks of the flock and pasture your kids beside the shepherds’ tents” [Sg 1.8]. So within this *mishkan*—and “tent” is more accurate a description, for Israel was in the desert—the Lord asks for “furniture” or *kely* which refers to anything from a utensil to clothing to a tool and even a weapon. “Some of them had charge of the utensils of service, for they were required to count them when they were brought in and taken out” [1Chron 9.28].

“They shall make an ark of acacia wood.” So here in vs. 10 there starts out construction of the “ark” or *’aron* which is the same spelling as the proper name Aaron. Since Aaron is second in charge after Moses, his ark-nature (for that is the meaning of his name), if you will, made him the ideal candidate for receiving the instructions pertinent to the *tavnyth* or “pattern.” How to fashion this *’aron* is spelled out not so much as instructions but as loving details to be cherished by its builders.

In vss. 13-15 the Lord mentions “poles” or *bad*, another meaning being found in Ezk 17.6: “And it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned toward him, and its roots remained where it stood.” And so these poles are to be a permanent feature of the *’aron*, implying that it will remain portable even if and when a permanent *miskan* is found.

“And you shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you” [vs. 16]. Reference is to “testimony” or *heduth* as in 16.34: “As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it (the container of manna) before the testimony, to be kept.” But the *heduth* is yet to follow, the “tables of stone with the law and the commandment” [24.12].

“Then you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold” [vs. 17]. *Kaporeth* is the word at hand which means a covering (*kaphar*, the verbal root) more than a seat. Further passages in Exodus contain frequent references to this term plus several in Leviticus which is to be expected. However, one is found in Numbers and First Chronicles, the latter being cited here: “Then David gave Solomon his son the plan of the vestibule of the temple and of its houses, its treasuries, its upper rooms and its inner chambers and of the room for the mercy seat” [28.11]. Incidentally, vs. 11 contains the word *tavnyth* (pattern) as handed over by David to Solomon. Chances are both father and son had in mind the incident of Moses having entered the cloud when he received the *tavnyth* first hand from the Lord.

“And you shall make two cherubim of gold; hammered work shall you make them on the two ends of the mercy seat” [vs. 18]. This is the first mention of “cherubim” (cherub as singular, *keruv*) so perhaps Moses didn’t have a clue who or what it was. The first biblical use of the term is Gen 3.24 (the only one in that book): “He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” So when hearing of *keruv*, obviously he

hearkened back to those cherubim protected the Garden of Eden, intimating that the ark is a new garden...not stationary but portable as the poles indicate. *Miqshah* is the noun for “hammered work” which seems to apply to anything rounded or turned. “Trumpets of hammered work shall you make them” [Num 10.2].

“The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces to one another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be” [vs. 20]. Here the cherubim are identified as having wings whereas those of Genesis in the last paragraph aren’t mentioned as having them. *Sakak* is the verb for “overshadowing” which basically means to weave, to interweave, so the wings of the cherubim were interlocked forming a protective cover over the *kaporeth*. Thus we have a two-fold protection over the ark itself. For another use of *sakak*, see Nah 2.5: “The officers are summoned, they stumble as they go, they hasten to the wall, the defense is set up.”

“There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony I will speak with you of all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel” [vs. 22]. Although the Lord has in mind Moses his continued role as leader, surely he must have had in mind successors which later would assume the role of priests. *Yahad* is the verb for “will meet” which alternate means to put out, to espouse. “There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory” [29.43]. In the verse at hand, *yahad* is used with the preposition *l* (‘to’) and reads literally “I will meet to you” as though the Lord were to press his face right up against that of Moses. The *kaporeth* (mercy seat) flanked by two winged cherubim act as a throne for the Lord or better, the Lord is “above” it (*mehal*), not on it. The occasion of such *yahad* is for giving “in commandment” or *tsawah* (a verb) which occurs frequently in the rest of Exodus, the next one being 27.20: “And you shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light.” Nothing is recorded as to when the Lord will so speak with Moses and implied successors, just the fact that it will happen. Because the issue at hand is one of *tsawah* or commands, it seems to be an occasion for legal action or clarification. Also nothing is said as to how the Lord will do the summoning.

“And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always” [vs. 30]. This “table” or *shulchan* which comes from the common verbal root *shalach* (to send, spread out) and connotes anything displayed upon it. Its details are laid out in vs. 23-29. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” [Ps 23.5]. This is the first mention of “bread of Presence” (*panyim*: from which is derived ‘face’), so Moses must have figured that the Lord will be present...will show his face...within the ark under the guise of bread and that bread intimates manna which nourished Israel for forty years wandering in the desert. “So Solomon made all the vessels that were in the house of the Lord: the golden altar, the golden table for the bread of the Presence” [1Kg 7.28]. Thus Solomon acted as a Second Moses for the people when constructing the temple.

“And you shall make a lamp stand of pure gold” [vs. 31]. *Menorah* is the word at hand, yet another instrument made of pure gold. Because so much gold was involved in the enclosed area of the ark, the *menorah* does not require giving off much light. The light it provides is sufficient to illumine the ark substantially.

“And see that you make them after the pattern for them which is being shown you on the mountain” [vs. 40]. Thus ends Chapter Twenty-Five, an echo of vs. 9 in reference to the “pattern” or *tavnyth*. Note use of the presence tense, “being shown” (*ra’ah*) which intimates an ongoing process that will take place outside the special confines of the cloud. It is as though this *tavnyth* will be the connector between in and outside the cloud which is why centuries later King Solomon will follow the same *tavnyth* as Moses.

Chapter Twenty-Six

This chapter (the same applies to Chapter Thirty-Six) goes into considerable detail as to the “curtains” (*yeryhah*) for the tabernacle, a term being applicable to a tent as well as a home. For the latter, see Sg 1.5: “I am very dark but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.” Those curtains used to conceal the tabernacle are ten in number of “fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet stuff” [vs. 1]. For the curtains over the tabernacle, they are eleven in number and made of goat’s hair. Next come “upright frames” [vs. 15] of acacia wood followed by “a veil of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and

fine twined linen” [vs. 31].

“And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised” [Mt 27.51-52]. The incredible thickness of the *yeryhah* being rent in two is matched by the earth quaking and the splitting of rocks to demonstrate the meaning of Jesus’ death. So by no means was this *yeryhah* a long, graceful, draping curtain gently blowing in the wind but something as hard and as thick as any wall. As for Jesus’ death, it not cause the tabernacle to split open which is significant.

“And you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan which has been shown you on the mountain” [vs. 30]. This command comes after the “upright frames” and before the “veil of blue,” etc., and echoes 25.40: “See that you make them after the pattern for them which is being shown you on the mountain.” There *tavnyth* is the noun for “pattern” whereas here for “plan” we have *mishpat*, commonly translated as “justice” (‘judgment;’ also as ‘manner’) last noted in 23.6: “You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his suit.” Such a *mishpat* is to be erected or *qum*, a verb which means to rise and has been discussed on several occasions above. Note the two tenses in the two verses at hand with regard to the verb *ra’ah* (‘to see’): the former is in the present tense and the latter in the past tense. Both apply to “on the mountain” where the preposition *b-* (‘in’) is used, literally as “in the mountain.”

“You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place” [vs. 34]. The “mercy seat” and “testimony” which have been discussed above are to be located in “holy of holies,” another way of stating “most holy place.” *Qodesh* is the word last noted in 22.31 as “consecrated” which basically means set apart from ordinary use.

Finally comes the “screen for the door of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework” [vs. 36]. *Masak* is the noun for “screen” which is specially used for the purpose at hand and means a covering. For another but related use, see Ps 105.39: “He spread a cloud for a covering and fire to give light by night.”

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Now the Lord turns attention to the altar and the court, obviously with Moses still in the cloud and outside the realm of space and time.

After instructions are imparted as to these two elements, “You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may be set up to burn continually” [vs. 20]. The noun for “lamp” is *ner* which also can refer to a candle. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” [Ps 119.105]. Because so much gold is involved in the construction of this holy place which lacks exterior light, even the slightest artificial light is sufficient to illumine it. Such is the case with the *menorah* in 25.31.

“In the tent of meeting outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the Lord. It shall be a statute forever to be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel” [vs. 21]. And so the “testimony” or *heduth* (last mentioned in 25.16) remains unaccessible only to Aaron (Moses’ mouthpiece), Nadab and Abihu. Unfortunately, these sons will be slain as Lev 10.1 recounts. Surely the Lord had in mind a class of priests who would carry on the sacred duties once established in Canaan. Note that the two sons are to be in tent of meeting, *mohed* being the word for the latter which also refers to time as noted in 9.5: “And the Lord set a time.” The notion of time bound up with *mohed* fits in with the duration Nadab and Abihu are to spend within the tent of meeting, that is at night. Even now in the desert this night vigil will be possible when the people have settled down. *Chuqah* is the word for “statute” last noted in 13.10. As for the verb “observed,” it is not in the Hebrew text.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

“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" [vs. 1]. This bringing near (*qarav*) was noted in 16.9: "Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your murmurings." In the verse at hand, *qarav* is a prelude, if you will, of Moses ordaining the four men as priests which is described in Chapter Twenty-Nine. Eleazar and Ithamar are found in 6.26 and 6.23 respectively as two of Aaron's sons; no further mention is made of the former whereas the latter is found in 38.21 who was appointed "for the work of the Levites." In other words, these two men seemed to have carried out their priestly duties well and did not meet the same unfortunate end as Nadab and Abihu.

So prior to the ordination of these first priests the Lord takes great pains to describe the garments they are to wear, "for glory and for beauty" [vs. 2] or *kavod* and *tip'areth*. The first had been touched upon earlier whereas the latter applies to an ornament or that which is splendid (it is the only use in Exodus). "I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory" [Is 46.13].

"And you shall speak to all who have ability, whom I have endowed with an able mind, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood" [vs. 3]. In other words, Moses is to notify all those among Israel who have "ability" or *chakmah* which more readily refers to wisdom, of being endowed with the ability to judge well, and applies to being skilled in any type of art or craft. To fashion priestly vestments for the first time or right after Moses imparted instructions for this directly from God, surely must require wisdom as commonly understood. As for the verse at hand, *chakmah* is used with *lev* or "heart," a heart of wisdom which is found in 35.25: "And all women who had ability spun with their hands," that is, with regard to sacred vestments and items pertaining to worship. So it seems that the *chakmah* at hand is more specific to a woman's ability to fashion such garments. This *chakmah* is used a second time in the same verse (3), "able mind," where *ruach* is the word for "mind," and *ruach* normally refers to spirit and thus involves more than mental ability. The verb *mala'* ('have endowed') means to fill.

"There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel; they shall be like signets, each engraved with its name for the twelve tribes" [vs. 21]. Reference here is to the "breast piece of judgment, in skilled work" [vs. 15] where *chasav* is the verbal root for "skilled" and means to think, invent thus implying a certain cunning. "With cherubim skillfully worked shall you make them" [26.1]. Insertion of these stones is significant for they represent each of the twelve tribes or going back to the twelve sons of Jacob who came to Egypt at the request of both Pharaoh and Joseph.

The importance of these twelve stones is noted later in vs. 29: "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breast piece of judgment upon his heart when he goes into the holy place to bring them to continual remembrance before the Lord." It is interesting that Moses has no role to play here, the person one would expect to have the role assigned to, not Aaron. But upon further consideration, Aaron had been his brother's mouthpiece when they were before Pharaoh which brings to light that Moses has no need, if you will, of such an office. He stands between the Lord and the people who are represented in the person of Aaron. Besides, Moses is aware of his impending death, that his task will be fulfilled at the end of forty years in the wilderness, and someone else must succeed him. *Zikaron* is the word for "memorial" as in 17.14: "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (*zeker* is the word for 'remembrance,' similar to *zikaron*). Such *zikaron* is not done verbally—no mention of liturgical words as prescribed—just the fact that Aaron will bring the twelve stones into the holy place.

Vs. 30 mentions the Urim and Thummim which "shall be upon Aaron's heart," the next mention of "heart" immediately after the twelve stones. Both are not described and are a form of divinization which were placed "in the breast piece of judgment," that is, they were inserted there as some form of objects, perhaps dice-like. "But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim. And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. Then Saul said, 'Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.' And Jonathan was taken" [1Sam 14.41-42].

"And you shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the Lord'" [vs. 36]. *Tsyts* is the noun for "plate," apparently small like a flower, for such is another meaning of that word.

“He (Solomon) carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms” [1Kg 6.29]. *Qodesh* is the word for “holy” and used with the preposition *l-* (‘to’) prefaced to “Lord.”

Chapter Twenty-Eight concludes with coats, girdles, caps and linen breeches to cover Aaron and his sons “when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place” [vs. 42]. *Sharath* applies to divine worship, a function of the priests, and is verb used as a participle in 24.13 as “servant:” So Moses rose with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God.” So to carry out *sharath* properly, the priests must be fully clothed to avoid being naked, an echo, perhaps, of the fear the first man in the garden: “I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself” [Gen 3.10]. Then again, the detailed descriptions of the priestly vestments echo similarly the clothes the Lord himself made for the first man and woman: “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” [3.21], that is, just before the man was banished from the garden. The importance of protecting against any form of nakedness is laid down with the concluding words of vs. 42: “This shall be a perpetual statute for him and for his descendants after him.”

Chapter Twenty-Nine

“Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve you as priests” [vs. 1]. The Hebrew text has for “this” is the familiar *davar* (thing; also as word). It’s as though Moses is being commissioned by the Lord to *davar* first and then to “do,” that is, “consecrate” Aaron and his three sons. *Kohen* is the familiar noun for “priest,” the last mention being 19.22 as related to “consecrate” (*qadash*): “And let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out upon them.”

Between vs. 1 and vs. 3 the Lord continues to speak with Moses—and this is still in the cloud—by spelling out in detail the types of offerings, that is, a young bull, two rams and several types of breads.

“And you shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him” [vs. 7]. *Mashach* is the verbal root for “anointing” and fundamentally means to spread over. The last time that word is used is 25.6 (i.e., the same oil at hand), “oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense.” Then vs. 8 says “and the priesthood shall be theirs by a perpetual statute.

After some details as to the sacrificial animals to be offered by the newly instituted office of priesthood through Aaron and his three sons, the text returns to the clothing at hand: “The holy garments shall be for his sons after him, to be anointed in them and ordained in them” [vs. 29]. *BeGED* is the noun for “garment,” a general term, which obviously here have special meaning by way of having described earlier their fabrication. The verse at hand is the first one that shows clearly that the priesthood is not limited to Aaron nor his three sons but still in the family: “for his sons after him.” The verb for “anointed” is *mashach* as in vs. 3; the verb for “ordained” is *mala’* (used with *yad* or ‘hand’) and reads literally “fill the hand.” “That he might fulfil the word of the Lord” [1Kg 2.27].

“The son who is priest in his place shall wear them seven days when he comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the holy place” [vs. 30]. Here is another mention of *sharath*, that liturgical form of worship, at the conclusion of 28.42: “when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near to the altar to minister in the holy place.”

“Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy; whatever touches the altar shall become holy” [vs. 37]. Six days are usually associated with work with the seventh set aside as one of rest, but here seven days are required for making “atonement” or *kaphar*, the verbal root for mercy seat as in 25.17. Thus atonement has more to do with the covering of sins than their elimination. So the double atonement-consecration pertains to the altar or *mizbach* which makes it *qodesh qadashym*, the adjective used twice for superlative.

“It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tent of meeting before

the Lord where I will meet with you, to speak there to you” [vs. 42]. Reference is to the lambs being offered in the morning and in the evening. Note the location of these offerings, door of the tent of meeting (*mohed*), this door being reminiscent of the blood of the first Passover lamb applied to the “two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them” [12.7]. This border area is where the Lord will meet with “you” which does not suggest Moses, the person whom the Lord is addressing, but Aaron, his sons and their successors as priests. *Yahad* is the verb for “meet” as in 25.22: “There (mercy seat) I will meet with you and from above the mercy seat from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony.” So the outlay of the ark and sanctuary suggest two manifestations of *yahad* which don’t have to contradict each other: from above the mercy seat and at the door of the tent of meeting. The main point: future priests are welcome to the tent of meeting but cannot enter it. The same applies to the people, for this cross-over place “shall be sanctified by my glory” or divine *kavod*, and that *kavod* will be not unlike the cloud which Moses entered upon Mount Sinai (cf. 24.18).

“And I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God” [vs. 45]. *Betok* is the word for “among” which more properly means something like right in the middle, at the very heart. So instead of the people being confined to their houses as they had been for celebration of the first Passover, the Lord will be confined to the tent of meeting while the people are outside. That is why Chapter Twenty-Nine concludes with what will become a familiar rallying point, if you will, for future generations: “And they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God.” So with this final assurance or better, when Moses exits the cloud and passes it along to the people, they will try to put that permanent dwelling of the Lord together with the mobility of his tent of meeting, this divine presence being a somewhat uneasy one until King David builds a final home for the Lord in Jerusalem.

Chapter Thirty

This chapter deals with the altar “to burn incense upon” [vs. 1] which differs from the altar of sacrifice described earlier. “And you shall put it before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony before the mercy seat that is over the testimony where I will meet with you” [vs. 6]. This altar of incense is to set before the “veil” or *paroketh* (the verbal root *parak*, to separate) which separated the holy place from the holy of holies. For details of its construction see 26.31 “And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen; in skilled work shall it be made with cherubim.” Note the addition of cherubim, those originally stationed at the Garden of Eden one the Lord had driven out the first man, a point made earlier. The *paroketh* differs from the *yeryhah* (‘curtain’) with respect to the tabernacle.

“Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year; with the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations; it is most holy to the Lord” [vs. 10]. The horns (*qeren*, singular) are first mentioned in 27.2 with regard to the altar upon which the blood of sacrifices are to be poured. Perhaps these horns represent the type of sacrificial animals as well as the four cardinal points of the earth. Regardless, they serve to locate the sacred space or the altar itself whether it be the altar of sacrifice or the one of incense, the latter being the case. *Kaphar* is the verb for “make atonement” as in 29.37 with regard to the altar of sacrifice. The four horns themselves are to be the focal point of this *kaphar*, not the altar itself, and this is to be effected one time each year, no more. Because this *kaphar* or covering (not necessarily elimination) of sins is done so seldom, it is “most holy” or *qodesh qodashym*, that superlative noted in 29.37. Note that the Lord speaks of Aaron in vs. 10, neither his sons nor their successors. Obviously there would be priests after Aaron dies, but this stress upon him is to show how important is this yearly offering.

“When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them” [vs. 12]. At first the shift to a census seems abrupt, out of place, but ties in with the sacrificial prescriptions being laid down. *Ro’sh* is the noun for census, the common word for “head”...a counting of heads, literally. The frequency of this *ro’sh* is not given, perhaps it started once a year with the atonement just described, but most likely spread out to longer intervals.

“And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them that they may serve me as priests” [vs. 30]. *Mashach* is the verb for “shall anoint” as in 29.30, there regarding the priestly garments. The Hebrew has for “serve as priests” and “me” the preposition *L* (‘to’) prefaced to both words which reads literally “to be priests to me,” indicative of how personal the Lord is taking all this.

“It shall not be poured upon the bodies of ordinary men, and you shall make no other like it in composition; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you” [vs. 32]. Reference is to vss. 22-24, “a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; a holy anointing oil shall it be” [vs. 25]. *Ro’sh* is the word for “finest” with regard to spices, the same term used for “census” in vs. 12. In other words, the “head” or best material available. *Matkoneth* is the noun for “composition” which means a measure as applied to a daily rate and noted in 5.8: “But the number of bricks which they made heretofore you shall lay upon them.” In the verse at hand, note the two uses of “holy” (*qodesh*): “it” or the oil and “you,” the priest using the oil.

“Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people” [vs. 33]. *Raqach* is the verb for “compounds” which means to spice, to season with regard to ointments. “Others, sons of the priests, prepared the mixing of the spices” [1Chron 9.30]. Such an unauthorized *raqach* is in imitation of the one just described which has the potential of being used by someone other than those priests ordained by the Lord, in other word, an “outsider” or *zar* which connotes being an enemy. *Zor* is a verb which means to be estranged and applies to a non-Israelite. Such a fate will apply to the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, later on when they “laid incense on it and offered unholy fire before the Lord” [Lev 10.1], a violation which caused their deaths. A fate even worse than death is to be cut off (*karath*) from Israel as vs. 33 states. This same fate of *karath* applies to anyone who makes “anything like it (incense) to use as perfume” [vs. 38].

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, Maer-shalal-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 or 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 left 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,” *raha* 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; as 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* (lasted 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 *panyim ‘el-panyim*. 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 not 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 hand 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 echos 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 *peteh* 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* harken 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 (*katav*) 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** +