

Chapter Nineteen

“On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai” [vs. 1]. This is the second mention of Sinai, the first being 16.1: “the wilderness of Sin which is between Elim and Sinai.” The location of Sinai or other places in the Book of Exodus have some value but play little or no role in this document except as an aid to the practice of *lectio divina*. This intent was set forth at the beginning and should be recalled from time to time, especially when place names can become confusing is the case here.

To pass from one region to another is a gradual process, especially when it comes to desert regions. The distinctions become clear by contours, oases (or lack thereof) and the color of sand. As had been the case since Egypt, the Israelites were moving from one desert region to another with the exception of having battled Amalek and then meeting Jethro. Though the time covered to date is short compared with the bulk of forty years wandering ahead of them, the Israelites deserve credit for demonstrating cohesion thus far; they had been accustomed to dwell in urban areas while in Egypt, so the desert experience is new to them. After this introductory statement indicative of movement from Jethro’s native land, vs. 2 says that “Israel encamped in the wilderness and there Israel encamped before the mountain.” In other words, two mentions of the verb “encamped” (*chanah*) which means to set oneself down or incline. For earlier instances, see 13.20, 14.2, 15.27 and 17.1; actually the use of *chanah* in the verse at hand is the last mention of this term in Exodus. No name is given to this mountain which may be the same as Horeb in Chapter Three.

“And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him out of the mountain” [vs. 3]. From the time Moses and Israel had left Jethro there is a sense of urgency that had not been present. His earlier experiences in Midian endowed Moses with great familiarity of the area since at the time he had tended sheep and sheep tend to wander into every conceivable place to find grass. Moses gave no hint as to his intent of ascending the mountain except to people like Aaron, Hur, Miriam and those elders he had chosen as judges. After all, both he and they didn’t know how long he would be on the mountain and had to inform the people who intimated something like this would occur as they had gathered from Moses persistently having asked Pharaoh to make sacrifice in the wilderness. Vs. 3 continues with “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel.” This the first time the Lord or anyone else uses the phrase “house of Jacob” (*beyth Yahaqov*) which acknowledges the coming of this patriarch into Egypt at his son Joseph’s request. Given that Jacob or Israel (the two being the same name), the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, had come to Egypt, it is interesting that no mention is made of Joseph who is the impetus behind it all. In vs. 3 the Lord uses two terms of address, *’amar* and *nagad*: the common verb to speak and the other which connotes a showing or making manifest. In sum, no words of greeting nor of introduction but of getting right down to business.

“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought

you to myself” [vs. 4]. This seeing of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians, Pharaoh obviously included, takes place high on a mountain which intimates an overall view of recent events. From there Moses could see—not with visible eyes but with eyes of the spirit—the Lord’s deeds. While “looking” from that vantage point, Moses could behold the entire encampment of Israelites down below and take some satisfaction in the role he had played thus far. Still, there was the burning issue of what to do with this multitude. “You” in the verse at hand is plural which, of course, refers to Israel as a whole in the person of Moses. As for “eagle” (*nesher*), another reference not unlike this one is Is 40.31: “Mount up with wings as eagles.” Moses did not have to worry about the future, for the Lord had brought him and Israel “to himself” upon these eagle wings.

“Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine” [vs. 5]. The verb *shamah* (to hear as to obey) is used twice with the preposition *b-* (‘in’) prefaced to “voice” rendering it literally (obey) “in my voice.” Vs. 5 echos 4.1: “they will not believe me or listen to my voice” where the same verb *shamah* is used. However, the double use of *shamah* applies to obedience and is the first instance of this divine request. And so accent is placed upon listening to God’s voice despite the high visibility of the ten plagues, crossing of the Red Sea, water from the rock, victory over Amalek as well as manna and quails on a daily basis. On the mountain Moses intuited that these direct interventions weren’t intended to last indefinitely but suffice in order to win Israel’s trust in the desert before settling down in Canaan. From that point on, focus would be upon hearing...not just within that land but later down through the centuries. In the same breath as this double *shamah*, if you will, is a *shamar* (keeping) of God’s covenant. “And you shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt” [12.17]. This is the fourth time “covenant” (*beryth*) is mentioned in Exodus and refers to the one made with Abraham all the way back before Israel had come into Egypt. The Israelites were somewhat familiar with the notion of *beryth* and are to be credited with keeping its memory alive for over four hundred years. Now that time gap is closed in preparation for a return to Canaan, the land promised to Abraham yet never really settled by him nor his descendants. Thus the twofold *shamah* and *shamar* (in that order, not reversed) are integral for future prosperity and reliance upon divine assistance.

If Israel is faithful to the *shamah-shamar* just mentioned, it will be “my own possession among all peoples,” that is to say, Israel will become the Lord’s very *segulah*, a term connoting private property as opposed to that which is held in common. “For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession” [Ps 135.4]. The privacy of this *segulah* is highlighted by contrasting it with “all peoples” even though the “earth is mine.” In other words, the Lord as possessor of the earth and all peoples has the freedom to single out whom he wishes. To solidify the new *segulah*, the Lord will make Israel “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” [vs. 6]. Note that accent is in the future (‘will make’), not presently in the desert. With the exception of Jethro of Midian, the idea of priest (*kohen*) is unfamiliar to the Israelites except what they had grown accustomed to in Egypt. And Egyptian priests were

servants not just to an indefinite multitude of gods and goddesses but to a living person, Pharaoh himself. For the notion of a *kohen*, you have to go all the way back to Melchizedek in Gen 14.28 ('priest of God Most High') yet even he was not of Israelites stock. In other words, *kohen* was not part of Israel's tradition as of this stage in their history. And so the promise is one of being a "kingdom" of priests isn't spelled out clearly but presumes that each member of Israel will partake in the office of *kohen* in one way or another. Being priests is identified with "kingdom" or *mamlakah*, a term which could be applied to other nations, Egypt, for example. As for "nation," *goy* is the word which later will be used as all nations other than Israel, a counter-word, if you will to *segulah*. Finally vs. 6 concludes with the injunction that Moses is to speak these words to the people or when he descends from the mountain.

"So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him" [vs. 7]. This coming is another word for descending from the mountain as well as terminating the encounter with the Lord. During most if not all such encounters there are neither introductory nor concluding words, just getting to the matter at hand. No superfluity of words exist with the Lord when he is doing the talking. The duration of Moses' stay on the summit isn't given as it will be later on (forty days and forty nights) but presumably is short, a climb and a descent on the same day. Even the time of the Lord's communication in vss. 3-6 could be imparted in human terms as within a few seconds but most likely were effected spiritually without the mediation of words. So chances are the people didn't even know Moses was gone for a few hours, just a few trusted elders. That's why Moses summons the elders first after which he "set before" them the *davar* or words commanded by the Lord. The verb at hand is the common *sum* ('recite') as in 17.14: "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua."

With regard to the elders, this *sum* is to be before them which intimates more than verbal communication and even writing them down. As with Joshua, what the Lord had spoken is a physical putting into their ears. Still the notion of freedom is there. The elders do not have to take up these words before them but can refuse to do so. This *sum* was not done in isolation because "all the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do'" [vs. 8]. Most likely the people saw the elders...and this could include the newly appointed judges (cf. 18.21) who got up and left to meet Moses. When they saw these leaders making their way to him they knew something important was up. Moses had to make a decision when he saw everyone streaming toward him. Instead of speaking with the elders alone—for they were certainly present right in front as in a circle—the people formed an outer ring listening in. Their response was spontaneous and right from the heart. Once this assembly dissolved, Moses "reported the words of the people to the Lord" [vs. 8]. Nothing is said about him ascending the mountain a second time in two days. This time Moses didn't have to make the ascent, for the Lord secretly descended the mountain with him and was present among the assembly. Thus this communication began with *davar* from the Lord to the people and concluded with *davar* from the people to the Lord.

“Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever” [vs. 9]. Such was the conclusion of the exchange of *davar*, of words. Moses hasn’t a clue as to this coming—whether it will be in the camp or upon the mountain—just that it will happen sometime soon. The adjective for “thick” is *hav* where most references are to a cloud which in vs. 9 is a separate term. The notion at hand is thick in the sense of being dark with rain (rain clouds), not that familiar in a desert environment except during brief, violent downpours. “He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water” [Ps 18.11]. Such an image wasn’t unfamiliar to Moses because not long ago the Lord appeared as a pillar of cloud and fire when Israel was about to cross the Red Sea. However, the thickness or *hav* of the cloud of which the Lord speaks is directed to Moses alone with the people watching and listening from the outside. Within this *hav* darkness—it differs from the *choshek* (often a metaphor for misery) which was felt, cf. 10.21—communication of an order different from earlier occasions is to take place. All earlier communications, with the exception of the burning bush and pillar of fire and cloud, did not have any visible point of reference. At the same time the Lord speaking with Moses will not be among the elders but in full public view: “that the people may hear.” Such hearing (*shamah* as in the context of obeying in vs. 5) will be for the purpose of Israel having faith (*’aman*, to believe) in Moses...not just in the context of a thick cloud but “forever.” That means the image of impenetrable thickness with only the sound of the Lord’s voice will make an enduring impression that will be handed down to future generations. Yet this hearing strangely isn’t one done by the ears but by obedience (the double *shamar* above, if you will), so there is not physical sound emanating from the cloud. Vs. 9 concludes with the sentence: “Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord,” that is, he communicated their response of willing obedience.

“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments” [vs. 10]. From this point onward we are moving into different territory, the penultimate purpose for which the Lord led Israel from Egypt...the ultimate reason being the reclamation of the land of Canaan. “Go” implies that Moses had been apart from the people and needs to join them. It takes place after the interlude, if you will, of the Lord speaking on the mountaintop and summoning the elders. “Consecrate” is *qadash* which means fundamentally to be clean, purify, and ties in with the washing of garments or *simlah*, usually applicable to large outer garments used by men and women. “Wash and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor” [Rt 3.3]. Though this *qadash* is not specified in vs. 10, presumably it is a kind of sprinkling with water. To do this, let alone wash garments in a desert environment, points to a lavish use of water, such a precious commodity, especially when it involves a vast multitude of people. “Today and tomorrow” suggests it would be too much to purify all the people in one day.

“And be ready by the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people” [vs. 11]. The two days used to consecrate the people is followed by the third day or “day three” which begins on the evening of the second day or after the people had gathered their daily portion of quails (not mentioned but certainly

assumed). *Kun* is the verb for “be ready” and connotes the idea of being established and hence is applicable to a custom as first noted in 8.26: “It would not be right to do so.” For another use, cf. Ps 108.1: “My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast!” Such *kun* is to be seen in light of the Lord’s descent upon Sinai of which vs. 3 is a prelude. There only a few Israelites such as the elders knew of Moses’ ascent but here it will be in full view of everyone. As to the manner of this divine descent, no one was certain as to what form it will assume except that it will be in a “thick cloud” [vs. 9] perhaps not unlike that pillar of fire and cloud at the Red Sea.

“And you shall set bounds for the people round about saying ‘Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death’” [vs. 12]. The setting of such “bounds” (*gaval*) is not determined; this verbal root fundamentally means to twist, wreath as a rope, so the bounds may consist of ropes taken from livestock. Four other biblical references to *gaval* exist (one Exodus example is vs. 23), one of which is Dt 19.14: “You shall not remove your neighbor’s landmark which the men of old have set.” Though the people are commanded not to ascent Sinai, emphasis is more on not touching the mountain, the verb being *nagah* as in 12.22: “touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin.” If a person should touch the mountain (no one seems to have done it), he or she will have a visible mark of contamination immediately recognizable by everyone. This *nagah* applies to the “border” or *qatseh* as in 12.16: “they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.” As noted there, *qatseh* signifies an end or extremity, an outpost belonging to a specific territory compared with *gevul*. The form of the death penalty is by stoning or by being shot as in vs. 13: “no hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.” Again we have emphasis on touching (*nagah*) which is to be avoided. Chances are that if a person did touch someone who made contact with the mountain, he too would face certain death as well as receiving for a time a visible mark of his offense. As for “shot,” the verb is *yarah* from which Torah is derived (noted above). The idea behind this verb is one of casting, so the form of execution could apply to being shot by arrows. “But God will shoot his arrow at them; they will be wounded suddenly” [Ps 64.7]. The same forms of execution (stoning and shooting) apply to beasts as well, and these refer to the livestock the Israelites had take from Egypt or captured after the battle with Amalek.

“When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain” [vs. 13]. *Yovel* is the word for “trumpet” and has come to be associated with the year of jubilee. “The people shouted, and the trumpets were blown” [Jos 6.20]. As for “long blast,” the Hebrew has the verb *mashak* which means to draw out. “And when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn” [Jos 6.5]. In the verse at hand, this blast which is *mashak*...drawn out...is different from shorter ones used for other purposes of summoning the people. Thus it stands out by being prolonged. This is necessary, given the strict injunction not to touch the mountain upon penalty of death. Only when the people heard the protracted blast could they come “up to the mountain,” the preposition being *b-* (‘in’) prefaced to mountain which does not mean ascending it but passing beyond the *gaval* or borders, pretty much at the

mountain's base.

Now that the manner by which the people are to assemble about the mountain has been communicated, Moses can descend after which his first task was “to consecrate the people; and they washed their garments” [vs. 15]. The verb for “consecrate” is *qadash* as noted in vs. 10 which in both instances involves the washing of clothes. One can picture Moses doing this *qadash* on one side of the *gaval* (border) with the multitude on the other side. No small wonder that the Lord laid such a strict penalty; if not, the people would have broken through. Next Moses orders “Be ready by the third day; do not go near a woman” [vs. 15], echoing vs. 11 (i.e., ‘day three’). *Nagash* is used for (do not) “go near” and is not unlike *nagah* in vs. 12 (“Take heed that you do not...touch the border of it’). So the same distance signified by the *gaval* at the mountain is to be kept with regard to sexual relations. Another reference for *nagash* is Gen 27.27: “And he came near and kissed him.” Certainly by day three the men and women regarded each other differently than before which made them aware of their relationship with the Lord.

“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightings and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people who were in the camp trembled” [vs. 16]. Here on day three there takes place the most dramatic divine intervention Israel had encountered, perhaps even more than the parting of the Red Sea. Reason: now Israel confronts God directly compared to the Red Sea when, despite the miracle, he worked through the pillar, not directly. To have thunder and lightning in the desert is rare, given the dry climate. As for the “thick cloud,” it differs substantially from the one which was *hav* in vs. 9 (‘thick’) by reason of its dark color compared with the cloud which is *kaved* or one characterized by its heaviness, if you will (*kaved* meaning fundamentally heavy from which *kavod* or glory is derived). All three manifestations took place high upon the mountain yet were clearly visible because of the desert atmosphere. They happened during the day; if it had been night, the people would have been more terrified. As for the “loud trumpet,” it differs from the *yovel* in vs. 13, that is to say, it is rendered as *qol shophar* or “voice of the trumpet,” *shophar* being a curved horn often associated with a ram. Nothing is said about the person sounding this trumpet which given its curved shape, made a deeper, more penetrating sound compared with the *yovel*. Because the *shophar* was endowed with a *qol* or voice, it was quite terrifying along with the thunder, lightning and thick cloud. No wonder the people “trembled” or *charad*. “The coast lands have seen and are afraid, the ends of the earth tremble” [Is 41.5].

“Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain” [vs. 17]. Given the terrifying spectacle, Moses had to use some physical force or better, yank the people from their tents where many were cringing. Apparently they were not that close to the mountain and hence the *gaval* or boundary which separate it from everything else. Moses first gathered the elders and deputized them with the task of going through the camp to assemble everyone after which they marched the short distance to Sinai not unlike in battle formation. Once there, “they took their stand at

the foot of the mountain” [vs. 17] with *tachat* for “at the foot of” also meaning under...under the long shadow that mountain had cast.

“And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire” [vs. 18]. *Hashan* (smoke) is a noun with no Hebrew word for “wrapped” but has “all” in its place...“all smoke.” This term is also used for divine anger as in Ps 18:8: “Smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth.” As with the burning bush and pillar of cloud and fire, a preferred way of God manifesting himself is through fire, and the verse at hand continues this theme. Fire produces smoke (again, exceptionally clear in the desert atmosphere) so it is the most direct result. The *hashan* that results was far thicker than anything before, “like the smoke of kiln” or *kivshan* which produces intense heat, so much that it is used for melting metal. Three other references are found in the Bible, two of which are in Exodus and the other being Gen 19:28: “and lo, the smoke of the land went up like th smoke of a furnace.” Surely those familiar with the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, integral to their heritage, could not help but make the association which made the event that much more fearful. In other words, is the Lord coming to destroy Israel here on his native territory? “And the whole mountain quaked greatly,” the verb being *charad* just like the people did in vs. 16: all the people who were in th camp trembled.” In sum, not just the summit of Sinai trembled but every bit of the mountain.

“And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder” [vs. 19]. In other words the “voice” (*qol*) of the *shophar* introduced in vs. 16 “speaks” more loudly, the verb being *halak* (to go) with the verb *chazaq* (to grow strong) and the adverb *me’od* (excessively). Thus we get something like “the voice goes louder and becomes stronger excessively.” At first you’d think it was impossible for any human voice to be heard in such a din, but “Moses spoke and God answered him.” Moses’ voice became just as loud as that *shophar* to which God responded in thunder. The Hebrew text lacks “thunder” and has the verb *hanan* (to answer).

“And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up” [vs. 20]. The cloud and trumpet, along with thunder and lightning, formed an escort to proceed the Lord whose actual manner of descent upon Sinai isn’t recorded but must have been the opposite to these dramatic elements. One gets the impression that he descended with the ease and quiet of a bird alighting upon a branch, concealed beneath these overpowering manifestations. The text specifies “top” or *r’osh* of the mountain” which one would assume, a way of precluding any impression that he might have been elsewhere on it or even hovering above the *r’osh*. Once there, the Lord summoned Moses to ascend, the manner of this calling not mentioned which is secondary to his willingness to make the arduous ascent. As soon as Moses arrives at the *ro’sh* of Sinai the Lord bids him to descend in order to “warn” the people or *hud*, this verb meaning to take as a witness, testify or to enjoin. So in the context of Moses just having attained the summit of Sinai and being asked to return, *hud* means that his presence there, however brief, is sufficient “witness” to communicate the

seriousness of the divine intervention. “Hear and testify against the house of Jacob’ says the Lord God, the God of hosts” [Am 3.13]. *Hud* has two parts: to prevent the people from breaking out and gazing upon the Lord. *Haras* is the verb for the former and connotes a pulling down to destruction. It is used in 15.7: “In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries,” that is, with reference to the Egyptian army drowned in the Red Sea. The common verb *ra’ah* (to see) translates “gazing.” Should the people manage to *haras* and get beyond the terrifying thunder, lightning and so forth, they would see the Lord and perish immediately. Such familiarity is exceptionally rare and reserved for only one person thus far, Moses, and even he did not see the Lord directly. Ever since the burning bush Moses never broke through...*haras*...to the Lord but respected the distance between them.

“And let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves lest the Lord break out upon them” [vs. 22]. This is the second mention of priests (*kohen*), the first being vs. 6: “and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” As noted there, the idea of priest is relatively new, the last mention in Israel’s tradition being Melchizedek in Gen 14.28 (‘priest of God Most High’) who was a foreigner. Somewhere along the line Moses, Aaron and others had to establish a functioning priest-class to serve the people, the manner of which is not described. But since Moses recently had met his father-in-law Jethro (priest of Midian), perhaps he garnered some ideas from him. During these tenuous days of desert wandering it was as good as any. Besides, the priests formed a kind of elder group not unlike the judges Moses had chosen at Jethro’s request in order to reduce the burden of his duties. The priests in vs. 22 who draw near (*nagash*) follow the pattern outlined in vs. 15 with regard to consecrating (*qadash*) the people. The *qadash* proper to the priests differs from that of the people by reason of them being allowed to draw near to the Lord. If this doesn’t take place, the Lord himself will “break out upon them” [vs. 22]. *Parats* is the verb as found in 1.12 with another though not dissimilar meaning: “the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad.” And so the *parats* which the Lord threatens Israel is not so much destruction but one not unlike that of Gen 11.8 where the same verb is used in reference to the tower of Babel: “So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.”

To the Lord’s words of caution Moses brought his concern about the people presumably eager to break through the bounds already established. In response to this natural concern the Lord tells Moses “Go down and come up bringing Aaron with you” [vs. 24]. Here is the second command to go down, the first being in vs. 21. And so Chapter Nineteen closes with only two people allowed to ascend Mount Sinai, Moses and his brother Aaron. Moses does communicate to the people what the Lord wishes to pass on to them, and that takes up the first half of Chapter Twenty culminating in the Ten Commandments.

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 women 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 *havad*, 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 imminent. 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 expand 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 *harpheh* frequently associated with the presence of God. This verb does not mean that Moses actually entered the *harpheh*, 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 *harpheh* in Exodus with two similar references in Deuteronomy. Such *harpheh* 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 (*harpheh*), 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 *harpheh* 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 *harpheh*, 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, *harpheh*. That would not be unlike Moses going right up to the divine *harpheh* 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 *chahal* 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 *lectio divina* is re-introduced. That is to say, (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 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,” *keseeph* 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 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.

“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.

“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.”

“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.

“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].

“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).

“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.

“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.

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 Lord 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.

“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 *mipanyaw* 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*.

“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.

Even though such resistance may be met with overwhelming divine intervention, there remains the strong allure of worshiping 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].

“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.

“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” (*érets*) refers not to the desert in which Israel received these words but the land of Canaan.

“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+). *Éymah* 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 *éymah* which goes before Israel can be identified as that *mal’ak*...messenger...the Lord sends before the people in vs. 20. The result? This *éymah* 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 *éymah* 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.

“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 *érets* 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 to be a scourge, the wild beasts are even more threatening.

“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].

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 *gevu* 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.

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 *érets* 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” (*merachq*), the verb being *shachah*, last noted in 23.24. This *merachq* 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 (*merachq*) 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 *mishkan* 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 pout 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 vss. 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” (*panym*: 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 inaccessible 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. *Chukah* 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]. *Beqed* 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 qodashym*, 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 qadashym*, 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].