

פ' דברים

אלה הדברים (1:1) The book of Devarim begins at the stage where the Jews have reached the east bank of the River Jordan and are ready to cross over and conquer Eretz Yisrael. The Exodus from Egypt was not an end in itself. It was the first stage in the journey to Eretz Yisrael. In the same way today, a Jew must realise that when he leaves a country in the Diaspora, the main reason should not be because of persecution or anti-Semitism or he cannot make a living there; it should be because he wants to go and live in Eretz Yisrael. There is little point in a Jew leaving, for example, England, in order to live in America.

This book begins on first day of the month of Shevat in the fortieth year after leaving Egypt and ends just thirty-seven days later, on the day when Moshe dies, namely, on 7 Adar. One can contrast this with the 2,000 years of the book of Bereshit! Although this is a very short period of time, there are a lot of Mitzvot (commandments) and Mussar (ethical lessons) contained within these thirty-seven days. One can thus see that even within a very short space of time, a lot can be done and said. One should never think that because the time is short, little can be accomplished. In fact, one is able to do a lot even within a short span of time if one applies one's mind to it!

ראה נתתי לפניכם את הארץ (1:8) Almost the entire content of the book of Devarim is Moshe's long speech to the Jewish people before he dies. He begins by stressing that G-d has given Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people and they should go and conquer it.

הבו לכם אנשים חכמים (1:13) Moshe then immediately goes on to talk about the appointment of judges. Any society which does not have a judicial system will immediately turn into anarchy. Judges and courts are a must in any society in order to decide on both criminal and civil matters. Having a judicial system is not just a commandment for Jews, but it is also one of the seven Noachide commandments for the entire world.

ושפטתם צדק (1:16) Not only must judges be appointed and courts established; they must operate on strict rules of justice and fair play. This includes, the right to present a defense, to cross examine the other side's witnesses, to have access to all documents, and so on. A judge is forbidden to decide on the verdict before hearing *all* the evidence, nor may he call, for example, a person accused of murder, a "murderer" before hearing all the evidence. There was a case in Israel, where a judge called a person a "murderer" *no fewer than 17 times* before hearing all the evidence, and moreover, he even did so from the first day of the hearings!

לא תכירו פנים במשפט (1:17) Or in today's language, there must be no protexiot (favouritism). Although here, the Torah is talking about the conduct of court cases, it of course applies to all aspects of life. How many times have appointments to jobs been done on some sort of protexiot, whether by the pulling of political strings or by friendship connections, and so on? How many "michrazim" (tenders) are already decided before receiving the applications for the "michraz" and the "michraz" is thus just an empty formality of going through the motions?!

ושלחה אנשים לפנינו ויחפרו לנו את הארץ (1:22) Moshe goes on to relate the incident of the "meraglim" (spies). Had they acted properly, they would have brought back a positive report on Eretz Yisrael, and the Jews would have then immediately entered and conquered the land.

ותרגנו באהליכם (1:27) The spies returned with a bad report, and the Jews cried that night that they did not want Eretz Yisrael. The Gemara at the end of masechet (tractate) Ta'anit does a calculation and shows that that night was the night of Tisha b'Av. G-d said that because you cried that night for nothing; I will give you something to cry for in future years on Tisha b'Av. It is most appropriate that one *always* read the Parashah of Devarim on the Shabbat before Tisha b'Av.

The Mishnah gives five reasons for Tisha b'Av. Chronologically the first reason is because of the Meraglim. The later four reasons were caused by the non-Jews. *We ourselves*, caused the day of Tisha b'Av to be a day of "tzarot" (trouble). Before blaming the non-Jews, let us look at our own conduct. Have we learned from this? Sadly, *no!*

Those of us who were in Eretz Yisrael in the weeks before the Six Day War, will never forget that period. Fasting and praying as the noose tightened around the Jews. The government even dug 30,000 graves for the expected civilian Jewish casualties. Then within days we experienced the wonders of G-d, the enemy was defeated, and almost all of Eretz Yisrael was in Jewish hands. Even military experts cannot explain this. How did we respond? Within hours we handed over the keys of Har Habayit (the Temple Mount) to the Arabs, we begged the fleeing Arabs to return, we refused to allow Jews to go and live in the liberated areas. Over half a century has now passed, and there could easily be millions of Jews living in Yehudah, Shomron and Aza. Such concepts such as Oslo, Wye, Geneva would never have been on the agenda except maybe on Purim! Had we annexed these areas after the Six Day War, the non-Jews would have accepted it. When there was a rumour a few months after the Six Day War, that we had ordered "Portland Stone" to rebuild the Temple, the non-Jews accepted it as quite natural. Try that today and see the non-Jewish reaction! Today we are no better than the ten Meraglim (spies). The words said by Yosef's brothers "Aval ashamim anachnu" (but We are guilty) are sadly appropriate to this situation today.

Unfortunately, we have lived so long without the Temple that we have forgotten what it was like in the days of the Temple. Today the sacrifices are just mentioned in our prayers and in the Torah readings. Our Pesach Seder is far from complete; where is the Korban Pesach (Pascal Lamb sacrifice)? Where are the Bikkurim (first fruits)? What has happened to Kiddush Hachodesh (sanctifying the new month)? Where is the Kohen Gadol (high priest) and the splendid service on Yom Kippur? What is a true Simchat beit Hashoeivah (celebration of the drawing of the water)? Do we really realise what is missing from our lives today? If we did, no one would dream of forcibly moving Jews out of areas of Eretz Yisrael.

ותבכו לפני ה' ולא שמע ה' בקלכם (1:45) One might easily ask why G-d did not listen to the Jews crying? One can cry after doing a wrong action for one of two reasons. One is that one regrets one's actions. The other is that one crying over one's punishment. The latter was the reason here for the crying and so G-d did not listen to the Jews. Likewise, on a human level, when a judge comes to sentence a person for committing a crime, or a parole board considers the early release of a prisoner, one of the main criteria is whether the person *regrets* his actions, as distinct from the *punishment* he will or has received for his actions.

כי לא אתן לכם מארצם (2:5) Both in the case of Benei Eisav and Benei Amon the Torah commands us not to annoy them, because he did not give the Jewish people their land. As one learns from the Midrash Tanchuma, the reason that the Torah begins with Bereshit, is that G-d created the world and gave Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people. Likewise, he distributed other areas of the world to other nations. Just as the Jews are strictly forbidden to hand over any part of Eretz Yisrael to the non-Jews, the Jews should not take areas of the world which belong to non-Jews. Despite all this, the non-Jews, and also, sadly, many Jews, accuse the Jews of being expansionists.

חלוצים תעברו לפני אחיכם (3:18) The tribes of Gad and Reuven who had received land in "ever hayarden" (Transjordan), would now cross the River Jordan with the other tribes and help conquer the land. This is a case of increasing "Ahavah" (love) between man and man, namely, they are not conquering land for themselves to live in, but to assist their fellow Jew. The opposite, namely "Sinat Chinam" (groundless hatred) can lead to disastrous results. Even a small incident, namely that of incorrect addressed invitation. (namely, that of the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza), can spiral, and it was this which caused the Destruction of the Second Temple. Who were the main culprits in this incident? It was the Rabbis who were present and did nothing, and as a result the Temple was destroyed. This is a lesson for all generations. When Rabbis see that something is not in accordance with halachah (Jewish law), they must not remain silent. They must raise their voices, however unpleasant it is for them to do so.

פ' ואתחנן

וְאֵתְחַנֵּן אֵלָיו (3:23) This Parashah is a continuation of Moshe's speech to the Jewish people before he dies. He begins by relating how he pleaded with G-d to let him enter Eretz Yisrael. However G-d refused and told him to stop asking him this. It has been said that it takes ten years to build up a reputation and only five minutes to destroy it. Moshe's momentary act of loss of self-control destroyed his life's ambition to lead the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael. We can learn a number of things from this incident.

A leader has to have a higher standard of behaviour than an ordinary citizen. Whereas an ordinary citizen is usually given a second chance, this should often not be the case with a leader. Unfortunately, often in practice, one sees the opposite. The bad deeds of leaders are often not publicised but instead are "swept under the carpet."

The Gemara learns from this incident that before one says the Amidah of shacharit (morning service), in which one asks G-d for a whole manner of things, one should say words of praise, namely the "pesukei dezimrah" (verses of praise). One can learn a lesson in human relations from this. When one wants to ask something from somebody, one should not begin straight away with the request, but with "Good morning, How are you today?" Sometimes one orders something and the wrong thing is sent. In such a case one should not begin by complaining that the wrong thing was sent. Instead one should begin by thanking them for their order, and they point out politely that they seem to have made a mistake and sent the wrong commodity.

לֹא תִסְפוּ עַל הַדָּבָר (4:2) One might well ask what is the harm in adding to something written in the Torah. Surely one is not breaking any commandment in the Torah by doing so? On the other hand, one can easily understand "lo tigraoo" (not to detract), since by doing this, one is breaking a commandment. The fact is that when one starts by adding to something in the Torah, the commandment will lose its authority and this can easily lead to the breaking of something which is written in the Torah. One can already see this in Parashat Bereshit. Chava was *only* commanded not to *eat* the fruit of "eitz hadaat" (the tree of knowledge), there was no prohibition on *touching* it. But what happened? She told the snake that she could not *touch* it, namely, she added to the command and in the end she came to *eat* it, namely, she broke the command.

וּנְשַׁמְרֶתֶם מְאֹד לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם (4:15) The Torah *stresses* how one must look after oneself. One should notice the word "meod" (very much). The principle of "pikuach nefesh" (saving of life) overrides almost every Mitzvah (commandment) in the Torah, even such serious ones as Shabbat. Even in the most remote danger to life, one is *obligated* to break Shabbat. It is serious error to say I will not break Shabbat to save a life. If as the result of this, someone would die, one would be guilty of murder. The followers of the Brisker Rav were particularly strict in all the details in the observance of Mitzvot, yet the Brisker Rav would almost always tell ill people who asked him whether they should fast on Yom Kippur, not to fast. When he was asked why he was so lenient regarding Yom Kippur, he would answer that he was not lenient about Yom Kippur, but he was strict about "pikuach nefesh."

כִּי תוֹלִיד בְּנִים (4:25) Here the Jewish people are warned that if they don't keep the Mitzvot, G-d will scatter them among the nations. One can easily understand why this section of the Torah is read on the morning of Tisha b'Av. But the question is have we learnt our lesson? All the anti-Torah decrees we have seen during the years from the Israeli Government will certainly not strengthen our hold on Eretz Yisrael.

וְאֵלֶיךָ אֵל-לֵקֶיךָ (4:30) One can always do teshuvah (repentance) and it is never too late. On the other hand, one should not leave it until it is too late! No one knows when his last day on earth has come. A man who was working for the Russian Communists against the Jews came to consult with the Chazon Ish. However immediately afterwards, he was killed in a plane crash. The Chazon Ish commented that he died contemplating Teshuvah.

אֲנֹכִי עֹמֵד בֵּין ה' (5:5) For the second time in the Torah, the "Ten Commandments" are given, although there are some differences in the wording, some of them significant. The first five are between man and G-d and the next five between man and man. The first

commandment is to believe in the existence of G-d and this is the basis for all the Mitzvot in the Torah. The Rambam begins his Mishneh Torah with this commandment. Let us now look at the complexity of the human body, and then look at the berachah "asher yatzar" (blessing reciting after leaving the toilet). If just one part, even a small part of the body goes wrong, one is in great trouble. Even the tiniest insect measuring less than a millimeter has all this complex mechanism in it. Could any non-Supreme Being create such creatures? No man has even been able to create a blade of grass!

If one looks at the second five of these commandments, one will see that the first two are the killing of a human being, physically and spiritually; the third is taking a person's possessions. The last two are mental harm done to a person and it does not even have to be in their presence. The feelings of a person are of no less importance than what one may physically do to him, and in fact in some cases the Gemara compares it to "shfikat damim" (spilling of blood).

There is the story of a Rabbi who had to choose between two houses. In one of them the kitchen was next to the dining room and in the other one, a distance away. He said that he would ask the maid to decide, explaining that she would be the one who would have to carry the dishes from the kitchen to the dining room.

וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם (6:7) One can see from this that one should always learn Torah, and one should never decide that one knows enough. Even the greatest Rabbis in the world have said how little they know. One needs to look at how much time one wastes every day which one could utilise for learning Torah.

וְהָיוּ שָׂרֵי מְדִינָה יוֹשְׁבֵי בָתֵּיהֶם וְכַתְּבָתֶּם עַל מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ (6:9) Government Officials sit in their home or office and there are guards outside to guard them. With the Jewish people it is the opposite. The Jew sits in his house, and the Mezuzah, namely the Divine presence, is there to guard him.

וְעַרְיָם גְּדֹלֶת וְטַבַּת אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְּנִיתָ (6:10) When one looks around Eretz Yisrael, for example around some areas in Yehudah and Shomron, and one sees Arabs continually building, mostly illegally, and one then sighs and asks oneself what can be done about it, one should remember this promise in the Torah. In the future all these houses together with their contents and all the orchards will all be given over to the Jewish people. But needless to add that the Jewish people have to act in accordance with the Torah before receiving them.

וְעֵשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר וְהַטּוֹב (6:18) A Jew has to act in a proper upright way. About the middle of the twentieth century, a Jew in England went bankrupt owing *non-Jews* hundreds of millions of Pounds sterling. His daughter then got married and instead of doing the *proper thing* and making a modest quiet wedding, he made an enormous super magnificent dinner, which was reported on in the non-Jewish press. What could all the non-Jews who had lost all their money as a result of this bankruptcy have thought?

כִּי יִשְׂאֶלְךָ (6:20) This is a question that one of the "four sons" asks in the Haggadah (text of Pesach Seder service) of Pesach. However, here the answer is not that which is given in the Haggadah. The Torah here answers "Avadim hayinu" (we were slaves). The reason is that if the child has not learned the first principles, he cannot possibly understand the technical answer given in the Haggadah to this question. Educators need to know to what level to teach a particular subject when teaching children, or for that matter, grown-ups. The same applies in kiruv (returning Jews to religious observance) work, to know in what order to teach a person the Mitzvot (commandments). This is especially so for those beginning to learn in Yeshivot for ba'alei teshuvah (a Jew returning to Torah observance).

וְלֹא תִתְחַתֵּן בָּם (7:3) Intermarriage is one of the serious problems facing the Jewish people today. Some countries have an intermarriage rate of about eighty per cent. Even Eretz Yisrael is not free of this problem. There are estimated to be about half a million *non-Jews* from the Soviet Union who came to Israel under the "Law of Return." Periodically there are parties in the Knesset who are advocating civil marriage. In addition, there are non-Orthodox "conversions" (at least those which took place abroad) where the High Court has decided that such "convertees" are to be registered as Jews. It might come to the state where to preserve Jewish identity in Eretz Yisrael, it will be necessary to prepare genealogy tables. This danger to the Jewish people cannot be overstressed.

פ' עקב

והיה עקב תשמעון (7:12) There are major parts of the body such as the heart or the brain. Likewise, there are minor parts, such as a finger or a heel, the latter in Hebrew is "eikeyv." In a similar manner there are basic mitzvot such as Shabbat or taharat hamishpachah (family purity), where one is informed that their non observance can result in the most serious of punishments. One is also warned in the Pirkei Avot to be careful of a minor commandment as with a serious one, since one does not know the reward for the observance of Mitzvot (commandments). One must not even "mzalzel" (degrade) any *custom*.

There is a true story of a totally non-observant youth aged about 18 who found himself with a religious family over Shabbat This was the first true Shabbat he had seen and he was so impressed that he told his host that he was going into the army and he wanted to do some Jewish observance, but one which did not appear obvious to his non-religious comrades. The host told him to follow the customary Jewish order of putting on shoes. The youth always followed this to the letter. On one occasion whilst in the army, he suddenly realised he had erred in the way he put on his shoes and asked to be excused for a few minutes, and he went off to re-put on his shoes. As a result, he missed the army airplane he was supposed to travel in. This plane crashed into another plane and over seventy soldiers were killed. By his being particular in the way he put on his shoes, his life was saved. As a result of this incident, he then became a ba'al teshuvah (a Jew returning to Torah observance).

וכל מדוי מצרים הרעים (7:15) The Pesach Haggadah (text of Pesach seder), includes a "competition" between the Rabbis to maximalise the number of plagues that the Egyptian received. One might well ask why such a competition? The reason is that G-d promises in this verse that all the plagues that he sent on the Egyptians he will not send on the Jewish people. Therefore, the more plagues one can find that the Egyptians received, the less will be on the Jewish people.

רבים הגוים האלה ממני (7:17) When one looks at the situation today of seeing so many Arabs living in Eretz Yisrael one might start despairing. There are some who thus say; let us solve the problem by giving away parts of Eretz Yisrael! In fact, demographers say that this won't solve the problem due to the number of Arabs living within the 1967 borders and their high birthrate. But instead of despairing we need to look how the Torah continues, namely, "lo tira mayhem ..." (you should not be afraid of them).

ויענך וירעבך (8:3) There is the command of "inui" (affliction) on Yom Kippur. How does one know it means fasting? Maybe it means standing in the cold or in the heat?! The answer is that from this verse in the Torah, the Talmud Yerushalmi learns that the "inui" of Yom Kippur is by becoming "ra'ev" (hungry), namely fasting.

כי לא על הלהם לבדו יחיה האדם (8:3) There are some people who think that their life is just for enjoying themselves, namely, eating, drinking and making merry, and working just in order to cover the costs of this! The life of a Jew has a much higher spiritual purpose than this, namely, the observance of Mitzvot (commandments) and the learning of Torah. One eats and drinks in order to be able to fulfill these functions.

כי כאשר ייסר איש את בנו (8:5) Anyone who has brought up children knows that at times one has to punish them as part of their training. Likewise, as the verse continues, G-d has to sometimes punish us for our misdeeds. Thus when we find afflictions hitting us, we must look at our deeds and try and find out what we have done wrong and then resolve to do better.

ארץ טובה ארץ נחלי מים (8:7) Everything one might desire for a holiday is to be found in Eretz Yisrael. There is every sort of panorama, mountains, valleys, rivers, greenery, desert and so on. There is also every sort of climate, snow on the Hermon, cool weather in the hills, hot weather on the low-lying land and so on. Whatever sort of "nofesh" (holiday) one may want, one will find in Eretz Yisrael. One does not have to go to Turkey or Greece or Nepal or Canada for one's holidays, something which is also forbidden according to Halachah (Jewish law). For every 4 amot (about 2 metres) on which one walks in Eretz Yisrael, one is doing a Mitzvah. What sort of Chinuch (education) is it for the

children when the Histadrut Hamorim (the Israeli Teachers' Union) advertises holidays in the Diaspora. Is there any wonder that so many youth want to leave Eretz Yisrael and not only for holidays?!

ואכלת ושבעת וברכת (8:10) After one has eaten a meal and is satisfied one must not "barach" with a letter "chet," namely just run off from the table. One should think where one's meal has come from. Without the rain, for example, there could be no food, and who causes the rain to fall? A Jew should therefore spend a few minutes after the meal to give the appropriate thanks to G-d for his meal, namely, "barach" with the letter "chaf" (blessing G-d)!

השמר לך פן תשכח (8:11) Let us consider the case of a poor man. He has little to eat and lives in a very substandard dwelling with few possessions. In such circumstances, he is sure to pray to G-d to improve his conditions. The wheel of fortune then turns and he becomes rich and he now has luxurious food, a beautiful house which is also wonderfully furnished including silver and gold ornaments. He is here warned by the Torah that now that he has everything he desired, he must not go and forget G-d.

כהי ועצם ידי (8:17) It is that when a man is very successful, it is sometimes very tempting for him to attribute it all to himself forgetting that everything comes from G-d. How many people after the Six Day War when doom and gloom changed within a few days to victory and liberation of Eretz Yisrael, attributed it *all* to the army, forgetting that the thanks were due to G-d who directed the army what to do.

ובאהרן התאנף ה' (9:20) Aharon was the one who was responsible for the sin of the golden calf, but he did not want to take the responsibility and he therefore tried to pass on the blame to the Jewish people. Here one can see that G-d was angry with him for not taking the responsibility. If one does something wrong, and everyone does so at some time, one must be prepared to take the responsibility.

ואשם את הלהת (10:5) After smashing the first "luchot" (tablets of stone) when he saw the golden calf, Moshe made a replacement set. The Gemara states that not only did he place the new set in the Ark in the Mishkan (Tabernacle), he also placed there the broken pieces of the original set. From this the Gemara learns an important lesson. It sometimes happens that a great Rabbi when he gets old becomes senile and forgets all his learning. Just as when he was younger and he was given great respect, he must likewise be given the same respect when he unfortunately becomes senile.

לא היה ללוי חלק ונחלה עם אחיו (10:9) Unlike all the other tribes, the tribe of Levi was not given land. The reason was that the Leviim had a special function in the Mishkan (and later in the Temple) service. Likewise, we see that Yeshivah students (and similarly non-Jewish theology students in the Diaspora) usually do not serve in the army. The studying of Torah is their national service and is of no less contribution to the country than being in the army.

ועתה ישראל מה ה' א-לקיך שאל מעמך (10:12) From this verse the Rabbis learn that we must say one hundred berachot (blessings) each day. How do we learn this number of one hundred? Rashi and Tosafot suggest technical reasons, but maybe one can also suggest the following reason, although it will not account specifically for the number of one hundred. The verse talks about "yirat Hasham" (fearing G-d), following in His path, loving Hashem, serving Hashem. Certainly a person keeping these Mitzvot will be saying berachot at every opportunity throughout the day and this will easily reach one hundred berachot.

תמיד עיני ה' א-לקיך בה (11:12) However bad the situation seems whether politically or financially, or there is an imminent attack by the enemy, one must remember that G-d is watching over Eretz Yisrael throughout the year.

כל המקום אשר תדרך כף רגלכם (11:24) The Parashah ends with the statement that any place in where one walks will be within our borders of Eretz Yisrael. What can one thus expect if one wants to do the opposite and throw out Jews from parts of Eretz Yisrael?!

פ' ראה

ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה (11:26) This Parashah is always read on the Shabbat preceding the month of Elul, the month of preparation before the Yamim Noraim (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). A Jew should not wait until Yom Kippur or even Rosh Hashanah before doing a "cheshbon hanefesh" (an accounting of the soul). He should have already started by Rosh Chodesh Elul (the beginning of the month of Elul). Every Jew has to decide whether he wants either berachah (blessing) or klalah (curse). If he wants berachah he has to work for it! Like any good thing, no-one gets it for nothing!

את הברכה אשר תשמעו (11:27) If a Jew observes the Mitzvot (commandments) and learns Torah, he can be sure that he will see a "siman berachah" (a sign of blessing). A Rosh Yeshivah (Head of a Rabbinical College) once went with a talmid (pupil) of his to a Rabbi known as the "Steipler" and argued that there was no "siman berachah" from this talmid's learning and he should therefore should leave Yeshivah? The Steipler then asked the talmid if he could learn a daf (page) Gemara. The Talmid answered in the negative. He then asked him if he could learn a Mishnah and again he answered in the negative. He then asked if he could learn a paragraph of Mishnah Berurah and he said he could. And could you do so before you began Yeshivah, He answered no. And is this not a "siman berachah"? he asked the Rosh Yeshivah. The Steipler then blessed the talmid and told him to continue learning Mishnah Berurah. After several years he knew the *entire* Mishnah Berurah. From this one can see that if a person does according to the best of his ability, he will see a "siman beracha" from his endeavours.

והקללה אם לא תשמעו (11:28) Before doing any transgression, however minor it may appear, one must consider that the present standing of one's good and bad deeds is *exactly equal* and that this transgression can turn the scales against him.

אלה החקים (12:1) Until now, Moshe's speech has been basically in general terms. He now begins a long list of Mitzvot; in fact, this is the greatest concentration of Mitzvot in the Torah, and it is appropriate that they are read during the month of Elul. One should pay particular attention to each of these Mitzvot, and, especially of those which are applicable today. One should then ask oneself whether one observes them properly, or indeed if one observes them at all, and then resolve to keep them.

וזבחת מבקרך ומצאנך...כאשר צויתך (12:21) The verse is referring to shechitah (ritual slaughter of animals). One should pay particular attention to the words "ka'asher tziviticha (as commanded by G-d). Then if one looks over the entire Chumash (Pentateuch), one will nowhere find the laws of shechitah mentioned. This is an excellent proof of the existence of the Oral Law. In fact, without the Oral law, one cannot understand the Mitzvot (commandments) in the Torah. From just the Written Torah, does one even know what Tephillin look like, that one has to blow a *Shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, what is a "pri atz hadar" that we take on Sukkot, and so on. Groups that do not accept the Oral Law are thus unable to keep the Mitzvot of the Torah?

כי יקום בקרבך נביא או חלם (13:2) In today's society this could refer to the cults which arise all over the place. The Torah states that even if they claim that they can prove the "truth" of their cult, one must not listen to them. It is a tragic fact that many Jews, especially youngsters, are today getting caught up with these cults, especially in the Far East, and one must make it a priority to wean them away from these poisonous influences and "karev" (draw near) them to the Torah.

ודרשת וחקרת ושאלת (13:15) Before coming to any decision, especially in the case of a person's guilt, one must make a *thorough* investigation of all the facts. It is absolutely forbidden to decide a person is guilty before hearing all the facts. In three of the chapters of the book of Eichah (Lamentations), the letter "pe" precedes the letter "ayin" and from this, the Rabbis learn that the "meraglim" (spies) spoke with their mouth "pe" what they had not seen with their eyes "ayin."

לא תאכל כל תועבה (14:3) In this Parashah are found most of the laws of Kashrut, namely,

the signs for kosher and non-kosher living creatures, shechitah, nevailah (animal which died), blood, and mixtures of meat and milk. There are the "modernists" who say that all these laws were designed for the age when there was no food hygiene. Nowhere is this suggested in the Torah. The prohibition to eat certain species of living creatures is one of self-discipline. One cannot eat just what one wants to eat.

איל וצבי (14:5) There have been attempts by Rabbis and zoologists to identify all the animals and the various birds which are mentioned. Rav Saadia Gaon identified the "zemer" as the giraffe, which indeed has the signs of a kosher animal. Although originally "masoret" (tradition) was the criterion to identify just kosher *birds*, some poskim (great Rabbis) have now extended it to include animals and locusts. In order to preserve a tradition, one needs reliable people to testify that their community ate this type of creature. There was a community which did shechitah on one "dror" (sparrow) each year to preserve the tradition. There is a group which is searching to find traditions for numerous animals, birds and locusts and periodically they arrange a dinner, in which these animals and birds are served as main courses, and locusts for the desert. They say that the locusts are very tasty; they are certainly healthier than ice-cream!

עשר תעשר (14:22) Instead of reading these words "aser ta'aser" (tithing) read them "aser ta'asher" (becoming rich). The reason behind this is that when one gives charity, one becomes rich. On the face of it, this seems contradictory. Surely if one gives away one's money, one becomes relatively poorer. However, today one may have a large balance in the bank, but tomorrow there may be a massive devaluation. This happened in Germany after the First World War and in South American countries some decades ago. Millionaires were turned into paupers overnight. However, money which one has already given to charity is credited in one's "Mitzvah account" and no sort of devaluation can devalue one's "Mitzvah account."

והגר והיתום והאלמנה (14:29) The Torah repeatedly, towards the end of this Parashah, stresses the need to help these unfortunate people, who have no man of the family to earn a living to support them.

לא יגש את רעהו ואת אחיו (15:2) The Shemittah (Sabbatical) year would cancel outstanding loans. Loans are generally given to needy people and by cancelling them, one is in fact giving charity. This is one of the wonderful aspects of the Shemittah year.

את הנכרי תגש (15:3) One might readily ask why the Shemittah does not cancel loans to non-Jews, and also why it is permitted to take interest from a non-Jew, but not from a Jew. The reason is that the norm is to loan money on interest and not cancel loans after a specific time. Thus if a Jew borrowed money from a non-Jew, the Jew would have to repay him with interest. So likewise the Jew will take interest from a non-Jew. It is only to a fellow Jew that this reciprocity of the prohibition of interest applies.

כי לא יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ (15:11) However much one tries, there will always be poor people in a country. No country has succeeded in eliminating poverty. In one community, the Rabbi warned the rich members of the community who were reluctant to give charity, that if they let the poor die of hunger, some of the rich members of the community would lose their money, since the Torah writes that there will always be poor people.

לא תשלחנו ריקם (15:13) Here is a source in the Torah for giving a retired worker a pension. Rav Schach when he was very elderly and could not continue giving his shiur (lesson) in the Yeshivah (Rabbinical College) was reluctant to continue receiving his salary. The Yeshivah pointed out to him that after all his many years of work in the Yeshivah, he was entitled to a pension.

והיית אך שמח (16:15) Although this appears in the Torah in connection with Succot and in particular with Simchat Torah, one could learn from this that a Jew, however gloomy the situation seems, should follow the doctrine of Rav Nachman of Breslov and always be happy!

פ' שופטים

שפטים ושטרם (16:18) The Parshiot which are read during the month of Elul have a relatively large proportion of the Taryag Mitzvot (the 613 commandments in the Torah). This Parashah begins with a theme which runs throughout the Torah, namely, having a system of Courts. This is a principle which is also applicable to the non-Jewish world, and it is one of the seven Noachide commandments. Indeed the name of the Parashah is "Shoftim" which means judges. This word is then immediately followed by the word "shotrim" which means policemen. It is no use having the best and fairest judicial system in the world, if there is no-one to enforce the judges' rulings. Although this should be obvious, this is sadly not always the case in practice. When a man refuses to give his wife a "get," even though there are sanctions that the Rabbinical and secular courts *can* take, how often do they use them? Or, when a court orders a man to pay someone damages or the such like, and he refuses, one has to go through an extremely complicated and costly process to get the money that one has been awarded. The cost and the time involved sometimes is not worth the bother and so the decisions of the courts become useless. Thus one can understand why the word "shotrim" *immediately* follows the word "shoftim."

ושפטו את העם משפט צדק (16:18) It goes without say that everybody is entitled to a fair trial and the authorities of every democratic country will confirm this! The politicians with their own agendas and the media have absolutely no right to decide on a person's guilt. Several years ago, the Knesset (Israel's Parliament) received a telephone call saying one of their member's had died. The Knesset stopped its order of business, held a minute's silence and someone gave a hesped (funeral oration). Immediately after this it was discovered that it was a hoax telephone call. The police investigated and as a result, an elderly couple were arrested, questioned for hours by the police, their names publicised in the media and as a result, had public humiliation and distress for several days. The real perpetrator was then found and hence this elderly couple were completely innocent. This incident illustrates the importance of not deciding a person to be guilty until properly tried. Another example is the "ma'atsar minhali" (administrative detention) which has been imposed on people in Eretz Yisrael. They are not even told what they are accused of, so that they can defend themselves of such charges! One person was in such "ma'atsar minhali" in the most inhuman conditions for eight months, before they decided he was not guilty of what they had alleged he was guilty of!

ולא תקח שחד (16:19) A judge has to be especially careful in all his actions, that there must not even be the slightest suspicion of a bribe. There was a case in Eretz Yisrael, where after hearing the case, but before giving judgment, the judge was given a lift in the prosecutor's car. On appeal to the Supreme Court, it was recommended, because of this, the case be re-heard in front of a different judge.

ויסלף דברי צדיקים (16:19) The Torah stresses the seriousness of taking a bribe in that it can even affect the thinking of a Tzadik (righteous person). A Rabbi who was known as the "Ohev Yisrael" and was also a Dayan (Rabbinical Court Judge), was usually able to decide quickly which side was right. On one occasion he was unable to do so. He happened to put his hand into his pocket and found a large sum of money there. One of the parties in the case had, unknown to the "Ohev Yisrael" slipped the money into his pocket and hence one can understand these words in the Torah "visalef divrei tzadikim" (pervert the words of the righteous).

צדק צדק תרדף (16:20) There are very strict laws in the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) Choshen Mishpat, on the conduct of judicial cases. For example, both sides must be present, both sides must be treated equally by the judge, they must be given equal time to speak, and so on. There was a case in England where the judge said to one attorney, "I can't hear you." The attorney accordingly spoke louder. The judge then said "I can't hear you when you are wearing a green suit." One might then rightly ask that if this is the attitude of a judge towards the attorney of one side, can one have confidence in his judgment?!

על פי שנים עדים (17:6) Needless to say that to convict a person one has to be sure of his

guilt. One cannot convict on the basis of vague evidence. In one case, a Supreme Court decided that a deceased person, who had never been brought to trial, was in fact guilty on the basis of "administrative proofs" of which they claimed there were many, yet in their judgment failed to list *even one* of them! In Jewish law, confession of guilt is not acceptable. One often hears of cases where at the trial the accused claimed that he was forced to confess as a result of pressure brought against him by the police, or even as the result of torture.

יד העדים (17:7) If the witnesses know that they will have to take part in the killing, they will be extra careful to tell the truth. Very few people like killing somebody else. Even when a person is judicially killed, one of the people doing the shooting or pulling a lever has blanks, so no-one knows who has actually killed the person.

על פי התורה אשר ירוך (17:11) Here the Torah gives authority to the Rabbis to make laws. Thus by breaking a Rabbinical law, it is like breaking a Torah law. One must therefore never say that "this is only a Rabbinical law"! This is the way the non-Orthodox groups began and one can see what they have arrived at today! It is written that "ha'over al divrei chachamim, chayav mita" (he who transgresses the words of the Rabbis is liable for the death penalty). However, this is not found with many Torah laws. One can compare this with doing something wrong in the presence of the king; he will send you to trial. However, if one does something wrong before one of his guards, they are likely to shoot him on the spot.

לא תסור (17:11) A Jew must always listen to the Rabbis, even if they tell him that right is left and left is right. One can compare this with going higher and higher in a building, the higher one goes, the further one can see. Likewise, the Rabbis who have studied Torah all their lives can see further than an ordinary man can see. Thus, what they say is "right," might *appear* "left" to the ordinary man. When Ya'acov blessed Yosef's children, he put his right hand on the Ephraim, who was the younger brother. Ya'acov was able to see that Yehoshua would come from Ephraim.

שום תשים עליך מלך (17:15) One can see from these verses that *more* laws applied to the king than for the ordinary Jew. The king was not allowed too many riches. One can contrast this with Ministers and Knesset members, who are always adding to their salaries and perks at the same time as the poor are receiving very little money and that numerous families are below the poverty line. A number of years ago, a former Speaker of the Knesset was given a grant of about a million shekels.

לא תלמד לעשות כתועבת הגוים (18:9) The Torah command the Jews that when they arrive in Eretz Yisrael, they must not make it like a non-Jewish country. It must be run according to the Torah. Sadly, what do we see? There was a party who was in the Government coalition which demanded a strictly secular run government. They even wanted to open a non-kosher restaurant in the Knesset! A lawyer studied the piskei din (rulings) written by a former President of the Israel Supreme Court. What did he find? English, American, Canadian, French precedents were readily brought by him, but he could not find *even one* from Jewish law!

שמע ישראל אתם קרבים היום (20:3) Before going into battle, the Jewish people were given instructions. One should note the word "shema" (hear) which was used. The Rabbis learn that there is no "shema" without an "asefa" (assembly). One can see from this that there must be unity in order to succeed against one's enemies. This is sadly lacking today, even to the extent of some of the leftists joining in with the non-Jews of the world against the other members of the Jewish people.

לא תשחית את עצה (20:19) The last part of this Parashah talks about the conduct in war. Many countries in the world think that anything is permitted in war. However, the Torah states otherwise, even to the extent of not destroying fruit trees.

ידינו לא שפחה את הדם (21:7) One might readily ask how the elders can be sure of the fact that a member of that city was not guilty of the murder of the corpse which had been found in the city? One can see from this that any stranger given hospitality would be accompanied out of the city. Hospitality does not end at the front door! The "lamed" in "eshel" is not "linah" (sleeping) but "livoi" (accompanying).

פ' כי תצא

כי תצא למלחמה על איביך (21:10) The Parashah begins with "When you go out to war against your enemy." Who is the greatest enemy of the Jew? The Arabs ... The UN... The Europeans ... The left? No - the greatest enemy is the "yaitze hara" (evil inclination), and during Elul especially, it the time to fight against it. This entire first paragraph of this Parashah can be studied in connection with this "yaitze hara." "V'raita shivya" – you see something which is wrong but instead of running away from it "v'hashakta ba" – you desire this wrong. You therefore "v'heveita btach beitecha" take this bad thing into your "house" and to appease your conscience "v'hisira et simlat shivya" – you make it seem that it is right. But then your conscience pricks you and "uvachta et aviha v'et ima" you remember your parents who trained you in the way of Torah and would not want you to do this wrong and as a result "lo chafatzta ha" - you manage to overcome the desire to do this wrong.

One notices that this Parashah begins with the words "ki tayze lamilchama" (when you go out to war), and likewise, towards the end of the last Parashah these same words occurred. Between these two occurrences are found the laws of the "egla arufah" ("broken-necked calf"). From this one can learn that even in warfare, one must remember the sanctity of life. Even killing a member of the enemy should not be regarded as a pleasure. The spilling of wine during the Pesach Seder when reading the ten plagues is a reminder of this principle.

בן סורר ומורה (21:18) Although today the actual laws of "ben sorer umoreh" (rebellious son) are effectively theoretical, the principal and problems of bringing up children is very practical. This has become even more urgent today with the drastic drop in discipline of the younger generation. Every year many non-religious parents transfer their children to learn in religious schools.

לא תלין נבלתו (21:23) The laws of speedy burials of Jews are learned from the burial of the criminal who has been put to death. In the non-Jewish world, when bodies are required for medical research, the first bodies released are those of convicted criminals who have been put to death, and those of unclaimed bodies. In Jewish law it is precisely the opposite! Even the "kohen gadol" (high priest) who cannot even attend his parent's funeral, is commanded to bury an unclaimed body.

השב תשיבם לאחריך (22:1) The halachah (law) of returning lost property is brought several times in the Torah. Everyone has at some time lost something, and even if it has not got much value, it can still be very worrying, and how relieved one feels when someone lets the owner know that they have found it. One can make it much easier to have property returned to the owner if one writes one's name on it For example, on the plastic case in which one carries one's Tephillin, one could stick a label with one's name, address and telephone number. It is not uncommon to find Tephillin left in a Shul without any name, and thus a person finding it will not know to whom to return it.

Not only should one return lost property, one should also "hashev teshivam" (return) people to the observance of Torah.

כי יקרא קן צפור (22:6) If one should take the eggs or young birds from the mother's nest this will not give any physical pain to the mother, but it does give her mental anguish. The Torah is not only concerned with physical pain to a living creature but also giving it mental pain. One can also see that this is a very easy commandment to observe, yet there is a great reward for its observance, namely that of long life. The commandment of honour to parents carries the same reward but is a very difficult commandment to observe. One can thus see that the reward does not depend on the difficulty of observing the commandment. Usually one does not know the reward for observing a commandment and one should therefore be careful over even something which seems trivial. There are many incidents where people's lives have been saved as a result of observing a commandment which might on the face of it not seem important.

ועשית מעקה לגגך (22:8) The commandment of promising long life is followed by the halachah of the building of a parapet on one's roof. One can learn from this that one must not assume

that because one has "gained" a long life, one can enter into a "danger zone." One must not rely on miracles. One must check one's house to see there is nothing dangerous in it. Today children are inquisitive and like to experiment with such things as electricity or household cleaners. The lesson is not to wait until after the first accident!

יחזו (22:10) לא תחרש בשור ובחמר יחזו In addition to the plain meaning, one can learn another important lesson from this. An ox denotes responsibility, an ass denotes foolery. One cannot combine the two! For example, one should not take a break from one's Torah studies in order to watch a non-instructive film on the internet.

ממזר (23:3) Mamzerut ("bastardy") does not just happen! It arises from breaking the laws in the Torah. Some of the non-orthodox movements will marry a second time a woman who has received only a civil divorce but not a get (religious bill of divorce) from her first husband, and thus cause irreversible family tragedies, namely the children and all their descendants will be mamzerim and will thus not be able to get halachically (according to Jewish law) married. To "add insult to injury" these non-orthodox movements then come along and claim they are "discriminated" against!

יבא עמוני (23:4) The Ammonites refused to give the Jews bread or water. One may ask that if they had claimed that they did not have the money for it, how is it that they had money to hire Bilam?! There are people who claim they have no money to give the poor, yet they find it for all sorts of "shtuyot" (nonsenses).

מצרי (23:8) The wicked Pharaoh did one good deed when the Jews left Egypt For this he was rewarded with "lo t'ae'v Mitzri" (not abhor an Egyptian). A good deed that a person does is never wiped out even amongst all his thousands of bad deeds.

קדוש (23:15) One is commanded to keep one's house clean. One must have proper facilities for sanitation. One must keep one's toilets clean. One can often judge a place by the state of its toilets! It is said that if you want to judge a Yeshivah (Rabbinical College), don't look at its Bet Hamidrash (Study Hall), instead look at its toilets! If the bachurim (students) cannot keep the toilets clean, there is something seriously wrong with their hashkafah (outlook)!

ועשית (23:24) One must not promise if one is unable to keep one's promise. Some people promise "the world" but in the end give nothing! They say they will finish a job or make a delivery within a week, yet two months later they still have not finished the job or delivered the goods. It is much better not to promise but then go on and speedily finish the job or deliver the goods.

אשתו (24:5) One might well ask why for only one year should there be simchah (happiness)? Should the following 60 years be "tzarot" (troubles)?! One could say that during the first year of marriage there is just him and his wife. After that there will hopefully be children, and the simchah will come from bringing up the children in the way of Torah and observance of the Mitzvot (commandments). For example, when the baby is able to say a berachah (blessing) on food, the parents will surely have much simchah from this.

שכרו (24:15) One is commanded to pay one's workman at the end of each day. The worker is very likely to need the money for basic food needs for him and his family. His grocer might refuse to give him credit even for basic necessities.

עמלק (25:19) In accordance with the laws regarding war which appear at the end of the previous Parashah and the beginning of this Parashah, the laws regarding Amalek might seem at first strange. One might well ask what is the difference between Amalek and the Jews' other enemies. The answer is that there are laws of war, and Amalek did not observe them. They made a cowardly attack in the rear on the tired and weary Jews when they came out of Egypt after many years of slavery. Therefore, the laws of war do not apply to Amalek. They utterly destroy the happiness of the world and they must thus be eradicated to the last Amalekite. Rav Shimshon Refoel Hirsh said that every generation has its Amalek

פ' כי תבוא

והיה כי תבוא אל הארץ (26:1) In the Torah, the word "vehaya" signifies that words of simcha (joy) will follow. This is in contrast to the word "vayehi" which introduces something bad. What is the simcha in this case? One can immediately see this from the following words "ki tavo el ha'aretz" (when you come to the land), namely, finally coming to Eretz Yisrael. This has been one of the main themes throughout the Torah. It goes right back to Parashat Lech Lecha, when G-d promised Eretz Yisrael to Avraham and his Jewish descendants. The promise for the liberation from the bondage of Egypt was always linked up with the promise of the entry to Eretz Yisrael. The leaving of the anti-Semitism of Egypt -was not an end in itself. One can contrast this with some of the leaders of secular Zionism, who wanted a Jewish State just to get away from anti-Semitism. It could just as well have been Argentina or Uganda. Unfortunately, the incident of the ten bad spies delayed the entry by forty years, but even at that time, G-d promised that the next generation would enter and conquer Eretz Yisrael.

ולקחת מראשית כל פרי אדמה (26:2) Already in the next verse, the Torah gives a Mitzvah (commandment) which depends on the holy soil of Eretz Yisrael, namely the Mitzvah of Bikkurim (first fruits). This was just one of the Mitzvot depending on the soil of Eretz Israel. To quote just a few, there are Trumot and Ma'aserot (tithing), Orlah (fruit trees during first three years) and Shemittah (Sabbatical year). This is unlike the Diaspora where food restrictions are limited to living creatures and one can therefore just go to any market and buy any fruit and vegetables. One Rabbi from America who came on Aliyah and gave shiurim (lessons) to people who came on Aliyah would say in his first shiur that in Eretz Yisrael there is such a thing as a "treife tomato" ("non-kosher" tomato) and then explained that it could be one that grew during the Shemittah year or one from which trumot and ma'asarot had not yet been taken.

One can also notice the word "v'lakachta" (and you shall take) But here one is not "taking" but giving and thus surely the word "v'natata" (and you shall give) should be used. One can answer that one is able to perform this Mitzvah *only* if one lives in Eretz Yisrael and one is "taking" the reward for observing this Mitzvah which is *specific* for Eretz Yisrael.

וענית ואמרת (26:5) When one brought the bikkurim to the kohen (priest), one had to make a certain declaration. At first, those who could say it themselves would do so and those who could not would repeat it after the kohen. This however caused embarrassment to those who could not do so, and thus it was decreed that everyone would repeat it after the kohen. From this one learns the very important principle of not embarrassing a person in public. For transgressing this one gets a "one way ticket" to Gehinnom (hell). To avoid a similar situation that could arise in a Shul, one should have the text of Birkat haTorah (blessings recited when called up to the Torah) on the Bimah (table where the Torah is read), in order not to embarrass a person who is called up and cannot say them by heart.

ארמי אבד אבי (26:5) Although the sojourn and Exodus from Egypt is quoted on numerous occasions in the Torah, the difference here is that in these verses it is given in a more personal manner, like words from the heart, and indeed these verses form an important part of the Maggid (relating of exodus from Egypt) in the Pesach Haggadah, and they are brought together with the Midrashic comments on these verses. In the Pesach Seder a man must look at himself as if *he himself* came out of Egypt.

במתי מעט. (26:5) When Yaacov and his family went down to Egypt, it was supposed to be a temporary measure in order to escape the famine. Yaacov accordingly acted and lived very simply. Sadly, all his family did not do so, as it is written "va'yechazu ba" (took up permanent residence). Unfortunately, one still sees this today. Why do Jews have to build magnificent Shuls in the Diaspora to last hundreds of years?! Maybe to say something in their favour-the Gemara in masechet (tractate) Megillah says that in the future these Shuls will be removed to Eretz Yisrael.

וירעו אתנו (26:6) Why not "vayoreu lanu"? An explanation is that Jews are made out to be guilty for everything, by the non-Jews, and sadly today also by many leftist Jews. When a Jew is murdered by the Arabs, it is the Jews who are guilty. The intifada is, of course, the fault of the Jews! When an Arab killed his mother, he blamed the Jews for giving him

something to drink. There is an organisation who criticised Arafat for using donkeys laden with explosives for the various suicide killings. The reason for this criticism was because donkeys were being killed, but they did not say even a word about the Jews who were being killed at the same time!

לבש ודבש (26:9) Throughout the generations, Jews yearned to come to live in “the Land flowing with milk and honey,” namely, Eretz Yisrael despite all the difficulties and dangers on the journey, and these dangers continued even after they had already settled in Eretz Yisrael. Even so, none of them would have even dared suggest that Jews be thrown out of any part of Eretz Yisrael, Unfortunately we hear this today even by some Jews.

בית (26:13) One of the declarations made by a Jew (in connection with ma'asarot) was that anything in his house which was not his, he would take it out and return it to the proper owners. One can contrast this with Government Ministers who receive various "presents" in the course of their term in office. After they leave office, they are not supposed to keep these things but pass them over to the State. Whether they do so is a different matter! Several years ago, there was an investigation into a member of the government on this matter.

למנו (26:14) In continuing his declaration, the Jew would then say that he did not use anything which was not his property for his personal use. It is reported that a large percentage of workers use things at their place of work for their personal affairs! Some people legitimately have all sorts of materials, such as stationery in their houses belonging to a charitable organisation which they are employed by or are voluntarily working for. The correct behavior is periodically to put something in the organisation's "pushka" (charity collection box) to cover any of the materials they might have used (for example, the organisation's pen) for their own private affairs.

גדלות (27:2) The Jews were commanded that when they arrived in Eretz Yisrael, they were to immediately write down the laws of the Torah on big stones. The people will then see them and act in accordance with them. In today's context, one needs to continually publicise the laws of the Torah and do one's utmost to ensure that the Knesset and the Government and the Courts act in accordance with them.

באר (27:8) The Torah laws were translated into seventy different languages so that *everybody* could understand them. Likewise today when there are Jews with all different backgrounds of knowledge or language, one must make the Torah accessible to them in a language or way that they understand.

רעהו (27:17) The Torah forbids someone to encroach upon his neighbour's livelihood. If one should see that one's neighbour has found a way to make a livelihood, one may not say that this is good idea and I will go in competition with him by doing likewise

בדרך (27:18) The Torah forbids someone to create a situation which might cause or tempt a person to do an "aveirah" (transgression). For example, one should not leave out large sums of money which might tempt a weak person to take. Likewise, one should regularly empty a charity box which is in a public place.

הארץ (28:10) A Jew should always act in a proper way and he should not try and hide his Judaism. If he acts proudly as a Jew, then the non-Jews are very likely to respect him for this. A non-Jewish millionaire employer in New York, who was acquainted with Jewish practices, refused to employ a Jew, whom he had heard had a good character, when he saw that in order to appear smarter before his interview with this non-Jew, shaved in the days before Tisha b'Av.

ידך (28:12) A large part of this Parashah deals with the blessings one would receive for observing the Torah and the curses should one not do so. This Parashah is always read within the two weeks before Rosh Hashanah, a period when a Jew should be doing "chesbon hanefesh" (soul searching) and deciding the direction he wants to go. One should therefore use this period wisely and productively.

פ' נצבים-וילך

אתם נצבים היום (29:9) "You are all standing today before G-d." The Parashah of Nitzavim is *always* read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah. In addition, its content is most appropriate for that time of the year, since this Parashah continually refers to doing teshuvah (repentance).

"Nitzavim" means standing namely, something which is static. In contrast to this, the word "Vayelech" designates movement, namely which is dynamic. Sometimes it is better to be "static" namely, not speaking nor doing anything. It is stated in the Pirkei Avot "s'yag l'hochmah shtikah" (a fence to wisdom is silence). Sometimes when one sees a person not performing a Mitzvah (commandment), it might be better not to react, since a reaction at the time might drive the person even further away from Mitzvot. Obviously, one must try and make this person observe the Mitzvot, but maybe this is not the right moment, or we are not the right person to do so. There are people who are experts in "kiruv" (drawing people closer to religious observance) and one should first consult with them on what to do in this particular case. On the other hand, sometimes one must act in a dynamic manner. If one sees somebody doing wrong and if it is likely that they will listen to us, one must act and not stand idly by and in this way one will hopefully "mekarev" (draw them near) them to Torah and Mitzvot.

כלכם (9:9) Everybody without exception stands on "yemai hadin" (days of judgement) before the Heavenly Tribunal for judgment. The Torah then goes on to list these various categories of people: the leaders, the elders, the police, the children and the women. There are no protexiot (favouritisms). However important a person is, he will be judged. No-one is above the Torah, whatever he may think. There are people who think that the Rabbinical Courts in Israel receive their authority from the State! A number of years ago, the Rabbinical High Court ruled quite categorically that the Rabbinical Courts receive their authority from the Torah and not from the State. In reaction to the Israel Supreme Court thinking that nothing can be above them, the Knesset (Israel Parliament) once proposed a law that there be a Court above the Supreme Court. The then President of the Supreme Court fought fiercely against such a law by lobbying Knesset members and managed to quash such a proposed law.

On Rosh Hashanah everyone is judged and it will be decided, "Who will live and who will die... Who will be rich and who will be poor." Yet despite all this, how many people are frightened? If instead, one received a summons to be judged in a Court, even for some *small* misdemeanor, one would be terrified. One would not be able to eat, and not be able to sleep. But now everyone is coming before the Heavenly High Court, yet almost everyone continues with their eating and sleeping habits as if nothing was happening. This very question was asked by Reb Itzel Peterburger who said that many people are terrified of such things such as dogs or imprisonment, and this is natural. But "yirat Shamayim" (the fear of Heaven), is something which has to be acquired. It might take one's whole life to reach even the lowest level.

א-לקינו (29:28) There are things which one cannot understand why they happen. For example, why did G-d allow six million Jews to be murdered in the Holocaust? One cannot begin to understand the methods of G-d. This is a question which Moshe Rabbeinu asked G-d. He had showed him a class of Rabbi Akiva's and then showed how he would be killed. Moshe then asked G-d, whether this is Torah and this the reward for it? G-d answered that this is his decision. Similarly, in a piyut (liturgical poem) said at Mussaf of Yom Kippur, a similar point is made. G-d answered that if we question his methods, he will return the world to "tohu va'vohu" (unformed and void). Today people are asking why we are having such "tzarot" (trouble) in Eretz Yisrael. Maybe some time in the future we will begin to understand this.

ושבת עד (30:2) One should not read "veshavta *ad*" but "veshavta *eid*" meaning that if we do a complete teshuvah, G-d will be a witness "*eid*" that we have done such teshuvah. However big a "rasha" (wicked person) has been in the past, he can always do teshuvah. One can always find some good in a person and on this one can build. The Chanukah miracle was the finding of one small bottle of oil which then "expanded" to last eight days. One might well ask why did the miracle happen specifically in this fashion and not in another? The Jewish people at the time were being assimilated with Hellenistic culture, but a bit of Jewish culture still remained in them, and on this bit was built a return to Torah. Today there are groups of

people who go to the Kotel (Western Wall) to look for people who they can see are far from Yiddishkeit. Because of the fact that they still have a bit of Yiddishkeit in them, they go to the Kotel, and it is thus possible to return them to Torah, and indeed many have returned.

לא בשמים הוא (30:12) Only in the "shamayim" (Heaven) is it possible to keep every hidur (refinement) on a Mitzvah. However, the Torah was given to mortals and one can only keep it to the best of one's ability. Everyone cannot put on Tephillin which has every hidur, it is almost impossible find a set of arba'at haminim with every hidur. Very few people can have kavanah (proper concentration) throughout the whole service, indeed even throughout the whole Amidah. At least one should try and do their best in the performance of Mitzvot, and to try and concentrate during a few of the berachot (blessings) of the Amidah.

ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע (30:15) On Rosh Hashanah our future for the next year is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. No-one knows what will happen to him during even the next moment, let alone during the next year. A Jew goes to work one morning and he is blown up by a suicide bomber, or his car is shot at and he is killed. This can happen to anyone of us at any time. But we must have emunah (faith) and realise that Eretz Yisrael is under the personal protection of G-d. It is regrettable that some Jews stopped visiting Eretz Yisrael because of various terrorist attacks and suicide bombings. One might add that such attacks are today not limited to Eretz Yisrael.

וילך (31:1) The Parashah "Vayelech" means one should be dynamic, and not sit passively and think teshuvah will automatically come to us. One must actively go and do teshuvah. Rosh Hashanah is not a time for merriment and drunkenness. This is Rosh Hashanah (First of January - Secular New Year) of the non-Jews. Some of them get drunk and jump in the fountains in New York and London. For the Torah observant Jew, Rosh Hashanah is not "keif" (fun), it is "hard work" in the spiritual sense.

וילך משה (31:1) G-d decided that it was time to change the leadership of the Jewish people. One can see from this that a leader must know when it is time to step down. One often sees that when a leader, who may have a wonderful record of service to his country, reaches a certain age, he sometimes starts becoming senile, and as a result in a very short period can destroy all the good work he has done during his lifetime.

לעיני כל ישראל חזק ואמץ (31:7) In the presence of the Jewish people one must be strong. Even if one feels weak oneself, towards other people one must show strength. This is particularly important for a leader. As a former Chief Rabbi of Britain once said that even if one feels disheartened in oneself with one's work, one must not show this *outwardly*.

הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף (31:12) One can understand assembling all the men and the women, but one might well ask why assemble the babies? One can learn an important lesson from this. One needs to educate the children in the ways of Torah from the age of *zero*. The early years of a child are its most informative years. There was a case of a Jewish child in France who was placed in a convent during the Second World War to save him from the Holocaust. When he was finally reunited with his relatives in Israel after the War (his parents had been murdered), he wanted to continue observing Christianity and he would go to a Church service every Sunday. Fortunately, after much effort, he returned to Torah. One must train a child from his earliest years to observe Torah, and certainly not encourage him to do things which are forbidden.

ועתה כתבו לכם (31:19) There is the Mitzvah for every Jew to write a Sefer Torah. One learns from this Mitzvah that every Jew should build up a Torah library in his house. The books should certainly not be for decoration but for use. It is very sad to see books in a house years after they were bought, in the same condition as when they were originally bought. It is a good sign when the pages have to be stuck up with sticky paper or they have to be rebound. Let us not be in the situation, that were it not for Pesach each year, the books in our houses would have thick layers of dust on them!

פ' האזינו

האזינו השמים ואדברה (32:1) As soon as the Jews crossed the Red Sea, Moshe sang a song of thanks to G-d. Likewise now, on the banks of the River Jordan, when the Jews are about to enter Eretz Yisrael, Moshe again sings a song of praise to G-d. An organisation was once asked to supply some letters from satisfied customers. Their reply was that people do not write letters of thanks when they are satisfied; they only write letters of complaint when they are dissatisfied. This is sadly the case. People often complain but rarely write letters of thanks and praise. "Hakarat hatov" (recognition of good) should never be forgotten, even if many years have already passed.

תזל כטל אמרתי (32:2) "My speech will be like dew." Just as dew is gentle, so should one's speech be. It is much easier to shout at a person when one is angry with them, but it is much better and much more effective to speak gently to them. As the Rabbis have said "The words of scholars are gentle."

הצור תמים פעלו (32:4) One sometimes see things in this world which one thinks would have been better had they not been created. Examples of this are: various insects, dust, poisonous plants. However, everything in this world has its place and its use, even if we are unable to understand why G-d created these things. Also everything has its correct quantity. Even though every oak tree produces hundreds if not thousands of acorns, each of which is a potential source for a new oak tree, the number of oak trees in the world remains about constant. Likewise, even though an insect can lay millions of eggs, the number of such insects usually remains about constant.

קל אמונה ואין עול (32:4) G-d will always reward us for our good deeds. We might not see the reward immediately, but it will surely, come, if not in this world, in the World to Come. Likewise, if we sin *and don't do repentance*, we will be punished for these deeds. We see in the Gemara how Nahum ish Gamzu was happy when he received great suffering in this world for a sin he had committed towards a poor and hungry man. He had delayed in giving him food and as a consequence this man died. He told his students that now that he had received his punishment for this in this world, he will not be punished for it in the World to Come. The lesson to be learned from this is to do repentance whilst we are still alive.

זכר ימות עולם (32:7) There is a hint in this verse to study our early history. We must not leave this subject to the archeologists. It is sadly a fact, that many of them try and "prove" from their "studies," that the Torah is not correct! Any facts, and there are numerous ones, which support the Torah, are conveniently ignored by them. An example is, that they claim that camels were not in use at the time of the Patriarchs and therefore all incidents using camels never happened. However even a cursory study of archeology of the period proves exactly the opposite! It is therefore important for people who are "Shomrei Mitzvot" (Torah observant) to study archeology.

The first shomrei mitzvot who go to study archeology would have to be taught by these current secular members. Of course, it would not be pleasant for these shomrei mitzvot, but they would have to bear with it.

There was a case of a Shliach Tzibur (man leading a Synagogue service) who was asked by a Shul to take the services on the Yamim Noraim (High Holy Days – Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). He was reluctant since he liked to daven (pray) in a Yeshivah (Rabbinical College) on these days. He asked the Chafetz Chaim, who said that we say in the Shema "becol m'odecha" (all your might), and from this we learn that we must be prepared to give up what we like in order to serve G-d and therefore he must give up davening in the Yeshivah in order to take the services at the Shul.

כנשר יעיר קנו (32:11) However a bad situation one might feel one is in, one must always remember that G-d is watching over us with loving care, just as a mother bird looks after her young.

וינקו דבש מסלע (32:13) These verses speak of the wonderful natural things that Eretz Yisrael contains. There are Jews who "dream" that America is the "goldena medina," but when they get there, they find it is quite different! If one opens one's eyes, one can see that it is *Eretz Yisrael* that is blessed with all the natural things one can want, namely, different flora, different climates, and different scenery as one travels through the country. One should ask who needs to go to Turkey or Greece or Italy for one's holiday? - (something which in addition is forbidden by Halachah (Jewish Law).)

וישמן ישרון ויבעט (32:15) We should continually ask ourselves whether we are grateful for all the good that G-d does to us, and all the everyday miracles he does for us. In the Six Day War, we liberated Yehudah, Shomron, Aza and the Golan in the course of just a few days. Even Professors of War Studies cannot explain this logically. In fact it is not logical. It can only be explained as a miracle from G-d. But are we grateful to G-d for this?! Instead of immediate mass settlement of these areas, people had to fight to build every single house. Now, we are hearing certain political parties proposing to throw Jews out of their houses in these liberated areas and establish there a "Palestinian" state.

לי נקם ושלם (32:35) It may well seem to us that today, the Jewish peoples' enemies in the world, and it is unfortunately full of them, have the upper hand, but in the end they will receive their due punishment from G-d.

ישתו יין נסיכם (32:38) Some authorities learn the prohibition of drinking non-Jewish wine from this verse. In olden days, and maybe in some places even today, non-Jews would use wine in their idol worshipping. However, in addition to this, one can see today that drinking with non-Jews can easily lead to intermarriage and other forbidden conduct.

ראו עתה כי אני אני הוא (32:39) From the experience of the Jewish people's wrong doings, they saw that the only correct path is that of the Torah. Even in generations which have strayed completely from the Torah, we often see Ba'alei Teshuvah (those who have returned to Torah observance) in the following generation. Let us look at the example of a certain very secular kibbutz. When it was founded, Yom Kippur was a working day. The members took their "Shabbat" on different days of the week. When about 50 years ago, a member brought in a Sefer Torah, the kibbutz members threw it over the fence. Everyone was shocked. However, the Ponovitzer Rav laughed, (just as Rabi Akiva did when he saw foxes running over the site of the Kadosh Kadoshim (Holy of Holies in the Temple)) and said that they were frightened of the power of the Torah and that one day the kibbutz will incorporate a Yeshivah (Rabbinical College). Indeed, this life style did not continue unchecked. Some of the members' children became Ba'alei Teshuvah and went to study in Yeshivot. Towards the end of 5764, one of these Ba'alei Teshuvah got married and a Shabbat Sheva Berachot (the blessings recited during the week after a marriage) was held in the kibbutz. At this, Sheva Berachot, Rabbis and members of the kibbutz sat together at the same table.

והושע בן נון (32:44) One immediately notices that here the Torah calls Yehoshua by his former name "Hoshea." It was only when he became well known was his name changed to Yehoshua. The question is therefore to be asked is why then use the name Hoshea, and especially on this occasion when he was about to become the leader of the Jewish people? In fact, this is precisely the reason that a leader needs to be modest, and using the name he had before he became famous, stresses this point. Unfortunately, today there are many leaders who are full of their own importance. They will use public money for their own personal benefit, even if the poor are starving and they think they can do as they want. In contrast, the Torah limits the amount of money the king may possess and *repeatedly stresses* the sin which Moshe committed and as a result could not enter Eretz Yisrael.

אשר תצום את בניכם (32:46) After he finished the song of Ha'azinu, Moshe, and one should remember that this was his last day on earth, commanded the Jews to pass on the Torah to their children. Only by educating our children in the way of the Torah can one pass it on to the future generations. Great stress was made by the Talmud and the later Rabbis of the importance of Torah education and the establishment of institutes for this purpose.

פ' וזאת הברכה

וזאת הברכה (33:1) This Parashah takes place on the last day of Moshe's life. That very day he recited the song of Ha'azinu, which warns the Jews what can happen if they do not observe the Torah. He now in this Parashah continues on a happy note with a specific blessing for each of the tribes. One can see from this that one should always end on a good note. There are four books in the Tanach (Bible), which end on a bad note. Therefore when reading them, after reading the last verse, one goes back and reads again the next to last verse.

ה' מסיני בא (33:2) Moshe begins his blessing by reminding the people of the Revelation at Sinai. Moshe received the *entire* Torah at Sinai, both the Written Law and the Oral Law. There is no other source for a Jew's observances. There can be no compromise on this and any groups such non-Orthodox ones who deny "Torah MiSinai" (Torah received on Mount Sinai) are not observing Judaism. They want their cake and eat it! They want their practices to be called Judaism!

אף חבב עמים (33:3) G-d loves the Jewish people and whatever he does, is for their good, even if what is happening is hard for us to understand.

תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה (33:4) One should note that the word which is being used here is "morasha" (and *not* "yerusha"). Yerusha is a plain inheritance received from one's father. If one wants, one can then give away such an inheritance to anyone one pleases. However, morasha is something to be passed down from generation to generation and cannot be given away. In this verse it says that the Torah is morasha, and it must thus be passed down from father to son. Indeed, this verse is one of the first things that a father teaches his son.

Another morasha is Eretz Yisrael. No Jew or Jewish Government has the right to give any of it away to non-Jews. Even if there would be a referendum and every Jew in the entire world would say that one should give away Eretz Yisrael to the non-Jews, it would have no effect.

ויהי בישרון מלך (33:5) From these words we can see the recognition of G-d as our King. Just a few weeks before reading this Parashah, there is Rosh Hashanah. The main theme of Rosh Hashanah is *not* the confession of sin *but* the recognition of G-d as the *King* of the world.

יהי ראובן ואל ימת (33:6) Moshe now begins a specific berachah (blessing) for each tribe. Each berachah is different and is suited for the particular circumstances of each tribe. When one sees that someone else receives something that you have not received, one should not be envious of them. It is very likely that his circumstances are different from yours and this is the reason that he received this particular thing.

The reason for the berachah for Reuven that "he should live and not die," is, that the area received by Reuven was on the east side of the River Jordan and it was surrounded by hostile forces and hence this tribe needed to be blessed to live and not to die

שמע ה' קול יהודה (33:7) The tribe of Yehudah was the first to undertake the conquest of Eretz Yisrael and hence, at first its area was an isolated settlement. Their berachah was in fact that other settlements would be built around Yehudah's area and it would thus become a large block of settlements which have continuity with the other tribes. This is a lesson we can learn today.

וללוי אמר תמיד ואוריך (33:8) The tribe of Levi had special functions in the in the Mishkan (Tabernacle) (and later in the Temple). They even had to disregard family connections when performing their work - "v'et echav lo hikir." (did not acknowledge his brothers), namely no potexiot (favouritism). One can contrast this when people do rigged "michrazim" (tenders) in order to bring

relatives, friends or party members into public office, or even worse still to fire workers in order to bring in such relatives and friends.

וליוסף אמר מברכת ה' ארצו (33:13) The special berachah for the tribe of Yosef was for successful agriculture, namely the right weather conditions. If there were to be drought, the agriculture would fail and the people would starve. Even today, in backward countries, one can see what happens if there is a drought for several years running. People desperately search the fields for food that one would normally discard.

ולזבולן אמר שמה זבולן בצאתך (33:18) Zevulun got his living from sea related activities. One should also note that he is always linked with Yissachar - "v'Yissachar b'ohalecha" (and Yissachar in your tents). From their income, the tribe of Zevulun would support the tribe of Yissachar who would be sitting in the Bet Hamedrash (Study Hall) learning Torah all day long. This was a partnership, and Zevulun got some of the reward of Yissachar's Torah learning. It is unfortunate today that there some who describe those who devote their lives to Torah study, as schnorrers. There are those who scream out that the Kollelniks (married Rabbinical College students) should go out and work. This is never said for those studying in Universities and these institutions receive enormous funding from the Government.

ולגד אמר... וירא ראשית לו (33:20-21) The tribe of Gad is praised as being the first tribe to pick a part of Eretz Yisrael for their territory. They did not just talk of living in Eretz Yisrael, as many Jews who today live in the Diaspora do. They already chose a part of Eretz Yisrael in which to settle.

ולאשר אמר ברוך מבנים אשר (33:24) The tribe of Asher was-blessed with riches. Some people are blessed with wealth, but they waste it on a lot of trivialities, but there are those who use it for constructive purposes such as supporting Torah institutions, and poor people

וישכן ישראל בטה בוד (33:28) After completing his berachot for the individual tribes, Moshe concludes that the Jewish people should dwell in security and that their enemies should perish. As we have seen throughout the Torah, this is dependent on the Jews observing the Torah.

ויעל משה (34:1) Moshe then went up the mountain where he was to die and although he was not permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael, he was able to see the beauty of the land from afar.

A young Jew who tried to enter Eretz Yisrael on a Haganah ship after the British had virtually stopped immigration, saw Eretz Yisrael from afar before the British diverted the ship to Cyprus. He then commented that it was like Moshe who just saw it from afar but was not able to enter Eretz Yisrael

ויתמו ימי בכי אבל משה (34:8) After Moshe had died the Jewish people wept for him for thirty days. One should note that the verse then goes on to say that after that, they finished weeping for Moshe. From this one can see that there is a limit on how much we should cry for a person who has died. It is G-d who decides when a particular person is to die and we must accept this with love and thus avoid excessive crying over his death. Logically one could thus argue that one should not cry at all. However, we are not angels, we are mortals with natural human feelings.

ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל (34:10) One can extend this idea that one should not even dare to compare people today to our leaders in the Tenach (Bible). One filmstrip brought out by a secular body felt that we should not limit the Ushpizin who visit the Sukkah to those we traditionally have, but suggested we should make various secular Zionist leaders our Ushpizin!!