

פ' ויקרא

ויקרא אל משה (1:1) In the latter part of the book of Shemot, detailed instructions are first given for the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and this is followed by the actual implementation. The last verses of the book of Shemot state that the Mishkan was then ready for use. It was not designed to be a museum but to be used day in, day out. Likewise, a Shul is not museum but needs to be used every day of the year.

The first part of the book of Vayikra largely contains the sacrifices offered up in the Mishkan. It is customary to *begin teaching* children from the book of Vayikra. What is the reason for this? The korbanot (animal sacrifices in the Mishkan) are "tehorim," (pure) and so are young children and one must strive to keep them "tahor." One needs to prevent any unclean influences from harming them. Such influences today, are, sad to say, prevalent in our society. There are also many non-Orthodox Jewish groups, and secularists who would love to be able to influence our children according to their ways and outlook. One needs to just look on how the leftist authorities did their utmost to secularise those who came on Aliyah from the Arab countries immediately following the establishment of the State of Israel.

The word "vayikra" is spelled with a small letter "aleph." Even from something like this, one can learn an important lesson. One must start by teaching small children "aleph, bet ..." Let them master the basics before going on to more difficult things. The Pirkei Avot tells us, that the age of five is for Mikra (Bible), ten for Mishnah and only fifteen for Gemara. Foundations of a building are the most important part of it. If there is an earthquake, then the strength of the foundations will determine if the building will withstand such an earthquake.

Another thing that can be learned from this *small* aleph is a sign to be humble. One must not push oneself to the front. One can see from the opening words of Vayikra that Moshe did not push himself; he waited until he was called by G-d. This was not an isolated example, but throughout his life he was humble.

אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן (1:2) This Parashah deals with private sacrifices. The word "korban" is from the word "l'karev," namely, to bring the individual Jew closer to G-d. Some non-orthodox groups are against korbanot. Either they have completely deleted them from their prayers, or they say it is a thing of the distant past. But this is their philosophy. They abolish laws of the Torah one by one and thus distance themselves further and further from the Torah. They then go and make "converts" who *only* have to follow the non-orthodox way of life, and they then want everyone to recognise them as Jews, and when they do not they make a big noise about it!

מן הבהמה (1:2) One will notice that a "behaimah" (domesticated animal) and an "oaf" (bird) can be brought as a sacrifice, but a "chayah" (wild animal) cannot. One might well ask what is the reason for this? Behaimot are usually quiet, inoffensive animals, for example, cows and sheep. One can contrast this with a chayah such as a deer, which is wild. We want quiet inoffensive animals for our sacrifices. Likewise, people should strive to be quiet and inoffensive. However, for the sake of honour to the Torah, one should deviate from this principle. Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach, who always spoke quietly was once heard shouting at his talmidim (students) because they had been acting against the honour of the Torah.

ונפש כי תקריב קרבן (2:1) One can see that the sequence of the private sacrifices quoted by the Torah, namely, behaimah, chayah, oaf, minchah (meal offering), go down in monetary value. One also sees that the term "nefesh" (soul) is only used for the sacrifice in which a person brings a minchah. One may ask which person will bring a minchah? The answer is a poor person who cannot afford to bring an animal or a bird. It is much easier for a rich man to bring an animal than for a poor person to bring some flour. Therefore the Torah uses the word "nefesh" for such a person; he brings it with all

his soul. It is not the value of what he brings, it is the thought and the intention behind it. A small present from a poor person has a much greater value than a large present from a rich person.

One might mention here a "tradition" which is sometimes seen at children's birthday parties, when towards the end of the party, the recipient opens all the presents in front of all the other children. This can easily publicly embarrass an invitee who cannot afford to give an expensive present. The other children at the party will not view the thought behind such a small present in the same way as G-d does!

וְכָל דָּם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ (3:17) The Torah repeatedly gives the prohibition of eating blood. Blood is regarded as the soul of the animal. One of the Avot Melachah (headings of work forbidden on the Sabbath) on Shabbat is killing and included in this prohibition is the drawing of blood. One therefore cannot squeeze out blood from a cut on Shabbat, yet one can squeeze out pus.

There is also the Mitzvah (commandment) of covering the blood of a "chayah" and "oaf" after killing them. This is to remind us that the blood is like the nefesh. One cannot bury the animal since one is going to eat it, but one can at least remember its "nefesh" by burying its blood. In the case of "beheimah" there is no covering of the blood; its nefesh is remembered when it was used as a sacrifice in the Temple. Furthermore, "chayah" and "oaf" have their blood covered as a reward for these creatures covering the blood of Hevel after Kayin had killed him. Again here one can learn that good must be rewarded by good.

וְאִם נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת תַּחַטָּא בְּשִׁגְגָה (4:27) Even if one commits a sin inadvertently, for example one does not know at the time that such an act is forbidden, one still needs to bring a sin offering. One might well ask, why in such a case, need one bring a sacrifice for atonement. The answer is, that if one could just pass over such an incident without any reaction, one would be likely to do it again. However, by bringing a sacrifice, this will help the person to remember that such an act is forbidden and one will be more careful about it in the future. Even though today, there is unfortunately no Temple and hence no sacrifices to bring, one still needs to feel remorseful for having transgressed such a law even by accident, and should make a resolution to be more careful in the future.

שְׁתֵּי תְרִימִם אוֹ שְׁנֵי בְנֵי יוֹנָה (5:7) The only two birds from which a sacrifice can be brought are the "tor" (turtle-dove) and the "yonah" (pigeon). Unlike animals and fish, the Torah does not give signs for permitted birds. However, from the list of forbidden birds given in the Torah, the Rabbis deduced a number of signs for permitted birds. However, all of these signs are not always required for a bird to be permitted. The "tor" and "yonah" have *all* these signs, and these are the birds which can be used for sacrifices. Likewise, a man should strive for the "maximum signs of purity."

וְהָשִׁיב אֶת הַגְּזֻלָּה (5:23) The end of this Parashah deals with sins a man might commit against his fellow-man. Maybe he steals something from him, maybe he does not return an item of lost property to the owner, and so on. What are the stages of repentance in such situations? The Torah states that the *first* stage is to put right the wrong with his neighbour. One has to return the stolen object, return the lost property and so on. Only *after* having done this, does he make it right with G-d, by his bringing the sacrifice. We have exactly the same principle today. It is stated in the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), that on erev Yom Kippur, one must make it right with one's fellow man; return anything one may have taken from him, compensate him financially for any damage one may have caused him, ask for forgiveness for any harm one caused him. In the absence of doing these things, he will not get forgiveness on Yom Kippur from G-d for any wrong he has done to his fellow man.

צו את אהרן (6:2) This Parashah continues with details of the various sacrifices brought by individuals.

The Gemara relates how Avraham asked G-d how his descendants would have atonement for their sins. G-d answered him that the sacrifices would help for such atonement. Avraham then went on to ask what would happen after the destruction of the Temple, when there would be no possibility to bring sacrifices, and G-d replied that the Jews should then read the verses dealing with the sacrifices during the tephillot (prayer services) in the Shul. Needless to say, this does not preclude teshuvah (repentance). One can thus see that the sacrifices are an integral part of the life and prayers of a Jew. This was the first thing that the non-Orthodox Jewish movements deleted or reworded from their prayer-book! In addition, at least one of them has completely deleted the Mussaf service from their prayers, since this service *entirely* parallels the Mussaf sacrifice which was offered up in the Temple on Sabbaths, Festivals and Rosh Chodesh (day of the new month). If one should look at their Yom Kippur timetable, one may find that in the morning there is Shacharit, and in the afternoon, Minchah, Yizkor and Neilah. However, one will not find Mussaf; it is completely absent from their Yom Kippur timetable!

The word "Tzav" is the language of "hurrying." One must hurry to keep Mitzvot (commandments). There are Mitzvot which one can perform during the entire night or the entire day, yet one should strive to perform them as soon as possible in the evening or morning. For example, the Mitzvah to read the Megillah on Purim is *any time* during the night and *any time* during the day, yet one should do so at the beginning of both the night and the day. This is likewise with other Mitzvot, (unless there is a special reason, such as with the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah).

The Gemara explains how the kohanim (priests) would "fight" to have the honour to tend to the fires on the altar. When given the sign, they would rush up the ramp to the altar. We can learn an important lesson from this. When we have the opportunity to perform a Mitzvah, we should rush to do so ourselves and not say that someone else can perform this Mitzvah instead of ourselves.

הוא העלה על מוקדה על המזבח כל הלילה (6:2) The words "kol halailah" (all the night) are a hint to the period when there is no Temple; one is then going through a period of darkness. Yet even when there is no Temple, we don't forget the sacrifices or the Temple Service. We have the Mussaf service, which is entirely in place of the "korban Mussaf." We remember the "korban Pesach" at our Seder service. On Yom Kippur we read the Avodah (Temple service of Yom Kippur) during the repetition of the Mussaf Amidah. On Sukkot we gather together each evening to remember the "Simchat Bet Hashoeiva" (the joyous water drawing ceremony in the Temple), and each weekday morning of Sukkot we do Hakafot (walking around the Synagogue) with the Arba'at Haminim (the four species taken on Sukkot). When we count the Omer, we remember the "Korban ha' Omer." Announcing Rosh Chodesh (the new month) on each Shabbat Mevarachin, reminds us of "Kiddush Hachodesh" (sanctifying the new month in the Temple), and so on. We are then able to remember how much is lacking from our daily lives, by not having a Temple today.

ופשט את בגדיו (6:4) The kohanim (priests) wore different garments for, on one hand, their service in the Mishkan, and on the other, for more "dirty" jobs such as removing the ashes from the altar. One can learn from this that one should change one's garments for Shabbat to much nicer garments. One should even keep a special Tallit for Shabbat. To show that these are garments specially set aside for

Shabbat, one should immediately after the Melave Malka (post Shabbat meal) change back into one's weekday clothes and not keep on our Shabbat clothes until one goes to bed.

והאש על המזבה תוקד בו לא תכבה (6:5) There is also a deeper meaning to this command. The word "aish" (fire) refers to Torah and the light of the Torah must never be allowed to go out. In other words, there is never a holiday from Torah. Wherever one goes and whatever one does, the Torah must be with us. The Talmud Yerushalmi says on this, that this fire must never go out, even on journeys. Whenever one goes away from home, one must take the Torah with us. When planning summer vacations, one should ask the following. Will the hotel have a good standard of Kashrut (kosher food)? What will the Shabbat atmosphere be like? Will there be problems on Shabbat, for example, with automatically opening doors? Will there be daily services in the hotel? Will there be Shiurim (lectures)? What about Tzniut (modesty) non-mixed swimming, non-mixed beaches?

במקום אשר ישחטו את העלה ישחטו את האשם (7:2) This Parashah talks about different kinds of sacrifices - olah, asham and chatat. However, the Torah commands us to bring them all in the same place in the Mishkan. What is the reason for this? The commentator, the "Klei Yakar" points out that this is to protect the feelings of the sinner, who is doing teshuvah (repentance) by bringing an "asham" or a "chatat." Any person seeing him, will not know whether he is bringing an "asham" or a "chatat" on the one hand, or an "olah" on the other hand. After one has done teshuvah, one is forbidden to remind a person of his past sins, even if he had sinned all his life. In addition, it is a very serious offence to embarrass a person in public.

The Midrash states that anyone who occupies himself with Torah is regarded as if he has offered up an "olah." The reason is that unlike other sacrifices an "olah" is *entirely*; consumed on the altar. This is unlike other sacrifices, where part of them is consumed by man. "Occupying one's self with Torah needs to be a "twenty-four-hour occupation," in other words one must not waste time on stupidities. Every minute of our lives is valuable and must be used productively. It is related that one Yom Kippur, the Vilna Gaon cried bitterly, since there were *six minutes* during that past year that he had wasted. Let us ask ourselves on Yom Kippur, how much time we wasted during that past year. Indeed, let us ask ourselves, how much time we waste *every day* during the year. It is instructive at the end of each day, to look back on that day and ask ourselves how we could have spent that day more productively!

זבה התודה (7:12) Another type of sacrifice is a thanksgiving offering. This is where we show our gratitude to G-d for the good he has bestowed upon us. Unfortunately, today we cannot bring any sacrifice but we show our thanks to G-d by reciting "Birchat Hagomel" (blessing of thanksgiving). Not only do we have to show our gratitude to G-d, but also to our fellow man. One year before Pesach, Rav Yisrael Salant loaned a student some money for Pesach. After the Festival he returned the money and thanked the Rav. Whereupon Rav Salant rebuked him saying that it is forbidden under the law of "interest" to say "thank you" in such a case. The following year, the Rav again loaned this student money for Pesach and remembering what had happened the previous year, returned the loan after Pesach and immediately started to leave the room. The Rav asked him where his gratitude was and he replied that on the previous year, he had rebuked him for saying "thank you." He answered him that it is true that according to the laws of interest, you cannot say thank-you, but by your movements you can still show your gratitude.

פ' שמיוני

וייה ביום השמיני (9:1) The latter part of the book of Shemot deals with the instructions and the actual building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). The beginning of the book of Vayikra deals with various sacrifices to be offered up in this Mishkan, with the end of the Parashat Tzav dealing with the days of "miluim," which are days of training for service in the Mishkan. This Parashah begins with the actual service in the Mishkan. There is a similarity with a Shul, namely it is first designed, then built, then the "ba'al Koreh" (the man who reads from the Torah) prepares the leining (the Torah reading), and then the tephillot (prayer services) can begin to be held there.

ויאמר אל אהרן קח לך עגל (9:2) One should note that the first offering brought by Aharon was an "aigel" (bull calf). One might ask why specifically an "aigel"? It was Aharon who had been responsible for the sin of the golden calf and it was thus appropriate that he *begin* his service in the Mishkan with an aigel for atonement. One can learn from this that when one does something wrong, the *first* thing one must do is repentance. One has to put right what one has done wrong. Likewise, the Jewish people who had participated in the golden calf brought as their first sacrifice an aigel.

ויאמר משה אל אהרן קרב אל המזבח (9:7) Even though Aharon was the High Priest, he did not push himself forward; he waited until he was told to act. One can contrast this with people who consider themselves important, and push themselves forward, for example, to have to sit on the top table. On occasion so many people feel they should sit on such a top table that chairs are continually being added!

ותצא אש (10:2) This first day in the Mishkan should have been a great day in the life of Aharon, but it was suddenly marred by the incident of his two sons dying. When one wakes up in the morning, one does not know what the day will bring. Will it be one's last day on earth? Will a member of the family be killed by an Arab shooting or a suicide bomber? It could likewise be the reverse. One wakes up anticipating a day of unpleasant things, but it then turns out to be a wonderful day.

וימתו לפני ה' (10:2) One might well ask why did the two sons of Aharon die? According to one opinion, they made by their own decision a small change in the order of the service. One should note that there were non-Orthodox Jewish groups who *began* their ways by making changes in the order of service, namely, they omitted mentioning the sacrifices, and there were also the secular kibbutzim who brought out their own "Haggadah" (book for Pesach Seder), which omitted all the berachot (blessings), and also made numerous changes to the text. Time shows how one change leads to another, and one shudders to look at the final result.

One should also note here that one did not say that because they are the sons of the High Priest, one should overlook their act. There must be no "protexiot" (favouritism) in the administering of justice. For example, if a "rightist" is sent to jail for blocking traffic, then a "leftist" must likewise be sent to jail for a similar offence. Sadly, we often do not see this.

Also, we again see that there is no "sanctuary" in the Mishkan, but a person is taken for trial, from wherever he might try and take sanctuary. One can contrast this with the Church in the Medieval ages and, sometimes even today, when terrorists took refuge in the "Church of the Nativity" in Beit-Lechem.

וידם אהרן (10:3) Aharon accepted the Divine will without any protest. Even if one does not understand or like what G-d is doing, it is not for us to say anything. G-d has his own agenda. Can we understand, for example, the Holocaust? Maybe in 500 years

times, we will begin to understand it.

יין ושכר אל תשת (10:9) Wine and alcoholic beverages lead to drunkenness, and drunkenness leads to all manner of unpleasant things. How many road accidents occur as a result of drunken drivers? How much intermarriage is caused or begun as a result of drinking with non-Jews. We can easily understand the laws of "yayin nesech" (non-Jewish wine) even today, even though in general there is no actual worshipping of idols as in the past,

In fact, although this law is stated in connection with the Kohanim (priests) in the Mishkan, it has a much wider application; it, for example, includes judges.

דברו אל בני ישראל (11:2) A major part of this Parashah deals with the laws of kashrut (kosher food), namely which living creatures may be eaten and which are forbidden to be eaten. It is an important part of the self-discipline of a Jew in not being able to eat everything he might want.

כל מפרסת פרסה (11:3) The Torah gives an internal sign, namely chewing the cud, and also an external sign, namely, split hoof, for an animal to be permitted to be eaten. One can learn from this that a man must be "clean" not only externally but also "internally." One can compare this also with the Ark in the Mishkan which was covered with gold not only on the outside but also on the inside.

ואת השפן כי מעלה גרה (11:5) The Torah gives the "shafan" (rock-badger) and the "arnevet" (hare) as animals which chew the cud. However, if one looks in zoology books, one will see that this is not the case. One might therefore well ask why then does the Torah class them as having this property? A suggested reason is that these two animals make movements with their mouths as if they were chewing the cud and the Torah talks in the language of man. The Torah is not intended as a book on zoology!

סנפיר וקשקשת (11:9) In addition to these external signs given by the Torah for a permitted fish, the Talmud gives some internal signs and one can learn from this the same lesson as for animals. In a like manner, although the Torah gives no signs for birds, the Talmud gives both internal and external signs. We only eat birds on the basis of a "masoret" (tradition) that that particular bird is permitted. One must remember that "masoret" is an integral part of the daily life of a Jew, and one must not just dismiss it because it is this.

ואת החסידה (11:19) One of the birds which the Torah forbids is the "chasidah" (stork). This is a bird which, on the one hand looks after its *own* young and on the other hand, preys on *other* birds. Thus, it thinks only of its own family but not on others. Needless to say, a person acting like this is not a respectable person.

וכל כלי חרס... כל אשר בתוכו יטמא (11:33) Only the inside of such an earthenware vessel can become unclean. Likewise, man who was formed from "afar ha'aretz" (dust of the earth) must be careful what goes inside him.

אל תשקצו את נפשתיכם בכל השרץ (11:43) The Chafetz Chaim illustrated this point with the story of a spice dealer whose shop was next to that of a skin tanner and in time the spice dealer absorbed the uncleanliness of the tanner. In other words, it is easy to absorb "unclean things" and one should therefore take great care.

להבדיל בין הטמא ובין הטהר (11:47) The Parashah ends with the note that the Jews are a Holy People and must thus learn to distinguish between what is pure and what is unclean.

פ' תזריע – מצורע

דבר אל בני ישראל לאמר אשה כי תזריע (12:2) This Parashah begins with the words "*benei yisrael*" (*sons of Israel*) but then continues with "*isha ki tazria*." (*a woman who brings forth seed*). One might well ask why it does not begin with "*benot yisrael*" (*daughters of Israel*)? The answer is that we are here talking about *taharat hamishpachah* (*family purity*) and this is a family affair. If the woman does not keep the laws of *taharat hamishpachah*, then also the husband can receive the punishment of "*karet*" (*excision*).

On the Shabbat when these Parshiot are read, it is customary in Shuls to talk about Mikvaot (*ritual baths*). Although in free countries, there is usually no problem from the authorities to build Mikvaot, there is sometimes opposition from the Jewish community, claiming that Mikvaot are old fashioned, and one receives answers such as why do we need them today, since people have bathrooms in their houses?! Until about the 1960s there were very few Mikvaot in England. The largest Orthodox Synagogal body in England, did not have even *one* Mikva (and its members therefore had to use the Mikvaot of other Synagogal bodies), but now there has now been a great improvement in England. This Synagogal body now has its own Mikvaot, and they are being constructed even in the small communities in England.

The Mikva in city of Liverpool in the north of England (the city where once Rabbi Unterman was its Chief Rabbi) was by the early 1970s a very old one. Fortunately, it was still kosher, although rather neglected, but it was situated in an area of Liverpool where Jews no longer resided. Women had to take a taxi to arrive there. It was not advisable to walk in that area at night. This changed in the mid-1970s when a beautiful new modern Mikva was built in the Jewish area. The main Shul in the area very readily gave one of their large rooms to be converted into the Mikva. They realised the importance of a Mikva in the Community, even though only about 20 women in a community of about 2000 families used the Mikva.

The main problem was in the totalitarian countries, such as the former Soviet Union. There Mikvaot had to be built secretly. Disclosure could lead to being sent to Siberia or the Gulag. Yet despite this, Mikvaot were built. On one occasion, a Communist inspector heard about a Mikva and came to the house where there was a Mikva in the basement. The woman in charge told the inspector that it was a water well. She then took a cup filled it from the Mikva and drank it to "prove" it, even though the water there had not be changed for months! With great "*mesirat nefesh*" (*self-sacrifice*) a Mikva was built in Vilna. Before that, women had to travel by train to Moscow, a journey every month of 14 hours each way to reach the Mikva there, and trains in Russia were not the most luxurious, and the company was not the best! After most of the observant community of Vilna had left for Israel, the Mikva needed refurbishing. Rabbi Zilber was asked whether this should be done and he replied that even that if just one woman would use it just once, this refurbishing must be done.

אדם כי יהיה בעור בשרו (13:2) The context of most of these two Parashiot deal with the "*metzora*" (*leper*). One could ask why the Torah goes into great detail about such things. They are not pleasant things to talk about. One can contrast this with the pleasant things that are written about in previous Parashiot, such as building the Mishkan, the sacrifices, the Festivals, and so on. The answer is that the Torah deals with *every* aspect of a Jew's life, even the not nice things to talk about. There is a full chapter in the Shulchan Aruch (*Code of Jewish Law*) on detailed laws on how to behave in the toilet.

והיה בעור בשרו לנגע צרעת (13:2) The word "*metzora*" can be considered as an abbreviated form of the words "*motzi shem ra*" (*a form of forbidden speech*). The Rabbis learned from this that being a "*metzora*" was a punishment for speaking "*motzi shem ra*." One can see at the end of Parashat Bahalotcha, where Miryam is afflicted with *tzara'at* (*leprosy*) for speaking "motzi shem ra" about Moshe Rabbeinu.

The sin of speaking forbidden things is, according to the Gemara, transgressed by almost everybody. In doing so, one "kills" three people, namely, the speaker, the listener and the person spoken about. To try and remedy this, the Chafetz Chaim wrote several books dealing with this subject. Before publishing them, he asked a number of prominent Rabbis for their endorsement. One of these Rabbis, before giving such an endorsement, wanted to find out whether the Chafetz Chaim himself "practiced what he preached" in this respect. He therefore met with him, spoke with him for several hours, trying to trap him into forbidden speech. But he didn't succeed. Only then did he give his recommendation. These books of the Chafetz Chaim have become very popular and many people learn from them on a daily basis.

One could notice that these laws dealing with metzora come after Parashat Shemini, the second part of which, deals with things which are forbidden "to be put in one's mouth." In contrast, forbidden speech comes "out one's mouth." One should Remember! It is much harder to spend a day not uttering forbidden speech than not eating forbidden food!

וראה הכהן את הנגע (13:3) The Mishnah in masechet (tractate) Nega'im comments that a person does not see the signs of tzara'at on himself, but only someone else does so. Likewise, a person himself often does not realise that he is uttering forbidden speech, and only another person will notice.

וישב מחוץ לאהל (14:8) The metzora was put outside the city for seven days. Likewise, one should "ostracise" a person who continually talks forbidden speech. If a person during a conversation starts to talk forbidden things, one should try and change the subject, or find an excuse to stop the conversation. Likewise, if a person speaking to someone on the telephone does this, one should terminate the conversation by saying that something has "just cropped up." It's true - the forbidden speech has "just cropped up"!

ואם דל הוא (14:21) At the end of his period of his purification, the Metzora had to bring a sacrifice. If he had money, there was no problem in his bringing such a sacrifice. But what if he were poor? The Torah allows for this contingency and says that he can bring a sacrifice of a lower value. The Torah is always concerned for the financial welfare of a person. Likewise, it is the thought behind giving any present which counts, and not the value of the present. From Parashat Vayikra one can see that a poor person's meal offering has more value than a rich man's animal sacrifice. Finance ministers could learn a lesson from this. At a time of financial stringency, it is the poor who will suffer. What is the point of decreasing income tax, when the poor who in any case do not earn enough to pay it, will not benefit by such "presents" given solely to the rich?!

כנגע נראה לי בבית (14:35) The signs of tzara'at are not just on the body of a person. They are also found on his clothes and in his house. One can learn from this that a person's clothes and his house can just as easily be "impure." Examples of this are clothes which are not respectable for a Jew or which are immodest, and the bringing in of undesirable literature into one's house. Should these things come on to the clothes or house of a Jew, then they must be "cleansed."

כי יהיה זב מבשרו (15:2) Following the laws regarding the Metzora, the Parashah ends with other sorts of impurity on a person. Here we see for example, that even chairs need washing. One can also look at this in a spiritual sense. Impurity can enter anything in a Jewish house, namely "even the furniture," for example non-suitable ornaments or pictures, and in such a situation they need to be removed.

פ' אחרי מות

ואל יבא בכל עת אל הקדש (16:1) One might well ask why two of the sons of Aharon died? This was first mentioned in Parashat Shemini and one of the many reasons given was that they made a change in the order of the service of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). From this one can see the seriousness of unilaterally making changes in Divine commands. Perhaps significantly, one of the first changes made by a non-orthodox Jewish movement, was to make changes in the liturgy. Now one can see where they have got to today!

The Rabbis also give another reason for their premature deaths. These two sons of Aharon would say, "When will these old men Moshe and Aharon die and we will take their place." However, it is G-d who decides who will die first and not us. No-one knows whether today will be his last day on earth. There was a woman, whose relative was going to get married a couple of months later and the bride's mother, (call her Mrs. X), was seriously ill. This woman, who also had a daughter also soon to be married, went around telling people that Mrs. X would die before the wedding. The following day this woman herself suddenly dropped down dead!

ואל יבא בכל עת אל הקדש (16:2) This Parashah begins with the laws concerning the entry of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur and his saying the "Shem hamefurash" (explicit name) of G-d. Here we have a combination of many holinesses. The High Priest, Yom Kippur, the Holy of Holies, the Divine Name. One can see from the Gemara in masechet (tractate) Yoma, the extensive preparations made for this moment. Likewise, every Jew should continually attempt to elevate his holiness, not just once a year and not just in one place, but always and everywhere.

When one observes non-Jews entering the area of the Holy of Holies whenever they feel like it, one should remember the Gemara at the end of masechet Makot, when the Rabbis saw foxes running in the Holy of Holies. *Only* Rabbi Akiva laughed and then explained that if the situation could come down to such a level, it can also rise to the level of the rebuilding of the Temple.

כתנת בד קדש (16:4) Normally the Kohen Gadol would wear eight magnificent garments. However, during the service of Yom Kippur, he would replace them with four plain white garments. This is a sign of simplicity and modesty. When elevating oneself in holiness, one needs to remember this fact. On Yom Kippur many Jews instead of their usual Shabbat clothes replace them with a simple white kittel (white robe worn by men on certain occasions). In many places, men when they die are wrapped in this kittel. There was an old man who specifically on Yom Kippur would wear a white head covering which covered tightly over his head. When asked about this he said that this would be his head covering when he died.

גורל אחד לה' (16:8) Normally gambling is forbidden. It even disqualifies a person from being a witness in a court case. However, on occasion it is required, so that a person cannot suggest that he has been discriminated against. In this particular case, it is to remove the situation where the Kohen Gadol himself has to decide which sa'ir (goat) will be the sa'ir hamishtaleach (the "sent away" goat). It can happen, for example in a school, that there is an unpleasant cleaning job that has to be done, and if the headmaster were to just choose a particular pupil to do it, comments could easily be made that he chose a boy he did not like. Therefore, were he to do a goral (lottery) to choose such a pupil, no such comments could then be made.

וכפר בעדו ובעד ביתו ובעד כל קהל ישראל (16:17) One should note the order. First of all one must make personal atonement and *only* after that, can one deal with other people. It is very easy to say "Do as I say, but not as I do." There are politicians love to say this. Before an American President tells Israel what to do, he should look at what he is doing in his own country! One should also remember that one can be strict in observing a particular Halachah (Jewish law) for *oneself* but not for *others*.

כי ביום הזה (16:30) As has been seen throughout the generations, Yom Kippur has a tremendous "magnetic power." Jews who are sadly very far removed from Yiddishkeit (Jewish observance) and are rarely seen in a Shul throughout the year, attend every Yom Kippur. Shuls often have to arrange "overflow" services to accommodate all these extra

worshippers! Many Shuls in the Diaspora use the opportunity to make a Kol Nidrei appeal for their Synagogue or some outside organisation.

In Israel there are organisations such as Tzohar who arrange minyanim on Yom Kippur for people whose only visit to a Shul is on Yom Kippur.

וְהָיָה זָמַן וְזָמַן אֶת הַדָּם (17:11) Time and time again the Torah gives the serious prohibition of eating blood. In contrast, today one can find positive lifesaving things from the blood of humans. Blood samples are taken and analysed speedily in a laboratory, and from the results can determine many illnesses or weaknesses which a person might have. These include anemia, diabetes, gout, kidney stones, heart disease, and so on. Another use of blood are blood transfers from donors to people who have been operated on, or have been involved in traffic accidents. Needless to say, that it is a great mitzvah to donate one's blood for this purpose.

וְהָיָה בָהֶם (18:5) From these words one learns the very important principle that the saving of life overrides almost every law in the Torah. If a person is in such a life-threatening state of health on Shabbat, or even if there is the slightest chance that he is in such a state, one is obligated to “desecrate” Shabbat to do everything to save his life. If one does not do so and the patient dies, one would be guilty of murder. Although the word “desecrate” was used here, it is not a desecration, on the contrary one is performing a great mitzvah. Even if it is found that one's actions were found to have been unnecessary, or if his actions do not help, or if someone has arrived before him to help the sick person, he has still done a great mitzvah and not a desecration. No repentance has to be done for his actions on Shabbat in helping the sick person.

The Rabbi of Brisk, who was normally very strict in the observance of all the Mitzvot, would almost invariably tell ill people not to fast on Yom Kippur. When he was asked why he was lenient regarding Yom Kippur, he would answer that he is not lenient about Yom Kippur, he is strict about "pikuach nefesh" (saving of lives). In some hospitals in Israel, before Yom Kippur the Rabbi of the hospital together with a medical doctor would go around to each patient to determine whether the patient could fast, and if not, how often and how much could the patient eat or drink.

עֲרוֹת (18:7) The Parashah gives a list of close relatives whom it is forbidden to marry. One could mention that the secular laws of various countries have similar lists, but they have them for genetic reasons. Problems have arisen when a boy and a girl of the same family have been adopted by different people. Even the biological parents don't know who the adoptive parents are, and as a result cases have been known where a brother married his sister. Due to their being a greater chance of this happening with Jewish children due to the far smaller numbers of Jews than non-Jews, the London Beth Din is supplied with the confidential information of the biological and adoptive parents and they can thus check when a marriage is to be registered whether there is any close relationship between the potential bride and groom.

לֹא תִגְלֶה עֲרוֹתָן (18:9) Even though many worshippers who attend Orthodox Shuls do not observe most of the Mitzvot, they realise that the laws concerning personal status must be done in accordance with the Torah. Such people sometimes say “My Shul I don't attend is an Orthodox one!” Some of those who join non-orthodox congregations do so because for some reason they are unable to join an Orthodox Shul. These reasons include that they or their mother has undergone a non-Halachic (not in accordance with Jewish law) conversion and hence they are in fact non-Jewish. Other reasons could be that a married woman who has not received a “get” (a religious bill of divorce) wants to remarry, or the offspring after such a marriage who unfortunately is a mamzer (a person who cannot get married according to Jewish law) wants to get married; in such cases they cannot get married according to the halachah (Jewish Law).

There was a case in London of a family who had membership in an Orthodox Synagogue but kept very little Yiddishkeit. Their daughter was planning to marry a boy whose family were members of a non-orthodox congregation and the groom's family wanted the ceremony to take place in their non-orthodox place of worship. However, the bride's father insisted it take place in an Orthodox Synagogue, since he felt that otherwise they would not be properly married.

פ' קדושים

תהיו קדושים (19:2) The Parashah of Kedoshim has the highest concentration of Mitzvot (commandments) in the Torah. The Jews are a Holy People and it is thus appropriate that this high number should be in a Parashah called "Kedoshim" (holy in the plural).

ובקצרכם את קציר ארצכם (19:9) Repeatedly throughout the Torah, one can see how it continually thinks of poor people, and the Torah contains many Mitzvot in order to help them. The first masechet (tractate) dealing with Zerayim is called Peah; from its contents one can see that before one thinks of one's own food, one should think of the poor man who has no food. There are halachot (laws) from the Torah as to which agricultural produce automatically belong to the poor. They are "leket" (gleanings), "shichicha" (forgotten produce) and "peah" (corner of the field).

לא תגנבו ולא תכחשו ולא תשקרו (19:11) One should note the order of these commandments since one sin leads to another; first one steals, then one denies that one has stolen, and then one swears falsely that one didn't steal.

לא תלין פעלת שכיר אתך עד בקר (19:13) There are strict rules in the Torah for paying a workman on time. Since he has done the work he must be paid immediately. One has no right to hold up his wages. Before a worker starts, one should make sure that one has the money readily available to pay him. One should not have to make excuses such as, "I have to go to the "kaspomat" (bank cash withdrawal machine), or "I need a new cheque book."

בצדק תשפט עמיתך. (19:15) There are strict laws for Dayanim (Rabbinical judges) hearing a case. There is a whole detailed chapter in the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) concerning the conduct of Dayanim in a case. They detail how both sides must be treated identically. However, unfortunately, in practice this is not always the case. Already 500 years ago a Rabbi known as the "Maharal of Prague" wrote that there are Dayanim who hear just one of the sides and then write up their rulings. He had very strong words against such Dayanim. In recent years there have been strong comments against Batei Din (Rabbinical Courts) who do not act in accordance with the Halachah (Jewish law).

לא תלך רכיל (19:16) Don't be an informer. An example, are leftist groups who photograph apartments being built in Yehudah and Shomron and then publicise the facts to the world. They also organize boycotts of products from these areas

לא תעמד על דם רעך (19:16) If one sees something dangerous, one must do something about it. Examples are, noticing an unguarded hole in the road, and a badly lit street. Roads always seem to be dug up to lay different sorts of pipes under the surface and when the workers leave at night, they don't always put a barrier around the hole, (which is sometimes very deep!) they have dug. The bulbs in street lamps have finite lives and one can often see those which have burned out. It is very possible that the town council does not know about this and people passing should inform them, especially if they are near a flight of stairs.

לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך (19:17) The Second Temple was destroyed because of "sinat chinam" (baseless hatred). As a result. 24,000 pupils of Rabi Akiva died, the reason being that they did not give respect to one another. It has been commented upon that had this not occurred there would be far more halachic (Jewish law) writings. Although the Gemara just mentions this as a historical fact, the later Rabbonim instituted a period of mourning during the days of the Omer which include not getting married and not cutting one's hair during this period.

לא תקם ולא תטר (19:18) One is forbidden to take revenge or bear a grudge against somebody. This is in fact a very difficult commandment to keep. A classic example of this is when someone asks to borrow one's tool and one replies that since you don't loan me things, I won't loan you. This is revenge. If instead one loans it to him but says even though you don't loan me things, I will still loan you. This is bearing a grudge.

ובגד כלאים שעטנז לא יעלה עליך (19:19) Just as one has to ensure that anything one puts in one's mouth must be kosher, one must likewise take the same care for the clothes one puts on one's body. It is possible that a jacket or coat has shaatnez (mixture of wool and linen) in it and it should therefore be taken to a Shaatnez Laboratory for testing. Sometimes a garment has on its label that it is free from shaatnez, but on enquiry one finds out that only a spot check had been made. The experts say that one cannot rely on a spot check and the garment needs to be sent for individual testing.

וערלתם ערלתו את פרוי (19:23) In the Diaspora although there are problems in finding kosher supervised manufactured products, there are virtually no problems with fruit and vegetables (provided one checks them for bugs). In Eretz Yisrael, however, there are numerous halachot (laws) which must be observed when eating fruit and vegetables, and one of them (which is brought in these verses) is Orlah (fruit of the first three years). When a Rabbi from America who came on Aliyah, gave his first kashrut lesson to those who have also come on Aliyah, he told them that in Eretz Yisrael you can have a "treife tomato," for example, one where terumot and ma'asarot (tithing) have not yet been taken, or produce of the shemittah (Sabbatical year).

לא תאכלו על הדם (19:26) From these words one learns that in the morning one must daven (pray) first, and only then eat. A Jew must always remember his priorities.

לא תקפו פאת ראשכם (19:27) This is the source for the growing of peyot (sideburns). Although one usually associates peyot with Chasidim, this is not so. Taimanim (Jews from Yemen) also grow them but they call them simanim.

ולא תשחית את פאת זקנך (19:27) From this one learns that one may not shave with a blade. An electric shaver is generally accepted since has a clipping action, similar to a scissors which is not forbidden. There are some who don't accept the use of an electric shaver and they use some powder which takes off the facial hair. To avoid all these problems, one can grow a beard which many Jews do.

וכתבת קעקע (19:28) The body is holy and mustn't be disfigured. A man should also certainly not put rings in his nose or ears! There are unfortunately many tattoo parlours which have opened and even many teenagers go along and get tattoos on various parts of their bodies and even on their face.

מפני שיבה תקום (19:32) One is commanded to stand up before a person over the age of seventy. If there are insufficient seats on a bus, one should offer them one's seat. There have been cases where the bus is full of teenage Yeshivah students, and an elderly person gets on the bus and has to stand because there are not enough seats, and not one of the Yeshivah students offers him a seat. In such a case the Rosh Yeshivah (Principal of the Rabbinical College) needs to be contacted and informed what occurred.

מאזני צדק (19:36) One must be scrupulous in one's business dealings. Just as one is strict to eat "glatt kosher" (very strict with what is kosher) with one's food, one needs to be "glatt yosher" in one's business dealings. If one finds that one has received too much change, one must refund the difference. If something arrives in one's order which one has not ordered, one should check one's receipt to see if it is included, and if not return it to the shop. In some places they will be profound in their thanks and might think you are a wonderful person. This is not the case; one has just done the correct thing according to the Torah.

Another associated prohibition is "geneivat da'at" (deception). For example, one goes into a shop where one has no intention of buying anything, and just asking the shopkeeper how much different things cost. If one's intention is just to compare prices with other shops, one must inform the shopkeeper of this fact, and he will then decide whether or not to answer one's questions.

ולא תלכו בחקת הגוי (20:23) Don't follow in the way of the non-Jews when they do not accord with the Torah way of life, We are a Holy People and must go in the way of the Torah. If democracy and the Torah conflict, needless to say, it is the Torah which takes precedence. The Supreme Rabbinical Court in Eretz Yisrael ruled, that its authority comes from the Torah and not from the Knesset.

פ' אמור

אמר אל הכהנים (21:1) The Parashah begins by giving the various laws concerning the Kohanim (priests). A Kohen has *both* "zechuyot" (rights) and "chovot" (obligations). Amongst his "zechuyot" are being called up to the first Aliyah in the Torah, and receiving the best portion of food. But he also has "chovot," such as limitations on whom he can marry, and not going near the dead. If one wants "zechuyot," one must also accept upon oneself the "chovot." The Knesset seems to be different in this respect! One of the Knesset members related that when he was elected to the Knesset, he was informed of his "zechuyot." When he then asked about his "chovot," he was told there were not any!

והכהן הגדול (21:10) The Torah gives the differences between an ordinary Kohen and a Kohen Gadol (high priest). The restrictions on the Kohen Gadol are much stricter than those pertaining to the ordinary Kohen, namely, he cannot even marry a widow and he cannot attend the funeral of the close members of his family. One may well ask why this difference? An ordinary Kohen is by birth; he has no choice and he cannot opt out! In contrast a Kohen Gadol is by choice; he doesn't have to accept the job. One can see a similar phenomenon with the Nazir (Nazirite). Should one take on a job, one has a greater responsibility than if one has no choice.

אשר יהיה בו מום (21:17) The Torah lists various blemishes which will prevent a Kohen from serving in the Mishkan (Tabernacle). On a wider scale, one can learn from this, that when a person is chosen for a particular job, he must have the right qualifications. One must select a person for a job by merit and not by *protexia* (favouritism) or political affiliation. A *micchaz* (tender) must not be an empty formality!

אתו ואת בנו (22:28) One is forbidden to kill an animal and its child on the same day. It is *mental* cruelty for an animal to see its parent or its child being killed. Similarly, the Torah also has other laws regarding mental cruelty to living creatures, for example "shiluach hakan" (sending away the mother bird from the nest), or not muzzling an ox. One can thus see that cruelty to animals is not limited to physical cruelty. Needless to say, there are also numerous laws in the Torah concerning physical cruelty to animals. It has been scientifically shown that Shechitah (ritual slaughter) is the most humane way to kill an animal. Sadly, anti-Semites try and stop Shechitah, claiming it is cruel! This was one of the first decrees made by the Nazis when they came to power. One does not have to be a genius to know whether it was made to harm the Jews or to protect the animal!

ולא תחללו את שם קדשי (22:32) A Jew must be very careful in his actions not to cause a Chillul Hashem (desecration of G-d's name). Some years ago, there was in England a case of a Jewish bankrupt who owed hundreds of millions of pounds to his non-Jewish creditors. He then married off his daughter. Instead of a modest wedding as he should have done in the circumstances, he made an enormous expensive wedding, which was reported in the national press. What did his non-Jewish creditors, who had lost an enormous sum of money, think of such an elaborate wedding!

ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל (22:32) A Jew must not be ashamed to show his principles in observing the Mitzvot (commandments) when he is amongst non-Jews. When Moshe Montefiore was appointed Lord Mayor of London, the ceremony took place on a Shabbat. Instead of using the traditional horse and carriage in the procession, he walked. When he was invited to dinner with the Queen, he took his own food and crockery. Likewise, when a former President of Israel went to Winston Churchill's funeral which was on a Shabbat he walked. Afterwards the various Heads of State who were present, were invited to the Palace of the Queen. He explained he could not go since it was too far to walk. They offered to send a horse drawn carriage to take him to the Palace, but he explained that this was also forbidden. One can see from this that, a non-Jew will respect a Jew who observes the Torah.

אתם (23:2) אשר תקראו אתם The Torah gives the power to the Sanhedrin to determine when Rosh Chodesh (New Moon) and hence the Festivals will occur. Even if a person thinks the Sanhedrin is wrong, they must still listen to it. Likewise, in every generation, one must listen to the "Poskei Hador" (great Rabbis of the generation).

לכם (23:15) וספרתם לכם According to most opinions the counting of the Omer as a Torah Mitzvah only applies during Temple times. However, even they hold that today it is still a Rabbinical precept, and one is counting the days till Shavuot, the anniversary of receiving the Torah from Mount Sinai. The Jewish people were keen to receive the Torah even though it added on numerous obligations to the Jew. This should always be remembered and a Jew should do his utmost to observe what is written in it.

השבת (23:16) ממחרת השבת There was a big argument between those who accepted the Oral Law and those who didn't, as to the meaning of these words. Without the Oral law we would not know how to observe many of the Mitzvot, for example Shofar, Tephillin, and Arba'at Haminim. The Oral Law is no less a part of the Torah than the Written Law.

ארככם (23:22) ובקצרכם את קציר ארצכם One might readily ask why this verse occurs in the middle of the laws concerning the Festivals. What is the connection? It is to remind us that there are poor people who cannot afford the large expenses to prepare for Yom Tov. We must therefore help these poor people. The first law in the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) concerning Pesach is "Kimcha d'Pischa" (supplying the poor with Pesach necessities).

אתם (23:27) ועניתם את נפשתיכם The affliction is the Simchah (happiness) of Yom Kippur. One begins the day with the berachah (blessing) of Shehecheyanu, which is the berachah of Simchah. A painful operation or a bitter medicine is often required to cure a person who is ill. At the time one does not like it, but afterwards one is glad that one went through this procedure. Likewise, the affliction of Yom Kippur is required to give one forgiveness for one's sins and to start a new leaf.

לכם (23:40) ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון The four species taken on Sukkot represent the four types of Jews in connection with learning and good deeds. The arava (willow) represents the Jew lacking both learning and good deeds, yet if the arava is missing, one cannot fulfill this Mitzvah. One can see from this that every Jew is important irrespective of his learning and good deeds.

כל האזרה בישראל (23:42) This means that all the Jews in the world could sit in just *one* Sukkah! One can learn from this that the Mitzvah of Sukkah shows the unity of the Jewish people. The strength of the Jewish people is when they act in unity. When there is fragmentation, the problems start, especially when some side with the non-Jews against other Jews. A big problem today in Eretz Yisrael is that some Jews fight against Jewish rights in Eretz Yisrael.

על המנרה הטהרה (24:4) Immediately after the section on the Festivals, follows the law of the Menorah (candelabra). This is a hint to Chanukah. In addition, the Menorah illustrates the spark of light in every Jew. As long as this spark is there, one can build on it and return a Jew to Yiddishkeit (Jewish observance).

ואפית אתה עשרה חלות (24:5) These twelve Challot (loaves of bread) were placed on the table in the heichal (hall) of the Mishkan on Shabbat where they remained till the following Shabbat, and they retained their freshness the entire week. On a deeper level one can learn from this that a Jew's learning must remain fresh; he must continually revise what he has learned.

לפרש להם על פי ה' (24:12) Moshe did not know the answer and so he asked G-d. One can learn from this that when one does not know the answer to something, one must not be ashamed to ask a Rabbi. Many organisations have a Beit Hora'a (a department for answering questions on Jewish law) where one can go to or telephone to ask a shailah (question).

פ' בהר

בהר סיני (25:1) The immediate question on seeing these words "b'har Sinai" (on Mount Sinai) is to ask "But are not all the Mitzvot (commandments) in the Torah from Mount Sinai?!" The reason that it is specifically mentioned here is to stress that all the details of the Shemitta (Sabbatical) year were given to Moshe on Mount Sinai and one must not "m'zalzel" (degrade) this important Mitzvah. It has a special importance since it shows faith in G-d. Many Jews in the past worked in agriculture. The farmer whose livelihood depended on the land would have to cease his work on the land for an entire year and put his complete trust in G-d for his "parnasah" (sustenance). This also proves that the Torah was given by G-d and not written by man as the "maskilim" ("enlightened" Jews) claim. Would a farmer himself write such a law which would deprive him of his livelihood for a whole year?! One could mention here that a certain Rabbi in a European country who denied that the Torah came from Sinai wanted to be the Chief Rabbi of that country. Fortunately, his bid was rejected!

ושבתה הארץ שבת לה (25:2) Throughout the generations until about the 1880s, Jews would strictly observe the laws of Shemitta. It is interesting to note that a Tosafot (a commentary on the Talmud) towards the end of masechet (tractate) Ketuvot brings Rabbeinu Chaim Cohen who states that one who will be unable to observe Mitzvot Hateluyim Ba'aretz (agricultural laws applicable just in Eretz Yisrael), should stay in Chutz La'aretz (Diaspora). If one looks at the various Mitzvot, one could conclude that he is, surely mainly concerned with Shemitta.

When what is popularly called the "Aliyah Rishonah" ("first" immigration to Israel) began, the Mitzvah of Shemitta was breached, or to say the least, circumvented. [Incidentally this term "Aliyah Rishonah" is a rewriting of history. Jews came on Aliyah throughout all the generations. For example, after the Crusaders were driven out of Eretz Yisrael, 300 Rabbis came from England and France; Talmidim (students) of the Vilna Gaon and the Baal Shem Tov came in their numbers; Mea Shearim (a very religious area in Jerusalem) was established well before the Bilu movement or Herzl.]

"Aliyah Rishonah" was the first Aliyah of Jews who were in general not "shomrei Mitzvot" (observant Jews). They must still be given great praise for coming to Eretz Yisrael, instead of going to America at the time when millions were going there from Eastern Europe. Some members of this group were of the "Bilu" movement. "Bilu" is the initial letters of "Bet Yaacov lechu v'nailcha." (House of Jacob, come and let us walk); however, the verse ends with "b'or Hashem" (in the light of G-d) which was left out of their name!

It is with this background that one can understand what occurred with the Mitzvah of Shemitta. The first Shemitta for the Bilu group arrived. No-one can pretend it would have been easy to observe Shemitta but it was certainly possible. On the face of it, the "Heter Mechirah" (selling Eretz Yisrael to non-Jews) may have seemed a reasonable solution. However, from archival material it is now known that the Bilu had other motives. It can be compared to the anti-religious parties in the Knesset today who want a secular state. They realized that if the Shemitta would be observed according to the Torah, the Rabbis would be the bosses, and if it would not be observed, the society would be secular. They therefore deceived the Rav of Kovno, exaggerating the situation of what would happen if Shemitta were to be observed according to the Torah. The Rav of Kovno was thousands of kilometres away and could therefore not verify the situation and so he gave a "heter mechirah" for that Shemitta *only*, provided that the Rabbis of Jerusalem concurred. The Rabbis of Jerusalem did not agree, yet the Bilus still used this "heter"! Great pressure was also exerted on the settlements who wanted to observe the Shemitta and Baron Rothschild was also pressurised not to support such settlements.

At a later date, Rav Kook was reluctant to continue to authorise this "heter mechirah" but great pressure was put on him to do so, and he almost resigned because of it. He also based it on the fact that "miuta dimiuta" (the tiniest quantity) of the land was then under Jewish ownership. This condition certainly does not apply today. Rav Kook himself did not personally rely on it and he praised those who likewise did not as "giborei koach" (masters of strength).

Leaving aside the complex halachic arguments for and against the validity of "heter mechirah," there is the "raiyni" (ideological) aspect. Selling Eretz Yisrael to the Arabs to avoid having to keep a Mitzvah originating in the Torah, and in addition, a Mitzvah in which the Jews are specifically promised a berachah (blessing). What if the Arabs won't sell it back at the end of the Shemitta year?! They would then have a

“Palestine” state in the whole of Eretz Yisrael!!

The argument that without the "heter mechirah" one would have to buy Arab agricultural produce is no longer valid. With cold storage, "menutakim," (products which grow detached from the ground), imports, etc., those who do not use "heter mechirah" produce, buy no more, *and even possibly less*, Arab produce during the Shemitta year. Even, with no connection to Shemitta, a large percentage of vegetables sold in Eretz Yisrael are Arab produce. Even products marked “heter mechirah” are not entirely from Jews, and a notable percentage is Arab produce.

The cost of observing Shemitta according to the Torah is less than the cost of a general election in the State of Israel. Money will always be found for elections, even if the Knesset is dissolved every few months, and so why cannot it be found for Shemitta observance? "Vetziviti et bircati lachem," the Torah promises the Jewish people a big berachah for observing the Shemitta. Thus by observing it, we would then have wonderful agricultural produce.

והחזרו (25:13) בשנת היובל הזאת תשבו איש אל אחוזתו Every Jubilee year, land returns to its former owners. This wonderful law prevents a few land speculators getting rich at the expense of the many. One can contrast this with the few Arab landowners and the numerous "serfs" slaving for them. One often sees how the gap between the rich and the poor instead of getting smaller, increases. The number of families under the poverty line in Eretz Yisrael increases all the time. Is the Government putting large taxes on the rich? No! It did the opposite; it decreased the child allowances for large families.

כי ימוך אחיך (25:25) One is commanded to help a fellow Jew when he gets into financial difficulties and sadly, in today's economic climate, there are no shortages of such people. The way to help the poor people is to set up "gemachim" (free loan organisations). One should note that they are almost all run by "shomrei mitzvot" (observant Jews) for the benefit of *all* the population. Do those who continually attack the "shomrei mitzvot" at every opportunity ever mention these gemachim? This fact was once pointed out by Rav Uri Zohar in the television election propaganda.

אל תקח מאתו נשך ותרבית (25:36) The Torah forbids charging interest. Even if a friend loans someone something, when returning it, one is even forbidden to say "thank you" since this will also be regarded as taking interest. However, as Rav Yisrael Salant pointed out to one of his pupils to whom he had loaned some money, when returning it although it is forbidden to say "thank you," one should by one's movements show one's gratitude.

It happened that a person who had once been very wealthy but had now lost all his money came to the Chatam Sofer to borrow some money for a business deal. He bought a certain commodity and immediately after, the price of this commodity shot up and thus he became wealthy again. To show his appreciation when he returned the money, he tried to give a diamond to the Chatam Sofer. The latter who also knew about precious stones carefully looked at the diamond and remarked how perfect it was and that it had no blemish. But he then immediately added that he could not take it since it would be taking interest on the loan. The man then asked him why he had studied it carefully and praised it. The Chatam Sofer then explained that all day long he studies Torah in the Bet Hamidrash (House of Study). When did he then have the opportunity to keep the Mitzvah of not taking interest?

One can also learn an additional lesson from this incident. There are Mitzvot which we keep daily or weekly or sometimes just yearly. Other mitzvot rarely, if ever, come our way. Thus when we have a potential opportunity to keep such Mitzvot, we should be very happy that such a situation has arisen.

לא תעשו לכם אילים (26:1) This Parashah ends with the strict prohibition of idol worship. Today, apart from in a few countries, people don't worship idols as such. However, sadly there are people who have made money their “idol.” Everything they do has to be for money, and they will do nothing on a voluntary basis. This is diametrically opposed to much of the content of this Parashah of loaning and helping the unfortunates and not taking any interest or physical gain for doing so. A person should be happy and satisfied to know that his reward for such Mitzvot is recorded for him in Heaven and can never be taken away from him.

פ' בחוקותי

אם בהקתי תלכו (26:3) Today almost everyone is talking about peace in Eretz Yisrael. Naturally, everyone wants peace, since peace is a wonderful thing. We see from a number of places in the Gemara that one may even change the truth for the sake of peace. For example, after hearing from the malachim (angels) that she would bear a son, Sarah said that Avraham was old. However, when G-d then spoke to Avraham, he quoted Sarah as saying that *she* was old. G-d changed what Sarah had said in order to preserve peace between man and his wife. The last chapter of the small masechet (tractate) "Derech Eretz Zuta" is devoted to peace and is indeed called "Perek Hashalom" (chapter dealing with Peace).

One might well ask what is the prescription for peace in Eretz Yisrael? These are indeed the opening words of this Parashah. Observe the Mitzvot (commandments) in the Torah, and then there will get "Shalom Ba'aretz" (peace in Israel). If one thinks that giving portions of Eretz Yisrael to the Arabs is the solution for peace, or throwing Jews out their homes, one is sadly mistaken. The Jews rights to Eretz Yisrael don't come from the Tenach (Bible) *read as a historic document*, nor from the United Nations resolution of 1947, and not from conquest, but *solely* because G-d gave it to the Jewish people *and them and them alone*.

ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם (26:4) For several years G-d withheld the rains, and as a result the Kinneret reached a critical low level. There was a terrible panic. An agreement was even signed with Turkey to send us water in plastic bags. However, after that, for some of the years, we were blessed with a lot of rain. Let us therefore show our appreciation to G-d for this in our observance of the Mitzvot and our attitude towards our rights to Eretz Yisrael.

ורדפו מכם חמשה מאה ומאה מכם רבבה ירדפו (26:8) One of the blessings in this Parashah is that G-d will give us so much strength that five of us would succeed in chasing one hundred of our enemies, and a hundred of us will succeed in chasing ten thousand. Rashi comments on this calculation. If five chase a hundred, then mathematically one hundred could chase *just* two thousand. But the blessing says ten thousand. The answer is that when Jews act together, their strength is proportionally much greater. Had all the Jews acted together in settling Yehudah and Shomron since the Six Day War there would be millions there today, not just about half a million. There would be *settlement blocks everywhere*. But even today, it is not too late. If sufficient Jews act together "likroa et hagezairah hara'a," (to tear up the evil decree), one can see from this berachah (blessing) that we can succeed.

ואם לא תשמעו לי (26:14) This Parashah then continues with the curses of what will happen if we do not observe the Mitzvot in the Torah. However, they end with a note of hope, namely, remembering the promises made to the Patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaacov. The answer to not have these k'lalot (curses) is to do teshuvah (repentance).

One can summarise the contents of the first half of this Parashah as "Reward and Punishment." Sometimes when we receive punishment, we often cannot, or do not want to understand why. One could well answer, "But I am strict about keeping the Mitzvot. Everything I eat is glatt kosher, I am strict about all the details of Shabbat, I daven every day with kavanah (proper concentration). Why am I being punished?"

To answer this, there is a mashal (parable with moral lesson) from the Chafetz Chaim. A man left home after Succot to work hard so that his large family would have good food for Pesach. All the money he earned working day and night he put in a big sack. Just before Pesach he started on his return journey. What he did not notice that there was a small hole in the sack and one by one his coins fell out He reached home, and

there to his consternation he saw that his sack was empty. The Chafetz Chaim explained that we work very hard to collect Mitzvot, but every day we speak Lashon Hara (forbidden speech). All our good deeds are lost.

All this is like the man who is very strict on all the details of keeping Shabbat. His fridge has a "hechshar" (Rabbinical approval) that he can open it without the slightest apprehension on Shabbat. His urn has a "hechsher," and not just a Shabbat switch, so that he can draw water from it without apprehension, and so on. However, during his Shabbat meals instead of talking Divrei Torah (words of Torah) he talks lashon hara at the Shabbat table. All his reward for strictly keeping Shabbat is swallowed up by his "aveirot" (sins) for his lack of "shmirat halashon."

Even when G-d gives us berachot, do we recognise them as berachot, or do we want more, and are we jealous of our neighbour who has more. We read in the Pirkei Avot, "Who is rich? He that is happy with what he has got."

A person living in a modest three-room apartment in a small town, instead of thanking G-d for having such an apartment, can easily be jealous of his friend who has a eight-room luxurious villa in Savyon or Caesarea. However, another person living in an identical apartment will recognise his blessings and be grateful that he is not living in one room in a Hatikvah quarter of Tel-Aviv, in a building which is falling to pieces, and having to share a primitive kitchen and toilet will four other families. In fact, one of the curses brought in this Parashah is "v'afu eser nashim lachmchem b'tanur echad" - ten women baking their bread in one oven. It is bad enough two women in one kitchen, but here the Torah talks about ten women in the same kitchen!

Everyone wants their children to be born healthy. But as one knows, unfortunately this is not always the case. There was account in the newspaper "Yated Ne'eman" of a family where a child was born with Down's syndrome. The family kept the child hidden and did not let anyone outside the family know of its existence, until they heard about another family with such a child but who regarded such a child as a "matmon" (treasure). Then their attitude completely changed. Whether one regards something as a blessing or a punishment depends on how one looks at it.

The following is related of the Bluzhever Rebbe who by a series of miracles survived the Holocaust, although all the members of his family perished. It happened when the grown-up son of Rav Shneur Kotlar died and he was sitting Shiva. He wouldn't talk to anybody and he was inconsolable. The Bluzhever Rebbe came for "nichum aveilim" (comforting mourners) and went to sit next to him and said "Rav Shneur, I envy you." Everyone around was amazed at such a statement and started to listen carefully. The Rebbe continued: "You lost a son. But he left a child to carry his name. You know where he is buried. You have other children who bring you joy. This room is full of people to comfort you. I also lost a child, my only daughter. Her husband was both a gaon (learned man) and a tzaddik (righteous man). I also had a little grandson. One day they were shot. There was no funeral, no burial. I don't know if they were buried at all. No-one came to comfort me, because they were all dead. I envy you, Rav Shneur." After the Shiva, Rav Shneur contacted the Rebbe to thank him for his words.

כִּי יִפְּלֵא נָדָר (27:2) This Parashah and also the Book of Vayikra ends with a theme which occurs from the middle of the Book of Shemot, namely the giving of voluntary contributions for the upkeep of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). A voluntary contribution has a far greater value than a compulsory tax.

Today a Shul is a "Mikdash Me'at." (a small Temple). In some Shuls one has to pay for one's seat. For a seat in the front row, near the Mizrach ("eastern wall") there is a certain price, but in the fourth row the price is lower. In other Shuls, one has to pay a definite amount for an Aliyah (being called up to the Torah), or there is an auction to sell these Aliyot. How much nicer it is, when the principle as with the building of the Mishkan applies, "Kol nediv libo." If you want to give, you give. No sanctions if you don't. There will then be no embarrassing of a person who cannot afford to pay for an Aliyah.