

**Torah Reading  
for  
Simhat Torah  
Evening**

from the Etz Hayim Humash

<sup>10</sup>Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the LORD singled out, face to face, <sup>11</sup>for the various signs and portents that the LORD sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, <sup>12</sup>and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.

10 וְלֹא-אֵלֶּם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כַּמֹּשֶׁה  
אֲשֶׁר יָדָעוּ יְהוָה פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים: 11 לְכָל-  
הָאֲתוֹת וְהַמוֹפְתִּים אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַח ה' יְהוָה  
לַעֲשׂוֹת בָּאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִפְרֹעֹה וּלְכָל-  
עַבְדָּיו וּלְכָל-אֶרֶצוֹ: 12 וְלְכָל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה  
וּלְכָל הַמֹּרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה  
לְעֵינֵי כָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל: \*\*

12. v. למערכאי סכום הפסוקים של הספר 955 וחציו 17:10  
12. v. סכום הפסוקים של התורה 5,845

#### EULOGY (vv. 10–12)

**10. Never again did there arise** The verse contrasts Joshua to Moses: Although Joshua succeeded Moses, neither he nor any subsequent prophet was Moses' equal.

**prophet like Moses** Although Moses was far more than a prophet, and is never directly called that elsewhere in the Torah, prophecy was one of his roles. Here the term implies that he remains superior to all other prophets.

**face to face** That God spoke to Moses "face to face" is stated in Exod. 33:11 ("as one man speaks to another"). Here the term is an idiom meaning "in person," "directly," "without mediation." That is, Moses experienced the most direct contact with God of any prophet, and so had the clearest knowledge of Him and His will.

**11. various** Literally, "all." The number of wonders executed by Moses was unparalleled.

**signs and portents** Moses was also incom-

parable in the wonders that God performed through him during the time of the Exodus. No other prophet so convincingly confirmed the credibility of his mission.

**the LORD sent him to display** The Torah here and elsewhere states that all the wonders Moses performed were by means of God's power and at His command, not through his own personal power or any occult skills. However, the next verse emphasizes Moses' role, because it was through those wonders that he established and proved himself as God's emissary.

**12. great might** Literally, "mighty hand." This and the "awesome power that Moses displayed" refer to "the various signs and portents" in verse 11.

**before all Israel** Literally, "in the sight of all Israel." That the Israelites witnessed these wonders is asserted often (e.g., 4:34, 6:22, 29:1–2). The Israelites were, therefore, convinced of the truth revealed by those events: the indisputable authenticity of Moses.

**12. before all Israel** With these words, we complete the reading of the Torah. It began in chaos, and with God imposing order on the chaos. It concludes with a nation of men, women, and children poised on the banks of the Jordan River, ready to begin perhaps the greatest spiritual adventure of all time, the effort to translate God's will into the daily life of a community.

In synagogues, we complete the Torah and proceed in two directions. First we go back to the opening words of Genesis and we begin again, finding new insights on every page, not because the Torah has changed, but because we have changed since we read it a year ago. And then, in the *haftarah* for *Simhat Torah*, we go forward into history, to read of Joshua's leadership of the people after the death of Moses.

#### HALAKHAH T'MA-ASHH

**34:12.** Upon completing the reading of the entire Torah on *Simhat Torah* with this verse from Deuteronomy, we turn back to the beginning of the Torah and read from the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis to emphasize that the study of Torah is unending. We also indicate the continuity of Jewish tradition by reading the first chapter of the Book of Joshua (the first book in the continuation of the Bible after the Torah) as the *haftarah*. In many synagogues, everyone is called up for an *aliyah* on *Simhat Torah*, even the children (S.A. O.H. 669:1.gloss), to symbolize that the Torah is the legacy of the entire people of Israel.

חזק חזק ונתנו

תם ונשלם תה

When God began to create heaven and בראשית\* בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם

ו. 1. ב' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

## CREATION (1:1-2:3)

## INTRODUCTION (1:1)

The Creation narrative in the Bible is a document of faith. In its quest for meaning it gives expression to the fundamental premise of the religion of the people Israel: The universe is entirely the purposeful product of the one God, a transcendent being, beyond nature, and sovereign over space and time.

**1. When God began to create** The conventional English translation reads: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The translation presented here looks to verse 3 for the completion of the sentence and takes

Time has not diminished the power or the majesty of the familiar biblical account of the creation of the world, nor has familiarity dulled its impact. It still moves us, conveying so much in so few words. What kind of world does the Torah envision God creating? The opening chapters of Genesis are not a scientific account of the origins of the universe. The Torah is a book of morality, not cosmology. Its overriding concern, from the first verse to the last, is our relationship to God, truth about life rather than scientific truths. It describes the world God fashioned as "good," a statement no scientific account can make.

God's world is an orderly world, in which land and water each has its own domain, in which each species of plant and animal reproduces itself "after its own kind." But it is also an unpredictable world, a world capable of growth and change and surprise, of love and pain, of glory and tragedy, not simply replication of what is, because it includes human beings who have the freedom to choose how they will act. And it is an unfinished world, waiting for human beings to complete God's work of creating.

## CHAPTER 1

The Torah assumes the existence and overwhelming power of God. We find here no myth of God's birth, as we find in other cultures' accounts of creation, only a description of God's actions. It seems that the Torah is saying, "This is the premise on which the rest stands. Only if you accept it is everything that follows intelligible." God created the world, blessed it with the capacity to renew and reproduce itself, and deemed it "good." This is the answer to the

basic and inevitable questions: Why is there something instead of nothing? Why is there life instead of inert matter?

The first letter of the first word in the Torah, "*b'reishit*," is the Hebrew letter *bet*. This prompted the Midrash to suggest that, just as the letter *bet* is enclosed on three sides but open to the front, we are not to speculate on the origins of God or what may have existed before Creation (Gen. R. 1:10). The purpose of such a comment is not to limit scientific inquiry into the origins of the universe but to discourage efforts to prove the unprovable. It urges us to ask ourselves, "How are we to live in this world?" And it urges us to live facing forward rather than looking backward. Jewish theology generally has been concerned with discerning the will of God rather than proving the existence or probing the nature of God. Ultimate origins ("Who made God?") are hidden from view, but all the rest of the world is open to inquiry. The Torah begins with *bet*, second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, to summon us to begin even if we cannot begin at the very beginning.

The Midrash takes the word for "beginning" (*reishit*) as a synonym for "Torah" (as in Prov. 8:22), interpreting the first verse as declaring: "With *reishit* did God create the heaven and the earth." God created the world by consulting the Torah, fashioning a world based on Torah values, or for the sake of the Torah, so that there would be somewhere in the universe where the values of the Torah could be put into practice (Gen. R. 1:1,6).

**1. When God began** The beginning of all knowledge and morality lies in the recognition that God created the world. Akiva taught: "Just

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Genesis is th of the world of rael, and of th with that peo claims to cover offers a rapid sk human history Abraham, with death of Josep work. This imk theme of Creat duction to the c tory. The openi to the historic chapter 12. Th views and value the pillars on w

The God of sufficient one, ture. He is the world, who is j man affairs, the being in Genesi creature of infi unique relation:

יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי-אֵל  
הָאוֹר כִּי-טוֹב וַיַּבֵּן  
הַחֹשֶׁךְ: 5 וַיִּבֶן  
לַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לֵאמֹר  
יוֹם אֶחָד: 6

creation. Light, like a separate entity, possess a name is tantamount in the worldview of including Egypt and was thus associated with the one who created the object named. Like day and night, the sun and moon. This is another way of saying that the creative power of the universe is a sovereign power over

The Hebrew words for "sunset" and "break of day" are appropriate before the creation of the first day. Here the two, the end of the period of activity was suspended) when the creative process

of the first day." The Hebrew words as both a cardinal

persons, no mixing of the different animal species. That separation, specifically achieved with the sun and moon, as there is a sense of divine service that marks the Sabbath and weekday, even the infant is born out of its mother. There is a sense of painful growth that outgrows its dependence. Midrash (Gen. R. 5:3) describes weeping at being separated from the waters, suggesting that the creative power is so potent that the united are separated. Finally, "one day," taken by the Hebrew day of the One, the

cycle begins at sunset. At sunset, and continues until if no stars are visible.

earth—<sup>2</sup>the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—<sup>3</sup>God said, "Let there be light"; and there was

verse 2 to be parenthetical, describing the state of things at the time when God first spoke. Support for understanding the text in this way comes from the second half of 2:4 and of 5:1, both of which refer to Creation and begin with the word "when."

**God** The Hebrew term for God used throughout this account of Creation is not the unique sacred divine name *YHWH* but *elohim*, a general Hebrew word for "deity," which can also refer to pagan gods. Although plural in form, it almost always appears with a singular verb or adjective. The name, connoting universalism and abstraction, is most appropriate for the God of Creation.

**create** The Hebrew stem of the word translated as "create" (ברא) is used in the Bible only for divine creativity. It signifies that the created object is unique, depends solely on God for its coming into existence, and is beyond the ability of humans to reproduce. The verb never means "to create out of nothing."

**heaven and earth** The observable universe is here specified by the use of the definite article in Hebrew (literally, "the heaven and the earth"). The combination of opposites ("heaven and earth") expresses the totality of cosmic phenomena, for which there is no single word in biblical Hebrew.

## THE PRIMORDIAL WORLD

(v. 2)

**2. unformed and void** The Hebrew for this phrase (*tohu va-vohu*) means "desert waste." The point of the narrative is the idea of order that results from divine intent. There is no suggestion here that God made the world out of nothing, which is a much later conception.

**darkness** In the Bible, darkness is often a symbol of evil, misfortune, death, or oblivion. Here it seems to be not just the absence of light

as the existence of a house testifies to the builder and the existence of a garment testifies to the weaver, so the existence of the world testifies to God who fashioned it" (Mid. Tem. 3). "Whoever teaches a child the Torah's account of Creation is to be considered as having created the world personally." To shape the moral imagination of a child is to create a new world.

וַאֲתָ הָאָרֶץ: 2 וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְהוֹמָה וְכָהוּ  
וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹמֹת הָאוֹר וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים  
מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם: 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

but a distinct entity, the origin of which is left unclear.

**the deep** The Hebrew word for "the deep" (*t'hom*) refers to the subterranean waters that ancient humans believed were beneath the earth. The text says nothing about how or when this body of water came into existence. In Proverbs (8:22–24) it is one of God's creations. The word is related etymologically to Tiamat, the maritime goddess in the Babylonian creation story. In all of the ancient Near Eastern creation stories, the primal element is water. To the ancients, the formless nature of water seemed to represent the state of affairs before chaos was transformed to order.

**a wind from God** Or, as others suggest, "a mighty wind." The Hebrew word *ruah* means "wind, breath, spirit." "Wind" is the prevalent understanding of the word here in ancient and medieval Jewish sources. As a physical phenomenon, wind conforms to the picture of primal chaos evoked by this verse.

**sweeping** Movement is the basic idea underlying this Hebrew verb (רָחַף). Motion, the essential element in change, originates with God's dynamic presence.

**water** This is either the cosmic ocean believed by the ancients to surround the earth or the water referred to in verses 6, 7, 9, and 10, namely, that which covered the solid mass of earth. These two bodies of water were probably not clearly differentiated in the ancient Hebrew mind.

## THE FIRST GROUP OF CREATED OBJECTS (vv. 3–13)

### DAY ONE

**3. God said** The divine word shatters the cosmic silence and signals the beginning of a

**3. God creates the world with words.** This is the first invocation of the Torah's belief in the reality of words, their power to create and to destroy.

**Let there be light** Light, the first thing God created, can be seen as symbolizing Judaism's commitment to clarity rather than mystery, to openness rather than concealment, to study

light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

new order. "God said" means that God created the world with His words. This signifies that the Creator is wholly independent of Creation. It implies effortlessness and absolute sovereignty over nature.

**Let there be** This instruction (*y'hi*), found again in verses 6 and 14, is reserved for the creation of celestial phenomena.

**light** The first creation by God's utterance. Light in the Bible serves as a symbol of life, joy, justice, and deliverance. The notion of light independent of the sun (which appears again in Isa. 30:26 and Job 38:19–20) derives from the observations that the sky is illumined on days when the sun is obscured and that brightness precedes the sun's rising. As in the ancient world generally, light itself is a feature of divinity.

**4. God saw** God perceived.

**was good** This affirms the flawlessness of God's creation. Reality is imbued with God's goodness.

**God separated** Separation, or differentia-

rather than blind faith. Light, God's first creation, becomes a symbol of God's Presence, in the fire of the Burning Bush and the revelation at Sinai, in the perpetual light (*ner tamid*) and the *m'norah* of the tabernacle. For some theologians, light functions as a symbol for God because light itself is not visible but makes everything else visible. "By Your light do we see light" (Ps. 36:10).

**4. God separated** The process of Creation is a process of making distinctions and separating—light from darkness, sea from dry land, one species from another—imposing order where there had been chaos and randomness. Throughout the Torah, we find this emphasis on distinction and separation: sacred and ordinary time, permitted and forbidden foods, rit-

יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר: <sup>4</sup>וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־  
הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר  
וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: <sup>5</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם  
וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר  
יוֹם אֶחָד: פ

tion, is another aspect of creation. Light, like darkness, is viewed here as a separate entity.

**5. God called** Not to possess a name is tantamount to nonexistence in the worldview of the ancient Near East, including Egypt and Babylonia. Name giving was thus associated with creation and domination, for the one who gives a name has power over the object named. In this narrative, God names day and night, the sky, the earth, and the sea. This is another way of expressing God's absolute sovereignty over time and space.

**evening . . . morning** The Hebrew words *erev* and *boker*, literally mean "sunset" and "break of dawn," terms inappropriate before the creation of the sun on the fourth day. Here the two words signify, respectively, the end of the period of light (when divine creativity was suspended) and the renewal of light (when the creative process was resumed).

**a first day** Better: "the first day." The Hebrew word "*ehad*" functions as both a cardinal

ually pure and impure persons, no mixing of diverse seeds or cross-breeding animal species. Aviva Zornberg suggests that separation, specialization, is almost always achieved with pain and sacrifice, even as there is a sense of sadness in the *havdalah* service that marks the separation of *Shabbat* and weekday, even as there is pain when an infant is born out of its mother's body, even as there is a sense of painful separation when a child outgrows its dependence on parents. The Midrash (Gen. R. 5:3) pictures the lower waters weeping at being separated from the upper waters, suggesting that there is something poignant in the creative process when things once united are separated.

**5. a first day** Literally, "one day," taken by the Midrash to mean "the day of the One," the

earth—<sup>2</sup>the earth with darkness over it, and a wind from God

<sup>3</sup>God said, "Let th

verse 2 to be parent of things at the time port for understand comes from the sec both of which refer the word "when."

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**heaven and earth** is here specified by in Hebrew (literally, "The combination 'earth'") expresses the idea, for which there is no Hebrew.

## THE PRIM

**2. unformed and void** The phrase (*tohu va-vohu*) The point of the phrase is that results from digestion here that (nothing, which is a **darkness** In the Bible, darkness is a symbol of evil, misfortune. Here it seems to be

as the existence of a world and the existence of a weaver, so the existence of God who fashioned the world teaches a child the importance of being considered personally." To shape a child is to create:

### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**1:5 there was evening and there was morning** According to Jewish law, the 24-hour cycle begins at sunset. *Shabbat* and holy days, therefore, begin in the evening, with candles lit 18 minutes before sunset, and continue until the following night when three stars can be clearly seen or 25 minutes after sunset if no stars are visible. (On determining the beginning of *Shabbat*, see S.A. O.H. 261:1–4.)

## SH'MOT

**1** These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each coming with his household; <sup>2</sup>Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; <sup>3</sup>Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; <sup>4</sup>Dan and

## שמות

**א** ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים מצרימה את יעקב איש וביתו באו: <sup>2</sup> ראובן שמעון לוי ויהודה: <sup>3</sup> יששכר <sup>4</sup> דן וזבולון וישראל ויהודה: <sup>3</sup> יששכר

### REVERSAL OF FORTUNE (1:1–22)

Joseph dies, with his generation; the Israelites multiply in Egypt; and a new pharaoh suddenly enslaves them. The barest of details concerning slavery and suffering are offered. The narrative becomes expansive only when it begins to describe the liberation.

#### AN INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY (vv. 1–7)

The sons of Jacob—the tribes of Israel—are listed in an order based on Gen. 35:23–26. That chapter includes the divine blessing to Jacob: “Be fer-

tile and increase; / A nation, yea an assembly of nations, / Shall descend from you” (35:11). This promise of increase has been fulfilled, as we read in 1:7.

**1. These are** The initial Hebrew letter of the verse that begins Exodus (*vav*, usually translated “and”) is a link to Genesis, because the letter suggests continuity with what precedes it.

**Israel** The name here refers to the patriarch Jacob. The name is used to refer to the nation for the first time in verse 9.

We read in the Book of Genesis the story of a family living out its relationship to God in the midst of sibling jealousies and marital strife. Exodus is the story of a people encountering God in the course of their journey from slavery to freedom.

#### CHAPTER 1

“The historian asks, What political, economic or religious factors inclined Pharaoh to enslave the Israelites? The Midrash asks, Why is Israel persecuted and enslaved more than any other nation of the world?” (N. Leibowitz).

The Sages of the Midrash, writing more than a thousand years after the events and living under the harsh rule of the Romans, tried to interpret the experience of slavery in Egypt as a way of understanding their own experience. Some said that slavery was a punishment for assimilating into the Egyptian way of life and wanting to be like the Egyptians. They interpreted the words “the land was filled with them” (1:7) to mean “the theaters and circuses were filled with them.” The Israelites adopted the Egyptian way of life in all of its crudeness and superficiality. Thus psychological enslavement, the notion that being an Egyptian was better than being an Israelite, preceded physical enslavement, even as psychological liberation will later precede physical liberation. These commentators describe the Israelites as devoid of redeeming qualities, and see the Exodus as resulting from God’s unearned grace

and God’s promise to the patriarchs (Tanh. B. Sh’mot 6).

Others saw enslavement in Egypt as part of God’s long-range plan, foreshadowed in Gen. 15:13, to take the descendants of Abraham and teach them, through the experience of being enslaved and redeemed, to be sensitive to the oppressed in every age (Exod. 22:20: “You shall not wrong a stranger . . . for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”) and to be grateful to God for intervening to free them. On the opening words of the book, “These are the names,” the Sages commented (again with later generations in mind) that “the Israelites were worthy of being redeemed precisely because they did not assimilate. Through all the years of slavery, they did not change their names, their language, or their mode of dress” (Mekh. Bo 5).

Striving not only to understand the Torah but to understand the phenomenon of gentile hatred of the Jewish people, the commentators carefully studied Pharaoh’s words in verses 9 and 10. They note that he objects not so much to the behavior of the Israelites as to their very existence. Like many enemies of the Jewish people, he exaggerates their numbers and power (they could not have been more than a small fraction of the Egyptian population). He uses the same words (“they are much too numerous for us”) that the king of the Philistines used for Isaac’s lone family in Gen. 26:16.

**1. the sons of Israel** When they were growing up, they were the sons of Jacob, not Israel.

In ancient times the Bible had four names from its initial form: *Y'tzi-at Mitzrayim*, *Exodus*, *Exodus Aigyp*, and *Exodus Aigyp*. The Jews of Alexandria adopted in the 1st century the abbreviated form, *Exodus*, from the Greek language. The book into 4 parts. The Jews in the Middle Ages were forced to engage in commerce with Christians who already

The geography of the book reveals a tripartite structure: (a) 15:21 deal with Israel, the struggle for achievement; (b) 15:22–18:27 deal with the Sea of Reeds; (c) 18:28–19:40 have their own story. In the end, this simple structure reveals a rich variety of the

Exodus is the first book of the Bible; its central theme informed the future and religion of the Jewish people. No less than 120 years of ethical and religious development significantly that it is a motivation for people's interests and rights, and a disadvantaged of society.

Examination of the Exodus indicates that the tradition has 140 years of development.

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וַיִּמְרְדּוּ אֶת־<sup>14</sup>  
בְּחֶמֶר וּבִלְבָּנִים  
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Naphtali, Gad and Asher. <sup>5</sup>The total number of persons that were of Jacob's issue came to seventy, Joseph being already in Egypt. <sup>6</sup>Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. <sup>7</sup>But the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them.

<sup>8</sup>A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup>And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. <sup>10</sup>Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they

**5. Jacob's issue** Literally, "that came out of Jacob's loin." In the Bible, the Hebrew for "thigh, loin," (*yerekh*) is a euphemism for the male organ of procreation.

**seventy** The number 70 in the Bible usually is not meant to be taken literally. It evokes the idea of totality, of being all-inclusive, on a large scale. Here, it is a round number.

**6.** The entire immigrant generation had died out by the time the oppression began.

**7.** This description of the Israelites' extraordinary fertility (in language that is also used in the Creation narrative of Gen. 1:20,28) suggests the concept of the community of Israel in Egypt as a miniature universe, self-contained and apart from the larger Egyptian society. It is the nucleus of a new humanity, spiritually speaking.

**the land** Not the whole of Egypt, but the area of Israelite settlement known as Goshen.

#### THE OPPRESSION (vv. 8-14)

The Israelites experience sudden cataclysmic change. The most reasonable explanation for the Israelites' change in fortune lies in the policies adopted by pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty (ca. 1304-1200 B.C.E.), especially by Ramses II (1290-1224 B.C.E.), who shifted Egypt's administrative and strategic center to the eastern delta of the Nile, where he undertook building projects that required a huge local labor force. "A new king" may also refer to a new dynasty.

**8. who did not know Joseph** He was ignorant of or indifferent to the extraordinary service that Joseph had rendered to Egypt and the crown.

Jacob had to wrestle and change to become Israel, and his children, the children of Jacob, also had to struggle to outgrow their less admirable traits to become the children of Israel.

**8. who did not know Joseph** Pharaoh knew that Joseph had saved Egypt, but did not care.

וְבוֹלֵן וּבְנֵימָן:<sup>4</sup> דָּן וְנִפְתָּלִי גָד וְאַשֶׁר:<sup>5</sup>  
וַיְהִי כָל־נֶפֶשׁ יִצְחָק יִרְדֵּי־יַעֲקֹב שִׁבְעִים  
נֶפֶשׁ וַיּוֹסֶף הָיָה בְּמִצְרַיִם:<sup>6</sup> וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף  
וְכָל־אָחִיו וְכָל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא:<sup>7</sup> וַיִּבְנִי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאֹד  
מְאֹד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:<sup>8</sup> פ

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ־חָדָשׁ עַל־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־  
יָדַע אֶת־יוֹסֵף:<sup>9</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עַמּוֹ הַזֶּה עַם  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וַעֲצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ:<sup>10</sup> הִבֵּה

**know** This is the first appearance in Exodus of the verb יָדַע, a key term in the Exodus narratives, occurring more than 20 times in the first 14 chapters. The usual rendering, "to know," hardly does justice to the richness of its meanings, which include emotions and relatedness as well as the intellect. The use of the word here to describe Pharaoh may anticipate "that you [Pharaoh] may know" in 9:29.

**9-10.** The historical situation that prompted his fears may plausibly be reconstructed if it is assumed that the text refers to Ramses II. The eastern delta of the Nile was vulnerable to penetration from Asia. In the middle of the 18th century B.C.E., it had been infiltrated by the Hyksos, an Egyptian term meaning "rulers of foreign lands." The Hyksos were a conglomeration of ethnic groups among whom Semites predominated. They gradually took over Lower Egypt and ruled it until their expulsion in the second half of the 16th century B.C.E. After that, the delta was neglected by the central government, although many Semites remained in the region. A revival of interest in that part of Egypt began with the reign of Haremheb (ca. 1330-1306 B.C.E.) and accelerated under his successors. It probably heightened sensitivity to the presence of a large body of foreigners in that strategic area.

**Israelite people** The unique Hebrew phrase *am b'nei yisra-el* (the nation of the descendants of Israel) is found only here. It tells us that the family of the patriarch Israel (Jacob) has become the people Israel and hence are a threat to the Egyptians.

**deal shrewdly** Literally, "wisely." To control

He did not let the information change his outlook (MRE 7:137). Through much of Jewish history, the people's well-being depended on the goodwill of a ruler. When the leadership changed, the fortunes of the Jewish community often changed as well. Pharaoh begins by



1 The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him

וַיִּקְרָא \* אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו

v. 1. א' זעירא לפי גוטחים מקובלים

### THE PRINCIPAL TYPES OF SACRIFICE (1:1-7:38)

Chapters 1-7 outline the biblical sacrificial system, as the Israelite priesthood administered it. The laws of the Torah did not permit Israelites to atone for intentional or premeditated offenses by bringing a sacrifice. There was no ritual remedy for such violations. In such instances, the law dealt directly with the offender, imposing punishments and acting to prevent recurrences. Gaining atonement through ritual sacrifice was restricted to situations in which a reasonable doubt existed about the willfulness of the offense. Even then, restitution was required if another person had suffered any loss or injury.

These chapters describe the basic kinds of sacrifices and list the several classes of offerings to be presented to God in the sanctuary. Chapters 1-5, addressed to individual Israelites and their leaders, recount what may be offered—including animals, birds, and grain. They establish the proper procedures for presenting the various sacrifices, a function performed primarily by priests but that occasionally required the participation of

those who brought the sacrifices. Chapters 6 and 7 constitute a professional manual for the priesthood and provide "an instruction" (a *torah*) for each of the major classes of sacrifices. In most cases, sacrifices served to remove the charges against the offenders, restoring them to a proper relationship with God and to membership in the religious community.

In most ancient societies it was believed that gods required food for their sustenance, relying on sacrifices for energy and strength. The Torah preserves the idiom common to ancient religions. However, it has a different understanding of the process: God desires sacrifices not out of the need for sustenance but out of longing for the devotion and fellowship of worshippers.

### THE BURNT OFFERING (*olah*) (1:1-17)

Chapter 1 deals with the sacrifice called "burnt offering" (*olah*), which was burned to ashes in its entirety (except for its hide) on the altar of burnt offerings. It was brought on various occasions, of-

Leviticus is a difficult book for a modern person to read with reverence and appreciation. Its main subject matter—animal offerings and ritual impurity—seems remote from contemporary concerns. Yet almost half of the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah are found in this book, the text with which young children traditionally began their Jewish education. Our concern in reading Leviticus should be more than historical ("this is what our ancestors used to believe and practice"). It should be an effort to understand the religious needs that were met by these practices in ancient times, needs that we still confront today, and the religious ideas that were taught in the process.

The modern temper tends to discount prescribed ritual in favor of spontaneous religious expression. Yet something in the human soul responds to ritual, whether it be the formality of a traditional wedding or the rituals of a sporting event or a public meeting. There is something comforting about the familiar, the recognizable, the predictable. There is something deeply moving about performing a rite

that is older than we are, one that goes back beyond the time of our parents and grandparents. At crucial times, it is important for us to know that we are "doing it right." There is power in the knowledge that we are doing what generations of people before us have done in similar situations, something that other people in other places are doing at the same time and in the same way. And rituals, including prescribed prayers, tell us what to do and say at times when we cannot rely on our own powers of inspiration to know what to do or say. "Ritual is a way of giving voice to ultimate values. Each of us needs a sense of holiness to navigate the relentless secularity of our lives" (Schorsch). For the Israelites of biblical times, it must have been gratifying to know what to do when they wanted to approach God at crucial moments of their lives, in need or in gratitude.

Discomfort with sacrificing animals as a way of worshiping God is hardly a modern phenomenon. The biblical prophets criticized the sacrificial system for its tendency to deteriorate into form without feeling. The Midrash

Popularly called *yikra*, "He called," Leviticus is known for its "instructions for the proper worship of God." This title defines the proper relationship with God.

The Hebrew word *yikra* means "to call." The content of the book is the most vital of the Torah. It was to express the relationship between God and the people. It was to express the very question of justice (6:6), who answers the question of justice. God more than a more specific question: "You your God, am a holy nation is

The content of the book is unified by the seven chapters: sacrifices under the law and as a commandment. The emergence of the Israelite nation by describing the sanctuary chapter 10 re-officiating by their death at 1

Leviticus 11 the Torah for Deut. 14). The verses 12 to 15, purifying impurity. Continuing the rites of Yom Kippur, cleansing of the people.

Leviticus 17 referred to as



from the Tent of Meeting, saying: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people; and say to them:

When any of you presents an offering of cattle to the LORD, he shall choose his offering from the herd or from the flock.

<sup>3</sup>If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall make his offering a male

ten together with other offerings. No part of it was eaten, either by priests or by donors. The *olah* could consist of male herd cattle (vv. 3–9), male flock animals (vv. 10–13), or certain birds (vv. 14–17). This range of choices—from expensive to inexpensive—enabled Israelites of modest means to participate in religious life, because they could present less costly offerings at the sanctuary.

The procedures for all burnt offerings were similar. The sacrifice was presented at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the donor laid his or her hand on the creature (thereby designating it for a particular rite), and blood from the sacrificed animal or fowl was dashed on the altar in appropriate ways.

**1. Tent of Meeting** Hebrew: *ohel mo-ed*, the portable tent structure that housed the Ark and the objects connected to the sacrificial system (see Exod. 25:1–27:21, Exod. 35–40). In other texts, this complex is called *mishkan*.

**2. the Israelite people** Hebrew: *b'nei yisra-el*, often translated literally as “the children of Israel.” “The Israelite people” reflects the concept of peoplehood basic to the biblical idea that nations, like families, are descendants of common ancestors with a common genealogy.

**offering** Hebrew: *korban*, which designates

plete. Each generation must find new ways to make God present in new situations that the Torah could not have foreseen.

**2. When any of you presents an offering** Literally, “When a man (*adam*) presents an offering.” May your offerings be like those of Adam, belonging to you and not stolen, offered solely to express your love of God and not to impress your neighbors (Lev. R. 2:7). The word for “offering” (*korban*) comes from the Hebrew root קרב, meaning “to bring close” or “to come close.” When we give a gift to someone we feel close to, we feel even closer for having given the gift. The *korban* both reflects and reinforces the Israelite’s bond to God. The point of

מֵאֵהָל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup>דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם  
אָדָם כִּי-יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קָרְבָן לַיהוָה מִן-  
הַבְּהֵמָה מִן-הַבָּקָר וּמִן-הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ  
אֶת-קָרְבָנְכֶם:  
<sup>3</sup>אִם-עֹלָה קָרְבָנוּ מִן-הַבָּקָר זָכָר תָּמִים

anything presented to God as one approaches the sanctuary. A *korban* could consist of artifacts and vessels, votive objects (brought in fulfillment of a vow), or sacrificial animals and fowl, as is the case here.

**cattle . . . herd . . . flock** In many of the Bible’s legal statements, a general category is given first, followed by particulars. Here the general category is livestock (*b’hemah*), further specified by the two usual classes: “from the herd (*bakar*) or from the flock (*tzon*).”

**3. If his offering is a burnt offering** The conditional word “if” (*im*) frequently introduces cultic laws (rules for organized religious worship) in the Book of Leviticus. Here it precedes each of the options available to those who offer sacrifices—the choice of which type of sacrifice to bring as well as the choice of which animal, fowl, or grain will constitute the offering. “Burnt offering” is designated by the Hebrew word *olah*, derived from the verb meaning “to ascend” (עלה). This offering may have been called *olah* because its flames and smoke “ascended” to heaven. The sacrifice, in its altered form, reaches God who was perceived as breathing its aromatic smoke, so to speak. Its purpose was to offer a gift to God to secure a favorable response. Frequently, the *olah*

the sacrifice is not to feed or to bribe God but to come close to God.

The opening words of the Hebrew text are singular, but the Torah soon shifts to plural. This reflects the essence of the religious experience. A Hasidic master taught that we enter the sanctuary as individuals but the experience of worship leads us to transcend our separateness and become part of the community.

**3.** The *olah* is purely a gift to God, with no specific benefit to the donor anticipated, except the satisfaction of having brought the offering to God. Whether brought out of a sense of reverence or out of a sense of guilt, it expresses the idea that everything we have comes

envisions God say their offerings to them before idols’ of biblical time worship, and the Israelite religion without it.

Maimonides believed this manner of worship that they were fed hungry without thoughts that God never offerings. After the Golden Calf, how ability of people to notion of the divine details of the sacrifice does not need our prayer, God does not we need to offer to. We recognize this: people to offer to accompany their prayer “The cult [i.e., offering] is not man’s kindness to man.”

Although Leviticus procedures for the offering of Psalms offers a emotional dimension. In Psalms, it becomes Israelite worship to God’s presence. “name, / by Your presence I will offer You a burnt house with burnt You” (Ps. 66:8, LORD, / . . . to live all the days of my tent with shouts).

The destructive the abrupt end of C.E. was traumatized the accustomed worship that time, however evolved as a place of prayer and study to the community of animal offerings, Jews learned religious deeds with to God that the day, hardly any I turn to the sacrifice. It may well be instinctive gesture

הכל המזבח  
 ליהוה: ס  
 10 ואם-מן-ה  
 מן-העצים ל  
 11 ושחט אתו  
 יהוה וזרקו ג  
 על-המזבח ג  
 ואת-ראשו ו  
 על-העצים  
 המזבח: 13 ו  
 והקריב ה  
 המזבח על  
 ליהוה: פ  
 שני 14 ואם מן-  
 והקריב מן-  
 את-קרבו: 5  
 ומלך אתו  
 ונמצה דמו  
 את-מראתו ו

Hebrew verb used  
 the nape of the  
 dition, the priest  
 which he severed

(an enlargement  
 too dirty to be  
 it was consigned  
 he entrails of an-  
 had to be washed  
 r, to ensure that  
 God (see v. 9).

ie, the Torah in-  
 is merely a fore-  
 future, even as  
 ticipation of the  
 sage that chill-  
 rry events, the  
 ie odor ... of the  
 s" and is moved  
 votion (Gen. R.

without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, for acceptance in his behalf before the LORD. <sup>4</sup>He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, in expiation for him. <sup>5</sup>The bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. <sup>6</sup>The burnt offering shall be flayed and cut up into sections. <sup>7</sup>The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and lay out wood upon the fire; <sup>8</sup>and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall lay out the sections, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar. <sup>9</sup>Its entrails and legs shall be washed with water, and the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on

was the first sacrifice in rites that included other offerings as well. In many instances, the *olah* was followed by the shared sacred meal (*zevah*).

**for acceptance in his behalf** The sacrifice is accredited to the donor as proper. When a sacrifice is not considered proper, the opposite is said of it: "not acceptable, discredited."

**before the LORD** This refers to a defined sacred area. Sometimes it was the zone beginning at the rear of the altar of burnt offerings in the sanctuary courtyard that continued to the interior of the tent; at times it was a large space near the entrance of the courtyard. Priestly law strictly limits sacrifice to a particular area and to the legitimate altar.

**4. He shall lay his hand** This symbolic act, "the laying on" of hands (known in later Hebrew as *s'mikhhah*), indicated ownership and served to assign a sacrificial animal or fowl solely for use in a specific rite. The offering, once assigned in this way, was sacred and belonged solely to God.

from God, given to us only on loan (Tanh. Tzav). It is called *olah* (from the root "to go up," as in *aliyah*) not only because it goes up in smoke but because it elevates the soul of the person who performs this act of generosity.

**without blemish** What renders an animal unfit in the sight of God does not disqualify the human being who offers it. The offering must be unblemished, as a sign of respect for God's altar and to discourage people from bringing

יקריבנו אל-פתח אהל מועד יקריב אתו  
 לרצנו לפני יהוה: 4 וסמך ידו על ראש  
 העלה ונרצה לו לכפר עליו: 5 ושחט  
 את-בן הבקר לפני יהוה והקריבו בני  
 אהרן הכהנים את-הדם וזרקו את-  
 הדם על-המזבח סביב אשר-פתח אהל  
 מועד: 6 והפשט את-העלה ונתח אתה  
 לנתחיה: 7 ונתנו בני אהרן הכהן אש  
 על-המזבח וערכו עצים על-האש:  
 8 וערכו בני אהרן הכהנים את הנתחים  
 את-הראש ואת-הפדר על-העצים אשר  
 על-האש אשר על-המזבח: 9 וקרבו  
 וכרעיו ירחץ במים והקטיר הכהן את-

**that it may be acceptable in his behalf** The *olah* sacrifice served as protection from God's wrath. Proximity to God was dangerous for both the worshipers and the priests, even in the absence of a particular offense. The favorable acceptance of the *olah* signaled God's willingness to be approached.

**5. against all sides of the altar** This refers to the altar of burnt offerings (mentioned by name in Lev. 4:7, and described in Exod. 27:1-8).

**6. shall be flayed and cut up into sections** Sacrificial animals usually were sectioned before being placed on the altar. The only exception was the paschal lamb. It was roasted whole (Exod. 12:9).

**8. with the head and the suet** The head of the animal had been severed. Suet is a type of hard organ fat.

**9. turn the whole into smoke** The burned parts of the sacrifice rise as smoke when they are consumed by the altar fire. Likewise, the word for

their lame and sick animals in a pretense of piety. An afflicted, broken soul, though, could bring an offering and might even be closer to God for having experienced pain and rejection. "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted" (Ps. 34:19). "You will not despise / a contrite and crushed heart" (Ps. 51:19, cited in Lev. R. 7:2).

**9. of pleasing odor to the LORD** The notion that God actually smells the aroma of the offering is rejected emphatically by rabbinic

## B'MIDBAR

**1** On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, saying:

*The Generation of the Exodus: The Wilderness Camp (1:1–10:10)*

### CENSUS IN THE WILDERNESS (1:1–54)

The march of the Israelites through the wilderness, from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, will take them through hostile environments, both natural and human. To meet those dangers, the people must be organized into a military camp, which requires a census.

**1. first day** In ancient times, the first day of each month was a holiday that provided an op-

## במדבר

**א** וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי בְּאַהֲל מוֹעֵד בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:

portunity to bring the people together for important announcements.

**wilderness** Hebrew: *midbar*; it does not mean "desert." Although the scant rainfall in the Sinai cannot support agriculture, it can provide adequate pasturage for flocks.

**The LORD spoke . . . in the Tent of Meeting** As Moses had been permitted to ascend to the

This fourth book of the Torah is known as "Numbers" in English, because of the census recorded in the opening chapter. In some Rabbinic texts it is called "The Book of the Census" (*Seifer Ha-P'kudim*). Its proper Hebrew designation, from its first significant word, is *B'midbar* (In the Wilderness), and it describes a people wandering through a spiritual as well as a geographic wilderness.

What must it have been like to experience the transition from the grand events of Sinai and the Sea of Reeds to the daily routine of the wilderness? The answer might lead us to the lesson that life is lived, not so much in the grand moments as in uncelebrated ordinary times. In Numbers, the focus of leadership passes from the prophet Moses to the priest Aaron, perhaps because the prophet issues great demands from the mountaintop, whereas the priest is involved with the people in the complexities and routines of daily life.

Throughout this book, the Israelites, who had experienced the Exodus, the crossing of the sea, and the revelation at Sinai, are described as a petulant, complaining people, constantly trying the patience of God and of Moses. In Hirsch's words, *B'midbar* contrasts "the people of Israel as it actually is" to "the ideal to which it was summoned in *Va-yikra*."

The generation of the wilderness dies off in the course of the 38 years covered by this book. At its conclusion, a new generation of Israelites who had never known slavery, a generation for whom the revelation at Sinai was tradition

rather than personal experience, stands poised to enter the Promised Land.

### CHAPTER 1

This first *parashah* deals mainly with two subjects: the census of Israelite adult males in preparation for the battles to reach and conquer the Promised Land, and the physical arrangement of the various tribes as they marched and as they camped.

**1. in the Tent of Meeting** "The LORD transferred the divine Presence from Sinai to the tabernacle, from a sanctuary established by God to one fashioned by the people Israel. The tabernacle was a portable Mount Sinai, the heavens transplanted and brought down to earth" (B. Jacob). The Israelites never felt lost in the wilderness because they were able to focus on the tabernacle at the center of their encampment.

The Jewish calendar arranges for these opening chapters of the Book of Numbers (which begin with God speaking to the people in the wilderness of Sinai) to be read every year on the *Shabbat* before the festival that celebrates the giving of the Torah, *Shavu-ot*. According to the Sages, this should remind us that the Torah was given in a wilderness, a place accessible to all, a site that belonged to no one people, and that it was given to a people with no real property and few possessions. "One should be as open as a wilderness to receive the Torah" (BT Ned. 55a). It is intimidating to open oneself to the demands of God, to a new and morally de-

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would enable  
bers now chro  
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and narrative  
lows: 1:1–10  
16–17 N, 18–  
27:12–23 N  
33:50–56, 34:

The princij  
bers is the Lor  
tion, God ke  
raelites, guide  
and provides l

Numbers r  
presence, whi  
and as fire by  
tionary center  
cle, exemplify  
between God  
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nations "that  
of this people  
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and when Yo  
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claims: "Lo, i

6 לְשִׁמְעוֹן שְׁלֹ  
 7 לְיְהוּדָה נַחֲשִׁ  
 8 לְיִשְׁשָׁכָר נַתָּו  
 9 לְזַבּוּלֹן אֶלִיָּא  
 10 לְבִנְיָמִן יוֹסֵף  
 לְאֶפְרַיִם אֶל  
 לְמְנַשֶּׁה גַּמְלִי  
 11 לְבִנְיָמִן אֲבִי  
 12 לְרֹדֵן אַחִיעֶזֶר  
 13 לְאֶשֶׁר פִּגְעִי  
 14 לְגֵר אֶלִיָּסָף  
 15 לְנַפְתָּלִי אֶח  
 16 אֶלֶה קְרִיאֵי קְרוֹ  
 אֲבוֹתָם רֹאשֵׁי אֶ  
 17 וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה וְאֵן  
 אֶשֶׁר נִקְבְּוּ בְּשֵׁם  
 הַקְּהִילֹו בְּאֶחָד  
 עַל־מִשְׁפְּחֹתָם  
 שְׁמוֹת מִבֶּן  
 לְגִלְגָּלֹתָם: 19 בָּא  
 וַיִּפְקְדֵם בְּמִדְבָּר  
 שְׁנֵי 20 וַיְהִי בְּנֵי־רֹאשׁ  
 לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבִי  
 לְגִלְגָּלֹתָם כָּל־יֹו  
 וּמַעֲלָה כָּל יֵצֵא  
 רֹאשׁוֹן שְׁשֶׁה וְ  
 מֵאוֹת: 22 פ  
 לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבִי  
 שְׁמוֹת לְגִלְגָּלֹתָם  
 שְׁנָה וּמַעֲלָה כָּל  
 לְמִטָּה שְׁמֵעוֹן

c., Targ. Jon.).

Reuben's title is given  
he heads the list even  
march (see 1 Chron.

2Take a census of the whole Israelite community by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head. 3You and Aaron shall record them by their groups, from the age of twenty years up, all those in Israel who are able to bear arms. 4Associated with you shall be a man from each tribe, each one the head of his ancestral house.

5These are the names of the men who shall assist you:

From Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur.

Presence of God atop the mountain, so might he enter the Tent of Meeting—a Mount Sinai on earth, so to speak. The Lord's voice came from within, from between the two cherubim facing each other atop the Ark.

2. The census described here follows the procedures of censuses in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. It even uses the same terminology. The census was indispensable for military conscription and for any government levy on persons or property. From 10:11, it is clear that the census was completed in less than 20 days.

3. *twenty years up* The age of conscription in ancient Israel. No upper limit is given here.

manding way of life. The Torah portrays the people Israel as periodically wishing they were back in the predictable, morally undemanding servitude of Egypt. Yet Israel's willingness to accept the Torah, to be "as open as a wilderness" to let the Torah's morality fill the moral vacuum in the lives of former slaves, was the essential first step in God's remaking the world. For the first time, God's world will contain a model people, guided by the Torah to live a God-oriented life.

The wilderness, untouched by human settlement, offered a contrast to Egypt, which was dominated by monuments fashioned by human hands. Thus it was a fitting stage for God's being proclaimed sovereign of the world. We may even see a parallel between the revelation at Sinai (when God imposed moral order in the midst of a wilderness) and the creation of the world (when God imposed natural order on chaos).

2. *Take a census* Literally, "lift the head." This prompted the comment, "Let the Israel-

2 שְׁאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עֵדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹת  
 כָּל־זָכָר לְגִלְגָּלֹתָם: 3 מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה  
 וּמַעֲלָה כָּל־יֵצֵא צָבָא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל תִּפְקְדוּ  
 אֹתָם לְצִבְאוֹתָם אֹתָהּ וְאֶהְרֹן: 4 וְאִתְּכֶם  
 יִהְיוּ אִישׁ אִישׁ לְמִטָּה אִישׁ רֹאשׁ לְבֵית־  
 אֲבוֹתָיו הִוא:

5 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמְדוּ  
 אִתְּכֶם  
 לְרֹאשׁוֹן אֶלִיָּצוּר בֶּן־שְׁדִיאוּר:

*able to bear arms* The previous statement with no age limit is now qualified.

5-15. Tribal lists throughout the Bible may vary in the names and the order of the tribes, but they share in common the concern for preserving the number 12. These lists can be divided roughly into two groups: those that include the tribe of Levi and those that omit it. All the tribal lists in Numbers fall into the latter category, because the tribe of Levi was exempt from military conscription.

*These are the names* The census supervisors, mandatory according to verse 4, are named by God.

ites hold their heads high in pride as they contemplate who their ancestors were" (Menaḥem Naḥum of Chernobyl). Although the purpose of the census was purely functional, mustering the Israelites for battle, the Midrash uncovers another dimension to it, by comparing God to a person who had a store of precious jewels. From time to time, this individual would take out the jewels and count them to take pleasure in their beauty and to be reassured that they were all safely there (Num. R. 4:2). For Ramban, the census testifies to the miracle of Israel's survival and increase despite the efforts of Pharaoh and Amalek and the rigors of the wilderness journey. He points to the enduring lesson of Jewish history: We have not succumbed in spite of devastating losses and persecution. Levi Yitzḥak of Berdichev connects the final total of 603,550 Israelites (v. 46) to a tradition that there are 603,550 letters in the Torah. Just as the absence of one letter renders a Torah scroll unfit for use, the loss of even one Jew prevents Israel from fulfilling its divine mission.

## D'VARIM

**1** These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan.— Through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab,<sup>2</sup> it is eleven days from

### A UNIQUE BOOK (1:1–5)

The first five verses give the time and place of the delivery of Moses' farewell address.

**1. These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel** Apart from some connecting passages and the narratives about Moses' last days, the speaker in Deuteronomy is Moses, not an anonymous narrator as in the previous books of the Torah. Even the narratives and laws appear as parts of addresses in which Moses reviews the past 40 years and prepares the Israelites for the future.

**on the other side of the Jordan** In Transjordan, east of the river Jordan. Although Moses

## דברים

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל- כל-ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בערבה מול סוף בין-פארן ובין-תפל ולבן וחצרת ודי זקב: <sup>2</sup> אחד עשר יום מהרב

never crossed over to the western side of the Jordan, this is written from the point of view of one already in the Land.

**the wilderness** The text locates this wilderness in the long narrow depression, or rift, that continues the Jordan Valley south of the Dead Sea down to the Gulf of Elat. This rift is known as the 'Arabah to this day.

**2.** It was an 11-day journey from Horeb (Mount Sinai) to Kadesh-barnea, the gateway to the Promised Land (see vv. 19–20). If the Israelites had trusted in God, this verse tells us, they could have entered the land immediately, without wandering in the wilderness for 38 years.

## CHAPTER 1

Some of Deuteronomy's passages, ranging from the Decalogue to setting aside cities of refuge, duplicate contents found elsewhere in the Torah. But 70 of the approximately 100 laws in Deuteronomy are not found in the earlier books. These laws deal mostly with arrangements for living in the Land and with the new emphasis on a central sanctuary to be designated by God. Moses is telling the Israelites things they will need to know when they settle the Land, things they had no need to know before.

One way of viewing this book is to see it as divided into three parts. In the first part, Moses reviews the history of the people's wandering, emphasizing Israel's lack of fidelity and gratitude. This is followed by a legal section, and finally by Moses' farewell address. Hirsch detects a tone of urgency throughout Moses' remarks, prompted, he suspects, by the concern that when the families of Israel are no longer camped around the tabernacle but are living each on its own property, the benign influence of God's Presence will be lost.

**1.** Moses began his career by pleading that he was not "a man of words" (*ish d'varim*, Exod. 4:10). After 40 years of teaching Torah, however, he has become an eloquent "man of

words." The change is not due to improved rhetorical skills but to his enthusiastic commitment to his message (Deut. R. 1:1).

The Midrash, noting the similar sound of *d'varim* (words) and *d'vorim* (bees), comments that Moses' criticisms of the people are like the stings of a bee. A bee's sting hurts the person stung but it hurts the bee more, causing its death. Moses dies at the end of Deuteronomy because criticizing Israel has taken so much out of him (Deut. R. 1:6). This would imply that we should judge the validity of criticism not only by its factual accuracy but by how much it pains the critic to say it. The harsh criticisms of Moses are spoken with love, in contrast to the praises of Balaam, spoken as flattery.

**to all Israel** Including Moses himself. His criticisms gain credibility because he criticizes his own behavior as well.

**1–2.** Why list all these place-names? To avoid shaming Israel excessively, lest they lose all hope of ever pleasing God. For Moses had been inclined to remind Israel of all the times they exasperated and disappointed God; instead, he referred only to the locations where those events occurred (Rashi). Or perhaps Moses is recalling all the places God and Israel have been together, as reminiscing lovers might do.

Deuteronomy h: *D'varim*, short f "(The Book of) from its opening "Repetition of tl "Deuteronomy") of five retrospect Moses addressed fore his death (1 32, 33), plus twc (chaps. 31, 34). discourse, in wh the people comr God at Mount S

Several theme Among the Tor: orous and clear of the ardent, ex God (4:32–40, love, justice, anc Israel (4:7), but sense; only Go dwells in the san

This book st God and Israel, tablished with tl and in Moab, it Israel enters its l

Deuteronomy land of Israel, w and righteousness and enjoying H (4:5–8, 7:12–12 conditional (11 pends on main God's social and a divine gift to justice and their ness (4:5–8). Tl most developed for the welfare c

בְּעֶרְבָה בְּהַר  
הַיָּם אֶרֶץ הַנּוֹבָה  
הַגְּדֹל נִהְר־פָּרוֹ  
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ

CEED

romised Land. Here  
is meant; the eastern  
rt of Seir-Edom. The  
ebrew נֹבָה (dry), re-  
ne region. Its average  
the northern end and  
d.

rranean.

The translation un-  
erring to one part of  
acoast, especially the  
nd part of the Jordan  
Num. 13:29). Later  
call Phoenicia "Ca-  
of the Hebrew text,  
hrase refers to all the  
part of the verse, and  
non biblical meaning  
d (e.g., Deut. 11:30;  
corresponds to the use  
gyptian sources when  
ion of Canaan under

Lebanon and Anti-  
including the Bekaa  
not to the entire ter-

part of the Euphrates  
n the Lebanon range,  
r of the river in north-  
therefore, represents  
the Promised Land

d's gift of the land to  
analogous to a sover-  
l servant. In an ancient

Hittite king makes a  
assal: "See, I gave you  
nd; occupy it."

God refers to Himself  
sing the first person in  
tical variation is com-  
her ancient Near East-  
to His oath to the pa-

Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir route.—<sup>3</sup>It was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses addressed the Israelites in accordance with the instructions that the LORD had given him for them, <sup>4</sup>after he had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth [and] Edrei. <sup>5</sup>On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this Teaching. He said:

<sup>6</sup>The LORD our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying: You have stayed long enough at this mountain. <sup>7</sup>Start out and make your way to the

**Horeb** Deuteronomy's name for Mount Sinai. Situated somewhere in the Sinai peninsula, its precise location remains unknown.

**Kadesh-barnea** Sometimes called simply Kadesh, it was near the western border of Seir-Edom, on the southern boundary of the Promised Land, in essence the gateway to it.

**by the Mount Seir route** Seir, or Edom, the southernmost of the Transjordanian kingdoms, extended westward into the highlands of the eastern Negeb. "(Mount) Seir" usually refers to this part of Edom.

**3. eleventh month** Later known as *Sh'vat*, which falls in January and February. This verse merges Deuteronomy into the chronologic framework of the previous books of the Torah.

**4. Ashtaroth [and] Edrei** These two cities

הָרָף הַר־שֵׁעִיר עַד קֶדֶשׁ בְּרִנְעָ: <sup>3</sup>וַיְהִי  
בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂתֵּי־עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ  
בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
כָּל־אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים: <sup>4</sup>אֶחָדִי  
הִכְתּוּ אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב  
בְּחֶשְׁבֹן וְאֶת עֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן אֲשֶׁר־יוֹשֵׁב  
בְּעֶשְׂתֵּרֶת בְּאֶדְרֵעִי: <sup>5</sup>בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאֶרֶץ  
מוֹאָב הוֹאִיל מֹשֶׁה בָּאֵר אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה  
הַזֹּאת לֵאמֹר:

<sup>6</sup>יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ דִּבֶּר אֵלֵינוּ בְּהָרָב לֵאמֹר  
רַב־לָכֶם שָׁבַת בְּהַר הַזֶּה: <sup>7</sup>פָּנּוּ | וְסַעֲוּ  
לָכֶם וּבְאוּ הָרָה אֶמְרִי וְאֶל־כָּל־שְׂכֵנֵינוּ

were twin seats of government for Og, king of Bashan. Both places are mentioned in Egyptian documents and in a Ugaritic text.

**5. in the land of Moab** In the steppes of Moab, so called because the area belonged to Moab before it was conquered by Sihon (see Num. 21:29), from whom the Israelites wrested it.

**this Teaching** Hebrew: *ha-Torah*, derived from "*horah*" (teach, instruct). "*Torah*" refers to rules of civil and ritual procedures, moral exhortation, and instructive narrative as well as prophetic teaching and reproach. Moses frequently refers to Deuteronomy as "*this Torah*." In later times the term "*Torah*" was applied to the entire Pentateuch and, ultimately, to the totality of the Jewish religious tradition.

### Moses' First Discourse (1:6–4:40)

Moses' first discourse serves as a prologue to the book. It emphasizes that the people's fate depends on their response to God's commands and promises. This address reflects the importance of his-

tory as the basis of Israelite religion. Religious belief in the Bible is based mostly on Israel's experience of God rather than on theological speculation.

**5. to expound this Teaching** He interpreted the Torah in many languages, so that future generations of Jews in many lands would have access to the Torah in a language and in terms that they could understand (*S'fat Emet*). There is holiness in the Hebrew language—"the holy tongue" (*I'shon ha-kodesh*)—in and of itself. It is also necessary, though, for people to learn what God requires of them in a language that they can understand.

**6. You have stayed long enough** There is a danger that the people Israel will grow too comfortable where they are and will be reluctant to move on into the unknown. There are times when our fulfilment as individuals or as a group requires us to leave the familiar and move on toward a goal.