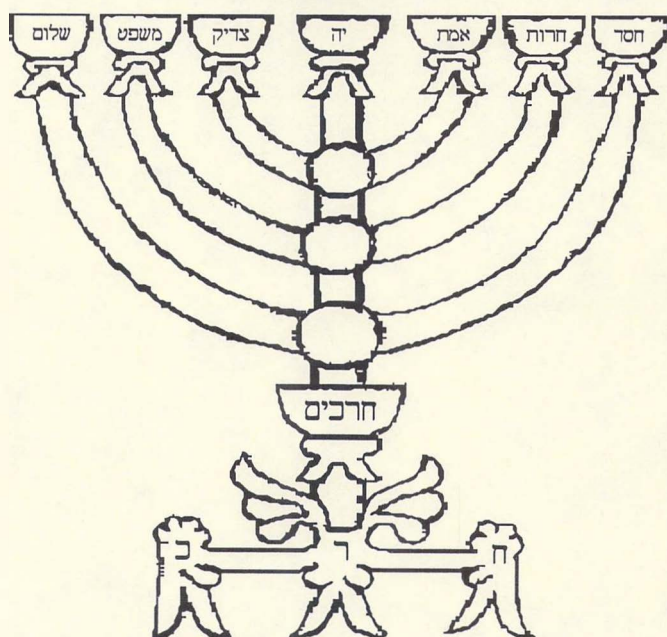


Kharakim

Shirim

shel

Parshiot



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YOU MAY RULE OVER IT*

הָלוֹא אִם-תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת
וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לִפְתַּח חַטָּאת רֵבֵץ
וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בוֹ:

If you do good, shall it not be lifted up?
And if you do not do good, sin reposes at the door;
and to you is its desire, but you may rule over it.

If you do good—When we are angry because we are accountable for the well-being of those around us (4:9) and for the consequences of our own behavior, and we contemplate further losing ourselves to assuage our feelings of estrangement from the Holy One, we are given a choice between atonement or greater alienation from the Divine Image that has been implanted within us. *Shall it not be lifted up*—Our “gift” or “sacrifice” that is lifted up is our choice to use our free will to do the will of God, which is what allows us to be “truly free” (Malbim). If we act with kindness and justice towards others, shall our gift not bring us closer to God? If we “improve” ourselves, surely we shall be atoned, our earlier missteps will be forgiven (Rashi), and we will again be at one with God. *And if you do not do good*—If we do not improve ourselves once we have failed to do right, we will further wrong ourselves and others. For once we waylay ourselves, walking away from the path of righteousness, we are ever more likely to move further away, “for such is the way of the evil inclination” (Sforno). *Sin reposes at the door*—It does not lurk, “lying in wait” to attack us at a moment of weakness. On the contrary, “. . . It remains quietly behind your door. It does not come in to you by itself, uninvited. . . . you must in the first instance invite it in, set a chair for it at your table. . . . All its desire is that you should master it and direct it” (S.R. Hirsch). *But you may rule over it*—The divine gift of sensuality has been given to us not that it should master and direct us, but that we “should master and direct it,” so that we “not suppress or kill it, but תִּמְשָׁל, regulate it, rule over it, and direct it” (S.R. Hirsch). Because the Divine Image is implanted in each of us, we may draw upon that image in creating the image of ourselves that we seek to fulfill (Sforno). Our “spiritual salvation lies fully within” us (N. Leibowitz). We may thus recognize our misstep and make it right; we may choose life over death; and, if we do so, we can make God present in our world.

* Genesis 4:7 (in Bereshit)

TWO BY TWO*

Am E7 Am
שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם בָּאוּ אֶל־נֹחַ
Am Dm
אֶל הַתְּבֵה זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה
E7 Am Dm
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ
Am E7 Am
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ

Two by two they came to Noah
Into the ark, male and female
as God commanded Noah

Two by Two—As one who struggled to be righteous in his generation—“Noah needed [God’s] support to uphold him [in righteousness]” (Rashi 6:9)—Noah’s task was to save and preserve all life on earth. *They came to Noah*—The hand of God, guiding all life to the ark, was joined to the hand of Noah, so the task was not his alone. In this, “the Word of God which administers nature . . . [was] the same which gave His Law to Man to be observed by his own free will . . .” (S.R. Hirsch). *Into the ark*—Noah was to build on earth, according to God’s design, the instrumentality of divine purpose and redemption. *Male and female*—Both would be necessary to repopulate and recreate the world by supporting, challenging, and holding one another accountable. *As God commanded Noah*—Although he doubted and delayed until the waters rose, Noah nonetheless bent his heart and mind to the divine will.

*

Genesis 7:9 (in Noach)

WALK BEFORE ME*

EmAm Em
 [אֲנִי־אֵל, אֲנִי־אֵל] אֲנִי־אֵל שְׂדֵי
 EmAm
 [הִתְהַלֵּךְ, הִתְהַלֵּךְ] הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי
 Em B7 Em Am
 [וְהָיָה, וְהָיָה] וְהָיָה תְּמִים:
 Em Am
 אֲנִי־אֵל שְׂדֵי
 Em Am
 הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי
 Em B7
 וְהָיָה תְּמִים:
 Am Em
 אֲנִי־אֵל שְׂדֵי
 Am Em
 הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי
 Em B7
 וְהָיָה תְּמִים:

I am God Almighty—
 Walk before Me
 and you will be perfect.

I am God Almighty—I am “sufficient” such that “even the smallest particle of matter” is stamped within by my sufficiency, which sets the “limit of its activity”—and you can do My will “in spite of opposition . . . being led from within yourself” (S.R. Hirsch). I created you with the will to choose and the strength to walk alone in my paths. *Walk before me*—“Gaze at Me, to know My ways, to the full extent of your capacity” (Sforno). I am “behind” you, guiding you with the light of My Torah; you can walk “before” Me, worshipping Me and spreading My Torah in the world. *And you will be perfect*—“Attach yourself to My service” (Rashi). When you commit yourself to live in My blessings and commandments, not abusing or ignoring them, you will begin to approach My perfection.

* Genesis 17:1 (in Lech Lecha)

KEEP THE WAY*

Am E7 Am
כִּי יִדְעֶתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה
Am E7 Am
אֶת־בְּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו
Am Dm
וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה
Am E7
לְעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט

For I have known him, so that he may command
his children and his household after him,
that they may keep the way of Adonai,
to do righteousness and justice. . . .

For I have known him—God and Abraham were intimate, sharing love and affection. There was a “special degree of intimacy” between them (N. Sarna) because of the “special consideration” given to one who places him or herself “completely under the guidance of God” (S.R. Hirsch). *So that he might command*—The divine aim was that Abraham should be the surrogate of the Almighty, guiding all those within his sphere of responsibility, on whose behalf he was able to act. *His children and his household after him*—To direct them and, through them, all future generations on the path of the one true God. “The generation must be born and brought up not to a ‘belief in God,’ but to ‘fulfilling His commandments’” (S.R. Hirsch). *That they may keep the way of Adonai*—That is, “living humanely and benevolently” in community, which must be based on a “pure moral life before God. . . . [since] a generation that is degenerating morally has no social future. . . .” (S.R. Hirsch) *To do righteousness and justice*—Which is to say, that they—like Abraham and Sarah—practice and teach that what “God has given everybody the right [to expect]” takes precedence over what “a person has the right to demand from another. . . . so that the poor can stand up before the rich, and . . . the rich consider themselves merely as administrators of a treasury which belongs to the poor” (S.R. Hirsch).

* Genesis 18:19 (in Vayaera)

A LITTLE WATER*

וַיָּרֵץ הָעֶבֶד לִקְרֹאתָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר
הַגְּמִיאֵינִי נָא מְעַט־מַיִם מִכַּדְּךָ.
וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂתֵה אֲדֹנָי וַתִּמְהַר
וַתִּרְדַּךְ כַּדָּה עַל־יָדָהּ וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ:
וַתִּכַּל לְהַשְׁקֵתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר

גַּם לַגְּמְלֵיךָ אֶשְׂאֵב עַד אִם־כָּלוּ לְשֵׁתָת:

And the servant ran to meet her, and said:
Please give me a drink, a little water from your pitcher.
And she said, drink my lord; and she hurried
and she let down her pitcher on her hand, and she gave him to drink.
And done giving him drink she said:
Also for your camels I will draw until they they finish drinking.

And the servant ran to meet her—The servant of God hurried to find the young woman to whom his faith had guided him. And said: Please give me a drink, a little water from your pitcher—He tested her character, her compassion for suffering. And she said, drink my lord; and she hurried—She responded without thinking, as if to share with a stranger in need was the most natural of acts, hurrying to be of assistance. And she let down her pitcher on her hand, and she gave him to drink—Recognizing the immediacy of his need, she did not delay him with conversation or questions. And done giving him drink she said: Also for your camels I will draw—She waited until he finished to avoid the choking that sometimes occurs when “the windpipe acts before the gullet (Taanit 5b)” (Sforno). And she had compassion for the animals as well. Until they finish drinking—She had “full knowledge of the great labor involved” in watering the ten camels (N. Sarna), which required many trips to the well and back to the watering trough. But she recognized that their thirst was as great a trial to them as her own was to her.

* Genesis 24:17-19 (in Chayai Sarah)

RIVKA LOVED YAAKOV*

Am
וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֵשָׂו
E7
כִּי־צִיד בְּפִיו
Am
וְרִבְקָה אָהָבָת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב:

Now Yitzhak loved Esav
because of venison [he put] in his mouth;
and Rikva loved Yaakov.

Now Yitzhak loved Esav—In his firstborn son, Esav, a rapist (Baba Bathra 16b) who affected piety with cunning speech (Genesis Rabbah 63:12), Yitzhak saw only the practical strengths that he himself lacked, and he knew the need his descendants would have of them. *And Rikva loved Yaakov*—A prophetic vision (Genesis Rabbah 67:9) allowed Rivka to see that Torah is the supreme source of strength, and to ensure the well-being of Yaakov Avinu because he was dedicated to its service.

* Genesis 25:28 (in Toldot)

ADONAI IS IN THIS PLACE*

Dm A7 Dm
אָבֵן יֵשׁ יְהוָה בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
Dm Gm
וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי:
Dm A7
וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי:
וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר

מִהֲנוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם־בֵּית אֱלֹהִים
וְזֶה שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם:

Surely Adonai is in this place
and I did not know it.
And he was afraid, and said:
How full of awe is this place.
This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gate of heaven.

Surely Adonai is in this place—God is present even here, in this wilderness (barren of Torah), so it too must be transformed into a sanctuary for the service of deeds to the Holy One. *And I did not know it*—If I had known that God is everywhere, I would not have been sleeping but awake to the divine will. *And he was afraid*—He now understood that each human being was responsible for the “Glory of God on earth” (S.R. Hirsch). *And said: How full of awe is this place*—That is, of “understanding,” according to the Targum (Rashi). *This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven*—“The . . . [gate of Heaven] where angels ascend to and descend from heaven” (N. Sarna), that is, where the means of communication between God and humankind are particularly accessible and powerful. He had come to see that the house of God, where the presence of God is palpable, is such that the angels must find God among humankind; and every home in which God is to be found is thus a “Gate of Heaven, a gate through which we come to God, [and] accordingly, the most consummate union of the earthly with the heavenly” (S.R. Hirsch).

* Genesis 28:16-17 (in Vayetze)

YOU HAVE STRIVEN WITH GOD*

A7 Dm
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יִעֲקֹב
Dm Gm
יֹאמֶר עוֹד שְׁמִי כִּי אֶם־יִשְׂרָאֵל
A7 Dm Gm
כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אָנָשִׁים
Dm
וַתִּבְּלָ:

And he said: Not Jacob
shall your name will be called anymore, but Israel;
for you have striven with God and with men,
and you have prevailed.

And he said [to him]: Jacob was wrestling with an incarnation of the evil that had been and was to be the “orb of empire, the sceptre and sword,” in which human consciousness and mind are confused by a darkness like that of the blackest night (S.R. Hirsch 32:25). *Not Jacob shall your name be called anymore*—You are no longer to be defined by where you began, at your brother’s heel, but by how you have chosen to live. *But Israel*—Your name shall tell of your struggle with the divine and against evil. *For you have striven with God and with men*—Including, now, the “prince of Esav” (Bereshit Rabbah), who represents the animating “spiritual essence” of empire against the spirit (N. Krochmal). You have persisted against all obstacles, endeavoring in spirit and flesh. *And you have prevailed*—You are blessed and will be healed from your wounds to struggle again and again—and “you will survive all the nations” (Sforno).

* Genesis 32:29 (in Vayishlach)

SHE IS MORE RIGHTEOUS THAN I*

Dm Gm A7 Dm
וַיְהִי בְּמִשְׁלַשׁ חֳדָשִׁים וַיִּגַּד לְיְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר
Dm Am Dm Gm
זָנְתָה תָמָר בְּלֶתֶךָ וְגַם הֵנָּה הָרָה לְזִנוּנִים
Dm Gm A7
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה הוֹצִיאוּהָ וְתִשְׂרָף:
Dm A7 Dm Gm
הִוא מוֹצֵאת וְהִיא שְׁלָחָה אֶל־חַמְיָהּ לֵאמֹר
Dm Gm A7
לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אֵלֶּה לּוֹ אָנֹכִי הָרָה
Dm A7 Dm Gm
וַתֹּאמֶר הַכֹּרֶנָּה לְמִי הַחֲתָמָת וְהַפְּתִילִים וְהַמָּטָה הָאֵלֶּה:
Dm Gm A7
וַיֹּכֵר יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר צְדָקָה מִמֶּנִּי
Dm A7 Dm Gm
כִּי־עַל־כֵּן לֹא־נִתְּתִיהָ לְשָׁלָה בְּנִי וְלֹא־יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ:

And it came to pass about three months after, it was told to Judah, saying:
Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot and, also, she is pregnant by harlotry.

And Judah said, bring her out and let her be burned.

When she was brought out she sent to her father-in-law, saying:

By the man whose these are, I am pregnant.

And she said, discern please, whose are these—the signet and the cords and the staff?

And Judah recognized [them] and said, she is more righteous than I
inasmuch as I did not give her to Shelah my son.

And he did not again lie with her.

And it came to pass about three months after, it was told to Judah, saying, Tamar your daughter-in-law, has played the harlot and, also, she is pregnant by harlotry—Both of her husbands, Judah's first and second sons—Er, who practiced anal sex so Tamar would not become pregnant and lose her beauty, and Onan, who, as yavam, did not want to father a child that would not be his and thus practiced coitus interruptus (Yevamot 34b)—were killed by God for their sins and left Tamar childless. Tamar had tricked Judah into playing the yavam by disguising herself as a harlot. And Judah said, bring her out and let her be burned—As the family head, Judah had the “power of life and death” over Tamar, even though she lived with her parents; because as a shomeret yavam (“awaiting the levir”), “any extralevirate sexual relationship would have been adulterous,” carrying the death penalty (N. Sarna). What Tamar had done was considered incest in the Torah—although it was an ancient custom for the widow of the dead man to be married by the brother, or the father, or the nearest relative in the family. When she was brought out she sent to her father-in-law—Although being taken out to be burnt, “her heart was strong as a lion” (Sforno). Saying: By the man whose these are, I am pregnant. And she said, discern please, whose are these—the signet and the cords and the staff? [which he had left with her as a pledge until he sent her payment]—She had it within her power to shame Judah but instead left it to his own conscience to acknowledge that he had fathered the child, even at the risk of her own life. Thus the Talmud teaches: “It is better for a man that he should cast himself into a fiery furnace than he should put his fellow to shame in public. From whence do we know this? From Tamar, of whom it says, When she was brought forth etc.” (Berachot 43b) And Judah recognized [them] and said, she is more righteous than I inasmuch as I did not give her to Shelah my [third] son.—He had it within his power to deny paternity and to avoid public humiliation but did not. And instead he affirmed that what she had done was for a good purpose, acceptable to God, because “a holy spirit was enkindled within her” (Genesis Rabbah 85:9). And he did not again lie with her—Although some [commentators] say, the meaning is that he did not cease from knowing her [sexually].

* Genesis 38:24-26 (in Vayashev)

GOD WILL ANSWER*

A7 Dm
וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף אֶת־פַּרְעֹה
Dm Gm
לֵאמֹר בְּלִעְדֵי
Dm Gm
אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה
Dm A7
אֶת־שְׁלוֹם פַּרְעֹה:

And Joseph answered Pharaoh,
saying: [It is] not in me;
God will answer,
the welfare of Pharaoh.

And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying—He had the opportunity to contrive a self-serving answer but did not. [It is] not in me—He removed from himself credit for the wisdom he was about to impart. He had matured from childish pride to a recognition of his role as a vessel of God. God will answer—Joseph then became the teacher of Pharaoh (41:39), who had initially perceived him as an expert “dream interpreter” (41:15) rather than an instrument of divine providence. The welfare of Pharaoh—Joseph teaches pharaoh about the one God who is concerned for all humankind (and creation) and who does not exclude those in power or the millions who are affected by their decisions. [Joseph here is a “light to the nations.”]

* Genesis 41:16 (in Miketz)

I WILL ALSO SURELY BRING YOU UP AGAIN*

A7 Dm
אֲנֹכִי אֶרְדּוּ עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם
Dm Gm
אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַם-עֲלֶיךָ
Dm A7 Dm Gm
וַיֹּסֶף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל-עֵינֶיךָ:

I will go down with you to Egypt;
and I will also surely bring you up again;
and Joseph shall put his hand upon your eyes.

I will go down with you to Egypt—“I shall protect you both on the journey and in Egypt” (N. Sarna). However abandoned we feel in the narrow places in our lives, when the pressures are greatest and our hopes are shattered, God is present for us—“the God of Israel is not bound to a particular place” (N. Leibowitz in the name of M. Buber). *And I will also surely bring you up again*—The promise that we will be brought up again is “both personal and national” (N. Sarna). When we are in that place of our greatest trial, surrounded by darkness and fear, it is through God that as individuals and a community we will can revive our courage and find our way to the light. *And Joseph shall put his hand upon your eyes*—We shall again find those whose care and kindness will sustain us and heal our spirits.

* Genesis 46:4 (in Vayigash)

I WILL MAKE YOU FRUITFUL*

A7 Dm
הִנְנִי מְפַרְקֶה וְהִרְבֵּיתֶךָ
Dm Gm
וְנָתַתִּיךָ לְקֹהֵל עַמִּים
Dm Gm
וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
Dm A7
לְזֶרְעֶךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֶחָזֶת עוֹלָם:

Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you;
and make of you an assembly of peoples;
and I will give this land
to your seed after you for an everlasting possession.

Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you—It is I who will give you the capacity to increase and fructify the earth. And make of you an assembly of peoples—“... The characteristic mission [of Israel is] that, in spite of their being united into one completely similar body of men [and women] by their all having one common spiritual and moral mission and outlook on life, they are nevertheless to consist of a diversity of tribes” (S. R. Hirsch), and thus we will be a unity in our diversity, strengthened by our differences. And I will give this land to your seed after you for an everlasting possession—“Only God can give an ‘everlasting possession’” (N. Sarna), so it will be our inheritance insofar as we live in the commandments and do not divide ourselves with causeless hatred.

* Genesis 48:4 (in Vayechi)

GET YOU TO YOUR BURDENS*

A7 Dm
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
Dm Gm
לָמָּה מִשָּׂה וְאַהֲרֹן
Dm Gm
תִּפְרִיעוּ אֶת־הָעַם מִמַּעֲשָׂיו
Dm A7
לָכוּ לְסִבְלַת־יְכֹם:

And the king of Egypt said to them:
Wherefore Moses and Aaron
do you cause the people to break loose from their work?
Get you to your burdens.

And the king of Egypt said to them—As with all authorities who are by their own lights unaccountable to higher authority, whether human or divine, he was indifferent to the demand of God that he had just heard through the righteous words of the prophets Moses and Aaron. Wherefore Moses and Aaron [?]—By what authority do you challenge my authority, which is unassailable? I recognize no higher power than myself, no higher purposes than my own. *[Wherefore]* . . . *do you cause the people to break loose from their work*—“Up till now the people know nothing other than they exist under the law, that hard labor is the natural lot to which they are born” (S.R. Hirsch). They are mine, my possessions, to serve me and my law; and they may have no other purpose or master. (As I have already said [5:2], your God means nothing to me.) *Get you to your burdens*—“The implication was: the people are busy with their tasks, and have made no appeals or requests. . . . You are only distracting them with your agitation” (N. Leibowitz). You too are subject to my will and must stop agitating the people to rebel against my power, must stop stirring them up with visions of a God of justice and with hopes of freedom from their burdens.

* Exodus 5:4 (in Shemot)

ONE LAW*

E7 Am
תּוֹרָה אֶחָת יִהְיֶה

לְאֶזְרָח וְלִגֵּר

Am

הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

Am Dm
תּוֹרָה אֶחָת יִהְיֶה

E7

לְאֶזְרָח וְלִגֵּר

Am

הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

One law it will be
to the homeborn and to the alien
who sojourns among you.

One law it will be to the homeborn and to the alien who sojourns among you—When one accepts the law and, in turn, is accepted as a Jew by a bet din (rabbinic court), complete equality is achieved with those who came out of Egypt and stood at Sinai—according to the law: “The born heathen receives full and complete equality of rank as soon as he [or she] enrolls into the Jewish bond with God” (S.R. Hirsch, 12:48). It is forbidden to call attention to Jews who have chosen to live by the law of Israel, separating them from those born to it; it is forbidden to remind them of a prior life, lifting up their pain or shame, or to withhold any honor, privilege, or kindness because of their past. There are no “converts” in Judaism, only Jews.

* Exodus 12:49 (in Bo)

WHY DO YOU CRY OUT TO ME?*

A7 Dm
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
Dm Gm
מִהַתְצַעֵק אֵלַי
Dm Gm
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
Dm A7
וַיֵּצְאוּ:

And the Lord said to Moses:
Why do you cry out to me?
Speak to the children of Israel
and they will go forward.

And the Lord said to Moses—God speaks to Moses because he too, not only the children of Israel, is crying out, fearful not of the Egyptians but that the leaders will keep the people from following him. Why do you cry out to me?—God rebukes Moses for remaining immobilized, ‘prolonging in prayer’ (Rashi) while the children of Israel are threatened by the pursuing Egyptians, waiting passively for God’s salvation. Speak to the children of Israel and they will go forward—Your lack of confidence in their courage and their leaders is misguided; they are only waiting for you to give the order to go into the sea—and they must act before I will act to save them.

* Exodus 14:15 (in Beshalach)

AND YOU WILL SEE*

Am E7 Am E7 Am
 וְאַתָּה תַּחֲזֶה מִכָּל־הָעָם אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל
 Am E7 Am E7
 וְרָאִי אֱלֹהִים אַנְשֵׁי אֱמֶת שְׂנֹאֵי בְצַע
 Am E7 Am Dm Am Dm
 וְשִׁמַּתָּ עֲלֵהֶם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת
 Am E7 Am Dm Am Dm
 שָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת: [וְאַתָּה תַּחֲזֶה]

And you will see out of all the people able men [and women],
 God-fearing men [and women], men [and women] of truth, hating unjust gain;
 and you will place [such people] over them [B'nai Yisrael],
 [to be] rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds,
 rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. [And you will see.]

And you will see—You will know through vision from God those who are to be leaders; and through those leaders you will see the power of B'nai Yisrael. *Out of all the people*—From among those “nominated by the people themselves” (S.R. Hirsch), you shall confirm the leaders. *Able men and women*—They will have both physical and moral stamina, willingness to listen to all the people, and not be intimidated by the more powerful. *Men [and women] of truth*—They will be the ones upon whom the people may rely, and thus they will be followed. *Hating unjust gain*—They will reject personal enrichment gained at the expense of another by the threat or doing of evil. *And you will place [such people] over them [B'nai Yisrael]*—As My prophet you will consecrate them to their tasks of judging and teaching, all of them accessible to the people and thus holding one another accountable. *[To be] rulers of thousands*—You shall confirm those whose vision and capacities, like your own, extend to the well-being of Klal Yisrael. *Rulers of hundreds*—You shall confirm those who can teach and apply the law while respecting the uniqueness of each community. *Rulers of fifties*—You shall confirm those who shall hear the first appeals and thus balance the demands of both order, which requires the upholding the decisions of lesser judges, and disorder, which results from confirming unjust judgements. *And rulers of tens*—And you shall confirm those whose judging and teaching shall be face-to-face, as Mine has been with you, with each and every one of My people.

* Exodus 18:21 (in Yitro)

WE WILL DO AND WE WILL HEAR*

A7 Dm
וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית
Dm Gm
וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ
Dm Gm
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה
Dm A7
נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע:

And he [Moses] took the book of the Covenant,
and read in the ears of the people; and they said:
All that Adonai has spoken
we will do and we will hear.

And he [Moses] took the book of the Covenant—“From Genesis until the giving of the Torah and the commandments that were given at Marah” (Rashi). *And [Moses] read in the ears of the people*—He took pains, through his own efforts and those of the leaders, to ensure that the book was read within the hearing of each and every one of the people—so that the words would not only be “heard” in the plain sense but be internalized, each person assuming the covenant with conscious intention. *And they said*—They answered not as individuals but as a community, for they had been enslaved and then liberated together, now inheriting the law together, and they had become one people through sharing a covenant with God. *All that Adonai has spoken*—They acknowledged that the words are holy, a gift from God, to enlighten us about the workings of God’s creation and how we shall guide our lives in accord with God’s will. *We will do*—We will, they affirmed, repeatedly apply ourselves to live this law, never relinquishing the covenant that defines us as a people, no matter the difficulties we encounter or our failures in meeting them. *And we will hear*—And we shall continue to listen to the decisions of judges and the lessons of our teachers who interpret the Torah in every time and place, dedicating ourselves to learn “all its details and meaning” (S.R. Hirsch).

* Exodus 24:7 (in Mishpatim)

THE TESTIMONY*

A7 Dm
וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ
את העֵדוּת
Dm
אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ:
Dm Gm
וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ
Dm A7
את העֵדוּת
Dm A7 Dm Gm
אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ (את העֵדוּת):

And you shall put into the ark
the testimony
that I shall give to you.

And you shall put into the ark the testimony—In the place created from the heartfelt offerings of each woman and man (Ex. 35:22), My law shall reside, and I shall dwell among you at the center of your community. *The testimony that I shall give to you*—That is, “the Torah, which is a testimony between Me and you,” a witness for all time—even as it shall be denied in every age—that I have “commanded you the commandments that are written in it” (Rashi).

* Exodus 25:16 (in Terumah)

I WILL DWELL AMONG B'NAI ISRAEL *

A7 Dm
וּשְׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
Dm
וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים:
Dm A7
וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם
Dm A7 Dm Gm
אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
Dm A7 Dm Gm
לְשֹׁכְנֵי בְּתוֹכָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:

And I will dwell among the children of Israel,
and I will be to them a God.
And they shall know that I am Adonai their God,
that I brought them out from the land of Egypt
to dwell among them. I am Adonai their God.

And I will dwell among the children of Israel—At the door of the Tent of Meeting “I will meet with the children of Israel” (29:43), so that I may be present at the center of their community, that they may know me every day. I will be to them a God—Knowing me they shall know good from evil, the direction for their lives shall be made clear to them, and they shall learn that they need not live in doubt and degradation. And they shall know that I am Adonai their God—I shall therefore be present to them in their joys and sorrows, always immediately accessible to them. That I brought them out from the land of Egypt to dwell among them—And that I liberated them so that they might thus know me and do my Torah. I am Adonai their God—The children of Israel shall remain a people so long as they know that I am their God.

* Exodus 29:45-46 (in Tetsaveh)

HE CAST THE TABLETS OUT OF HIS HANDS*

Am
וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר קָרַב אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה
Am E7
וַיֵּרָא אֶת־הָעֵגֹל וּמַחֲלֹת
Am E7 Am E7
וַיַּחַר־אַף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֶךְ מִיָּדוֹ אֶת־הַלְּחֹת
Am E7 Am
וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֹתָם תַּחַת הַהָר:
Am E7 Am
[וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֹתָם]

And it came to pass when he [Moses] came close to the camp
that he saw the calf and dancing;
and Moses became very angry, and he cast out of his hands the tablets,
and he broke them beneath the mount.

And it came to pass when he [Moses] came close to the camp—He knew from his encounter with God that the people had “dealt corruptly” (32:7), so he was expecting to see them in ruination of their covenant, worshipping a golden calf. That he saw the calf and dancing—But they had gone beyond idolatrous worship to incest (Rashi 32:6) and murder (Hur was killed for rebuking them—Rashi 32:5), far beyond “mental error” (S.R. Hirsch) to jeopardizing the very existence of their newly acquired peoplehood by wholesale rejection of Torah. And Moses became very angry—They were showing themselves undeserving of Adonai’s compassion, for which Moses had argued so courageously and eloquently, and entirely insensible to the gifts—the blessings and commandments—that God had given them. And he cast the tablets out of his hands and he broke them—They were unworthy of the Torah, and their rejection of its gifts had already broken its spirit among them, so Moses by physically breaking the tablets compelled them to confront what they had forsaken. Beneath the mount—And he did this beneath the mount, in the sight of the holy place in which they had been given by God, so clear was his purpose and his knowledge that the tablets were only a symbol; that neither God nor Torah could in any way be diminished by shattering them, only strengthened, because they had already been shattered in the experience of the people through their apostasy.

* Exodus 32:19 (in Ki Tisa)

WHOEVER IS OF A WILLING HEART SHALL BRING IT*

A7 Dm
קָחוּ מֵאֲתֶכֶם תְּרוּמָה לַיהוָה
Am Gm
כָּל נְדִיב לְבוּ יִבְאֶה
Dm A7 Dm Gm
אֵת תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנַחְשֵׁת:

Take from among you an offering to Adonai;
whoever is of a willing heart shall bring it,
the offering of Adonai: gold and silver and brass.

Take from among you—It was to be gathered from all the women and men (38:29), from the skilled and unskilled, from the learned and unlettered; every person, no matter their station, could contribute to building the sacred precincts; every person's contribution was needed and valued, not only that of the more well-off. *An offering to Adonai*—The generosity of the people would not accrue to Moses or other leaders but would be singularly dedicated to the service of Adonai. *Whoever is of a willing heart shall bring it*—That is, whoever was willing to freely assume the “yoke of heaven,” not simply to give gold but to self-impose commitment to the demands of the covenant as well. *The offering of Adonai*—They brought their offerings for the sake of heaven, not to impress their neighbors or for any other base reason. *Gold and silver and brass*—Each had some metal of some value that could be contributed, if not gold then silver or even brass, so each had the capacity and thus the opportunity to share in the creation and ownership of the sacred center of the community.

* Exodus 38:5 (in Vayakhai)

MOSES WAS NOT ABLE TO ENTER*

Am
וַיִּכַס הָעָנָן אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד
Am E7
וַיִּכְבוֹד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן:
Am E7
וְלֹא־יָכַל מֹשֶׁה לָּבוֹא אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד
Am E7 Am E7 Am E7
כִּי־שָׁכַן עָלָיו הָעָנָן וַיִּכְבוֹד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן: [וַיִּכְבוֹד יְהוָה]

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting,
and the glory of Adonai filled the tabernacle.
And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting
because the cloud abode on it, and the glory of Adonai filled the tabernacle.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Adonai filled the tabernacle—The free-will offering of the whole community was made so unstintingly, so whole-heartedly, that God's splendor became palpably present throughout. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting because the cloud abode on it, and the glory of Adonai filled the tabernacle—Moses could not enter into God's presence in the tent of meeting as he once had as the prophet of God, because the combined goodness of the people had enabled them to create a sacred place in which God would always be among the whole people.

* Exodus 40:34-35 (in Pekude)

IF A SOUL SINS*

Dm Gm A7 Dm
וְנִפֶּשׂ בֵּיתְחֻטָּא וְשָׁמְעָה קוֹל אֲלֹהִים
Dm Gm
וְהוּא עֵד אִם רָאָה אִם יָדָע
Dm A7 Dm Gm
אִם-לֹא יִגִּיד וְנָשָׂא עוֹנוֹ:

And if a soul sins in hearing the voice of swearing,
and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of it,
if he does not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity.

And if a soul sins—That is, if one makes a mistake or error and misses the right path, thus wronging or losing oneself and, possibly, others. *In hearing the voice of swearing*—And the mistake occurs when the person is asked to swear or has taken an oath in a matter to be adjudicated, one in which the parties face damaging legal consequences. *And is a witness*—And this person is a witness in the matter, with the capacity to establish the truth of events which are contested. *Whether he has seen or known of it*—As a witness, he has either direct or circumstantial evidence. *If he does not utter it*—That is, if one who may ensure that justice will prevail fails to speak out and prevent harm to an innocent party, thereby allowing the world to be tilted toward evil. *Then he shall bear his iniquity*—He shall thereby tilt himself toward evil, committing the same by failing to act against it when it is within his power; thus he shall bear the burden of self-imposed alienation from the Creator of the world and all that is good in it, and he shall require atonement.

* Leviticus 5:1 (in Vayikra)

THIS IS THE THING*

A7 Dm
וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעֵדָה
Dm Gm
זֶה הַדְּבָר
Dm A7 Dm Gm
אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת:

And Moses said to the congregation:
This is the thing
that Adonai has commanded to be done.

And Moses said to the congregation—What he had to say was for the ears of all the people, because ultimately he and the priests would be accountable to them. *This is the thing*—The consecration of Aaron and his sons was not to elevate Moses or Aaron, but because the kohen—“which always denotes ‘he works’” (Rashi, Ex. 29:30)—must be consecrated to the burden he will assume. *That Adonai has commanded to be done*—That for the priesthood to succeed, to remain aligned with the divine purpose, Aaron and his successors throughout the generations must assume not the glory of exalted position but the burden of unending service, not to do public performances in the name of God but to serve God and the people with humility.

* Leviticus 8:5 (in Tzav)

YOU SHALL OBSERVE*

Am E7 Am
וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַמִּצְוֹת כִּי בַעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
Am E7 Am E7
הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־צְבֹאוֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
Am E7
וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
Am E7 Am E7
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם:

And you shall observe the unleavened bread; for on this very same day
I brought out your hosts from the land of Egypt;
therefore you shall observe this day
throughout your generations, an ordinance for ever.

And you shall observe the unleavened bread—“Do not read hamatzot [unleavened bread] but hamitzvot [the commandments]—just as one may not leaven unleavened bread, so one may not leaven [delay doing] a commandment, but if it comes to your hand, do it immediately” (Rashi in the name of R’ Josiah). For on this very same day I brought out your hosts from the land of Egypt—It was not our own doing but the work of almighty God that liberated us from slavery and degradation, and thus we are bound in conscience to repay our obligation.

Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations, an ordinance for ever—Since we and every generation are the direct beneficiaries of the Exodus, we are recipients not only of the divine gift of living free but the holy obligation to create freedom; that is, the matza symbolizes the nexus of “having attained our freedom through God, with . . . our belonging to God. . . .” (S.R. Hirsch, 12:18); and thus we have been given our freedom to create a community with God in which doing the commandments leads to a world of righteousness, truth, justice, freedom, peace, and kindness, not only for ourselves but for our children and our children’s children.

* Exodus 12:17 (in Shemini maftir portion)

HIS FORESKIN SHALL BE CIRCUMCISED*

A7 Dm
וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי
DmA7 DmGm DmGm
יִמּוֹל בְּשָׂר עֶרְלָתוֹ:

And in the eighth day
the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

And in the eighth day—That is, eight days after the birth of a male child, when the seven days of his mother's ritual impurity have passed, and regardless of whether the eighth day falls on Shabbat. *The flesh of his foreskin*—The sign of the covenant shall be “in the organ whereby the species is perpetuated” to symbolize the “continuity of the covenant among later generations” [following Abraham and Sarah] (Sforno, Gen. 17:13). *Shall be circumcised*—The mark of the covenant is the beginning of the individual's moral career; yet initially it has far greater impact among the community in which the family resides—whose members become individually and jointly responsible for that career—because “every child of such a [Abrahamitic household, whether the child is male or female] is born to, and acquired by, the Abrahamitic community. . .” (S.R. Hirsch, Gen. 17:10).

* Leviticus 12:3 (in Tazria)©

THE DAY OF HIS CLEANSING*

Dm Gm A7 Dm
זֹאת תְּהִיָּה תּוֹרַת הַמִּצְרָע
 Dm Gm
בְּיוֹם טְהָרָתוֹ
Dm A7
וְהוּבָא אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן:

This shall be the law of the leper [metsora]
in the day of his cleansing;
he shall be brought to the priest.

This shall be the law of the leper [metsora]—Torah treats leprosy (not the disease we know now by that name) as a spiritual rather than medical problem—which the Sages linked to evil talk, as Rabbi Yose said, “Whoever retails evil talk is visited by plague. . . .” (Arakhin 15b). *In the day of his cleansing*—The effects of the metsora’s offerings for atonement went beyond the afflicted individual, unlike other offerings, since “any object he touches becomes טמא [ritually impure] not only for him but for the whole community . . .” (S.R. Hirsch); and so, too, the damage done by evil talk has no boundaries—like the feathers of a pillow let into the wind, which can never be regathered—because it touches every member of a community. *He shall be brought to the priest*—The sacred duty of the priest was to guide the process of ritual cleansing and atonement, not to cure the individual but to protect the commonweal by declaring that the necessary spiritual realignment of the metsora had taken place and that return to the community would pose no further threat; as we, too, must create sacred time and space—through Torah study, prayer, and mitzvot—to realign ourselves when we have engaged in evil talk.

* Leviticus 14:2 (in Metsora)

LIVE IN THEM*

A7 Dm
וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי
Dm A7 Gm
אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אִתְּם הָאָדָם
Dm Gm
וְחִי בָהֶם
Dm A7
אֲנִי יְהוָה:

And you shall therefore keep My statutes and My ordinances,
which if a person does them
shall live in them:
I am Adonai.

And you shall therefore—Because you are to be holy to Me, you shall not follow the corrupt practices of the Egyptians or assimilate with the Canaanites (18:3), lest you bring down upon yourselves the same judgments they suffered. *Keep My statutes and My ordinances*—You shall “study with intention to practice” (S.R. Hirsch) those of My mitzvot which are comprehensible to you in their purpose and those which are not, “keeping” and “doing” both (Rashi). *Which if a person does them shall live in them*—In doing them you shall remain within a community of living faith, fully alive in the purpose and well-being they lend to the life of the people, and never suffering mortal danger or death because of them (Yoma 88b). *I am Adonai*—Thus you shall remain aligned eternally with the divine purposes of your ineffable Creator

* Leviticus 18:5 (in Aharei Mot)

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF*

לא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ ^{Dm}
_{Gm} _D
חוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ
_{Dm} _{A7}
וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא:
לֹא־תִקַּם וְלֹא־תִטַּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְךָ
_{Gm} _D
וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ
_{Dm} _{A7}
אֲנִי יְהוָה:

You shall not hate your brother in your heart;
you shall surely rebuke your neighbor,
and you shall not bear sin because of him:
You shall not take vengeance,
nor bear any grudge against the children of your people,
but you shall love your neighbor as yourself:
I am Adonai.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart—Your “brother” includes all Jews (Chofetz Chaim) about whom, when we observe or encounter their wrongful acts, we are not to keep festering within ourselves condemnation or hatred, thus destroying klal Yisrael. *You shall surely rebuke your neighbor*—You shall tactfully challenge wrongful speech or actions, never publicly and always with respect and kindness, giving your fellow Jew the benefit of the doubt that an honest mistake has been made (possibly yours) or that there is good reason for the behavior in question, and you shall do so regardless of whether the person is far your senior or your junior, as it is said: “Even the disciple must rebuke the master” (Baba Metzia 31a). *And you shall not bear sin because of him*—If we do not speak out to protest that which destroys the individual and the community, then we ourselves have done evil (Kohelet

Rabbah 8); because in failing to rebuke we carry the sin not only of the individual whom we could have helped return to the path of righteousness, but the community as well, as it is said: "Jerusalem was destroyed only because they did not rebuke each other. . ." (Shabbat 119b). *You shall not take vengeance*—You shall live in the image of your God, guided by the Torah, not adopting the values and behaviors of those who harm you. *Nor bear any grudge against the children of your people*—You shall not poison yourself and your community by refusing to forgive those who have harmed you by error or ignorance in word or deed; but neither shall you make yourself or your community vulnerable to those who intend malevolence against you. *But you shall love your neighbor as yourself*—This is not a matter of how you feel but what you shall do toward others: only that which you would have done to yourself (Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 4:14); that is, you shall sanctify yourself, make yourself holy, by applying in your daily life—toward yourself, your neighbor, and your God (Rashi, Shabbos 31a)—the Torah's statutes and ordinances. *I am Adonai*—Thus you and your community shall remain aligned with the plan of your Creator.

* Leviticus 19:17-18 (in Kedoshim)

I AM ADONAI WHO SANCTIFIES YOU*

Am E7 Am
וְלֹא תַחֲלִלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם קֹדֶשׁי
Am Dm
וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
Am E7 Am Dm
אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקַדְּשְׁכֶם:

And you shall not profane My holy name;
but I will be sanctified among the children of Israel:
I am Adonai who sanctifies you.

And you shall not profane My holy name—That is, by “willfully transgressing” (Rashi) my words, my statutes and ordinances—the mitzvot, refusing to do good or hiding yourself in the presence of evil. *But I will be sanctified*—If rather than doing murder, idolatry, or sexual immorality, you “surrender your life” (Rashi), My name—all those attributes that I represent—will be made sacred: stirring, animating, and elevating your community and the lives of your children and your children’s children (S.R. Hirsch). *Among the children of Israel*—Even your children are obligated to sanctify the divine name in the presence of great evil, i.e., “even children may not participate in such desecrations” (S. Riskin in the name of Y. Kamenetzky and Maimonides); and the higher our station and status in the community, the greater our obligation to sanctify the name, because our “refusal to sacrifice any impulse of our being” serves as “propaganda for the powerlessness” of God (S.R. Hirsch). *I am Adonai who sanctifies you*—The dedication of all our heart and spirit in community to the will of God is the surest means by which each of us shall be lifted up in peace and lovingkindness as a creature created in the image of God.

* Leviticus 22:32 (in Emor)

YOU SHALL NOT WRONG ONE ANOTHER*

Am F Am
וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת־עֲמִיתוֹ
Am F
וְיִרְאתֶם מֵאֱלֹהֵיךָ
Am Dm Am Dm
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

And you shall not wrong one another;
but you shall fear your God;
for I am Adonai, your God.

And you shall not wrong one another—You shall not cause harm to one another physically or in ways that have material consequences—for example, by giving “misleading information or improper advice” (Sforno); nor shall you cause painful feelings with your words. Such “wrongdoing by word” (Rashi) includes: reminding someone of their past, raising false hopes, and bringing shame upon another publicly, but particularly, “hurting somebody by words in such a way that only God can see the evil intent” (S.R. Hirsch). *But you shall fear your God*—Even if you believe that only the One Above knows that you intended harm, because your words were so cunningly contrived, you shall know too that the Creator’s rule prevails throughout all of creation, and that our defiance of it can lead ultimately only to atonement or the fragmentation of our souls, the disintegration of the inner part of ourselves that makes us unique beings. *For I am Adonai, your God*—My “face,” that is, the teaching of my Torah, is inescapable for you—even as you seek to avoid and disclaim it—because it is the blueprint of My creation, in which you must live: thus I remain your God despite your resistance and rejection of Me.

* Leviticus 25:17 (in Behar)

IF IN MY STATUTES YOU WILL WALK*

Dm
אִם־בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ
Dm A7
וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם:
וְנָתַתִּי גִשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעִתָּם וְנָתַנָּה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ
Dm A7
וְעֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִיֹו:
Dm A7 Dm Gm
וְהִשִּׁיג לָכֶם דִּישׁ אֶת־בְּצִיר וּבְצִיר יִשִּׁיג אֶת־זֶרַע
Dm A7 Dm Gm
וְאָכַלְתֶּם לַחֲמֵכֶם לְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנֹת וּשְׁבַתֶם לְבִטָּח בְּאֶרְצְכֶם:

If in my statutes you will walk and my commandments you observe,
and you do them;
then I will give you your rains in their seasons, and the land shall yield her produce,
and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit;
and your threshing shall reach to the vintage and the vintage shall reach to sowing time,
and you shall eat your bread with satiety and dwell in safety in your land.

If in my statutes you will walk and my commandments you observe, and you do them—According to our Sages there are three levels of “walking” or going: speech, which is a part of study; thought, when we “reflect upon the commandments so as to know the manner in which they are done and their purpose” (Sforno); and action, the performance of the mitzvah. The “going,” the “movement toward a goal” (S.R. Hirsch), from a lower to a higher level of observance, begins with “toil in Torah,” because the purpose of Torah study is to do the commandments (Rashi). Then I will give you—God’s gifts are to the people, the whole community: the individual receives no certain material reward in this world for doing a mitzvah. Your rains in their seasons, and the land shall yield her produce, etc.—By going in God’s statutes and keeping and doing the commandments as a community, we will have done everything we can to ensure our “physical, social, and political well-being” (S.R. Hirsch). And you shall eat your bread with satiety—We shall be satisfied with what we reap when we are living fully in God’s commandments. And dwell in safety in your land—And, living as such a community, we shall care for one another in advantage and adversity.

* Leviticus 26:3-5 (in Behukotai)

FOR THE CHARGE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL *

Am F Am
וְהַחֲנִים לְפָנֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן קִדְמָה
C
לְפָנֵי אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד מִזְרָחָה
C G7
מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וּבְנֵי שֹׁמְרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ
Am F
לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. . . .

Those who encamped before the Tabernacle to the front,
before the Tent of Meeting to the east,
were Moses and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary,
for the charge of the children of Israel. . . .

Those who encamped before the Tabernacle to the front, before the Tent of Meeting to the east—We are often called to be in places where it seems difficult or impossible to do God’s will; but we make it possible when, each of us individually and all of us together as a community, we choose others who study and practice the lessons of Torah to be our neighbors, our associates, and our teachers. Were Moses and Aaron and his sons—Since Moses engaged in the study of Torah, those who were his neighbors “became great in Torah” (Rashi), as it is said, “It is well with the righteous, (and) well with his neighbor”; while many of those encamped near the Kohathites, and the family of Korach, became enmeshed in his rebellion (Rashi 16:1), as it is said: “Woe to the wicked, woe to his neighbor” (Genesis Rabbah 89:7). Keeping the charge of the sanctuary—Each of us is given a unique gift to guard the sanctuary, that is, to maintain the holy precincts—all the sacred places and times—that sanctify and uplift the Jewish people to God’s purposes. For the charge of the children of Israel—Each of us, and each of our congregations, may choose from moment to moment whether the purpose of our existence is to satisfy our private appetites or, instead, to model for others the upbuilding of Israel as a holy nation, one people that ennoble and realizes all the ends we seek in life.

* Numbers 3:38 (in Bamidbar)

GOD BLESS YOU*

Dm C7 Dm GmDm
יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ.
Dm C7 Dm Gm
יֵאָר יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיַּחֲנֶךָ.
Dm C7 Dm Bb Gm
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ, וְיִשֵּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

May God bless you and keep you.
May God's face light you and grace you.
May God face you and give you peace.

Dm Gm Dm
May we find harmony with the Divine
C7 Dm
Shelter and light.
Gm Dm
May the wonder of the Infinite shine,
C7 Dm
Gracious and warm.
Gm Bb Dm
And may our holy God be in our heart,
C7 Dm
Compassion and peace.

May God bless you and keep you—May we always remember that God's creation is much richer than we can comprehend, and when we open ourselves to its blessings and commandments our material wants (Rashi) are satisfied. *May God's face light you and grace you*—Since we are blessed by God with the capacity to understand Torah, may we use that understanding to attain spiritual fulfillment through “insight in God's management in history and of our own mission and tasks in life” (S.R. Hirsch), so that we may be “gracious to one another and compassionate to one another” (Numbers Rabbah 11:6). *May God face you and give you peace*—May we always exert ourselves to seek the face of God, the divine path of Torah, so that we seek peace beyond ourselves, in our family and community, the reward for which is to be enlightened and liberated from our private anxieties and depression.

* Leviticus 6:24-26 (in Naso)

THAT YOU NOT BEAR IT ALONE*

A7
Dm
 וְיֵרְדְּתִי וְדִבַּרְתִּי עִמָּךְ שָׁם
Dm
Gm
 וְאֶצְלָתִי מִן־הָרוּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיךָ
Dm
Gm
 וְשָׂמְתִי עֲלֵיהֶם וְנָשְׂאוּ אֹתָךְ
Dm
Am
 בְּמִשָּׂא הָעַם וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא אֹתָהּ לְבַדְּךָ:

And I will come down and speak with you there;
 and I will take of the spirit that is on you,
 and I will put (it) on them; and they shall carry with you
 the burden of the people, that you not bear it alone.

And I will come down and speak with you there—This is one of ten instances of “coming down” mentioned in the Torah (Rashi), each of which describe a manifestation of God on earth, because the process of one individual’s spiritual endowment empowering others entails the active presence of the Creator in human affairs. *And I will take of the spirit that is on you*—That is, “I will make great” (Rashi) the spirit that is on you, to make it possible when you gather the 70 elders (11:16) that My spirit shall guide you to recognize those who were afflicted for the sake of the people in Egypt, so they too shall receive the spirit. *And I will put (it) on them*—It shall in no way be diminished in you—which may be compared to “A light lying upon a candlestick, and everyone kindles (the other lights) from it, but its own light does not diminish at all” (Rashi)—and, to the contrary, that you seek to uplift them as leaders shall only increase the approbation of your own leadership. *And they shall carry with you the burden of the people*—Your leadership shall be more readily accepted since the people will see that “the elders are with you and concur in your actions” (Sforno), which the people recognize as essential because their afflictions and troubles are so numerous that many leaders are required. *That you not bear it alone*—The afflictions of the people have both spiritual and material import—apparent in the loss of intimate family relationships, the overwhelming demands of daily work, and the withering of community life—and thus the prophetic spirit of God must be instilled in many leaders so that the people may be uplifted.

* Numbers 11:17 (in Behaalotkha)

MAKE FRINGES ON THE CORNERS*[†]

E7 Am
דְּבַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
Am Dm
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם
Am Dm
וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית עַל־כַּנְּפֵי בְּגָדֵיהֶם
Am E7
לְדֹרֹתָם. . . .

Speak to the children of Israel,
and say to them
that they shall make fringes on the corners of their garments,
throughout their generations. . . .

Speak to the children of Israel—Help the people to understand the consequences of ignoring the mitzvot, so they will want to take pains to remember them, and so they will recognize the need for practical reminders (S.R. Hirsch). *And say to them that they shall make fringes on the corners of their garments*—One interpretation of why fringes (צִיצִית) are so called is because, as with “looking through [מְצִיץ] the lattice [הַרְבֵּים]” (or openings), in the Song of Songs (2:9), the reference is to the verse (Num. 15:40), “that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Adonai” (Rashi). *Throughout their generations*—The Torah, the plan and pillar of creation, shall sustain and be sustained eternally by those who dedicate themselves to create openings (הַרְבֵּים) through which their fellow Jews look to the mitzvot and do them.

* Bamidbar 15:38 (in Shlach)

A SIGN TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL*

Gm
Dm
Gm
Dm
Gm

G7
Dm
G7

אָמַר אֶל־אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וַיִּרָם אֶת־הַמִּחֹתָת מִבֵּין הַשְּׂרָפָה
 וְאֶת־הָאֵשׁ זָרְהֶהָ לָאָהּ כִּי קָדְשׁוֹ:
G7
Dm

אֵת מִחֹתֹת הַחֹטְאִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּנִפְשֹׁתָם
Dm
Gm

וַעֲשׂוּ אֹתָם רִקְעֵי פָחִים צְפוּי לַמִּזְבֵּחַ
Gm
F

כִּי־הִקְרִיבֻם לִפְנֵי־יְיָ וַיִּקְדָּשׁוּ
Dm

וַיְהִיו לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
Gm
F

[וַיְהִיו לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל]

Say to Elazar, son of Aaron the priest, take up the fire-pans from among the burning—
and the fire scatter far—for they are holy.

The fire-pans of these sinners against their own souls,
they shall make them hammered plates as a covering for the altar,
for they offered them before Adonai and they are holy;
they shall be for a sign to the children of Israel.

Say to Elazar, son of Aaron the priest, to take up the fire-pans from among the burning—and the fire scatter far—Pour out the ashes other than in the special place outside the camp, because the offering was of an “alien incense,” and although brought at the behest of Moses, it was “defective” (Sforno). For they are holy—It is forbidden, under the circumstances (the direct taking of life by God?), for anyone to “derive benefit” from these fire-pans (Rashi). The fire-pans of these sinners against their own souls—They were brought before God by those who wanted “to bring about a decision . . . over the true and real priesthood” that God desired, which was achieved at the cost of their lives (S.R. Hirsch), because they “opposed the Holy One” (Rashi). They shall make them hammered plates as a covering for the altar, for they offered them before Adonai—Because the effect of this offering was none the less to sanctify the Sanctuary, the fire-pans were “to remain dedicated to the maintenance of what had been achieved” (S.R. Hirsch). And they are holy—“At first they were but accessories of the altar, but now they are part of the altar itself” (Menachot 99a). They shall be for a sign to the children of Israel—Those who seek holy office for their own ends, God seeks to consume, because they pervert that which was created to raise up Am Yisrael in the divine image.

* Numbers 17:2-3 (in Korach)

HE WAS SANCTIFIED IN THEM*

Am Dm E7 Am
 וַיִּקְהָלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַקְּהָל אֶל־פְּנֵי הַסֵּלַע וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהֶם
 Am E7 Am Dm
 שְׁמַעוּ־נָא הַמְּרִים הַמִּן־הַסֵּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצִים לָכֶם מַיִם:
 Am Dm Am E7
 וַיָּרֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיַּךְ אֶת־הַסֵּלַע בְּמַטְהוֹ פַּעַמַיִם
 Am Dm
 וַיֵּצְאוּ מַיִם רַבִּים וַתִּשְׁתַּהֲעַדָּה וּבַעִירָם:
 Am E7
 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַל־אַהֲרֹן
 Am Dm Am E7 F
 יַעֲזוּב לֵאמֹר לֹא־הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 Am Dm A7
 לְכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם:
 E7 F
 הַמָּה מֵי מְרִיבָה אֲשֶׁר־רָבוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְהוָה
 Am
 וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם:

And Moses and Aaron gathered together the assembly before the rock, and he said to them:

Hear now you rebels, are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?

And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice;
and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle.

And the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron:

Because you believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel,
therefore you shall not bring the assembly into the land that I have given them.

These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel strove with the Lord,
and He was sanctified in them.

And Moses and Aaron gathered together the assembly before the rock, and he said to them: Hear now you rebels, are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?—Bitter that after 40 years “he had still not won the confidence and trust of the people” (S.R. Hirsch), Moses “denigrated—and so delegitimized—the very nature of the nation” (S. Riskin) by characterizing all the people as “fools” (Rashi), which was chillul Hashem (Rambam). And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle—Moses and Aaron were bidden by God to “speak to the rock before their eyes” (20:8)—instead of within their hearing—because the commandment was “calculated to impress the people with the omnipotence of God” (J.Z. Mecklenburg), which would have sanctified God. And the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron: Because you believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring the assembly into the land that I have given them—Because you did not believe that the rock itself, contrary to the laws of nature, could be changed “from ‘rock’ to ‘water’” through the speech that I placed in your mouth, you did not demonstrate to the people my “excellence and goodness” (Sforno), which might have turned them from their rebellion; and this failure of faith was more offensive than before (11:22) because, unlike the earlier instance which was “committed in secrecy,” here it was committed in the “presence of all Israel” (Rashi). These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them—Had Moses and Aaron not been punished, they may have been viewed as exempt—allowed to cross over, where the others of that generation were not—since ultimately all would know of the commandments they received from God; and thus their deaths—as the fire-pans of those who rebelled against God were beaten into plates to cover the altar, and as the ashes of the heifer which was tamei in the salughtering were used by those who salughtered it to purify themselves—served to sanctify the Divine Name “among mankind” (Rashi), as it is stated, “Through them that are close to me I will be sanctified” (Lev. 10:3).

* Numbers 20:10-13 (in Chukat)

HOW GOODLY*

מַה טָּבוּ אֹהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב

מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel.

How goodly are your tents—“Tent” is a reference to the marriage relationship (Mo’ed Katan 7b), and outside the tent to being apart from one’s mate (15b). As the gentile Bilam looked upon Israel, he saw that the tents were arranged so that “their doors were not directed one opposite the other” (Rashi), ensuring privacy for the sake of modesty and family integrity. “Our rabbis taught: Concerning a man who loves his wife as himself, who guides his sons and daughters in the right path . . . , Scripture says [Job5:24], and you shall know that your tent is in peace” (Yevamot 62b). “How ‘good’ and not how ‘beautiful’”—the arrangement of tents by family and tribe confirmed each child’s parentage—because they affirmed a “moral ideal and the true well-being of a nation” (S.R. Hirsch). *O Jacob*—“Jacob” is thus destined to “survive all the nations” and will be present at the “end of days” (Sforno, Gen. 32:29). *Your dwellings*—“Dwellings” refers to a place of prayer or the Sanctuary (Sforno). “Do not read ‘mishkenotheka’ (your tabernacles) but ‘mashkenotheka (your forfeits), O Israel’ for the Tabernacle and the Temple were to be forfeited by Israel when they sinned” (Numbers Rabbah 12:14). The tent of Shiloh and the Temple are goodly because in them the children of Israel “make atonement,” to be at one with their God (Rashi). *O Israel*—Withal, “Israel” shall prevail over adversaries and adversity in heaven and on earth (Sforno Gen. 32:29).

* Numbers 24:5 (in Balak)

ATONEMENT FOR THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL*

לְכֵן אָמַר הַנְּנִי נָתַן לוֹ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם:
וְהָיְתָה לוֹ וּלְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו בְּרִית כְּהֵנָּה עוֹלָם
תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאֱלֹהָיו וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Therefore say: Behold, I give him [Pinchas] My covenant of peace.
And it will be for him and his seed after him a covenant of eternal priesthood;
because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel.

Therefore say—Let every generation know: The Moabite and Midianite kings had learned they could defeat Israel by turning the people away from God, by tempting them to commit sexual sins, which would first destroy family morality but ultimately the whole people. One king aimed to seduce the Israelite leaders by using his daughter Kosbi, who enticed Zimri, a prince of the tribe of Simeon. She and others seduced thousands into the worship of Ba'al Peor, which required defecating on their idol, as a condition of giving themselves sexually (Rashi 25:1-3). Pinchas knew the law from Moses—"one who cohabits with a heathen woman is punished by zealots"—and since he had discerned its letter, he was to be the agent to carry it out (Sanhedrin 82a). He rose up and slew Zimri and Kosbi—Zimri had taken Kosbi into a tent before Moses and all the people, to belittle the law—and by his action Pinchas stayed the plague that God had begun to destroy Israel. *Behold, I give him My covenant of peace*—Pinchas earned the eternal grant of peace because he restored the "peace with God and His law," ensuring the resumption of real peace among the people (S.R. Hirsch). In recognition of the cost to those who take a life for God's sake, "the Divine blessing was designed to cope with this situation and promised peace and tranquility of soul" (Z.Y. Berlin). *And it will be for him and his seed after him a covenant of eternal priesthood*—Pinchas had acted as a priest, sanctifying that which had been desecrated by Zimri and Kosbi, and which lay unredeemed by the immobilized people and their inert leaders. Like his grandfather, Aaron, he was a pursuer of peace, knowing that "sometimes, in order to make peace, a person must be Rodef Shalom—chase away the peace" (Chasam Sofer). In his act of atonement for the whole people, he became the forebear of all high priests. *Because he was jealous for his God*—Pinchas slew Zimri and Kosbi for the sake of heaven, motivated by his ardor to maintain the love of God for the children of Israel, and their sanctification as a holy nation. He was zealous from the knowledge that spiritual death always leads toward physical death. *And made atonement for the children of Israel*—The children of Israel had remained passive in the presence of radical evil that could destroy the spirit of the covenant, which was still fragile, and thus they were estranged from their God and the law that Moses had related to them: Pinchas' act enabled them to be at one again with the Torah and its Divine Author.

* Numbers 25:12-13 (in Pinchas)

NO TITLE*

* Numbers (in Matot)

IN THE MIDST OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL*

וְלֹא תִטְמָא אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּהּ

אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי שׁוֹכֵן בְּתוֹכָהּ

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה שׁוֹכֵן בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

You shall not defile the land that you inhabit,
in the midst of which I dwell;
for I, Adonai, dwell in the midst of the children of Israel.

You shall not defile the land that you inhabit—Most of all, you shall not remain indifferent to the loss of innocent human life, which has been created by the will and in the image of God—because ignoring the demands of “Justice, Love, and Morality” destroys the foundations of the “social well-being of the life of the people” (S.R. Hirsch). *In the midst of which I dwell*—“You shall not cause me to abide in uncleanness” (Rashi). By remaining in the impurity of your indifference you become increasingly estranged from Me, lending to the appearance of My powerlessness among the people. *For I, Adonai, dwell in the midst of the children of Israel*—“Even during the time when they are unclean, the Divine Presence is among them (Siphre)” (Rashi). My mercy and compassion are always present—it is always possible to be at one with Me—so the land and the people need never be permanently estranged from holiness.

* Numbers 35:34 (in Maasei)

THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S*

לֹא־תִכְבְּרוּ פָנִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט
בְּקֶטֶן כַּגָּדֹל תִּשְׁמָעוּן
לֹא תִגּוּרוּ מִפְּנֵי־אִישׁ
כִּי הַמִּשְׁפָּט לְאֱלֹהִים הוּא
וְהַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִקְשֶׁה מִכֶּם
תִּקְרַבּוּן אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּיו:

'You shall not respect persons in judgment;
the small and the great alike you shall hear;
you shall not be in awe of the face of any man;
for the judgment is God's;
and the cause that is too hard for you,
you shall bring it to me and I will hear it.'

*'You shall not respect persons in judgment—*Those who serve as judges must be appointed for their knowledge of the law and their probity, not for their influence or position, lest they “condemn the innocent” or “vindicate the guilty” (Rashi). And the parties to a dispute must not be personally known to the judge (Sifre). *The small and the great alike you shall hear—*Neither the poor nor the rich shall be honored by the court, but the principles of truth and justice shall guide the proceedings. *You shall not be in awe of the face of any man—*You shall not fear speaking the truth—“storing up” your words (Sifre)—in any matter in which truth or justice would be perverted by your silence, out of fear that violence or other harm will be done to you. In reaching judgments the judge is “doing the work of God,” thus the criteria for judgment are not the judge's but God's; and judgment should not be constrained out of fear because, as it is said (Sabbath 10a), every judge who furthers justice is “considered as if he had participated in God's work of creation”—and thus he must have faith in God's protection and support (S.R. Hirsch). *For the judgment is God's—*When justice is perverted by human judges, it is left to God to right the balance of good and evil in the world because “you have perverted justice against Me” (Rashi). *And the cause that is too hard for you, you shall bring it to me and I will hear it—*But God said to Moses, “I shall make you know that you cannot decide difficult cases” (Sifre), because it is not man but God that “sees into the [human] heart” (I Samuel 16:7). And so Moses, when he could not decide a matter from what he had already learned, would seek from God “the necessary instruction” (S.R. Hirsch).

* Deuteronomy 1:17 (in Devarim)

TO YOU IT WAS SHOWN*

אַתָּה הִרְאִיתָ לְדַעַת

כִּי יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים

אֵין עוֹד מִלְּבַדּוֹ:

(To) you it was shown to know
that Adonai, He is God;
there is nothing beside Him.

(To) you it was shown—It was shown when God gave the Torah and each of us saw that “He is One” (Rashi). The whole people experienced the One God, revealed in Mattan Torah, the giving and receiving of Torah, which was understood to reveal the workings of all creation and our place within it. *To know that Adonai, He is God*—The people acquired not a belief but “knowledge . . . [by] direct actual evidence of your own senses” (S.R. Hirsch). (Original italicized.) We cannot gainsay that experience—it was within the ken of the whole people—any more than the Holocaust experience of the whole people can be denied by another generation. *There is nothing beside Him*—There is no life independent of the divine will, no force or place that will allow us to be removed from its consistency and continuity, no dignity or justice apart from its verities. All the observations of our vaunted science, like the experience of our forebears, confirm the necessity of a divine intelligence at the center of creation and our submission to its will. We are as children in this creation, and yet, miraculously, we are given within our power all that is needed to remake the world in the image of its Creator.

* Deuteronomy 4:35 (in V’etchanan)

GUARD YOURSELVES*

הִשְׁמְרוּ לְכֶם פְּתִיחַתְּהוֹן לְבַבְכֶם
וְסַרְתֶּם וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם:

Guard yourselves, lest your heart be open (to be seduced),
and you turn aside and serve other gods
and bow down to them.

Guard yourselves, lest your heart be open (to be seduced)—Be prepared in the excess of gifts you are given to find that “your heart be lifted up and you forget Adonai your God” (8:14) is their source, because when satiated you will be seduced into thinking that it is your own power that gives rise to the life and wealth you enjoy. *And you turn aside and serve other gods*—You shall be tempted to “separate yourselves from Torah” and in its place make into gods “no gods . . . the work of men’s hands, wood and stone” (Isaiah 37:19), which are called “other gods” because “every day men create new deities . . .” (Sifre). *And bow down to them*—When we worship these “no gods” we destroy the Jewish people by dismantling its foundation of “moral behavior,” because the well-being of the people depends upon our being united in a Torah vision and purpose (S.R. Hirsch).

* Deuteronomy 11:16 (in Ekev)

A BLESSING AND A CURSE*

רֵאָה אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה:
אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם:
וְהַקְלָלָה אִם־לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וְסָרְתֶם מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם
לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר־לֹא יָדַעְתֶּם:

See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.
The blessing, that you hearken to the commandments of Adonai your God,
that I command you today.
And the curse, if you do not hearken to the commandments of Adonai your God,
but turn from the way that I command you today,
to go after other gods, which you have not known.

See—You are not as other nations but face “two extremes,” blessing and curse (Sforno). *I set before you today a blessing and a curse*—The choice of good or evil is present every day of your life, because God has put “your future fate most blessed or most accursed entirely in your own hands” through the gift of Torah (S.R. Hirsch). *The blessing, that you hearken to the commandments of Adonai your God, that I command you today*—The root of the word blessing (ברך) is related to the knee joint, “the essential lever for moving forward” (S.R. Hirsch). You shall receive the blessings by demonstrating to yourself that you are able to respond with all the goodness you have been given, thereby tilting the world toward goodness, as it is said: “Because . . . if he performs one good deed, happy is he for turning the scale both for himself and for the whole world on the side of merit; if he commits one transgression, woe to him for weighting himself and the whole world in the scale of guilt . . .” (Kiddushin 4Ob). *And the curse, if you do not hearken to the commandments of Adonai your God*—The root of the word curse (קלל) is related to “becoming empty, devoid of self-substance” (S.R. Hirsch). If you ignore the teachings of Torah, you shall estrange yourself from God and the Jewish people, becoming empty in your own eyes. *But turn from the way that I command you today*—You will curse yourself if you trade the truth of Torah for the momentary diversion of secular, material values, which have no lasting power, and if you fail to remember that your blessings may come in the midst of poverty and your curses may come in the midst of riches. *To go after other gods, which you have not known*—“Every step away from the Torah is a step toward עבודה זרה [strange worship],” because to believe in God as a Jew requires not only mere belief but acceptance of God’s “rule” over us and our submission to God’s “control” of all our actions (S.R. Hirsch).

* Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (in Reeh)

THAT YOU MAY LIVE*

צֶדֶק צְדָק תִּרְדוּף
לִמְעַן תַּחֲיֶה וְיִרְשֶׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר־יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

Justice, justice, shall you pursue,
that you may live and possess the land
that Adonai your God gives you.

Justice, justice shall you pursue—The purpose of your courts shall be “justice alone, justice and only justice” (J.H. Tigay). You shall seek to ensure that the benchmark of every court [and act of government] is “righteousness” (Sforno). And righteousness must be not only the judicial purpose but its method as well (Kotzker Rebbe), so that there is no double jeopardy (Sifre), favoritism to any particular class or interest (16:19), or any other perversion of justice. *That you may live and possess the land*—The well-being of the entire people and its ability to maintain itself in the land depends on the righteousness of those who administer the law, because they model the pursuit of justice for every individual, family, and community in the nation. Thus the naming of “honorable judges” is sufficient to sustain Israel and to “settle them upon their land” (Rashi). *That Adonai your God gives you*—Our lives and the possession of the land are not granted unconditionally but are renewed minute by minute, hour by hour, and day by day, according to how well we demand and dispense justice that meets the Creator’s standard of righteousness—the measure for any individual or nation to survive.

* Deuteronomy 16:20 (in Shoftim)

YOU SHALL NOT HIDE YOURSELF*

וְאִם־לֹא קָרֹב אָחִיךָ אֵלֶיךָ וְלֹא יָדַעְתָּ
וְאִסַּפְתָּ אֶל־תּוֹךְ בֵּיתְךָ
וְהָיָה עִמָּךְ עַד דִּרְשׁ אָחִיךָ אֹתוֹ וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּ לוֹ:
וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְחֹמְרוֹ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְשִׁמְלֹתָיו
וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל־אֲבֹדֹת אָחִיךָ
אֲשֶׁר־תִּאֲבֹד מִמֶּנּוּ וּמְצָאתָהּ
לֹא תוּכַל לְהִתְעַלֵּם:

If your brother is not near you and you do not know him,
then gather it [which you have found] inside your house,
and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it, and you return it to him.
So shall you do for his donkey, so shall you do for his garment,
and so shall you do for any lost article of your brother,
that may become lost from him and you find it;
you shall not hide yourself.

If your brother is not near you and you do not know him—“Brother” includes every Jew (Chofetz Chaim), your enemy too, “because the Torah speaks in opposition to the inclination to evil,” that is, the tendency to see others as less the children of God than ourselves (Sifre). Then gather it [which you have found] inside your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it, and you return it to him—We are obligated to act personally for the well-being of our fellow Jew, and to do so until that person can respond for his or her own well-being. So shall you do for his donkey, so shall you do for his garment, and so shall you do for any lost article of your brother—Our responsibility extends beyond the property to the person of anyone “who finds himself in spiritual danger” (J. Hurwitz). We are obligated to help that person return to the path of righteousness (בדרך ישרה), because every soul that is lost to the Jewish people—including our own, which we are especially obligated to reclaim—diminishes the nation’s ability to do God’s will in the world. This obligation includes Jews who are “preoccupied with the trivialities of the times” to the exclusion of Torah and mitzvot (Chofetz Chaim). For tinokos shenishbu (Jews “held captive” by Gentiles), we are obligated to bring them back to Torah and, if there is no one else to do this, to dedicate a tenth of our time to this mitzvah (M. Feinstein). That may become lost from him and you find it—It is not sufficient that that which is “lost” is not in the control or possession of your brother; it must be found in a state of “disarray” or be “uncontrolled” for us properly to assume responsibility for it (Sifre). You shall not hide yourself—We are obligated to speak out and to act whenever we can prevent a loss (N. Scherman). While we have the physical power to hide ourselves, there is no acceptable moral choice but to speak and act for our fellow Jews—except when to do so would cause greater loss to ourselves than to others who are at risk (Sifre).

* Deuteronomy 22:2-3 (in Ki Teitzei)

YOU HAVE BECOME A PEOPLE TO ADONAI*

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה וְהַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם אֶל-כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר
הִסַּכְתָּ וּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל
הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיִיתָ לְעַם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

And Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying:
“Keep silent, and hear, O Israel;
this day you have become a people to Adonai your God.”

And Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying:—The priests were included because of their responsibility to teach Torah to the people (Sforno). No longer were only the leaders to be the “representatives and keepers of the Torah” but the people themselves had been made responsible for it (S.R. Hirsch). “Keep silent, and hear, O Israel”—Close your mouths and open your minds, so that your “imagination” will allow you to understand your covenant with God (Sforno)—because if you do this you will keep the mitzvot and survive. Each day of your life should be lived as if “today you have entered into a covenant” with God (Rashi). “This day you have become a people to Adonai your God”—It was only at this point that the people had received all of the commandments, without which the covenant could not fully guide their lives. The teaching was that it is the Torah that makes you a nation, that will unite you even if you should lose the land—the Torah will bind you together, keep you holy, and sustain you when dispersed in the land (S.R. Hirsch 24:1 and 27:11).

* Deuteronomy 27:9 (in Ki Tavo)

THE WORD IS VERY NEAR TO YOU*

כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום
לא־נִפְלְאֶתֶת הוּא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא־רְחֹקָה הוּא:
לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא לֵאמֹר
מִי יַעֲלֶה־לָנוּ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָנוּ
וַיִּשְׁמַעֵנוּ אֶתְּהָ וַנַּעֲשֶׂנָּה:
וְלֹא־מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הוּא לֵאמֹר
מִי יַעֲבֹר־לָנוּ אֶל־עֵבֶר הַיָּם
וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁמַעֵנוּ אֶתְּהָ וַנַּעֲשֶׂנָּה:
כִּי־קְרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ:

For this commandment which I command you today
is not concealed from you and it is not far off.
It is not in heaven, [for you] to say,
“Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it to us,
and make us hear it, that we may do it?”
And it’s not over the sea, [for you] to say,
“Who shall go over for us to the other side of the sea,
and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?”
But the word is very near to you—in your mouth and in your heart—to do it.

For this commandment which I command you today—This “commandment of repentance” directs us to do teshuvah and “cleave to God” (Sforno)—the measure of which is to keep the mitzvot. [This commandment] is not concealed from you and it is not far off—The way in which the Torah has been given to us makes it possible “to learn it, to meditate on it, and carry it out” (J. Tigay); thus we have “no need for prophets” (Sforno) or an oligarchy of the wise. It is not in heaven, [for you] to say, “Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?”—We need not ask God to clarify the mitzvot because, once given, the Torah is entirely and eternally in human hands. Since it is not inaccessible, we have “no excuse for neglect” of learning Torah and doing mitzvot (N. Leibowitz). And it’s not over the sea, [for you] to say, “Who shall go over for us to the other side of the sea, and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?”—We can find within ourselves that which calls us to the will of our Creator, regardless of the time or space that we occupy at any moment. But the word is very near to you—in your mouth and in your heart—to do it—The alienation of our spirit tells us that we have missed the mark or gone off the path, and our mouth is capable of expressing responsibility and regret, and taking steps to ensure that we “turn toward Adonai our God with all our heart and all our soul” (30:10)—and thus we make it possible “for the entire Torah to be fulfilled” (S. Riskin).

* Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (in Nitzavim)

NO TITLE

* Deuteronomy ____ (in Vayeilech)

CHARGE YOUR CHILDREN*

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

שִׁימוּ לְבַבְכֶם לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מַעֲיֵד בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם

אֲשֶׁר תִּצְוֶם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם לְשָׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת:

He [Moses] said to them:

“Set your heart to all these words that I testify against you today,
that you charge your children to observe to do all the words of this law.”

He [Moses] said to them:—He imparted to them his role as teacher of Torah for the next generation; as he had taught it to them, so they would teach it to their children. “*Set your heart*”—To set the heart requires that “one must concentrate with all one’s eyes, heart and ears” to fathom the words of Torah (Sifre). We must whole-heartedly take upon ourselves the yoke of learning and living the Torah if we are to successfully bequeath it to another generation. “*To all these words*”—The reference is to all the words, because there is nothing empty or useless in the Torah—and that which appears so is “due to our lack of understanding, our failure to labor to discover its meaning” (N. Leibowitz). “*That I testify against you today*”—We were thus warned from that day to this of the consequences of honoring or abandoning the teaching, that the choice is between “sustenance without suffering,” in which we reap blessings out of proportion to our merit, or destruction if we seek to “frustrate” God’s will (Sforno). “*That you charge your children*”—That from the beginning and throughout the lives of our children we are to ordain and consecrate them to the vision and practice of this teaching of Israel as a holy nation; that upon our deathbed this charge to them will be our “last will and testament” (Sforno); remembering, Moses was grateful that Torah was observed after he taught it, because “had others not accepted the Torah through him, it would have been worthless” (Sifre)—and it would not have been our inheritance. “*To observe to do all the words of this law*”—The survival of our children as Jews in their succeeding generations, the life of Am Yisrael, depends now upon our teaching them, so that they in turn observe to teach their children.

* Deuteronomy 32:46 (in Haazinu)

AN INHERITANCE*

תּוֹרָה צְוֵה־לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה
מוֹרָשָׁה קְהֵלֵת יַעֲקֹב:
וַיְהִי בִישֻׁרוּן מֶלֶךְ
בְּהִתְאַסֵּף רֵאשֵׁי עָם
יַחַד שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Moses commanded us a law,
an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.
And He was king in Jeshurun,
when the heads of the people were gathered,
the tribes of Israel together.

Moses commanded us a law—Moses taught that whatever happens to us, we are to cleave to the Torah, because it is our light and the blessing of our lives, the true source of knowing ourselves, creation, and God. *An inheritance of the congregation of Jacob*—The Torah is to be “accepted by us and our children as an inheritance” (Sforno). It is to be the eternal possession of the Jewish people, and thus each generation is bound to sustain and pass it to the next generation. This may be likened to a king’s son who has been taken captive and removed from an inheritance: “Should he desire to return, even after a hundred years, he will not be embarrassed to do so, because he can say, ‘I am returning to my inheritance’” (Sifre). *And He was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, the tribes of Israel together*—God was sovereign over all Israel only when together “they accepted and affirmed” God’s sovereignty (Sforno), as Torah commands us. The name of God will be praised and the word of God will guide the nation when all the tribes of Israel together “form one unified group” (Sifre), all learning and living Torah. Then Am Yisrael will walk in the path of righteousness.

* Deuteronomy 33:4-5 (in V’zot Habrakha)