

אורי וישעי Light and Strength
 As we begin the month of Elul, we make our annual reacquaintance with Psalm 27, a psalm that begins **הו אורי וישעי - The Lord is my light and my strength** and is built on so many word-pairs. As we recall, the use of word-pairs and couplets is a major feature of the Hebrew language and an important characteristic of biblical texts. Word-pairs are deployed to add **texture and depth** to a concept, to sketch the **range and spectrum** of an idea, and also, to illustrate **contrasts and differentiations** between opposites.

ברכה וקללה Blessings and Curses
 Like Psalm 27, this week's parasha begins with a word-pair in the first verse: **ברכה וקללה - blessings and curses** (Deut. 11:16). We receive **blessings** if we obey the commandments and **curses** if we don't. This is one of Deuteronomy's great themes, and Moses will return to it just prior to his death.

חוקים ומשפטים Laws and Statutes
 The parasha introduces a list of **חוקים** - **laws and statutes** (11:32, 12:1). **חוקים** are generally understood to be laws that do not have a readily accessible rationale, (the *red heifer* is the classic example) and **משפטים** are statutes that can be easily understood (eg. *Do not steal*).

הר וגבעה Mountains and Hills
 When Israel enters the Land it will encounter several nations who already live there, nations who worship local gods and observe pagan rituals. They build their shrines **עליההרים ועליהגבעות - on the high mountains and on the hilltops** (12:2) a word-pair that is also found in Isaiah 40:4, **יְשַׁפְּלוּ וְכָל-הָר וּגְבֵעָה יִשְׁפָּלוּ - let every mountain and hill be made low** (which we read two weeks ago on Shabbat Nahamu). You can hear the resonance of this couplet in this line of *I Have a Dream: Let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.*

עלה וזבח Burnt Offerings and Sacrifices
עלה וזבח - burnt offerings and sacrifices (12:6). This word-pair covers the broad menu of sacrifices from the **עלה - the (completely) burnt offering** to the **זבח שלמים - the festive peace offering** which was eaten by the individual.

מעשר ותרומה Tithings and Contributions
נדרים ונדבות Vow and Freewill Offerings
צאן ובקר Sheep and Cattle
 Gifts to the sanctuary also include **ואת דבם מעשרתיכם ואת תרומת דבם - your tithings and the contributions of your hands**, as well as **ונדריכם ונדבותיכם - your vow-offerings and your freewill-offerings**, and **ובכרת בקרבם וצאנכם - the firstborn of your cattle and of your flocks**.

מנוחה ונחלה Resting Place and Inheritance
 The land is described as **אליהמנוחה ואליהנחלה - a resting place and inheritance** (12:9) which simultaneously conveys the sense that the land is where you find collective **safety and security**, but also it is **legally yours**, ie. you have title to it, because you inherited it legally from those to whom it was promised.

הטמא והטהור The Impure and Pure
צבאי וצבא Deer and Gazelle
 The parasha introduces us to the concept of non-sacred slaughter. Up until this point, meat could only be consumed at a sacred site. This posed obvious problems for people who wanted to eat meat on a more regular basis, for whom travel to the sacred site posed a rather unnecessary challenge, and who may not have been in a state of ritual purity to eat it. The Torah allows you to slaughter the animal for meat provided you drained it of its blood. **הטמא והטהור - the impure and the pure may eat it** (12:15) meaning that the consumption of meat was desacralized, and you could eat it **כצבאי וצבא - as you would eat the deer and gazelle**, (12:15) animals which while permissible for consumption were not acceptable as sacrifices presumably because they would have to be trapped and kept in captivity. The Torah's preference for domesti-

cated animals over hunted animals discloses its negative opinion of hunting and hunters.

להוסיף ולהגרוע To Add or Diminish

The Torah is specific about its requirements, לא-תסף עליו ולא תגרע ממנו: **you are not to add to it, you are not to diminish from it** (13:1) (Is there an echo of this phrase in the Gettysburg Address *The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.*

נביא וחולם Prophet and Dreamer

We are being warned about **נביא או חולם הלום** **prophets or dreamers** (13:2) who have power to sway people to worship false gods. What is the difference between a **prophet** and a **dreamer**? A **prophet** is someone who claims to convey God's words usually with a formula such as "*Thus says the Lord*". A **dreamer** claims to receive a message in a dream and probably was not "professional" in the sense of receiving and communicating these dreams regularly (J. Tigay). Succinctly conveyed by the rock group Supertramp: *Dreamer, you're nothing but a dreamer*. This individual may give you an **אז מופת או מופת** **a sign or a portent** (13:2) which is how Moses was able to gain the trust of the Israelites, but the telltale sign of his veracity is his allegiance to God.

קרוב ורחוק Near and Far

Enticement and curiosity of other gods may emerge from peoples that are either **הקרובים** **near to you or far from you** (13:8) indicating the degree to which wonder and fascination of other people's and cultures is such an extraordinary feature of humanity.

אח ורעה Brother and Kinsman

Moving on to other issues, during the Sabbatical year, one is instructed not to oppress **אח אחד או אח אחד** **one's kinsman or one's brother** (15:2). The pair **אח ורעה** ought to remind us of Leviticus 19 in which we are told **אל תשנא את אחיך בלבבך** **do not hate your brother in your heart** (Lev. 19:17) and also **ואהבת לרעה כמוך** **to love your kinsman as**

yourself (Lev. 19:18). The intensity of the relationship of **brother and kinsman** demarcates the boundary between **kith** and **kin** and all others.

מעשה ומשלוח זד Do and Make

As a result of giving to others God will bless you **ובכל מעשה ידיך** **in all your doings and in all the enterprises of your hand** (Deut. 15:10) which is an interesting way to encapsulate labor: there are things you **do** and things you **make**.

עני ואביון Afflicted and Needy

We are commanded to give to the poor with this formulation: **פתח תפתח את ידך** **you are to open, yes, open your hand** - **לא אחיד לעניך** **to your brother, to your afflicted one and to your needy-one in your land** (15:11). Are these three separate classifications: 1) **your brother**, 2) **your afflicted-one** and 3) **your needy-one**, or two: 1) **your brother who is also afflicted**, and 2) **your needy-one**? The interesting thing with triples is that they can be subdivided into a pair. The cantillation groups **לא אחיד לעניך** as one unit and differentiates it from **אביון** creating two spheres of obligation: **your brother** who has fallen on hard times, and a **needy person** in your community to whom you are also obligated. It is worth exploring the different psychological and emotional dynamics of giving to your brother as opposed to giving to a stranger.

בן ובת Son and Daughter עבד ואמה Slave and Maidservant יתום ואלמנה Orphan and Widow

On Festivals entire households plus the Levite and the stranger make the pilgrimage. (16:11)

Other pairs in this parasha: the Levite has no **תלוק ונתלה** **portion and inheritance** (12:12). You are to do **הטוב והישר** **what is good and what is right** (12:28). If you live too far from the Temple to bring your tithe, you can sell it and use the money to buy **צמר או יין** **sheep or cattle** or **ויבשכר** **wine or any other intoxicant** (14:26). There are categories of animals that cannot be sacrificed: **אם או עור** **lame or blind** (15:21)