

### Devarim:

Moses' farewell message to his people commences with an expose of their failings and treachery. While political leaders are generally obsessed with spin, currying favour and popularity, the spiritual leader has to brave the slings and arrows in order to preach some uncomfortable home-truths.

### Va-Etchanan:

*And you shall observe these laws which I command you this day*" (Deut. 4:40). Who 'commands' these days? No one. Not parents, not teachers, and, with the decline of religious values, not even God! Discipline is derided, and moral licence is demanded as the birthright of modern superman.

### Eikev:

Moses prayed that God should not destroy His people and His inheritance (Deut. 9:26). We should pray that we don't destroy our own people - through assimilation and intermarriage - and our inheritance, through neglect of Jewish education and practice of mitzvot.

### Re'eih:

*See I set before you this day a blessing and a curse* (Deut. 11:26). One of the most tragic aspects of the modern age is that people have even lost the capacity to "see," to distinguish between life-styles that yield blessing and those that are its antithesis.

### Shoftim:

The Torah sets up four categories of soldiers who, "at the approach of battle" (Dt 20:2) are to be exempted and sent home: those who are faint-hearted, those who have recently built a new home, planted a new vineyard or married.

Why the Torah insisted on them all lining up for battle, rather than exempting the latter three at the outset from any conscription, might well have been so that brave fellow soldiers would not know the real reason the faint-hearted were withdrawing.

### Ki Tetzei:

From the Torah law promising 'long life' for the mitzvah of *Shiluach ha-Ken*, sending away the mother bird before rifling her nest (Dt22:6-7), we may infer, *a fortiore*, the immense importance of prior consideration for the suffering of those upon whose loved ones we intend to inflict violence.

### Ki Tavo:

*Look down from Your heavenly habitation and bless Your people Israel* (Dt. 26:15). We ask God to bless us from such a remote point, because, from there, only the broad and general picture of our true situation is visible. If God really came close, our moral and spiritual warts would be too large for the expectation of any blessing.

### Nitzavim:

*I have set before thee life and death...choose life* (Dt 30:19)! In the moral universe man ever remains his own master. Though man cannot always even half control his destiny, God has given the reins of man's conduct altogether into his hands.

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