# Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Exploring Torah: Questions and Meanings 1

# THE TORAH PORTIONS OF EXODUS

Parashat Shemot 7

Pharaoh's war against the Jews

When is civil disobedience justified?

Moses: fear, courage, self-doubt, or humility?

Parashat Va'era 17

Why so many names for one God?

The "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart

Parashat Bo 25

Were the Israelites justified in taking gold and silver from the Egyptians? Origins of the Pesach celebration

Parashat Beshalach 32

Was Israel's escape from Egypt a "miracle"?

Why all the complaints against Moses and God?

Amalek's attack upon the Israelites

Parashat Yitro 42

The burden of leadership

What happened at Mount Sinai?

Parashat Mishpatim 51

Ethical and ritual mitzvot

Caring for the stranger

Parashat Terumah 61

The sanctuary in Jewish tradition

"Exactly as I show you . . . so shall you make it"

Parashat Tetzaveh 69

What is the ner tamid?

Priestly clothing: fashionable style or significant symbol?

Parashat Ki Tisa 77

Why did they build the golden calf?

Moses protests on behalf of his people

## Parashat Vayakhel-Pekude 86

The Sabbath is for celebration, for rest, not work! The obligation of giving charity, tzedakah Accountability of public officials

## THE TORAH PORTIONS OF LEVITICUS

## Parashat Vayikra 97

The meanings of sacrifice and prayer Defining "sin" in Jewish tradition

#### Parashat Tzav 104

Finding meaning in obsolete traditions The holiness of blood

### Parashat Shemini 111

What did Nadab and Abihu do wrong? Different views on kashrut—the Jewish art of eating

#### Parashat Tazria-Metzora 120

Biblical medicine, ritual, and ethics The sin of slandering others

#### Parashat Achare Mot-Kedoshim 127

Seeking meaning for the strange ritual of the scapegoat Defining "holiness" in Jewish tradition Can we love others as ourselves?

#### Parashat Emor 138

The Jewish festivals: Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukot Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth: about Lex Talionis

## Parashat Behar-Bechukotai 150

Lessons from the sabbatical and jubilee years
The mitzvah of caring for the poor
Rewards and punishments: the consequences of our choices

# Glossary of Commentaries and Interpreters 162 Bibliography 165