

Shelach Lekha:

Ur'iytem otto - "and when you see them (the tzitzit), you will remember all my commandments." Those who have their tzitzit externally hanging down understand the biblical verse as an instruction: "and you *shall* see (the tzitzit)..." This is not rabbinically mandated, however, and is viewed by many as religious exhibitionism.

Korach:

How preposterous that, after all Moses had achieved in Egypt, at the Red Sea and after the giving of the Torah by his agency, his credentials could still have been challenged. But, on reflection, not so preposterous when we consider how many times Israel has called into question the credentials of God Himself.

Chukkat-Balak:

"And Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through his territory" - The antipathy of Israel's neighbours is as old as the Bible.

Pinchas:

How ironical that, as reward for Pinchas's violent moral crusade, his offspring should have been installed in the office of "an eternal priesthood" (Nu. 25:13), binding them to a life of dedication, mediation and community service. Perhaps that element of the priesthood may be understood as a divine caution against the excesses of zealotry.

Mattot-Massei

"Whoever habitually takes vows offends against rabbinic sensitivity" (Talmud). Vowing to undertake some philanthropic or religious enterprise is an exercise in self publicism which totally neutralises the pure intention that is a *sine qua non* for the performance of a mitzvah. Such a vow also defies fate, as it is based on the assumption that one will remain sufficiently healthy and wealthy to see it through to fulfilment.