

For the story of the Ten Commandments has come to identify core features and themes of the Jewish people that have sustained us for thousands of years.

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The giving of the Ten Commandments fulfills a theological purpose that is similar to the ones achieved by those other two decisive moments in Israel's history, but Sinai adds an additional component not present either in Eden or on the shores of the Red Sea: only there does the connection between heaven and earth require the people's response and assent.

Rabbi Oren J. Hayon

Rashi (11th century) re Genesis 1:1

יהוה (Elohim) God created heaven and earth: It does not state יהוה (Adonai) created, because at first God intended to create the world to be placed under the attribute of strict justice, but He realized that the world could not thus endure. Therefore God gave precedence to Divine Mercy, allying it with Divine Justice. It is to this that Genesis 2:4 alludes, *in the day that יהוה (the Lord God) made earth and heaven.*

Exodus 20:1 And God (אלהים) spoke all these words saying:

Rashi (11th century)

God spoke: אלהים (Elohim) is a term for a judge. Since there are chapters in Torah where if a person observes the commands contained therein he will receive a reward but if he never observes them he will not receive punishment, one might think the Ten Commandments are of such a nature (i.e., that no punishment will follow if they are not observed because no punishment is mentioned in the text). Therefore the text says, *God spoke, God who is judge, who exacts punishment.*

Bachya (13th century)

all these words: (the word **all** implies) that the Holy One Blessed Be He spoke all these words in one saying, something that is impossible for a human being to do, to speak in this manner.

spoke all these words, saying: the word **לֵאמֹר** was added here in order to teach that all ten commandments were spoken in a single utterance. This was something a human mouth would be unable to do, and a human ear would be unable to hear.

saying - Another way of understanding the word **לֵאמֹר** in our v. is that it refers to the hidden meaning of the words of revelation. Each utterance of God contains meanings obvious to all, as well as hidden meaning. In this instance **וידבר** (*spoke*) refers to the plain meaning, the revealed message, while the hidden meaning is alluded to in the word **לֵאמֹר** (*saying*). This principle may be applied to most instances where Torah writes, **וידבר ה' אל משה לֵאמֹר** (*God spoke to Moses, saying*) The text is telling us that God said more than the obvious at a superficial reading of the words.

saying - Moses heard every one of the Ten Commandments one at a time and related them to the people. The Israelites heard the first two commandments at the same time and from the same source as did Moses, but they could not make sense of them. The other eight commandments they heard from Moses just as they heard all other commandments in the Torah from Moses. The word *saying* means that Moses was to communicate God's words to the people.

Or Hachayim (18th century)

God spoke all these words: We find the attributes of Justice and Mercy joined in the giving of the Ten Commandments, when it says, אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ - I am the Lord your God.

God (אלהים) spoke - Because it is אֱלֹהִים (God) who speaks and the world is created (in Genesis 1), we may view the revelation at Sinai and the Ten Commandments as a reenactment of the creation of the universe.

all these words: this is a reminder that you cannot accept Torah piecemeal. One who accepts all of Torah's commandments except even for one is considered as having rejected all of Torah.

God spoke all these words - The reason God made the Israelites hear His voice aloud was to discipline them and remove the residual pollutants they still suffered from as a result of Adam's sin. Once they were free of the pollutants, the Israelites were fit to hear the voice of God and God could justify associating His name with Israel.

2. "I am the Lord (יהוה) your God (אלהים) who took you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

or

2. I the Lord (יהוה) am your God (אלהים),.....

Rashi

brought you out - the act of My bringing you out is alone of such importance that you should subject yourselves to Me.

Ibn Ezra (12th century)

I am the Lord - Note that all the commandments fall into two categories. One category consists of rational laws, which God implanted in the minds of all intelligent human beings. There are many such commandments. The only (behavioral) one (not necessarily rational) is Shabbat. Thus every intelligent being of every nation and every tongue agree on them, for they are implanted in the mind by reason. There is nothing to add to or subtract from them. He who is without reason has no Torah. The second category is hidden commandments, i.e., ones which contradict reason. If we find one that contradicts reason, we should not take it at face value but must search for its meaning in the books of wise men of blessed memory to find out whether it is a parable. If it is not there, we must then investigate on our own.

I am the Lord - There are three types of commandments, namely ones observed with the heart, ones observed by speech, and ones observed by acts, all three of which have both positive and negative commandments. The heart: *You shall love the Lord your God, and You shall not hate another in your heart.* Speech: Reciting the Shema every day and Birkat Hamazon after meals, and *You shall not bear false witness.* Acts: The positive and negative acts are too numerous to mention.

I am the Lord - The first commandment is the basis of the nine that follow. Its place is among the precepts of the heart. The first commandment teaches that one should believe with an unwavering faith that this glorious God, whose name is written but not pronounced, is one's only God.

I am the Lord - The intelligent person will come to know God by learning the ways of God (meaning, by studying nature).

who brought you out - God did this for no other nation.

who brought you out... - Why are we obligated more than any other nation to observe God's commandments. Have we not all one Creator? Moses gave three answers: First, *we were slaves in Egypt, and God did all these things for us.* Second, *God did this for our own good always.* Third, *if we observe all God's commandments, we will be righteous people and merit the world-to-come.*

Nachmonides (13th century)

I am the Lord.... - There exists an Eternal Being through whom everything has come into existence by His will (i.e., the universe is the result of design not necessity) and power, and He is God to those who are obligated to worship Him. It is with His will and providence that we came forth from slavery. It is also evidence of God's infinite power.

I am the Lord - A midrash explains why there can be no other gods: A king invaded a country and his attendants said to him, "Issue decrees to us." He refused saying, "No. First you must accept my sovereignty, then I will issue decrees to you. For if you do not accept my sovereignty, why would you carry out my decree?" Similarly God says to Israel, "I am the Eternal your God. You shall have no other deities. As you accepted my sovereignty in Egypt, so you must carry out My decrees."

Baal HaTurim (13th century)

I am the Lord your God - why did God not identify Himself as Creator of the universe? Because unlike the exodus, there were no witnesses whereas for the exodus from Egypt there were.

I am the Lord your God - (There is disagreement among the rabbis whether the people heard all the commandments or just the first two) N claims God address all ten to the people. The problem was that the people did not understand what they were hearing. Moses therefore needed to explain the text to the people, with the exception of the first two commandments, which they both heard and understood directly from the Lord without need of an intermediary.

I am the Lord your God - The Ten Commandments were all formulated in the (second person) singular mode. At the end of the chapter, in referring to the giving of the Commandments, God uses the (second person) plural mode. The reason for the variation is to warn the people that they are both individually and collectively obligated to carry out God's instructions and refrain from violating the commandments. God wanted to be on record as if He had spoken to every Israelite individually.

Bachya (13th century)

I am the Lord - God is alone, has no partners. The word **אֲנֹכִי, I**, (as opposed to **אֲנִי, I**) refers to a presence, and the **א** (aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) at the beginning of the word and the verse alludes to both His existence and His preceding all. The other three letters are all multiples of 10 (**נ** is 50, **כ** is 20, **י** is 10), which is itself a dimension of the number 1.

took you out of the Land of Egypt - **הוֹצֵאתִיךָ** (which he translates, *brought you forth*) is used in the same sense as in Genesis 1, the creation of the universe (*let the earth bring forth, etc*). It signifies that the exodus was a rebirth of the world as it had been known (prior to Adam and Eve eating the fruit and being cast out of the Garden of Eden).

Or Hachayim (18th century)

out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage - the reason both phrases appear is that *God* addressed their bodies and their souls separately. *I am the Lord your God* was addressed to their souls, which departed from their bodies when *God* spoke these words.

I am the Lord your God - this means *God* remains our *God* both when employing the attribute of *Mercy* and the attribute of *Justice*. Thus we have the tradition (Talmud *B'rachot*) that one blesses *God* joyfully even when something tragic occurs. When *God* subjects us to discipline, He does so to insure that our future will be happier.

out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage - the reason both are stated is that the first refers to the exodus which has already taken place and the second refers to the future liberation when the *Messiah* comes.

Malbim (19th century)

I am the Lord your God - God exists independent of any other thing or cause, a point expressed through the name יהוה. This is actually the future (imperfect) form of the verb *to be* and thus denotes, He shall be no matter what (based on Exodus 3:14), *I am that I am*. It also implies past and present - *is* and *was* - indicating that the Lord precedes all else and that He always existed. God's name can also be referred to as, *He who brings into being*. (This reading of the word is what gave birth to the proposal that Yahveh/Yahweh is perhaps the way God's name was pronounced).

Benno Jacob (19th-20th century Reform commentator)

who brought you out... - (יהוה) had created man to be free, the highest form of which is found in divine service. If liberty and culture could not exist, then men should bid farewell to culture for the sake of freedom.

brought you out of the house of bondage - were these words removed, the breath of freedom and a key to the Jewish heart would have disappeared from the Decalogue.