

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. --- Exod. 20:2

Rabbi Abbahu said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: when the Holy Blessed One gave the Torah, no bird chirped, no fowl flew, no ox bellowed; the wheels (of the Divine chariot) did not fly nor did the seraphim (angels) chant **Kadosh** (the chant described in Isa. 6), the sea was undisturbed and no creature spoke, but the world was quiet, totally silent, and the voice came forth: *I am the Lord your God.* ---

Midrash Sh'mot Rabbah 29:9

Why were the Ten Commandments not given at the beginning of the Torah? To what can this be compared: A king who entered another land. He said to them: “I shall rule over you!” They responded: “What good have you done for us, that you should rule over us?” What did he do? He built them a wall, he brought water to them, he fought wars for them. He said to them, “I shall rule over you!” They readily agreed. Similarly, God brought forth Israel from Egypt and split the sea for them, sent down manna for them, dispensed the quail to them, provided them the well and fought for them the war against Amalek. When he said “I shall rule over you!” they readily assented. --- **Mekhilta; Yalkut Shimoni**

Your God: “your” is singular. Why so? To convey that even if individuals violate them, it would be as if all of you had violated them. --- **Midrash ha-Gadol**

Your God: “your” is singular. Why so? To convey that every individual Jew must say: these commandments were given to me, and I personally must fulfill them; I must not say: “It will be okay that the Torah is maintained by others.” --- **Midrash Lekach Tov**

Your God: “your” is singular. Why so? To give Moses something to use in Israel’s defense when they made the golden calf. He said: *Let not your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against your people* (Exod. 32:11). You did not command them not to

have other gods; you commanded it to me alone. --- Rashi, based on Midrash Shemot Rabbah 43:5

Your God: “your” is singular. Just as an image can be made so that everyone thinks the eyes are looking directly at him, so too when God spoke, everyone thought He was talking directly to him. After all, if the taste of manna could have the taste best liked by every individual, how much more so God’s word. --- Chizkuni (Chezekiah ben Manoah, 13-14th c. France)

God appeared to them at the sea as a warrior. God appeared to them at Sinai as a scribe teaching Torah. God appeared to them in the time of Solomon as a youth, and God appeared to them in the time of Daniel as an elder. The Holy Blessed One said to them: they see me in many forms. It is I who was at the sea, I who was at Sinai; I who am the Lord your God. --- Midrash Tanchuma Yashan

I do change appearances, but do not err and say there are two divine powers. I am the One who took you out of Egypt; I am the One who was at the sea. --- Rashi, based on Mekhilta

Let us explain this verse in light of the rabbinic teaching: “At the sea He appeared to them as a youth, and at Sinai He appeared to them as an elder.” (Pesikta Rabbati 21:5) The Blessed Holy One constricts Himself in the worlds. However, at the sea, where there was a change in nature, He was not garbed in the worlds, and the Israelites saw the Divine unclothed. At Sinai, however, the Blessed Holy One dressed Himself such that the worlds could maintain their existence.

In the writings of the **Ari** (Yitzchak Luria), clothing is associated with the symbol of hair. That is why at the sea God appeared to them as a youth, without facial hair, without any worldly garb. When giving the Torah, God was revealed to them as an elder, with a beard, dressed in this-worldly form. This is alluded to in the words of our Sages of blessed memory: “At the sea, even the maid servant saw that which the prophet Ezekiel did not see.” (Mekhilta, Beshallach 15:2) For Ezekiel and the other prophets saw God clothed in the world, as it were, according to the measure

of the worlds. But at the sea, everyone saw God unclothed (perhaps “unmediated”?)

At Sinai, however, God had to be covered in “garments” so that the Israelites would understand the Torah. That is why it is written (in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy): “You appeared in the cloud of Your glory...”, that is, by limiting and clothing His great light, for a cloud is a symbol of darkness; the liturgy then explains why this [darkness] was necessary by saying “...upon Your holy people to speak to them,” meaning that God spoke to them from within a cloud (i.e., a garment), so that they could understand His holy words. --- **Kedushat Levi**, Chasidic master Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, 18th-19th c.

Rabbi Yosi son of Rabbi Chanina said: According to each person’s capacity did they hear God’s voice speaking to them. Do not be surprised by this, for the manna which came down for Israel also was tasted according to the desire of each individual; the small children according to their taste, the youngsters to theirs, the elders to theirs. Naturally, all the more so, the speech was understood by each group according to their ability. --- **Pesikta d’Rav Kahana**

This is a positive commandment, both teaching and commanding them that they must know and believe that the Lord exists and that He is their God. He preexists everything, and everything comes from Him by His will and His power, and He is the God whom they must serve. --- Nachmanides

Do not think that our Sages are unanimous in their opinion of this utterance. I for one am not too shy to say that it is not a commandment, but an introduction to the commandments. --- Abarbanel

Who brought you out of the land of Egypt: Yehuda haLevi once asked me why God did not say here: “Who created heaven and earth, and Who created you.” My reply (in brief) was that “I the Lord” was enough for the enlightened, but the unenlightened needed tangible proof of why they should serve him. --- Abraham ibn Ezra, 12th c.

From the house of bondage: Why does it need to say this? Did not the Israelites come directly out of Egypt; did they not know that Egypt was the house of bondage? But God knew that they had short memories, and they needed this reminder that the Egypt from which they had escaped was, in fact, hell on earth. Egypt was the first Holocaust inflicted upon the Jewish people. --- Dennis Prager