

# The Ten Commandments in the Midrash

## 'Aseret ha-Dibrot, Exodus 20

### עשרת הדברות.

### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

ונדבר אל־הים, את כל־הדברים האלה, לאמר:

And God spoke all these words, saying,

«אני יהוה יהוה אל־הים. אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים:

I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

ב לא יהוה לך אלהים אחרים, עד־פני: לא תעשה לך פסל וכל־תמונה, אשר בשמים במעל, ואשר בארץ מתחת, ואשר במים מתחת לארץ: לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם. כי אני יהוה אל־הים אל קנא, פקד עון אבות על־בנים, על־שליש ועל־רביע לשה: ועשה חסד לא־לפים. לא־חבי וג־שמרי מצותי:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the form of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation, of them that hate me; and showing lovingkindness to the thousandth generation, of them that love me and keep my commandments.

ג לא תשא את־שם־יהוה אל־הים לשוא. כי לא ינקה יהוה, את, אשר ישא את־שמו לשוא:

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

ד זכור את־יום השבת לקדשו: ששת ימים תעבד ועשית, כל־מלאכתך: ויום השביעי, שבת ליהוה אל־הים. לא־תעשה כל־מלאכה, אתה, ובִנְךָ ובִתְךָ, עבֶדְךָ ואִמְתְךָ ובְהֶמְתְךָ, וְגֵרְךָ אשר בשעריך: כי ששת־ימים עשה יהוה, את־השמים וא־ת־הארץ, את־הים וא־ת־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם, וַיָּנַח ביום השביעי. על־כן בֵּרַךְ יְהוה את־יום השבת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ:

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day, is a sabbath unto the Lord thy God: on it thou shalt not do any work, neither thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is therein, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

ה כבד את־אבִיךָ ואת־אִמְךָ. לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּ יְמֶיךָ, על־הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר־יְהוה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

Honor thy father and thy mother; in order that thy days may long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

ו לא תרצח: Thou shalt not murder.

ז לא תנאף: Thou shalt not commit adultery,

ח לא תגנב: Thou shalt not steal.

ט לא תענה ברעך עד־שקר:

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

י לא תחמד בית רעך. לא־תחמד אִשְׁתִּי רעך, ועֶבְדוֹ ואִמְתּוֹ וְשׁוֹרוֹ וַחֲמֹרוֹ, וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־לְרֵעֶךָ:

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.

## **God is One -- The Shema**

Midrash - Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:31-36

31. HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE (Deut. 6:4).

Halachah: If a Jew recites the Shema' and does not enunciate clearly its letters, has he fulfilled his duty? The Sages have learned thus: If one recited [the Shema'] but did not clearly enunciate [its letters], R. Jose says: He has done his duty; R. Judah says: He has not done his duty. And what constitutes a clear enunciation of the letters? Our Rabbis taught us: [In reciting the words] 'bekol levavekem' ('with all your heart', Deut. 11:13), one should make a clear pause between the one lamed and the other lamed; in 'va'avadtem meherah' ('and you perish quickly', Deut. 11:17), one should make a clear pause between the one mem and the other mem.

R. Judah further said in the name of Rav: And if one was reciting the Shema' while walking [he should] stop, in order to accept the Kingdom of Heaven standing. And what part [of the Shema'] is termed 'the Kingdom of Heaven'? [The words], 'The Lord our God, the Lord is One.'

Whence did Israel merit to recite the Shema'? R. Phinehas b. Hama said: Israel merited to recite the Shema' at the Revelation on Sinai. How [is this to be inferred]? You find that it was with this word [Shema'] that God first began [to speak] at Sinai. He said to them: 'Hear, O Israel, I am the Lord Your God,' [Deut. 5:1] and they all answered and exclaimed: 'The Lord our God, the Lord is One.' And Moses said, 'Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.' The Rabbis say: God said to Israel: 'My children, all that I have created I have created in pairs; heaven and earth are a pair; sun and moon are a pair; Adam and Eve are a pair; this world and the world to come are a pair; but My Glory is One and unique in the world.' Whence this? From what we have read in our context, HEAR O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.

32. Another explanation: HEAR, O ISRAEL. This bears out what Scripture says, 'Whom have I in heaven but You? And beside You I desire none upon earth (Ps. 73:25).

Rav said: There are two firmaments, the heaven and the heavens of heavens.

R. Eleazar said: There are seven firmaments: Heaven (shamayim), the Heavens of Heavens (sheme shamayim), Firmament (raki'ah), Sky (shehakim), Habitation (ma'on), Residence (zebul), Thick Cloud ('arafel); and God opened them all unto Israel in order to show them that there is no God but He. The Assembly of Israel said before God: 'Master of the Universe, whom have I in heaven but Your glory? As in heaven I have none but You, so too upon earth I desire no other; as I have not associated another God with You in heaven, so upon earth, too, I have not associated with You any other God; but daily I enter the synagogues and testify concerning You that there is no other God but You, and I exclaim, HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.'

33. Another explanation: HEAR O ISRAEL. This bears out what Scripture says, 'My son, fear the Lord and the king,' etc. (Prov. 24:21). What is the force of 'And the king'? Abraham who feared Me -- did I not proclaim him as king in the world, as it is said, 'At the vale of Shaveh--the same is the king's vale' (Gen. 14:17); Joseph who feared Me, of whom it is written, 'For I fear God' (Gen. 42:18) -- did I not proclaim him as king in the world, as it is written, 'And Joseph was the governor over the land' (Gen. 42:6)? [He who fears the Lord need fear none else, and is thus as a king.]

Another interpretation: 'My son, fear the Lord and the king,' and rule over your inclination. Once R. Simeon b. Eleazar came to a city in the South and entering a synagogue he asked the teacher

[scribe], 'As you live, is there here any wine for sale?' The latter replied: 'Master, this is a city of Samaritans and they do not prepare the wine with [the strict levitical] purity as my fathers were wont to do.' He [R. Simeon] then said: 'If you have any wine to spare give it to me and I will buy it from you.' The teacher replied: 'If you can master your desires you should not taste of it'; whereupon R. Simeon b. Eleazar exclaimed: 'As for me, I can master my desires.' Hence the force of 'and king', that is to say, Rule over thine inclination. [Be 'king' over your desires'.]

Another explanation: 'My son, fear the Lord and the king.' What is the force of, 'And the king'? [It means], but [fear] not Molech, as [Scripture] in another context says, 'And you shall not give any of your seed to set them apart to Molech' (Lev. 18:21).

Another explanation: What is the force of, 'And the king'? Make [God] King over you. And meddle not with them that are given to change (Prov. loc. cit.): Do not meddle with those who declare that there is a second god. R. Judah b. Simon said: [Scripture says], 'And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, says the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die' (Zech. 13:8); the mouths that declare that there are two Powers shall be cut off and die. And who will survive in the future? But the third shall be left therein. This refers to Israel who are termed 'thirds', [threefolds] for they are divided into three groups, Priests, Levites, and Israelites; and are descended from the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Another explanation: Because they praise God with the threefold expression of holiness, 'Holy, holy, holy' (Isa. 6:3). R. Aha said: God was angry with Solomon when he uttered the above verse. He said to him: 'Why do you express a thing that concerns the sanctification of My Name by an obscure allusion' [in the words] 'And meddle not with them that are given to change' (shonim)? Thereupon immediately Solomon expressed it more clearly [in the words], 'There is one that is alone, and he has not a second; yea, he has neither son nor brother' (Eccl. 4:8); 'He has neither son nor brother,' but HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD. THE LORD IS ONE.

34. R. Isaac opened [his discourse] with the text 'The Lord is my portion, says my soul; therefore will I hope in Him' (Lam. 3:24).

R. Isaac said: This may be compared to a king who entered a province with his generals, rulers, and governors. Some of the citizens of the province chose a general as their Patron, others a ruler and others a governor. One of them who was cleverer than the rest said, 'I will choose the king.' Why? All others are liable to be changed, but the king is never changed. Likewise, when God came down on Sinai, there also came down with Him many companies of angels, Michael and his company, Gabriel and his company. Some of the nations of the world chose for themselves [as their Patron] Michael, others Gabriel, but Israel chose for themselves God, exclaiming, 'The Lord is my portion, says my soul'; this is the force of, HEAR. O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.

35. Another explanation: HEAR O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.

Whence did Israel merit to recite the Shema'? When Jacob was about to die he called together all the tribes and he said to them: '[I am anxious] lest you bow down to another God after I have departed this world.' Whence this? For so it is written, 'Assemble yourselves, and hear, you sons of Jacob' (Gen. 49:2).

What is the force of, 'And hearken unto Israel your father' (ib.). Jacob said to them: 'The God of Israel, He is your Father.' They replied: HEAR. O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. And he added softly, 'Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.' R. Levi said: And what do Israel imply when they now say, [HEAR. O ISRAEL]? HEAR our father ISRAEL, [Jacob] what you have commanded us we still adhere to; THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE

36. Another explanation: HEAR O ISRAEL.

The Rabbis say: When Moses ascended to heaven he heard the ministering angels saying to God, 'Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.' This [declaration] Moses brought down to Israel. And why do not Israel make this declaration publicly [i.e. aloud]?

R. Assi replied: This can be compared to a man who stole jewelry from the royal palace which he gave to his wife, telling her, 'Do not wear these in public, but only in the house.' But on the Day of Atonement when Israel are as pure as the ministering angels they do recite publicly, 'Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.'

## Honoring Father and Mother

Midrash - Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:15

15. YOU HAVE COMPASSED THIS MOUNTAIN LONG ENOUGH (Deut. 2:3).

Halachah: What is the reward of a Jew who zealously observes the duty of honoring father and mother?

The Rabbis have learnt thus [Peah 1:1]: These are the things for which a man enjoys the fruits in this world while the principal remains for the World to Come: the honoring of father and mother, etc.

[Mishnah 1. The following are the things for which no definite quantity is prescribed: the corners [of the field, left unreaped], first-fruits, [the offerings brought] on appearing [before the Lord at the three pilgrim festivals], the practice of lovingkindness, and the study of the Torah.

These are the things for which a man enjoys the fruits in this world while the principal remains for him in the world to come: the honoring of father and mother, the practice of charity, and the making of peace between a man and his friend; but the study of the Torah is equal to them all.]

**Dama b. Nethina** . R. Abbahu said: R. Eliezer the Great was asked by his disciples: 'Can you give an example of [real] honoring of parents?' He replied: 'Go and see what Dama b. Nethina of Askelon did. His mother was mentally afflicted and she used to slap him in the presence of his colleagues, and all that he would say was, "Mother, it is enough!" Our Rabbis say: Once the Sages came to him to Askelon, where he lived, to buy from him a precious stone [to replace one] lost from the vestments of the [high] priest, and they fixed the price with him at a thousand golden pieces. He entered the house and found his father asleep with his leg stretched out on the chest wherein the stone was lying. He would not trouble him, and he came out empty-handed. As he did not produce the stone the Sages thought that he wanted a higher price, and they therefore raised their offer to ten thousand golden pieces. When his father awoke from his sleep Dama entered and brought out the stone. The Sages wished to give him ten thousand golden pieces, but he exclaimed: 'Heaven forbid! I will not make a profit out of honoring my parents; I will only take from you the first price, one thousand golden pieces, which I had fixed with you.'

And what reward did the Holy One, blessed be He, give him? Our Rabbis report that in the very same year his cow gave birth to a red heifer, which he sold for more than ten thousand golden pieces. See from this how great is the merit of honoring father and mother.

**Esau**. R. Simeon b. Gamaliel said: No son has ever honored his parents as I have done, and yet I find that Esau honored his father even more than I. How? R. Simeon b. Gamaliel said: I usually waited on my father dressed in soiled clothes, but when I went out into the street I discarded these clothes and put on instead handsome clothes. Not so Esau; the clothes in which he was dressed when attending on his father were his best.

The proof for this is this. When he went out hunting in order to bring venison to his father that he might bless him, what did Rebekah, who loved Jacob, do? She gave him dainties and said to him, 'Go to your father and receive the blessings before your brother receives them.'

Whereupon Jacob said to her, 'Mother, do you not know that Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man' (Gen. 27:11): Perhaps my father will discover that I am not Esau and I will be put to shame before him.' Whence this? Because it is said, 'Perhaps my father will feel me,' etc. (Gen. 27:12).

She replied to him: 'My son, your father's eyes are dim; I will dress you with the fine clothes which your brother wears when he attends on your father, and when you come to him and he takes hold of your hand he will think that you are Esau and he will bless you.' And whence this? Because it is said, 'And Rebekah took the choicest garments of Esau,' etc. (Gen. 27:15), that is to say those which he was wont to wear when attending on his father, as it is said, 'And put them upon Jacob her younger son' (Gen. 27:15).

Hence when Jacob came to him, what did Isaac say? 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau' (Gen. 27:22). [He recognized that the garments were the best.] Isaac blessed him and he went out.

Then Esau arrived and entered into the presence of his father. Isaac asked him, 'Who are you, addressing me in such a loud voice?'

He replied: 'I am your son, your firstborn, Esau' (Gen. 27:32). As soon as he heard his voice he knew that he was Esau. He said to him: 'My son, your brother came with guile, and has taken away your blessing' (Gen. 27:35).

Thereupon Esau began to cry and to complain: 'Come and see what this quiet man of whom it is written, 'And Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents' (Gen. 25:27), has done to me. Not enough that he mocked me for selling him my birthright, Behold, now he hath taken away my blessing' (Gen. 27:36).

Hence you learn that Esau was most scrupulous in honoring his parents.

## **Murder, adultery and idolatry**

Midrash - Exodus Rabbah 16:2

2. DRAW OUT, AND TAKE YOU LAMBS (Ex. 12:21). It is written: 'In sitting still and rest shall you be saved' (Isa. 30:15). We have learned [Pes. 25]: **Everything may be used for healing, save idolatry, immorality, and murder.**

**MURDER.** For example: If one should say to a man: 'Kill this man and you will be healed', he should not listen to him, for it says: 'He who sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed' (Gen. 9:6). Since he who sheds blood has his own blood shed, how can the sufferer be healed by the shedding of blood?

**ADULTERY.** What is an example of being healed through immorality? If a man is told to act immorally that he may be healed, he should not listen to such advice, for a man is strictly forbidden to act immorally. You will find the section concerning the nazirite and the unfaithful woman side by side. [Num. 5:11-31] The nazirite vows not to drink wine; whereupon God says to him: 'You have made a vow not to drink wine in order to be removed from sin; then do not say: "I will eat grapes and no sin will befall me." Since, however, you have made a vow against wine, I will teach you not to sin before Me.' He told Moses, therefore, to teach Israel the laws of the nazirite, as it says: 'When either man or woman shall clearly utter a vow... he shall abstain from wine and strong drink' (Num. 6:2-3), 'he shall eat nothing that is made of the grape-vine' (Num. 6:4), and when he does this, he will be like an angel [free from sin]. All the days that he consecrates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy, as it says: 'And, behold, a watcher and a holy one' [referring to an angel] (Dan. 4:10). Again, a woman too is called 'vine', for it says: 'Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine' (Ps. 128:3).

God said: Do not say: I know I must not intimately associate with a woman, but I will take hold of her, or embrace her or kiss her and still not be led into sin. For just as the nazirite who vowed abstention from wine must abstain from grapes, whether dried or in a liquid state, also from anything soaked with grapes or that comes out of the vine, so also must you abstain from the slightest touch of any woman who is not your wife. This is what Solomon cautioned: 'Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?... so he that goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her shall not go unpunished' (Prov. 6:27,29). Hence did God place the section of the nazirite next to that of the unfaithful wife, because of their similarity to one another. He who touches another's wife brings death upon himself, as it says: 'Yea, a mighty host are all her slain' (Prov. 7:26), and also 'Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on the nether-world' (Prov. 5:5). Since it [immorality] has all these characteristics, how can it give new life to the sick? It is for this reason that one must not seek healing thereby.

**IDOLATRY.** What is the example for idolatry? If an ailing person in Israel is told to go to a certain idol and he will be healed, he must on no account obey; for so we are told: 'He who sacrifices to the gods, except to the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed' (Ex. 22:19). Since he who worships other gods is destroyed, it is much better for him to die of his illness in this world than bring destruction upon himself [in both worlds].

Not only is idolatry itself forbidden, but this prohibition extends to all things connected with idolatry. For instance: If a man is told to take of the incense offered up to idols or something from the sacred grove and make of it a charm whereby he may be healed, he should not comply; for it says: 'And none of the devoted thing shall cleave to your hand' (Deut. 13:18) -- this refers to idolatry. It also says: 'And you shall not bring an abomination into your house, and be accursed like unto it' (Deut. 7:26). Why is this? Because there is no reality in them and they are of no avail whatsoever, as it says: 'Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good' (Jer. 10:5).

-You will find that this is what Jeremiah said to his generation: 'Behold, I will arraign the idols in judgment, and will declare their works and that of God, so that all may know the difference between God and the idols.' Four times on one page will you find that Jeremiah exposed the shame of idolatry and revealed the praise of God, as it says: 'Thus says the Lord: Do not lean the way of the nations,... for the customs of the peoples are vanity' (Jer. 10:2,3); 'They deck it with silver and with gold... they are like a pillar in a garden of cucumbers, and do not speak' (Jer. 10:4,5).

-Now that you have heard the shame of the idols, come and hear the praises of God, as it says: 'There is none like You, O Lord;... Who would not fear You, O King of the nations?' (Jer. 10:6,7).

-Now that you have heard the praises of God, hear once again the shame of idolatry, for it says: 'But they are altogether brutish and foolish:... silver beaten into plates which is brought from Tarshish' (Jer. 10:8,9).

-Now that you have heard the shame of the idols, come and I will tell you once again the praise of God, for it says: 'But the Lord God is the true God' (Jer. 10:10).

-Now that you have heard the praise of God, come and hear once again the shame of the idols; for it says: 'Thus shall you say to them: 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens' (Jer. 10:11).

-After having heard the shame of the idols, come and hear once again to the praise of God; for it says, 'He who has made the earth by His power... at the sound of His giving a multitude of waters in the heavens' (Jer. 10:12-13).

-Now that you have heard the praise of God, come and hear once again the shame of the idols, for it says, 'Every man is proved to be brutish... They are vanity, a work of delusion' (Jer. 10:14-15).

-Now come and listen once again to the praises of God after this exposition of the shame of the idols, for it says, 'Not like these is the portion of Jacob; for He is the former of all things' (Jer. 10:16).

God, therefore, said: Since it [idolatry] is like a mute stone, [Hab. 2:19] and mere make-believe, and others have to guard it from being stolen, how can it possibly give new life to those who are suffering?' It is for this reason that one must not seek a cure from anything that belongs to it. You will find that when Israel were in Egypt, they served idols, which they were reluctant to abandon, for it says: 'They did not every man cast away the detestable things of their eyes' (Ezek. 20:8).

God then said to Moses: As long as Israel worship Egyptian gods, they will not be redeemed; go and tell them to abandon their evil ways and to reject idolatry. This is what is meant by: **DRAW OUT AND TAKE YOU LAMBS**, that is to say: Draw away your hands from idolatry and take for yourselves lambs, thereby slaying the gods of Egypt and preparing the Passover; only through this will the Lord pass over you. This is the meaning of 'In sitting still and rest shall you be saved'. [Through repentance and rejection of idols will you be saved.]



## Shabbat

Midrash - Exodus Rabbah 25:11-12

11. SEE THAT THE LORD HAS GIVEN YOU SHABBAT (Ex. 16:29). Why does it say SEE, when 'know' would have been better? This, however, is what God said to them: 'When the heathen come and say to you: "Why do you keep Shabbat on this day?" then tell them: "See, the manna does not descend on Shabbat."

Why does it say, THE LORD HAS GIVEN \*YOU\*? - **TO YOU has He given it, but not to the heathen.** It is in virtue of this that the Sages stated [Sanh. 56b] that if some of the heathen observed Shabbat, then not only do they not receive any reward, [but they are even considered to be transgressing]; for it says, 'And day and night shall not cease' (Gen. 8:22), and also 'It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever' (Ex. 31:17).

[Veshamru] Ex. 31:16. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep Shabbat, to observe Shabbat throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant. 17. It is a sign between me and the people of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

It is just as if a king and queen were sitting on their thrones and somebody passed between them; he would be deemed to have offended. [Likewise, if a heathen comes between God and Israel, it would be improper.]

12. R. Levi said: **If Israel kept Shabbat properly even for one day, the son of David would come.** [In Shabbat 118b, R. Simeon bar Yohai puts the number at two Shabbatot.] Why? Because it is equivalent to all the commandments; for so it says, 'For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the flock of His hand. To-day, if you would but listen to His voice!' (Ps. 95:7)

-R. Johanan said: The Holy One, blessed be He, told Israel: 'Though I have set a definite term for the millennium which will come at the appointed time, whether Israel returns to Me in penitence or not, still, if they repent even for one day, I will bring it before its appointed time.' Hence, 'To-day, [redemption comes] if you would but listen to His voice'; and just as we find that the son of David will come as a reward for the observance of all commandments [one day], so also will he come for the observance of one Shabbat, because Shabbat is equivalent to all commandments. R. Eleazar b. Abina said: In the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings we find it stated that Shabbat is equivalent to all commandments.

-**In the Torah**, because when Moses forgot to tell them the command of Shabbat, God said to him: 'How long you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?' (Ex. 16:28), [His sin was only forgetting the instruction of Shabbat, and yet was tantamount to his neglect of all the commands.] and immediately after this it says, 'See that the Lord has given you Shabbat' (ib. 29)

-**In the Prophets**, for it says, 'But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they walked not in My statutes' (Ezek. 20:13), and immediately afterwards it says, 'And My sabbaths they greatly profaned' (ib.).

-**In the Writings**, because it says, 'You came down also upon Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven' (Neh. 9:13), and immediately afterwards it says, 'And made known to them Your holy sabbath.' [Shabbat is the only command that is specified.] God said: 'If you virtuously observe Shabbat, I will regard you as observing all the commands of the Law, but if you profane it, I will regard it as if you had profaned all the commands'; for so it says, 'That keeps Shabbat from profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil' (Isa. 55:2). [Thus, to refrain from desecrating Shabbat is equivalent to refraining from all evil.] When man keeps Shabbat, whatever he decrees God fulfils, for

it says, 'If you turn away your foot because of Shabbat' (Isa. 63:13), and immediately after this it says, 'Then shall you delight yourself in the Lord' (Isa. 63:14), which has the same meaning as the verse, 'So shall you delight yourself in the Lord; and He shall give you the petitions of your heart' (Ps. 37:4). Moreover, whatever benefit you derive in this world, is but the fruit thereof, but the principal will remain for you in the World to Come, because it says, 'And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it' (Isa. 58:14).

## **I Am the Lord Your God**

AND GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS, SAYING: I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD (Ex. 20:1)

Midrash - Exodus Rabbah 28:4-6

[AND GOD SPOKE] ALL THESE WORDS, SAYING (Ex. 20:1). God does all things together. He puts to death and brings to life at the same time, He wounds and heals at the same time. If there is a woman giving birth, people going down to the sea, men travelling through deserts, or who are incarcerated in prison, though one is in the east and another in the west, one in the north and another in the south -- He hears them all simultaneously, for so it says, 'I form the light, and create darkness', etc. (Isa. 45:7).

Isa. 45:7. I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the Lord, who does all these things.

Dust is changed to man, and man is changed back to dust, as it says, 'And turns the shadow of death to the morning' (Amos 5:8). What does 'to the morning' imply? -- As it was at first [i.e., darkness]. What does it say at the beginning? -- 'And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood' (Ex. 7:20). Later, the blood became water again.

Living flesh dies, but the dead flesh comes to life again. [The hand of Moses was stricken with leprosy and then healed again; likewise Miriam.]

The rod became a serpent, but afterwards it became a rod again.

The sea became dry land, but later it became sea once more, and so it says, 'That calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the face of the earth (Amos 5:8).

Similarly, the command: 'Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy' has its opposite, 'And on the sabbath day two he-lambs of the first year (Num. 28:9). [Sacrifices break Sabbath rest.]

The command: 'You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife' (Lev. 18:16) has its opposite in: 'If brethren dwell together,' etc. (Deut. 25:5), [a man must marry his brother's wife under certain conditions] and all these things were said simultaneously,

-- hence AND GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS, SAYING.

5. Come and see that the ways of God are not those of men. A mortal king cannot wage war and at the same time be a scribe and a teacher of little children, but God can.

On the sea yesterday, He was like one waging war, for it says, 'The Lord is a man of war' (Ex. 15:3), and also, 'He stirs up the sea with His power' (Job 26:12); and today, at Revelation, He descended to teach His children Torah.

Hence does it say, 'Behold, God does loftily in His power; who is a teacher like Him? (Job 36:22).

-- Hence AND GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS.

6. Another explanation of AND GOD SPOKE ALL THESE WORDS, SAYING. R. Isaac said: The prophets received from Sinai the messages they were to prophesy to subsequent generations; for Moses told Israel: 'But with him that stands here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day,' etc. (Deut. 29:14). It does not say 'that does not stand here standing with us this day', but just 'with us this day' -- these are the souls that will one day be created; and, because there is not yet any substance in them, the word 'standing' is not used with them. Although they did not yet exist, still each one received his share [of the Torah]; for so it says, 'The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi (Mal. 1:1). It does not say 'in the days of Malachi', but 'by Malachi', for his prophecy was already with him since Sinai, but hitherto permission was not given him to prophesy...

So Isaiah said: 'From the time that it was, there am I' (Is. 48:16). [Implying that he had been at Revelation.] Isaiah said: 'I was present at the Revelation on Sinai whence I received this prophecy, only And now the Lord God has sent me, and His Spirit (ib.); for hitherto no permission was given to him to prophesy. Not only did all the prophets receive their prophecy from Sinai, but also each of the Sages that arose in every generation received his [wisdom] from Sinai, for so it says, 'These words the Lord spoke unto all your assembly... with a great voice, and it went on no more' (Deut. 5:19). [Since 'it went on no more', we must conclude that all the prophets and Sages received their messages from that voice at Sinai.]

R. Johanan said: It was one voice that divided itself into seven voices, and these into seventy languages.

R. Simeon b. Lakish said: [It was the voice] from which all the subsequent prophets received their prophecy.

The Sages said: It had no echo.

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: How is it possible to say, 'The voice of the Lord is with power' (Ps. 29:4)? Do we not know that no creature can withstand the voice of an angel, as it says, 'His body also was like the beryl... and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude' (Dan.10:6). Was it then necessary for the Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it says, 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' (Jer. 23:24) to speak with power? The meaning, however, of 'The voice of the Lord is with power' is that it was with the power of all voices. [To each it spoke according to his powers of comprehension.] As to the view of R. Johanan, the following verse supports him, for it says, 'The Lord gives the word; they that proclaim the tidings are a great host' (Ps. 68:12). [I.e., His words are split up into a great host.]

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Midrash, Exodus Rabbah 29:1-9

1. I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD (Ex. 20:1). It is written, "Did ever a people hear the voice of God [speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?]" (Deut. 4:33).

Some sectarians once asked R. Simlai: 'Are there not many deities in the world?'

He replied, 'What makes you think so?'

'Because,' they said, 'it is written, "Did ever a people hear the voice of God [Elohim, plural]?"

[Hashama] 'am kol Elohim medabber...]

To which he replied, 'It does not say medabberim [plural] but "medabber" [singular].

Whereupon his disciples said to him: 'O teacher, you have thrust these [sectarians] off with a broken reed, but what answer will you give to us?'

R. Levi then offered them this explanation: It says, 'Did ever a people hear the voice of God?' What does this mean? Had it said 'The voice of God in His power', the world would not have been able to survive, but it says instead: 'The voice of the Lord is with power' (Ps. 29:4) - that is, according to the power of each individual, according to the individual power of the young, the old, and the very small ones [and this is why it may sound like many different voices]. God said to Israel: 'Do not believe that there are many deities in heaven because you have heard many voices, but know that I alone am the Lord your God,' as it says, "I am the Lord your God" (Deut. 5:6).

2. Another explanation of I AM THE LORD THY GOD.

It is written, 'The Lord spoke with you face to face' (Deut. 5:4).

R. Abdimi of Haifa said: Twenty-two thousand [angels] descended with God on Sinai, as it says, 'The chariots of God are myriads [>20,000], even thousands upon thousands [>2,000] - shinan' (Ps.

68:18). The very best and choicest of them [went down]. Lest you think that because they were so many, they were crowded together, the verse, therefore, states, 'shinan,' meaning sha'anan (peaceful) and quiet. Note that in the words, 'The Lord is among them' (ib.), the name of God is not spelled with a yod [YHVH], but with an aleph and a dalet [Adonai], to show that the Lord of the whole world was among them.

(R. Levi offered another explanation of this: The tablet of the Shem Hameforash [The Divine, ineffable Name] was inscribed on their hearts.)

Another explanation of 'The Lord is among them' is given by the Sages: The name of God was joined with the name of each angel, as MichaEL, GabriEL. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: 'Do not imagine that because you have seen so many faces, therefore there are many deities in heaven; know that I am the only God.' Hence, I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD.

3. R. Tobiah b. Isaac expounded: I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD-It was on this condition that I BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, that is, that you acknowledge Me as your God.

Another explanation of I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. It can be compared to a princess who having been taken captive by robbers, was delivered by a king who subsequently wished to marry her. Replying to his proposal, she said: 'What dowry do you give me?' He replied: 'Even if I have no other claim on you but that I rescued you from the robbers, that is sufficient.'

4. Another explanation of I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. R. Aha b. R. Hanina began: 'Hear, O My people, and I will speak' (Ps. 50:7). R. Simeon b. Yohai said [Pesikta of R. Kahana, 12:5]: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: 'I am God over all earth's creatures, yet I have associated My name only with you; for I am not called "the god of idolaters" but "the God of Israel".'

R. Levi said: Israel asked of God two things -- that they should see His glory and hear His voice; and they did see His glory and hear His voice, for it says, 'And you said: Behold, the Lord our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire' (Deut. 5:21). But they had no strength to endure [this Revelation], for when they came to Sinai and God revealed Himself to them, their souls fled because He spoke with them, as it says, 'My soul failed me when He spoke' (Song of Songs 5:6). It was the Torah that pleaded for mercy for them before God: 'Is there a king who gives his daughter away in marriage and slays his own family? The whole world is now rejoicing, yet Your own children are dead.' Whereupon their souls immediately returned, for it says, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul' (Ps. 19:8).

R. Levi said: Was it not obvious to God that if He revealed His glory to Israel and made them hear His voice, they would not be able to endure it? God, however, foresaw that they would one day worship idols, and to prevent them from pleading, 'Had God shown us His glory and greatness, and made us hear His voice, we would not have worshipped idols' -- for this reason does it say, 'Hear, O My people, and I will speak, [O Israel, and I will testify against thee; God, your God, am I.]' ('Shema' 'ammi ve-adabbera, Yisrael ve-a'idah bach; Elohim elohecha anochi')

5. Another explanation of I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. R. Abbahu illustrated thus: A human king may rule, but he has a father and brother; but God said: 'I am not thus; I am the first, for I have no father, and I am the last for I have no brother, and besides Me there is no God, for I have no son.'

Another explanation of I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. It is written, 'I have declared, and I have saved, and I have announced,' etc. (Isa. 43:12) -- 'I have declared' to Egypt that you have fled, so that they may hear and pursue after you and be drowned in the sea, as it says, 'And it was told the king of

Egypt that the people had fled (Ex. 14:5). 'And I have saved,' as it says, 'Thus the Lord saved Israel that day (ib. 30). 'And I have announced' - to the heathen, for it says, 'The peoples have heard, they tremble' (Ex. 15:14). 'And there was no stranger [lit: 'strange god'] among you' (Isa. 43:12), because it says, 'And Moses let his father-in-law depart (Ex. 18:27), and immediately after we read, 'In the third month (Ex. 19:1). 'Therefore you [alone] are My witnesses, says the Lord, and I am God' (Isa. 43:12); hence, I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD.

6. A further illustration: When a human king is about to enter a city, the inhabitants sweep and sprinkle the city and adorn it and hang it with rugs and all kinds of beautiful ornaments, and also illuminate it with lights. 'But in My case, it is not so,' said God. 'When I entered My world, I spread the curtains, for it says, 'That stretched out the heavens as a curtain' (Isa. 40:22); I kindled the lights, for it says, 'And God said: Let there be lights' (Gen. 1:14); I sprinkled water, for it says, 'Let the waters... be gathered together' (Gen. 1:9); I have adorned all I have created, as it says, 'And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them' (Gen. 2:1).'

7. I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. When a human king builds a palace, is it possible for him to move it from its place? But with Me it is not so; for it says, 'I have made and I will carry; yea, I will bear, and will deliver' (Isa. 46:4). 'I have made' -- for it says, 'And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife,' etc. (Gen. 3:21). 'I will carry' -- for it says, 'And the Lord God bore the man [to the Garden of Eden](Gen. 2:15).

Another interpretation: 'I have made,' as it says, 'For it repents Me that I have made them (Gen. 6:7); 'And I will carry' -- namely, Noah, as it says, 'And the Lord shut him in' [God bore the ark above the waters](Gen. 7:16). 'Yea, I will bear,' for it says, 'And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower [and bore this act of rebellion patiently]'(Gen. 11:5). 'And I will deliver' -- Abraham, of whom it says, 'And He said to him: I am the Lord that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees [thus delivering him from evil](Gen. 15:7).

Another explanation: 'I have made' Israel, for it says, 'Has He not made you, and established you?' (Deut. 32:6); 'And I will carry,' as it says, 'And how I bore you on eagles' wings (Ex. 19:4). 'I will bear' [the sin of the] Golden Calf. 'And deliver,' as it says, 'And the Lord said: I have pardoned according to your word' (Num. 14:20).

8. Another comment: When a human king goes forth for a reception of homage, he goes forth singly [with few attendants and no army], and when he goes forth to battle, myriads accompany him; but with God the reverse is the case. When He goes forth to battle, He goes alone, for it says, 'The Lord is a man of war' (Ex. 15:3), but when He came to give the Torah on Sinai, myriads [of angels] accompanied Him, as it says, 'The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands' (Ps. 68:18).

9. Another explanation of I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. It is written, 'The lion has roared, who will not fear?' (Amos 3:8), which explains the verse, 'Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For it befits You' (Jer. 10:7).

The prophets said to Jeremiah: 'Why do you say "O King of the nations"? All the other prophets call Him "King of Israel", whereas you call Him, "King of the nations."'

To which he replied: 'I heard Him say to me, "I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (ib. I, 5), and therefore do I say "King of the nations", thereby implying that if He does not spare His own children and His

family, will He then spare others? -- as it says, 'Awful is God, because of Your holy places (Ps. 68:36).' [God will be feared because of the punishment He will inflict on those who destroyed His Temple] 'Who would not fear You, O King of the nations?' -- Who will not be afraid of You? It is as if a

money-lender having filled his pocket with gold coins stood crying out loudly: 'Whoever wishes can come and borrow,' and when people heard this, they fled, saying: 'When the time comes for him to be repaid, which debtor will be able to bear it?'

Similarly, God came down to Sinai to give the Ten Commandments so that the world shall not totter, [It was the Torah that set the earth on a solid foundation] as it says, 'The earth trembled, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God' (ib. 9). The mountains also quaked before God and also the pillars of heaven shook, and Israel also trembled, as it says, 'And all the people... trembled' (Ex. 19:16). The mountain trembled, for it says, 'And the whole mount quaked greatly' (ib. 18). Why did they all quake? Because He spoke words of life, and the prophet cries out, 'The lion has roared, who will not fear?' R. Jeremiah said: If the earth trembled when He gave life to the world, how much the more so when He comes to punish the wicked for transgressing the words of the Torah? -- as it says, 'Who can withstand His wrath?' (Nahum 1:6). 'And who may abide the day of His coming?' (Mal. 3:2). If no creature has power to stand before Him when He is pleased [at Revelation], then who can stand before Him when He rises in His fierce wrath? Hence 'Who would not fear You, O King of the nations?' (Jer. 10:6).

Another explanation: 'The lion has roared.' It is written, 'They shall walk after the Lord, who shall roar like a lion' (Hos. 11:10). R. Simon said: It is like a king who entered his palace, and when his lady heard this, she made room for him and trembled. If the lady trembled, what should the maid-servant and men-servants do? So when God revealed Himself to give the Torah to Israel, they heard the voice and died, as it says, 'My soul failed when He spoke' (Song of Songsd 5:6); if Israel were so afraid, then how much more were the nations?

Another explanation of 'The lion has roared': The Sages said in the name of R. Hoshaya: Baltsa asked R. Akiba: 'Whence comes the thunder?' He replied: 'When the Holy One, blessed be He, beholds the heathen temples and their worshippers enjoying peace and prosperity in this world, and sees His Temple destroyed and in the hands of idolaters, He becomes jealous and begins to roar, and immediately heaven and earth tremble, as it says, 'And the Lord shall roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shall shake' (Joel 4:16). What does Israel do? -- He, as it were, protects them, as it says, 'But the Lord will be a refuge unto His people' (ib.).

Another explanation of 'The lion has roared'. Come and see: The Temple is called 'lion', for it says, 'Ah, Ariel, Ariel [the lion of God]' (Isa. 29:1), and the Royal House of David is called 'lion', as it says, 'How was your mother a lioness; among lions she couched' (Ezek. 19:2). Israel is called 'lion', for it says, 'Judah is a lion's whelp' (Gen. 49:9), and Nebuchadnezzar is called 'lion', for it says, 'A lion is gone up from his thicket' (Jer. 4:7). Now he destroyed the Temple, took away the kingdom of the house of David, and exiled Israel, and God says: 'Where is the den of lions?' (Nahum 2:12), where are My children? 'At that moment He roars mightily because of His fold' (Jer. 25:30).

Another explanation of 'The lion has roared'. God said to Israel: 'Will you receive the Ten Commandments?' 'Yes,' they replied, as it says, 'With [aley] an instrument of ten strings, and with psaltery' (Ps. 92:4), which means, I must [alay] accept the Ten Commandments. What is the meaning of, 'The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?' (Amos 3:8). Said R. Abbahu in the name of R. Johanan: When God gave the Torah no bird twittered, no fowl flew, no ox lowed, none of the Ophanim stirred a wing, the Seraphim did not say 'Holy, Holy', the sea did not roar, the creatures did not speak, the whole world was hushed into breathless silence and the voice went forth: I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. So it says, 'These words the Lord spoke unto all your assembly... with a great voice, and it went on no more' (Deut. 5:19). R. Simeon b. Lakish said: What is the meaning of 'And it went on no more'? -- When man calls his friend, there is an echo to his voice, but there was no echo to the voice that proceeded from God. Should you wonder at this, then remember that when

Elijah came on Carmel, he gathered all the heathen priests [1Kings 18:19] and said to them: 'Cry aloud, for he is a god' (1Kings 18:27).

1Kings 18:27. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them [the prophets of Baal], and said: 'Cry aloud; for he [Baal] is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone to the bathroom, or he is in a journey, or perhaps he sleeps, and must be awaked.'

So what did God do? He silenced the whole world, both those in heaven and those on earth, and the whole world became waste and void, as if no creature was in the world, as it says, 'But there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded' (1Kings 18:29). [Not only was Baal silent, but the whole world was silent.] Had He spoken, they would have said: 'Baal has answered us.' How much more natural was it then that when God spoke on Mount Sinai, the whole world became silent, so that all creatures might know that there is none beside Him. Then He said: I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. And of the Time to Come it says, 'I, even I, am He who comforts you' (Isa. 51:12). [Because they received the Commandments beginning with 'anochi', God will comfort them in the Messianic Age also with 'anochi'.]



# The Ten Commandments: 'Aseret ha-Dibrot

## Exodus 20

1. And God spoke all these words, saying,
2. I am the Lord your God, who have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
3. You shall have no other gods before me.
4. You shall not make for you any engraved image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;
5. You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
6. And showing mercy to thousands of those who love me, and keep my commandments.
7. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.
8. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
9. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work;
10. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates;
11. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and made it holy.
12. Honor your father and your mother; that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you.
13. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
14. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbor's.
15. And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they were shaken, and stood far away.
16. And they said to Moses, Speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.
17. And Moses said to the people, Fear not; for God has come to test you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that you sin not.

## Also in Deuteronomy 5

1. And Moses called all Israel, and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that you may learn them, and keep, and do them. 2. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. 3. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day. 4. The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, 5. I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to tell you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and went not up into the mount, saying, 6. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. 7. You shall have no other gods before me. 8. You shall not make any engraved image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth; 9. You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 10. (K) And showing mercy to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 11. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold guiltless him

who takes his name in vain. 12. Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord your God has commanded you. 13. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; 14. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is inside your gates; that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you. 15. And remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and with a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day. 16. Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you; that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you, in the land which the Lord your God gives you. 17. You shall not kill. Nor shall you commit adultery. Nor shall you steal. Nor shall you bear false witness against your neighbor. 18. Nor shall you desire your neighbor's wife, nor shall you covet your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is your neighbor's. 19. These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice which was not heard again. And he wrote them in two tablets of stone, and delivered them to me. 20. And it came to pass, when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, for the mountain burned with fire, that you came near me, all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; 21. And you said, Behold, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire; we have seen this day that God talks with man, and he lives.