

## 5783 - Exodus 18-20 - Yitro (Jethro)

<sup>20:1</sup>And God spoke all these words: (1) <sup>2</sup>"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

(2) <sup>3</sup>"You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup>"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

(3) <sup>7</sup>"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

(4) <sup>8</sup>"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

(5) <sup>12</sup>"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

(6) <sup>13</sup>"You shall not murder.

(7) <sup>14</sup>"You shall not commit adultery.

(8) <sup>15</sup>"You shall not steal.

(9) <sup>16</sup>"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

(10) <sup>17</sup>"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

1. (v. 2) **אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם**—*Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt*. The question has been asked **why does Hashem define Himself here as the One who took Israel out of Egypt rather than the One Who created heaven and earth**. In *Rashi's* opinion the Exodus from Egypt was sufficient unto itself to warrant Israel's service to Hashem ... <sup>1</sup>

*Ramban* states that it was imperative to firmly proclaim Hashem's unquestioned existence in the Ten Commandments. The fact that Hashem created the heaven and earth requires certain proofs which are accessible only to philosophers and learned men. Creation was not an

event that was witnessed and perceived by other humans. In contrast, the miracles of the Exodus were observed by millions of people. This tremendous historic event occurred before the eyes of all humanity, demonstrating the real existence of Hashem, as well as His sovereignty over nations and nature.

In *R' Yehudah HaLevi's* opinion, the reason why the Ten Commandments mentions the Exodus rather than the Creation is because **the Exodus demonstrates the concept of a personal God**. Abstract philosophic contemplation may lead one to the conclusion that there is an all-powerful Creator. However, if the starting point of our analysis is the actual fact of the Exodus and of Hashem's revelation on Mt. Sinai, then not only is the existence of an all powerful God manifest, but one can derive too, the concept of a personal God who reveals Himself to Israel. **The fact that Hashem is intimately involved in the affairs of men and nations is more important comparatively speaking than God the abstract Creator** (*Kuzari*<sup>2</sup> 1:25, 2:54).

### a. Exodus 3:7-10

<sup>7</sup>The LORD said, **"I have indeed seen the misery of my people** in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and **I am concerned about their suffering**. <sup>8</sup>So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ... <sup>9</sup>And now **the cry of the Israelites has reached me**, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. <sup>10</sup>So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

### b. Isaiah 63:7-9

<sup>7</sup>I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. <sup>8</sup>He said, "Surely they are my people, children who will be true to me"; and so he became their Savior. <sup>9</sup>**In all their distress he too was distressed**, and the angel of his presence saved them. **In his love and mercy he redeemed them**; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

### c. Matthew 6:25-34

<sup>25</sup>"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life

1 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Shemos*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 265-278.

2 The *Kuzari*, full title *Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion*, also known as the Book of the Khazar is one of the most famous works of the medieval Spanish Jewish philosopher and poet Judah Halevi, completed in the Hebrew year 4900 (1139-40 CE).

more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and **yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?** <sup>27</sup>Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? <sup>28</sup>And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup>Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, **will he not much more clothe you**—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup>So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

<sup>34</sup>Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

d. Hebrews 4:14-16

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Yeshua the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup>For **we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses**, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup>**Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**

2. (v. 2) מִבֵּית עֶבְדִּים—*From the house of slavery*. This supplementary detail stresses that Hashem's intention was not only to liberate the Israelites on a national and political level, **but also on the spiritual plane**. Before they could rise to this exalted spiritual freedom, **the emancipation from a slave mentality was required**. Thus, the laws at the beginning of the very next *Sidrah* (*Mishpatim*) are devoted to the subject of freeing slaves. Just as Hashem is a pure Spirit, free from matter, similarly man, created in His image, is expected to rise above the limitations of his material body and attain a similar independence.

The Zohar expounds upon the suggestion that a physical deliverance preceded the moral and spiritual ascent. R Yosei, the youngest student of R' Shimon ben Yochai, was at first hesitant to ask a question which he presumed was too audacious: Why does Hashem proudly and repeatedly mention that He redeemed Israel from Egypt? Was He not simply honoring the promise made to Abraham: *Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own, and they will serve them... and afterwards they shall leave with great possessions* (Genesis 15:13-14).

R' Shimon ben Yochai replied to his student that Hashem went far beyond the deliverance promised to Abraham. Not only did He break the fetters of physical enslavement, but also the chains of their moral and spiritual degradation. Then, at the Revelation at Sinai, He transported them to sublime heights of purity and holiness. As a result of their exposure to the immoral Egyptians, they had sunk almost to the lowest level of moral degradation (forty-ninth out of fifty). Yet, it only took fifty days to achieve their transformation into a *kingdom of ministers and a holy nation* (19:6). Thus, the remembrance of the Exodus is mentioned exactly fifty times throughout the Torah. It is to this great and eternal spiritual redemption to which the redemption from Egypt refers.

The first words of the Ten Commandments express the fundamental principles which form the special relationship between Hashem and Israel. Consequently, *Ramban* concludes that the commandment of ... *acceptance of the sovereignty of Heaven*, and ... *acceptance of the obligation to perform the mitzvos*, are included in this verse. *Rambam* offers a broader, more general significance to the words: *I am Hashem, your God. It is a command to believe in God, the First Cause Who created everything. This is the foundation of wisdom*. This commandment constitutes a confession of faith, and involves neither a positive nor negative act. *Halachos Gedolos*<sup>3</sup> **does not record this first commandment in his list of the 613 mitzvos for belief does not constitute a command. Ibn Ezra, however, considers this first commandment to be a mitzvah and stresses that the duties of the heart and mind are the most important and noblest**, despite widely held erroneous opinions to the contrary.

a. Mark 12:28-34

<sup>28</sup>One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Yeshua had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" <sup>29</sup>"The most important one," answered Yeshua, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.' <sup>30</sup>**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength**' (Deu 6:5). <sup>31</sup>The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Lev 19:18). There is no commandment greater than these." <sup>32</sup>"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup>To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all

<sup>3</sup> Halachoth Gedoloth (lit. great halachoth) is a work on Jewish law dating from the Geonic period. It exists in several different recensions, and there are sharply divergent views on its authorship, though the dominant opinion attributes it to Simeon Kayyara.

your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." <sup>34</sup>When Yeshua saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

1) Matthew 15:18-19

<sup>18</sup>But **the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart**, and these defile them. <sup>19</sup>For out of the heart come evil thoughts-- murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

2) Proverbs 6:12-15

<sup>12</sup>A troublemaker and a villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth, <sup>13</sup>who winks maliciously with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, <sup>14</sup>**who plots evil with deceit in his heart**—he always stirs up conflict. <sup>15</sup>Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed-- without remedy.

3) Galatians 6:7-10

<sup>7</sup>Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup>**Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.** <sup>9</sup>Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people ...

3. (v. 3) **לֹא יִהְיֶה־לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים**—*You shall not recognize the gods of others.* *Rashi* maintains that this verse prohibits the possession of newly fashioned idols, as well as those which were previously made by others but are presently owned by a Jew. According to *Ramban*, however, this prohibition goes beyond the actual possession of idols. He argues that **this verse embraces even the mere verbal acknowledgment of false gods.** *Rambam* states that **even if one assumes in his mind alone that a deity other than Hashem exists, he transgresses this commandment** and is considered an apostate (Hil. Yesodei HaTorah [The Laws (which are) the foundation of the Torah] 1:2). **This is one of the rare instances in which a purely mental act constitutes a sin.**

*Sefer Mitzvos HaGadol*<sup>4</sup> states that this commandment also forbids belief in the concept of **שותף**, *partnership*, **a single divinity composed**

**of two or more separate divine entities, such as is found in the dogma of the trinity** espoused by elements of Messiahianity.

To understand the great emphasis on forbidding idolatry in any of its forms, whether in thought, word, or deed, it is necessary to look at the historical context. **Even today, some religions, while subscribing to faith in one God, still retain vital vestiges of their heathen past.** They have merged several entities into one divinity and interposed agents between God and man. **Ultimately these beliefs stem from pagan origins and prevent a true recognition of the absolute Unity of God.** The belief that there is more than one component of the divinity results in a double standard of ethics in social, political and economic areas, as well as in science, philosophy and the arts. Judaism strongly opposes this dualistic system, which ultimately divides people into opposing groups. Instead, Judaism subscribes to a complete Unity, derived from absolute monotheism. If the commitment to the Unity of Hashem is absolute, then polytheistic vestiges disappear. **Only one morality can exist, one justice, one humanity, and one truth.** All the world's peoples are called upon to join as brothers in worshiping the same God. Hence, confronted with man's dualistic tendencies, there is a need to conclude the commandment, *I am Hashem, your God*, with the prohibition *you shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence.* The positive side is not enough. A corollary must be attached with its specific message of exclusivity: **one God alone, and no other.**

Thus, the first two commandments were proclaimed pg maT, in the same breath. Moreover, they are blended together by **the tonal accents employed when this passage is read publicly in the synagogue.** The melody binds the two verses and molds them into one single idyllic phrase ...

a. Exodus 20:17

<sup>17</sup>"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. **You shall not covet** your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

1) Leviticus 19:17-18

<sup>17</sup>"**Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart.** Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. <sup>18</sup>"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

a) Matthew 5:21-22

<sup>21</sup>"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that **anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.**

<sup>4</sup> *Sefer Mitzvot HaGadol* ("The Great Book of Commandments"), completed in 1247 is a work of halakha by Moses ben Jacob of Coucy, containing an enumeration of the 613 commandments.

2) Proverbs 6:25

<sup>25</sup>**Do not lust in your heart after her beauty** (i.e., your neighbor's wife) or let her captivate you with her eyes.

a) Matthew 5:27-28

<sup>27</sup>"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup>But I tell you that **anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

b. Sanhedrin 56a

Our Rabbis taught: seven precepts were the sons of Noah commanded: **social laws;**<sup>(33)</sup> **to refrain from blasphemy, idolatry; adultery; bloodshed; robbery; and eating flesh cut from a living animal.**<sup>(34)</sup>

(33) I.e., **to establish courts of justice**, or, perhaps, to observe social justice (Nahmanides on Gen. XXXIV, 13): Hast. Dict. (s.v. Noachian precepts) translates 'obedience to authority'.

(34) **These commandments may be regarded as the foundations of all human and moral progress.** Judaism has both a national and a universal outlook in life. In the former sense it is particularistic, setting up a people distinct and separate from others by its peculiar religious law. But in the latter, it recognises that moral progress and its concomitant Divine love and approval are the privilege and obligation of all mankind. And hence the Talmud lays down the seven Noachian precepts, by the observance of which all mankind may attain spiritual perfection, and without which moral death must inevitably ensue. That perhaps is the idea underlying the assertion (*passim*) that a heathen is liable to death for the neglect of any of these. The last mentioned is particularly instructive as showing the great importance attached to the humane treatment of animals; so much so, that it is declared to be fundamental to human righteousness.

c. Exodus 23:23-24

<sup>23</sup>My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. <sup>24</sup>**Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices.** You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces.

d. Romans 1:18-23

<sup>18</sup>The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup>**since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.** <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world **God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen**, being understood from what has been made, so that **people are without excuse.** <sup>21</sup>For although **they knew God, they neither glorified him as God** nor

gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup>and **exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.**

4. (v. 4) **לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ פֶּסֶל**—*You shall not make yourself a carved image.*

While many religions not only tolerate, but even require physical representation of their saints and gods, Judaism has always declared that **Hashem is spiritual and invisible.** It is a grave sin to revere any form or image carved or sculptured by man. This law may have hindered the development of the arts in Israel, but it was of inestimable value in preserving the purity of Israel's concept of Divinity.

**The prophets and sages fought fiercely against idolatry.** In fact, in the time of the Hasmoneans, this prohibition gave them the spiritual strength to die as martyrs. They were killed if they refused to bow before an idol and yet they refused to deviate from their faith in the One God. Countless Jews were prepared to die at the hands of Roman legions rather than allow the Imperial eagle to be erected in the Temple. Likewise, in the Middle Ages many parents chose to die with their children rather than submit to a forced baptism. The 19th century German philosopher Emmanuel Kant<sup>5</sup> wrote that there is no passage in the Bible more sublime than the verse: You shall not make yourself a carved image. He viewed this prohibition as the key to the martyrdom and the heroic greatness showed by the Jewish people through the ages.

a. John 4:24

<sup>24</sup>**God is spirit**, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

1) 2Corinthian 3:17

<sup>17</sup>Now **the Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2) Colossians 1:15

<sup>15</sup>**The Son is the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation.

3) 1Timothy 1:17

<sup>17</sup>Now to the King eternal, immortal, **invisible**, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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5 Immanuel Kant, (1724–1804) is German philosopher whose comprehensive and systematic work in epistemology (the theory of knowledge), ethics, and aesthetics greatly influenced all subsequent philosophy, especially the various schools of Kantianism and idealism—<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Immanuel-Kant>.

b. 2Corinthians 6:15-18

<sup>15</sup>What harmony is there between Messiah and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup>What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For **we are the temple of the living God**. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Lev 26:12; Exo 29:45; Jer 32:38). <sup>17</sup>Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you" (Isa 52:11). <sup>18</sup>And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2Sam 7:14).

5. (v. 15 [13]) **לֹא תִגְנוֹב**—*You shall not steal*. Private ownership of property is a formal right consecrated by Hashem. Violating this right is a sin against God and an offense against human justice.

The restriction regarding stealing is proclaimed in a universal form, like the rest of the Ten Commandments, **and is addressed to everyone** (*Kli Yakar* [Precious Object]). **Not only is the kidnapping of human beings included (as indicated by *Rashi*)**, but also the theft of money or other property (see commentary of *R' Bachya*). *Rambam* commences his treatise on the laws of theft by stating that whoever takes another's money transgresses a prohibition of the Torah, whether it be money taken from a Jew or a gentile, from an adult or a minor (*Hil. Geneivah* 1:1). Like the preceding prohibitions, this one extends to anything that might promote its violation, such as befriending thieves (*Targum Yonasan*). This commandment includes also **גְּנֵיבַת דָּעַת**, *stealing the mind* [lit., "theft of knowledge"], i.e., **misleading or deceiving speech or conduct**.

a. Exodus 21:16

**"Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death**, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's possession.

b. 1Timothy 1:8-11

<sup>8</sup>We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. <sup>9</sup>We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup>for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, **for slave traders and liars and perjurers**—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine <sup>11</sup>that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.