

הַנְּגִישִׁים אֶל־יְהוָה יִתְקַדְּשׁוּ פֶן־יִפְרֹץ בָּהֶם יְהוָה: כג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה לֹא־יִוָּכַל הָעָם לָעֵלֶת אֶל־הַר סִינַי כִּי־אַתָּה הֶעֱדַתָּ בְּנֹוֹ לֵאמֹר הִגְבַּל אֶת־הַהָר וְקַדְּשָׁתוֹ: כד וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹוֵי יְהוָה לְדָוִד וְעָלִית אֶתְּךָ וְאַהֲרֹן עִמָּךְ וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהָעָם אֶל־יְהִרְסוּ לָעֵלֶת אֶל־יְהוָה פֶּן־יִפְרֹץ־בָּם: כה וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים: ס כ א וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת פְּלִי־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֶר: ס ב אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ

דְּקָרְיָוִן לְשִׁמְשָׁא קָדִם יי וַיִּתְקַדְּשׁוּ דִילְמָא יִקְטוּל בְּהוּן יי: כג וַאֲמַר מֹשֶׁה קָדִם יי לֹא יִכּוּל עַמָּא לְמַסַּק לְטוּרָא דְסִינַי אַרְי אֶת אֶסְתְּרָתָּ בְּנָא לְמִימַר תַּחֲסִים יֵת טוּרָא וְקַדְּשִׁיהּ: כד וַאֲמַר לִיהּ יי אֲוִיל חוּת וְתַסַּק אֶתְּ וְאַהֲרֹן עִמָּךְ וְהַכֹּהֲנָא וְעַמָּא לֹא יִפְגְּרוּן לְמַסַּק לְקָדִם יי דִילְמָא יִקְטוּל בְּהוּן: כה וְנַחַת מֹשֶׁה לְעַמָּא וַאֲמַר לְהוּן: א וּמְלִיל יי יֵת כָּל פְּתִיגְמִיָּא הָאֵלֹוֵי לְמִימַר: ב אֲנָא יי אֱלֹהֶיךָ דִי אֶפְיִקְתִּיךָ מֵאֶרֶעָא

אין אלהים אלא דיין, (וכן הוא אומר קְלָהִים לֹא תִקְלָל (להלן כג, כו) ותרגומו דיינא), לפי שיש פרשיות בתורה שאס עשאתן אדם מקבל שכר ואם לאו אינו מקבל עליהם פורעניות, יכול אף עשרת הדברות כן, תלמוד לומר וידבר אלהים, דיין ליפרע: את כל הדברים האלה. מלמד שאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא עשרת הדברות בדבור אחד, מה שאי אפשר לאדם לומר כן. אם כן מה תלמוד לומר עוד אנכי ולא יהיה לך, שחזר ופירש על כל דבור ודבור בפני עצמו: לאמר. מלמד שהיו עוין על הן הן ועל לאו לאו: (ב) אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים. כדאי היא ההוצאה שהיו משועבדים לי. דבר אחר, לפי שנגלה בים כגבור מלחמה, ונגלה כאן כוקן מלא רחמים, שנאמר (להלן כד, י) וַתִּסַּח רַגְלֵי קַמְעֵשָׂה לְבִנְת הַסְּפִיר, זו היתה לפניו בשעת השעבוד, וקָמְעָס הַשָּׁמַיִם משנגאלו, הואיל ואני משתנה במראות אל תאמרו שמי רשיות הן, אנכי הוא אשר הוצאתיך ממצרים ועל הים. דבר אחר, לפי שהיו שומעים קולות הרצה, שנאמר (להלן פסוק טו) קֹת הַקּוֹלֹת, קולות באין מארבע רוחות ומן השמים ומן הארץ, אל תאמרו רשיות הרצה הן. ולמה אמר

הוא יחיד חשוב לפני רב: יחרסו. כל הריסה מפרדת אסיפת הבנין, אף הנפרדין ממנצב אנשים הורסים את המנצב: (כג) וגם הכהנים. אף הזכורות שהעבודה בהם: הנגשים אל ה'. להקריב קרבנות, אף הם אל יסמכו על חשיבותם לעלות: יתקדשו. יהיו מזומנים להמיצב על עמדתן: פן יפרץ. לשון פרצה, יחרוג בהם ויעשה בהם פרצה: (כג) לא יוכל העם. איני צריך להעיד בהם שהרי מוקרים ועומדים הם היום שלשת ימים ולא יוכלו לעלות שאין להם רשות: (כד) לך רד. והעד בהם שנית, שמזרין את האדם קודם מעשה ומזרין אותו בשעת מעשה: ועלית אתה ואהרן עמך והכהנים. יכול אף הם עמו, תלמוד לומר ועלית אתה. אמר מעתה, אתה מחיפה לעצמך, ואהרן מחיפה לעצמו, והכהנים מחיפה לעצמם, משה נגש יותר מאהרן, ואהרן יותר מן הכהנים, והעם כל עיקר אל יחרסו את מנצבם לעלות אל ה': פן יפרץ בהם. אף על פי שהוא נקוד חטוף קמ"ץ אינו זו מגזרתו, כך דרך כל תיבה שנקודתה מלאפ"ו"ס כשהיא צאה [סמוכה] במקף משתנה הנקוד לחטוף קמ"ץ: (כה) ויאמר אליהם. התראה זו: (ה) וידבר אלהים.

not belong to him. His boundary is an abstraction, an intangible separation. Apparently, God did not want the people to refrain from ascending the mountain because a physical barrier blocked them. Thus He commanded Moses to descend and warn the people so they would restrain themselves because of Moses' command, and not because of a physical constraint. This idea is a major motif in the Torah. For Jews, there are neither fences nor partitions. The prohibition and the warning alone are enough to prevent a Jew from transgression and wrongdoing. God had to emphasize to Moses that the whole Torah is contained in the words, "Al yehersu, Let them not break through" (verse 24)—do not break down any abstract boundaries or partitions. Judaism contends that the slave does not understand the concept of a division between sacred and profane, of "Let them not break through." The Gemara states, *A slave prefers a dissolute life* (Gittin 13a; Kesubos 11a). He takes as much as he can. Only physical power can stop him—a taskmaster or a policeman. The most amazing thing about the Exodus, far greater than the signs and

who go near to the Lord shall prepare themselves, lest the Lord wreak destruction upon them.”²³ And Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot ascend to Mount Sinai, for You warned us saying, Set boundaries for the mountain and sanctify it.”²⁴ But the Lord said to him, “Go, descend, and [then] you shall ascend, and Aaron with you, but the priests and the populace shall not break [their formation] to ascend to the Lord, lest He wreak destruction upon them.”²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and said [this] to them.

20¹ God spoke all these words, to respond.* ² “I am the Lord, your God,* Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* ³ You

wonders, is the transformation of a nation of slaves who lived in a boundless state, who “preferred a dissolute life,” who did not understand the meaning of laws and strictures and obeying laws when no taskmaster threatens. (*Festival of Freedom*, pp. 71-72)

The Torah requires man to not cross certain boundaries. We do not abstain from violating Shabbos because of the threat of stoning; aside from one incident in the desert, no Jew was ever stoned for violating Shabbos. There is no serpent to kill us, no sanctions imposed, if we desecrate the Shabbos. לא יוכל העם לעלות אל-ה' סיני. The imaginary line that the Jew lives by is stronger than any fence. (*Boston*, 1979)

A priest who enters the *Heichal*, the Sanctuary, is flogged, but if he enters the Holy of Holies he is punishable by death at the hands of God. He must not enter the place where the *Shechinah* is located.

One who utters the holy name of God in vain has transgressed a negative commandment. One who pronounces an unnecessary benediction has also transgressed a negative commandment. The *halachah*, in its sober, simple way, expresses a sublime metaphysical idea: sometimes it is necessary for there to be a tension of great fear that is manifested in retreat. God constructs universes and destroys them, says the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 3:7). י-ה-ו-ה is both a noun and an adjective, and in its adjectival form it expresses two ideas: the coming into being of what exists, and the annihilation of what exists.

The Kabbalah has revealed to us the secret of the breaking of the vessels and the story of the seven “kings” (from *chesed*, lovingkindness, to *malchus*, kingdom) who ruled and “died” because they were unable “to tolerate the light that spread within them from sphere to sphere” (*Etz Chaim* of R. Chaim Vital, *Sha'ar Hakelalim*). Covering the lights streaming from the Infinite makes it possible for worlds to exist. The divine separateness protects being. (*From There Shall You Seek*, pp. 63-64)

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֶר - *God spoke all these words, to respond.* For extensive commentary on this verse, see Appendix A.

וְאֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ - *I am the Lord, your God.* When speaking of the existence of God which is the content of this commandment, Maimonides writes: *The foundation and mainstay of all wisdom is to know [leida] that there is a Primary Being who is the Creator.* (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 1:1). To know (*leida*) means that our conviction of the existence of God should become a constant and continuous awareness of the reality of God, a level of consciousness never marred by inattention; to believe (*leha'amin*), on the other hand, implies no prohibition against inattentiveness. I believe—but it may happen that I become distracted at times from the thing in which I believe. But the term “to know” (*leida*) references a state of continuous awareness—that the belief in God should cause man to be in a state of perpetual affinity, of constant orientation. God should become a living reality that one cannot forget even for a minute.

מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: ג' לֹא-יְהִי־לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים דְּמִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדוֹתָא: ג' לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים

לשון יחיד, אלהיך, ליתן פתחון פה למשה ללמד סניגוריא צמעשה העגל, וזהו שאמר (להגן לב' יא) לָמָּה ה' יִתְּרָה אֶפְדָּךְ צָעֲמָךְ, לא להס צוית לא יהיה לכם אלהים אחרים אלא לי לצדי: מבית עבדים. מצית פרעה שהייתם עבדים לו. או אינו אומר אלא מצית עבדים שהיו עבדים לעבדים, תלמוד לומר וַיִּפְדֶּךָ מִצֵּרֵי מִצְרַיִם מִיַּד פְּרַעֲהַ מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם (דברים י, ח), אמור מעתה עבדים למלך היו ולא עבדים לעבדים: (ג) לא יהיה לך. למה נאמר, לפי שנאמר לא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ (פסוק ג), אין לי אלא שלא יעשה, העשוי כבר מנין שלא יקיים, תלמוד לומר לא יהיה לך: אלהים אחרים. שאינן אלהות אלא אחרים עשאוים אלהים

This keen awareness of the existence of God should constitute the foundation of our thoughts, ideas and emotions in every situation and under all conditions. Everything else inevitably depends upon this supreme article of faith. Be conscious of God's existence at all times.

A man wakes at dawn and sees the sun rising or goes out at sunset and sees the fiery clouds which drape the horizon in the twilight of a weekday at dusk, and though he may be a physicist or another type of scientist who is capable of interpreting the phenomena of sunset and sunrise in quantitative mathematical-scientific terms—still, he must see in the splendor of sunrise and sunset, in this wondrous cosmic regularity, a reflection of the glory of God, Whose primeval will was central to the dynamics of creation and still animates all organic matter. "To know" means to see the sun rising and to immediately say the blessing, *Creator of light and producer of darkness*, or to see the sun setting and say the blessing, *Creator of sunsets*, or to see trees blossom and recite a blessing over this, or to look at the sea and to respond by acknowledging *He Who fashioned creation*.

"Knowing" does not refer to nature alone. It is sufficient that a man reflect on past or present events, enough that he read the morning news in the paper—and that he discerns the hand of Providence and hears the *shofar* calls of the Almighty. Man is under the obligation of fulfilling the positive commandment of "knowing" that there exists a Primary Being responsible not only for nature but for all of history as well. It is a positive commandment to see God's presence in everything. (*On Repentance*, pp. 144-146)

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים - *I am the Lord, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* Rashi, quoting *Mechilta*, comments: *Taking you out of Egypt is sufficient reason for you to be subject to Me.* Apparently, Rashi and *Mechilta* were bothered by the question of why the Almighty did not introduce Himself as the creator of heaven and earth.

Since God is creator and sustainer of everything—from the outskirts of the universe to the blossoming rose in one's backyard—man is always confronted with Him. God is omnipresent and watches over everything and everybody. It was Abraham who discovered His relationship with the universe. Abraham discovered God who created the world, heaven and earth, the empty stretches of the uncharted spaces, every insect and every flower. *Chazal* say that Abraham looked upon the world and saw it illumined by intelligence and order, and he asked, "How can this world have no ruler?"

Abraham chose to enter into a covenant with God, signaling a unique relationship with a specific nation. From the metaphysical viewpoint, there is a difference between His relationship with the universe and the relationship with Israel. Within creation, God is the ruler, God is the master, God is the lawmaker, God is the architect, God is the king. Man surrenders to God. However, within the covenantal community, God is not only the ruler and creator, but also teacher, comrade, friend and counselor. This singular relationship which binds God with man within one fellowship is a result not of creation, but of the Exodus from Egypt. Had God said, "I am the Lord your God

shall not have the gods of others in My presence. 4 You shall not make for yourself*

who created heaven and earth,” there would be no explanation for the revelation at Sinai, for the establishment of a new relationship between Him and His people.

Chazal commented that the phrase אֲשֶׁר הוּצַאתִי מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אִתָּךְ can be read אֲשֶׁר הוּצַאתִי מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אִתָּךְ I was taken out with you from the land of Egypt. We both were oppressed. We both were in bondage. We both gained freedom.

At the cosmic level of the God-man confrontation, God owns everything; man owns nothing. Within the covenantal community, however, the relationship is a mutual one. God owns man, but man also owns God. In the *Amidah* prayer, we invoke *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*—our forefathers each had a *kinyan*, an acquisition in God, as it were. This verse of the Decalogue represents the first time that God took His name, changed it into a possessive noun, and said: I am your God. You own Me; I am your property. I own you as creator; you own Me as a member of the covenantal community. אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, I will be your God in a very private, unique way. My presence in your historical drama will differ from My intervention in universal history. This involves an act of *tzimtzum*, a contraction of God’s presence. The same God whom the universe cannot contain descends from His transcendental recesses into a small, weak, slave community, joins it, and introduces Himself as אֱלֹהֶיךָ. (*Noraos Harav*, Vol. 5, pp. 46-50)

Rashi, quoting *Mechilta*, indicates that God identifies Himself through the Exodus because He revealed Himself at the Red Sea as a warrior and reveals Himself here as a merciful older man, with a brick of sapphire under His feet (24:10). This brick was before Him during the Israelite’s enslavement as a sign that God suffered along with them. With the arrival of the dark night of the soul, in moments of agony and black despair, when living becomes ugly and absurd, when man loses his sense of beauty and majesty—God addresses him, not from infinity but from the infinitesimal, not from the vast stretches of the universe but from a single spot in the darkness which surrounds suffering man, from within the black despair itself.

My wife lay on her deathbed, and I watched her dying, day by day, hour by hour. Medically, I could do very little for her; all I could do was pray. I could not pray in the hospital—somehow, I could not find God in the whitewashed, long corridors among the interns and the nurses. However, the need for prayer was great; I could not live without gratifying this need. The moment I returned home, I would rush to my room, fall on my knees and pray fervently. God, in those moments, appeared not as the exalted, majestic King, but rather as a humble, close friend, brother, father: in such moments of black despair, He was not far from me; He was right there in the dark room; I felt His warm hand on my shoulder, I hugged His knees. He was with me in the narrow confines of a small room, taking up no space at all.

God abiding in a fenced-in finite locus manifests His humility and love for man. In such moments *humilitas Dei*, which resides in the humblest and tiniest of places, addresses itself to man. (*Majesty and Humility*, pp 32-33)

❧ לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עִלְפָּנִי - *You shall not have the gods of others in My presence.* Maimonides lived in an age where there were no idols. He had never been in a Christian society, and the Moslems are not idolaters. Maimonides’ understanding of לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עִלְפָּנִי is thus a philosophical one. A philosophy that explains the finite universe in terms of itself, without recourse to infinity—to the *ein sof*—is *avodah zarah*. If someone singles out a certain principle besides