



Jewish Congregation of Marco Island

## A CLOSE LOOK AT TORAH

Focus on a question in the weekly portion

February 07, 2026



**“Fostering diverse modes of attention to textual details cultivates correlative forms of attention to the world and divine reality”**

Michael Fishbane (1943- ), *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלֶּדֶת הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֶסֶק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

### “Tachometer Torah”



...read down to the red line

### Parashat-haShavu'a Stats

Weekly Portion: Yitro

Consists of: Exodus 18:1-20:26

Sequence—

in annual Torah cycle: 17<sup>th</sup> of 54

in Exodus: 5<sup>th</sup> of 11



### A Salient Selection from the Portion -

Exodus 19:21-20:3

**Context:** *Exodus, second of the Five Books of the Torah, is an account of how God liberated the Israelites from Egypt and entered into a Covenant with us at Mount Sinai, and a record of the legislations we undertook for the conduct of the society we were to establish in the Promised Land.*

**Content:** *It is The Giving of the Torah at Sinai, even more than the Exodus from Egypt, that is the watershed event in Jewish national history. Our departure from forced servitude to Pharaoh was only a prelude, giving us the freedom to choose to serve God instead. Here, fifty days after the Exodus, God urges Moses to go back down the Mountain to stand among the people he leads.*

19:21] - The Eternal One said to Moses, “**Go down, inform the people** they are not to break through to The Eternal One to gaze, lest any of them perish. [19:22] - The priests, too, who will be approaching The Eternal One, must stay apart, lest The Eternal One break out on them.”

19:23] - But Moses said to The Eternal One, “The people can't come up to Mount Sinai, for You swore us on oath: ‘set the Mountain apart by setting boundaries around it’.”

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה רִד הָעָד  
בָּעָם פֶּן יִהְרָסוּ אֶל יְהוָה לְרֹאוֹת  
וְנָפַל מִמֶּנּוּ רַב וְגַם הַכֹּהֲנִים  
הַנִּגְשִׁים אֶל יְהוָה יִתְקַדְּשׁוּ פֶן יִפְרָץ  
בָּהֶם יְהוָה

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוָה לֹא יוּכַל  
הָעָם לָעֶלֶת אֶל הָר סִינַי כִּי אַתָּה  
הִעַדְתָּה בָּנוּ לֵאמֹר הִגְבַּל אֶת הָהָר  
וְקִדְּשְׁתּוּ

- more over

19:24] - But The Eternal One told him, “Go down. You may come back up— you and Aaron; but let not the priests, or the rest of the people, break through to come up to The Eternal One, Who might lash out against them.” [19:25] - **So Moses went down** to the people to tell them that.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֲנִי ה' וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהָעָם אֵל יִהְיֶה לָּעֹלָת אֵל יִהְיֶה פֶּן יִפְרֹץ בָּם וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם

20:1] - **At which God spoke** all these words, saying:

וַיִּדְבֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֹר

20:2] - *Anochi Adonai Eloheicha*, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage;

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

20:3] - you shall have no other gods, besides Me.

לֹא יִהְיֶה לָּךְ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פָּנַי



אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ

אֱלֹהֶיךָ

יְהוָה

אֲנֹכִי

Exodus 20:2 -

<b>I am</b>	The Eternal One,	your God,	<b>Who</b> brought you out...
<b>I,</b>	The Eternal One,	<b>am</b> your God,	<b>Who</b> brought you out...
<b>I—</b>	The Eternal One,	your God—	<b>am the One Who</b> brought you out...

**בְּרִית עֲשֻׁרֵת הַדְּבָרִים** - Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13, 10:7

“this Covenant of **the Ten Declarations**”

Jewish	Catholic	Protestant
<b>עֲשֻׁרֵת הַדְּבָרִים</b> <b>The Ten Statements</b>	<b>Decalogue λόγος</b> <b>The Ten Words</b>	<b>The Ten Commandments</b>
1. <b>I am</b> The Eternal One, your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.	1. <b>I am</b> the Lord, your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. <b>You</b> shall have no other gods before Me <i>etc.</i>	<b>I am</b> the Lord, your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. ----- 1. <b>You</b> shall have no other gods before Me.
2. <b>You</b> shall have no other gods before Me <i>etc.</i>	2. <b>You</b> shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.	2. <b>Make</b> no graven images.
3. <b>You</b> shall not take the name of The Eternal One, your God, in vain.		3. <b>You</b> shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

- continued

**וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים -**

A) Abraham ibn-Ezra (1089-1164) on Exodus 20:1 - **“At which God spoke”** –

יש שאלות קשות בפי הזאת

There are some very difficult questions raised in this chapter.

**אמרו רבים כי השנים הדברים לבדם אמר השם ועדותם שכתוב בדבור ראשון אנכי ה' אלהיך ובשניה כי אנכי ה' אלהיך אל קנא**

Many have said that **The Ineffable One uttered only two of these Declarations**, in evidence whereof they adduce the fact that [only two of these are framed in the first-person]. The first of these is **“*Anochi Adonai Eloheicha*”** [20:2], while the second is **“*Anochi* — The Eternal One— am a jealous God”** [20:5].

**ובשלישי כתוב את שם ה' אלהיך גם את אשר ישא את שמו לשוא ולא אמר שמי**

By contrast, [the third declaration of the Decalogue is framed in the third person— namely, the prohibition against taking] “the Name of The Eternal One, your God [in vain,” in verse 7] **does not say “My Name”**;

**וברביעי כי ששת ימים עשה ה' וגו' על כן ברך ה'**

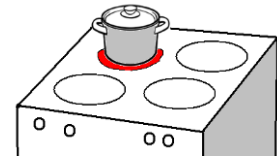
the fourth [is also third-person]: “for in six days did The Eternal One make [heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day;] wherefore The Eternal One blessed [the Shabbat day, and hallowed it” [20:11];

**ובחמישי אמר אשר ה' אלהיך נותן לך**

and the fifth “[honor your father and your mother,] that your days may be long upon the land which The Eternal One, your God, is giving you” [20:12. So on, for the rest of these Ten declarations, only the third-person reference refers to— but is not spoken by— the Deity].

**ויש לשאול איך יספר דבור אנכי בעשרת הדברים כי הוא המצוה והנה איננו מצות עשה ולא מצות לא תעשה**

Moreover, there is room to ask **how we are to count the declaration “I am [The Eternal One, your God]” among the Ten Statements**. For here God is the One doing the commanding— and yet [**I am** The Eternal One, your God”] **is neither a “thou shalt,” nor a “thou shalt not.”**



**ושאלות קשות מאלה**

Moreover, there are certain questions herein that are even more difficult than those.

**והנה אנחנו קראנו זו הפרשה שהיא פ' וישמע יתרו ראשונה ופ' ואתחנן שניה והנה ראינו כי מתחלת אנכי ועד סוף את אשר ישא את שמו לשוא אין שנוי בין ב' הפרשיות ומתחלת זכור עד סוף עשרת הדברים שנוי בכ"מ**

We first encounter this passage [of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20] in this weekly portion *Yitro*, and will then later reprise it in the weekly portion *Va'Etchannan* [Deuteronomy 5]. Now we will find that there is no distinction between the text of the two passages, from “I am the Eternal One” through to “The Eternal One will not hold guiltless one who takes His Name in vain”[— namely, Exodus 20:1-7 and Deuteronomy 5:6-11]. And yet **from that point onward, until the end of the Ten Statements, there are numerous differences, in a number of places.**

**בראשונה זכור ובשנית שמור**

[After cataloguing several of these, ibn-Ezra continues with one of the larger and more striking

**- more over**

changes between the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of The Ten Commandments]. **Initially it says “remember [the Sabbath” - Exodus 20:8], but the second time it says instead “keep [the Sabbath” - Deuteronomy 5:12].**

ואמר עוד על כן ברך ה' את יום השבת

Moreover, it initially says [“for in six days The Eternal One made heaven and earth,] whereupon The Eternal One blessed the sabbath day” [Exodus 20:11].

ואלה הפסוקים אינם כתובים בשנית רק **טעם אחר** וזכרת כי עבד היית בארץ מצרים ואמר באחרונה על כן צוך ה' אלהיך לעשות את יום השבת

Now, these same verses are not repeated the second time [in Deuteronomy 5:15]; moreover, that latter text **offers a totally different rationale** [for Shabbat observance]: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt,” and then concludes: “on which basis The Eternal One, your God, commanded you to keep the Shabbat day” [5:15].

וכאשר חפשנו בדברי חז"ל מה אמרו על ככה מצאנו שאמרו **זכור ושמו**  
**בדבור אחד נאמרו**

When we searched the words of our sages to see what they said concerning this conundrum, we found that they said [in the **Talmud, Rosh haShanah 27a**] that **“Remember”** [in Exodus 20:8] **and “Keep”** [in Deuteronomy 5:12] **were spoken in a single utterance.**

וחלילה חלילה שאומר שלא דברו ככונה כי דעתנו נקלה כנגד דעתם ואיננו כן

Heaven forbid that I am saying our blessed sages spoke incorrectly (for our minds are insignificant, in comparison to theirs)—**however, this is not correct!**

First verse of *L'chah Dodi*  
by Shlomo haLeivi Alkabetz, 1575

**שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדָבוּר אֶחָד**

הַשְּׁמִיעֵנוּ אֶל הַמִּיחָד

“Keep” and “Remember” **in a single utterance**  
did the One Unified God let us hear.

**יְיָ אֶחָד וְשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד**

לְשֵׁם וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת וּלְתִהְלָה

The Eternal One is One, and His Name is One,  
for fame and splendor and praise!

**Option 1 –**

Forty years after leaving Egypt, **Moses retooled what God had said** at Mount Sinai, in order to meet the needs of a new generation.

Deuteronomy 4:44

**וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה**  
“This is the Torah  
**אֲשֶׁר שָׂם מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי**  
**בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**  
that **Moses placed** before  
the Israelites”

**Option 2 –**

**God made both declarations simultaneously** at Sinai as a verbal “Zip File,” providing leeway for **Moses to do his judicious re-write** forty years later.

Numbers 10:13

**עַל פִּי יְהוָה**  
“...at the command of  
**The Eternal One,**  
**בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה**  
by Moses’s hand.”

**Option 3 –**

**Moses wrote it down the right way** in Exodus.

Then another author, in a later age, reformulated the text when composing Deuteronomy.



B) Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918),  
*Die Composition des Hexateuchs* -

The formation of the Torah reflects changes in the history of Israelite religion as it moved from free, simple and natural to fixed, formal and institutional.

The earliest material, in the “J” document [referring to the Deity as יהוה “the Eternal One”], is a product of the 10th century BCE at the court of Solomon in Jerusalem, while the “E” document [referring to the Deity as אלהים “God”] was composed a century later in the northern Kingdom of Israel.

Deuteronomy was a product of the religious reformation under King Josiah in 620 BCE, reflecting the influence of the prophets and the development of an ethical outlook, to represent the pinnacle of Jewish religion. It was followed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by the Priestly document, which reflects the rigid, ritualistic world of the priest-dominated, post-exilic period.

C) Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889-1963),  
*Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People* -

In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, an event of enormous significance took place: the Torah was fixed and canonized. The motive in this undertaking was that true repentance could only be shown if Israel made God’s Torah the basis of its life.

In previous ages it had existed as a type of literature, composed in varied styles and variously formulated by the circles of priests and scholars who cultivated it. The new aspiration to live by the Torah made it necessary to collect the ancient scrolls, to combine and consolidate them into an organized, integral whole that the people might know the will of God.

There arose a desire to establish a canon of sacred writings, authorized by the consent of the people and the sages.

הקדוש ברוך הוא אומר שני דברים בדיבור אחד מה שאי אפשר לבשר ודם לעשות כן שנאמר אחת דבר אלהים שתים זו שמענו וגו'

D) Midrash M'chilta d'Rabi Yishma'El, Shirah 8 - The Holy And Blessed One says two words in a single utterance, the like of which is impossible for any mortal of flesh and blood to do— even as it is said in Scripture: “the Word of God is one; two have I heard[, for God is mighty” - Psalm 62:12].

מי כמוכה נאדר בקדש נאה אתה ואדיר בקדש לא כמדת בשר ודם מדתך מדת בשר ודם אינו יכול לשמוע שני דברים כאחת אבל הקדוש ברוך הוא אמר עשרת הדברות כאחד מה שאי אפשר לבשר ודם לעשות כן שנאמר וידבר אלהים את כל הדברים האלה

“Who is Your like, distinguished in holiness?” [Exodus 15:11] signifies: “you are majestic and splendid in sanctity. For Your measure is not like that of mortals of flesh and blood. The limitation of flesh-and-blood is that we cannot even hear two words at the same time—

yet The Holy And Blessed One proclaimed Ten Declarations at once (the like of which it is utterly impossible for any mortal of flesh and blood to do)— even as it says in Scripture: “Then God spoke all these words” [Exodus 20:1].

Ibn-Ezra, Text “A” above:

הוא המצוה

God is the One doing the commanding—

והנה איננו מצות עשה

and yet [I am The Eternal One, your God”] is neither a “thou shalt”

ולא מצות לא תעשה

nor a “thou shalt not.”

- more over

E) Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), *T'rumat Tz'vi* on Exodus 20:2 - “*Anochi Adonai Eloheicha*” - This verse is formulated not as a statement, but rather as a *mitzvah*— a religious duty. Accordingly, it signifies not “I, The Eternal One, **am** your God,” but rather “I, The Eternal One, **shall be your God.**” In this manner **it postulates, as the basis for our relationship to God, that commitment** which our sages describe as עול מלכות שמים *ol malchut shamayim*, “[undertaking the burden of] the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

F) <u>Leviticus 22:32-33</u> -	G) <u>Jeremiah 32:38</u> -	H) <u>Ezekiel 37:23</u> -
<p>אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקַדְּשְׁכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם</p> <p>I— The Eternal One, Who consecrate you— am the One Who is bringing you out of the land of Egypt</p> <p>לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים to be your God.</p>	<p>וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם</p> <p>They will be My people,</p> <p>וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים</p> <p>and I will be their God.</p>	<p>וְטַהַרְתִּי אוֹתָם וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם</p> <p>I have purified them, so that they may be My people,</p> <p>וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים</p> <p>and I will be their God.</p>

המקום מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא	<p>“The Place”; The Omnipresent One</p> <p>“The King over kings of kings”</p> <p>“The Holy And Blessed One”</p>	Crown
הרחמן בוראנו יוצרנו	<p>“The Compassionate One”</p> <p>“our <b>Creator</b>”</p> <p>“the <b>One Who formed</b> us”</p>	Caring
אדוננו גואלנו אבינו שבשמים אבינו מלכנו	<p>“our <b>Lord</b>”</p> <p>“our <b>Redeemer</b>” [v. Lev. 25:26]</p> <p>“our <b>Celestial Parent</b>”</p> <p>“our <b>Parent</b> and Sovereign”</p>	Covenant

**Moses Maimonides, Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith (1168) -**

- 1) God is **Creator** of the universe, **with sole authority** for its management.
- 2) God is an **all-encompassing unity**.
- 3) God is not a physical or corporeal being.
- 4) God is the **First Cause** and the **Last Phenomenon**.
- 5) God is the **only proper object** of prayer or praise.
- 6) the Prophets were the instruments of **God’s Revelation to humanity**.

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**Reform Judaism - Centenary Perspective of Central Conference of American Rabbis (1975)**

The affirmation of God has always been central to our People's will to survive. The trials of our own time, and the challenge of modern culture, have made steady belief and clear understanding difficult for some. Nevertheless, we ground our lives— personally and communally— in God's reality, and remain open to new experiences and conceptions of the Divine.

**Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism (1988) -**

Conservative Judaism affirms the critical importance of belief in God, but does not specify all the particulars of that belief. Doubts and uncertainties about God are inevitable; indeed, they arose even in the hearts and minds of biblical heroes such as Abraham, Moses, and Job, the biblical prophets and Wisdom teachers, among the greatest masters of rabbinic midrash, and in the writings of renowned Jewish thinkers and poets to the present day. One can live fully and authentically as a Jew without having a single satisfactory answer to such doubts— one cannot, however, live a thoughtful Jewish life without having asked the questions.

**Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach (1988) -**

Reconstructionists believe that the Jewish people is the constant which runs through all the various stages in the evolution of Jewish civilization. God is not an omnipotent commander who rewards and punishes. [Movement founder Mordechai] Kaplan located God in the powers that direct people in the search for salvation, and emphasized the ways that God should function in peoples' lives, working through us rather than upon us.



**Irreconcilable Differences in  
Our Fundamental Convictions...**



**...about the nature of God:**

**Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed [381 CE] -**

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,  
... and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-  
begotten Son of God,

... and in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and  
Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.

Deuteronomy 6:4 – hearken, O Israel: The  
Eternal One, Alone, is our God; The Eternal is  
One.

Isaiah 45:7 – in order that all may know— from  
the rising of the sun to the utmost west— that  
there is none besides Me; I Am The Eternal  
One, and there is no other.

**...about the human soul:**

Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae 82:4 [1270] - The concupiscence which makes the Original Sin pass from parents to children is not merely a physical yearning, but rather libido habitualis— that is, a wound of the whole of human nature.

Benjamin Harris, The New England Primer [1690] - In Adam's fall, we sinnéd all.

Genesis 1:28 – Go forth— be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

Prayerbook – O God, the soul You have placed within me is pure. You created it pure; You formed it pure; You breathed it into me pure; You preserve it within me pure; You will reclaim it from me pure; and pure will You restore it to me in the time to come.



**Incompatible core values:  
Buddhism and Judaism**



*Aryash Tanga Marga* - The Noble Eightfold Path

...based on the premise that **the body-mind works in a corrupted way**

corresponding principles of Jewish religious thought

...based on the premise of **the purity of the eternal soul endowed by the Creator**

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1. right view – **futility** of striving after worldly fulfillment.  
Genesis 1:28 – “**fill the earth.**”  
Isaiah 45:18 – “**it was made to be fulfilled.**”

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  2. right resolve – **renouncing** worldly life.  
Deuteronomy 8:10 – “**eat and be fulfilled, and offer blessing in thanks.**”  
Jeremiah 29:5 – “**build houses, and dwell in them;  
plant vineyards, and drink their wine.**”

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  3. right speech – renouncing gossip and falsehood.  
Leviticus 19:16 – “do not be a tale-bearer.”  
Exodus 23:7 – “keep far from falsehood.”

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  4. right conduct – renouncing **material desire**: no theft, violence, or sexual misconduct.  
Exodus 20:13 – “do not murder, commit adultery, or steal.”

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  5. right livelihood – renounce **meat, alcohol**, weapons, and slavery.  
Leviticus 11:2 – “**these are the creatures you may eat.**”  
Leviticus 10:9 – “you may not drink wine or beer **when on duty.**”

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  6. right effort – restraining unwholesome impulses.  
Exodus 20:14 – “do not covet.”  
Leviticus 19:18 – “do not resent, or bear a grudge.”

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  7. right mindfulness – focused thought, to be conscious of word and deed.  
Psalms 34:14 – “keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from deceitful speech.”

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  8. right meditative awareness – **accepting reality as it is**, without craving or aversion.  
Leviticus 11:43 – “do not taint your soul, **with that which is repugnant.**”
- 

**יְהִי לְרָצוֹן אֱמֹרִי פִי וְהִגִּיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי**

I) Psalms 19:15 - May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be **pleasing** before You, O Eternal One— my Rock and my Redeemer.

**- continued**

עֲשֵׂה צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט נִבְחַר לִיהוָה מִזֶּבֶחַ

J) Proverbs 21:4 - To do what is right and just, is more pleasing to The Eternal One than sacrificial offerings.

הֲכֵזָה יְהִיָּה צוֹם אֲבַחֲרֶהוּ יוֹם עֲנוּת אָדָם נִפְשׁוֹ הִלְכָּהּ כְּאֶגְמוֹן רֹאשׁוֹ וְשֵׁק וְאַפֵּר יָצִיעַ

K) Isaiah 58:5 - Is such the fasting that I would desire: a day for people to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a reed, and decking yourself in sackcloth and ashes?

הֲלֹזָה תִקְרָא צוֹם וַיּוֹם רָצוֹן לִיהוָה

Do you call that a sacred fast, a day pleasing to The Eternal One?

הֲגִיד לָךְ אָדָם מַה טוֹב וּמָה יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ

L) Micah 6:8 - It has been told you, O humanity, what constitutes “the good,” and what The Eternal One asks of you:

כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט

only the doing of justice;

וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד

the loving of kindness;

וְהִצָּנֶעַ לְכַת עִם אֱלֹהֶיךָ

and comportment in dedicated partnership with your God.