



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*

ברוך אתה ייִהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אָשֶׁר קָדְשָׁנוּ בְמִצְוֹתָיו, וַצְנָנוּ לַעֲסֹק בְדִבְרֵי תּוֹרָה :

### “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 רֵד הָעֵד  
בְּעַם פָּנָו יְהִרְסוּ אֶל יְהוָה לְרֹאֹת  
וּנְפַל מִפְנֵו רַב וְגַם הַפְּהַנִּים  
הַנְּגָשִׁים אֶל יְהוָה ? תַּקְדְּשׁוּ פָנָו יְפַרֵּץ  
בְּחַם יְהוָה

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוָה לֹא יָכַל  
הָעָם לְעַלְתָּא אֶל הָר סִינִי כִּי אַתָּה  
הַעֲדָתָה בָּנָיו לְאָמֵר הַגְּבֵל אֶת הָר  
וְקָדְשָׁתוֹ

- 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.

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

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

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

ויאמר אליו יהוה לך רד ועלית  
אתה ואחרך עמך ומכהנים והעם  
אל יחרשו לעלת אל יהוה פן יפרץ  
בם **וירד משה אל העם** ויאמר  
אליהם

**ויזכר אליהם** את כל הדברים  
האלה לאמר

**אנכי יהוה אללהיך אשר הוציאתיך**  
מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים

**לא יהיה לך אללים אחרים על פני**



**אשר הוציאתיך**

**Exodus 20:2 -**

**I am**

The Eternal One,

your God,

**I,**

The Eternal One,

**am** your God,

**I—**

The Eternal One,

your God—

**יהוה אללהיך**

**Who brought you out...**

**Who brought you out...**

**am the One Who brought you out...**

**ברית עשרת הדברים** - Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13, 10:7  
“this Covenant of the Ten **Declarations**”

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

**וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים** -

A) Abraham ibn-Ezra (1089-1164) on Exodus 20:1 - “**At which God spoke**” – **יש שאלות קשות בפ' הזאת**

There are some very difficult questions raised in this chapter.

**אמרו רבים כי השנים הדברים לבודם אמר השם ועוזותם שכותב בדבר ראשון אני ה' אלהיך ובשניה כי אני 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 אמרשמי**

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' וגוי על כן ברך ה'**

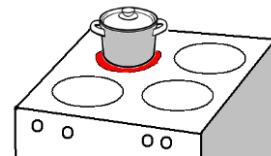
the fourth [is also third-person]: “for in six days did The Eternal One make [heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day;] wherefore The Eternal One blessed [the Shabbat day, and hallowed it” [20:11];

**וב חמישי 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 דבר א נכי בעשרת הדברים כי הוא המצווה והנה איןנו מצוות עשה ולא מצוות 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 מלאה**

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

**והנה אנחנו קראנו זו הפרשה שהיא פ' וישמעו יתרו ראשונה ופ' ואתחנן שנייה והנה ראיינו כי מתחלת אנחנו ועד סוף את אשר ישא את שמו לשוא אין שניוי בין ב' הפרשיות ומתחלת זכור עד סוף עשרת הדברים שניי 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.**

**בראונה זכור ובשנית שמר**

[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 זכרת כי עבד היהת באזן מקרים ואמר באחרונה על כן צוק 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 בדבריו חז"ל מה אמרו על כהה מצאנו שאמרו זכור ושמור בדבורה 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.

וחילילה חלילה שאומר שלא דברו נכוונה כי דעתנו נקלה כנגד דעתם ואינו לנו 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 haLevi Alkabetz, 1575

שְׁמֹר וְזָכֹר בְּדָבָר אֶחָד

השְׁמִיעָנוּ אֶל הַמִּיחָד

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

יְ אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד

לִשְׁם וְלִתְפָּאָרָת וְלִתְהָלָה

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.

**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.

**Option 3 –**

Moses wrote it down the right way in Exodus.

Deuteronomy 4:44

וזאת התורתך  
“This is the Torah  
אשר שָׁם מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
that Moses placed before  
the Israelites”

Numbers 10:13

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



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 **אלhim** “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 וגנו

D) Midrash M’chilta d’Rabi Yishma’Eil, 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 ואדר בקדש לא כמדת בשר ודם ממדת  
 בשר ודם אינו יכול לשמעו בשני דברים כאחת אבל הקדוש ברוך הוא אמר  
**עשרה הדברות כאחד** מה שאי אפשר לבשר ודם **לעשות** כן שנאמר וידבר  
**אלhim 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:

הוּא הַמְצֻוָּה

God is the One doing the commanding—

וְהִנֵּה אַיִלְנוּ מְצֻוֹת עַשָּׂה

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

וְלֹא מְצֻוֹת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה

nor a “thou shalt not.”

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) Leviticus 22:32-33 -	G) Jeremiah 32:38 -	H) Ezekiel 37:23 -
<p>אָנָּנוּ יְהוָה מַקְדְּשָׁכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִאָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם</p> <p>I— The Eternal One, Who consecrate you— am the One Who is bringing you out of the land of Egypt</p> <p><b>לְהִיוֹת לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים</b> to be your God.</p>	<p>וְהִי לִי לְעָם</p> <p>They will be My people,</p> <p>וְאָנָּנוּ אֶחָד לְהָם לְאֱלֹהִים</p> <p>and I will be their God.</p>	<p>וַתִּמְرְתִּי אֶתְכֶם וְהִי לִי לְעָם</p> <p>I have purified them, so that they may be My people,</p> <p>וְאָנָּנוּ אֶחָד לְהָם לְאֱלֹהִים</p> <p>and I will be their God.</p>



**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**.

**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 sinned 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.

Psalm 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.”

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**יְהִי לְرֹצֶן אָמֵרִי פִי וְהַגִּזֵן לְבִי לְפָנֵיךְ יְהָוָה צֹוְרִי וְגַאֲלִי**

I) Psalm 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.

**עֲשֵׂה צְדָקָה וּמְשֻׁפֶּט נְבָחר לִיהְוֹת מְזֻבָּח**

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

**חֲכַזָּה יְהִי צוֹם אֶבְחָרָהוּ יוֹם עֲנוֹת אָדָם נָפְשׁוֹ הַלְּכָבָד כְּאָגָמָנוּ רָאשׁוֹ וְשָׁקָן אֶפְרַיִם יְצִיעָה**

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?

**חֲלֹזָה תִּקְרָא צוֹם וַיּוֹם רְצֹוֹן לִיהְוֹת**

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

**הָגִיד לְךָ אָדָם מָה טֹב וּמָה יְהֹוָה דָּוְרָשׁ מִמְּךָ**

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 עֲשֹׂת מְשֻׁפֶּט**

only the doing of justice;

**וְאֶחָבָת חֶסֶד**

the loving of kindness;

**וְהַצְנָעַ לְכָת עִם אֱלֹהִיךָ**

**and comportment in dedicated partnership with your God.**