



# A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF TORAH

EXCERPT FROM THE WEEKLY PORTION

January 22, 2022



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה:

## Torah Stats

Weekly Portion: Yitro  
Consists of: Exodus 18:1-20:26  
Sequence—  
in annual Torah-reading cycle: 17<sup>th</sup> of 54  
in the Book of Exodus: 5<sup>th</sup> of 11



## - A Salient Selection from the Portion -

Exodus 20:2-14

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 they undertook for the conduct of the society they were to establish in the Promised Land.*

Content: *This week's portion details the Israelites' arrival at Mount Sinai; God's offer to make them "a Covenant people and a light unto the nations"; and the declaration of עֲשֵׂרֵת הַדְּבָרִים The Ten Great Declarations which constitute the central planks of the enduring relationship that both binds our people to the Creator and defines our involvement in the core principles of a just society. We will focus on the whole of "The Ten Commandments," to explore the implications of the textual structure.*

20:2] - I am The Eternal One, your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of that place of servitude. [20:3] - You are to have no other gods before Me. [20:4] - You are not to make yourself a sculpted form—nor any other kind of image!—of anything which is in the heavens above; which is in the earth beneath; nor which is in the waters beneath the earth. [20:5] - You are not to bow down to such, nor to worship them. For I, The Eternal One, your God, am a God of zeal, taking the sins of the parents into account when judging the third and fourth generation of their descendants— [20:6] - but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me by keeping My commandments!

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר  
 הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית  
 עֲבָדִים לֹא-יְהִיָּה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים  
 אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל  
 וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל  
 וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם  
 מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם  
 וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
 אֵל קַנָּא פֹקֵד עוֹן אָבֹת עַל-בָּנִים  
 עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים לְשֹׁנָיִם  
 וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים לְאֹהֲבָי  
 וְלֹשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי

- more over

20:7] - ¶ You may not invoke the Name of The Eternal One, your God, for some vain matter— for The Eternal One will not hold blameless one who invokes His Name for some vain matter. ¶

[20:8] - Remember the Shabbat day, to hallow it. [20:9] - Six days you may labor, to accomplish all your productive tasks, [20:10] - but The Seventh Day is a [Day of complete cessation] for The Eternal One, your God[, on which] you are not to do any productive labors— neither you nor your son nor your daughter; your manservant nor maidservant, nor your livestock, nor the foreigner who dwells in your community. [20:11] - For in Six Days did The Eternal One make the heavens and the earth; the sea; and all that they contain. Yet [God] ceased on The Seventh Day. Therefore did The Eternal One bless The Shabbat Day, and declared it to be sacred. ¶ [20:12] - Show deference to your father and your mother, in order that you may endure long upon the soil which The Eternal One, your God, is giving you. ¶ [20:13] - You may not commit murder. ¶ You may not commit adultery. ¶ You may not steal. ¶ You may not offer false testimony against another. ¶ [20:14] - You may not envy your neighbor his house. ¶ You may not envy your neighbor his wife— nor his manservant nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything else that is your neighbor's.

ס לא תשא את-שם-יהוה אלהיך לשוא כי לא ינקה יהוה את אשר-ישא את-שמו לשוא פ

זכור את-יום השבת לקדשו ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל-מלאכתך ויום השביעי שבת ליהוה אלהיך לא-תעשה כל-מלאכה אתה ובנך ובתך עבדך ואמתך ובהמתך וגרך אשר בשעריך כי ששת-ימים עשה יהוה את-השמים ואת-הארץ את-הים ואת-כל-אשר-בם וינח ביום השביעי על-כן ברך יהוה את-יום השבת ויקדשהו ס כבד את-אביך ואת-אמך למען יארכו ימיה על האדמה אשר-יהוה אלהיך נתן לך ס לא תרצח ס לא תנאף ס לא תגנב ס לא תענה ברעך עד שקר ס לא תחמד בית רעה ס לא-תחמד אשת רעה ועבדו ואמתו ושורו וחמרו וכל אשר לרעה

- Constitutional Nomenclature -

A) Exodus 34:28 -

ויכתב את דברי הברית

So [Moses] wrote down the words of the Covenant,

עשרת הדברים

these Ten Declarations.

B) Deuteronomy 4:13 -

ויגד לכם את-בריתו אשר צוה אתכם לעשות

[God] declared His Covenant, which He commanded you to do—

עשרת הדברים

these Ten Declarations.

- Some Selected Talmudic Citations -

<p>C) <u>Shabbat 86b</u> -                  תנו רבנן                  We have learned from                  our Mishnaic sages                  בששי בחדש ניתנו  <b>עשרת הדברות</b>                  לישראל                  that it was on sixth day                  of [The Third Month - ref.                  Exodus 19:1] that <b>The                  Ten Declarations</b> were                  given to Israel.</p>	<p>D) <u>B'rachot 5a</u> -                  ואתנה לך את לחת                  האבן והתורה                  והמצוה אשר כתבת                  להורתם לחות אלו  <b>עשרת הדברות</b>                  In the Torah phrase “I                  have given you the stone                  tablets, with the instruct-                  ions and command-                  ments which I wrote                  down to teach you”                  [Exodus 24:12], “<b>the tab-                  lets</b>” refers to <b>The Ten                  Declaration</b>.</p>	<p>E) <u>Rosh haShanah 32a</u> -                  הני עשרה מלכיות                  כנגד מי                  To what do the ten de-                  clarations of Divine                  Kingship [in the Rosh ha-                  Shanah <i>shofar</i> service]                  correspond?  <b>כנגד עשרת הדברות</b>                  שנאמרו לו למשה                  בסיני                  They correspond to <b>The                  Ten Declarations</b> that                  were proclaimed to                  Moses at Mount Sinai.</p>
--	---	--

<p>Torah Hebrew                  Septuagint (c. 150 BCE)                  Jerome - Vulgate (405)                  John Wycliffe (1383)</p>	<p><b>דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית עֶשְׂרֵת הַדְּבָרִים</b>                  “the <b>words</b> of the Covenant, the Ten <b>Declarations</b>”                  τῆς διαθήκης τοὺς δέκα <b>λόγους</b>                  “the Covenant, those ten <b>words</b>”  <b>verba foederis decem</b>                  “the ten <b>words</b> of the Covenant”                  ten <b>wordis</b> of the boond of pees</p>
<p>William Tyndale (1530)  <b>Geneva</b> (1550)                  King James Bible (1611)                  New American Standard (1960)</p>	<p>the <b>words</b> of the couenant,                  euen ten <b>verses</b> ← 13 (✱) or 16 (†)                  the <b>words</b> of the Covenant,                  even the Ten <b>commandments</b>                  the <b>words</b> of the covenant,                  the ten <b>commandments</b>                  the <b>words</b> of the covenant,                  the Ten <b>Commandments</b></p> <p><b>מִצְוֹת ≠ דְּבָרִים</b></p>

**וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאַמְרָם** אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים לֹא הָיָה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא פֶקֶד עֵינָי אֲבֹת עַל בְּנֵי עַל שְׂלֵשִׁים וְעַל רְבַעִים לְשָׁנָיִ וְעֵשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא כִּי לֹא יִנְקָה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂא אֶת שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוּא

**זְכוֹר** אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְשׁוֹ שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעֵשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלַאכְתֶּךָ וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל מְלַאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וּבְהֵמָתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּם וַיִּנַּח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ **כִּבְדָּךְ** אֶת אֲבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּ יָמֶיךָ עַל הַאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תִרְצַח לֹא תִנְאַף לֹא תִגַּב לֹא תַעֲנֶה בְרַעְדְּךָ עַד שֹׁקֶר לֹא תִחַמֵּד בֵּית רַעֲד לֹא תִחַמֵּד אִשֶׁת רַעֲד וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וְחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרַעֲדְךָ

- Subdividing the Decalogue -		
16 verses		13 verses
Catholic & Lutheran	Protestant	Jewish
1. No other gods	1. No other gods	1. I am The Eternal One
2. No blasphemy	2. Don't make idols	2. No other gods
3. Honor the Sabbath	3. No blasphemy	3. No blasphemy
4. Honor your <b>parents</b>	4. Honor the Sabbath	4. Honor the Sabbath
5. Don't murder	5. Honor your <b>parents</b>	5. Honor your <b>parents</b>
6. Don't adulterate	6. Don't murder	6. Don't murder
7. Don't steal	7. Don't adulterate	7. Don't adulterate
8. No perjury	8. Don't steal	8. Don't steal
9. Don't covet house	9. No perjury	9. No perjury
10. Don't covet anything	10. Don't covet	10. Don't covet

- Correspondences Between the Two Tablets of the Decalogue -  
(per M'chilta d'Rabi YishmaEil)

1. I am the Lord	↔ violate the Divine Image ↔	6. Don't murder
2. No other gods	⇒ idolatry is infidelity ⇒	7. Don't adulterate
3. No blasphemy	↔ perjury about stealing ↔	8. Don't steal
4. Honor the Sabbath	⇒ labor denies God "rested" ⇒	9. No perjury
5. Honor your parents	↔ engender dishonest child ↔	10. Don't covet

F) Isaac of Radvil (1760?-1825), *Ohr Yitzchaq* - The prohibition “Thou shalt not covet” is placed at the end of the Decalogue, because one who has observed this particular precept is certain to have observed all those which came before it. But one who has not the self-discipline sufficient to fulfill this ban against coveting will need to begin again with the first Commandment: belief in the justice of God. For **no one who had sincerely believed in God would have been covetous** of that which God has allotted as the portion of another.

G) Mishnah Tamid 5:1 -

אמר להם הממונה ברכו ברכה  
אחת והן ברכו קראו עשרת  
הדברים שמע והיה אם שמוע  
ויאמר ברכו את העם שלש ברכות

The worship-leader called on them to recite one preliminary blessing, which they did; **then they read The Ten Declarations** and [the three paragraphs of] the *Sh'ma*, before blessing the people with the three-fold benediction [Numbers 6:24-26].

H) Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 9b -

בדין היה שיהיו קורין עשרת  
הדברות בכל יום ומפני מה אין  
קורין אותן מפני טענות המינין  
שלא יהו אומרים אלו לבדן ניתנו  
לו למשה בסיני

It would be fitting and proper for us to read The Ten Declarations daily [as part of our regular devotions]; **so why do we not do so?** Because of the accusations of heretics, in order that they should not have opportunity to say: “**It was only these** [ten alone] **that God gave** to Moses at Mount Sinai!”

- continued

I) RaMBaM (Moses Maimonides, 1135-1204), Introduction to chapter 10 of Mishnah Tractate Sanhedrin - The Eighth Principle of Faith is to believe that the Torah in its entirety was given us through Moses our Teacher, directly from God.

We do not know precisely how it reached it us, but only that it came to us through Moses, who acted like a scribe taking dictation. **All the words of the Torah therefore came from God; and all are, as such, God’s Own instructions**— perfect, pure, and holy.

<b>RaMBaM’s 8<sup>th</sup> Principle of Faith in the Jewish Liturgy</b>	
as read in the preliminary service	as sung in the closing hymn <i>Yigdal</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">אֲנִי מֵאֲמִין בְּאַמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה</p> <p>I believe with perfect faith</p> <p style="text-align: center;">שְׁפָל הַתּוֹרָה הַמְצוּיָה עִתָּהּ בְּיַדֵּינוּ</p> <p>that <b>the entirety of the Torah</b> which is now found in our possession</p> <p style="text-align: center;">הִיא הַנְּתוּנָה לְמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם.</p> <p>is the one given to our Teacher Moses (peace be upon him!).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת נָתַן לְעַמּוֹ אֵל</p> <p style="text-align: center;">עַל יַד נְבִיאָו נֶאֱמַן בְּיָתוֹ</p> <p>A Torah of truth God gave His People by means of His prophet, most trusted in His House.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">לֹא יַחֲלִיף הָאֵל וְלֹא יִמִּיר</p> <p style="text-align: center;">דָּתוֹ לְעוֹלָמִים לְזוּלָתוֹ</p> <p>God will neither change nor alter His law for all time for any other besides it.</p>

מפני מה לא ניתנה תורה בארץ ישראל

J) Midrash M’chilta d’Rabi YishmaEil, baChodesh 5 - On what account was the Torah not given within the Land of Israel?

**שלא ליתן פתחון פה לאומות העולם לומר לפי שנתנה בארצנו לפיכך לא קבלנו**

**In order not to furnish a pretext for the nations of the world** to say: “Inasmuch as God’s laws were not given within the borders of our country, we are therefore not bound by them!”

דבר אחר שלא להטיל מחלוקת בין השבטים שלא יהא זה אומר בארצי נתנה וזה אומר בארצי לא נתנה לפיכך נתנה במדבר דימוס פרהסיא במקום הפקר

On the other hand, [it was not given within the Land of Israel] so as not to arouse rivalry between the respective Tribes— so that no one of them would be able to say boastfully: “It was given within my territory!,” while another would have to say: “within my territory it was not given.” Accordingly, it was given in the wilderness— an open public gathering in a neutral and ownerless space.

**בשלשה דברים ניתנה תורה במדבר ובאש ובמים**

The Torah was given through three things: by wilderness [Exodus 19:1ff], by fire [*ibid.* 19:18], and by water [*ibid.* 14:21 and 15:23ff].

מה אלו חנם לכל באי העולם

Just as all those are freely accessible to every human being,

**אף אלו חנם לכל באי העולם**

**so too are these** [words of the Torah] **freely accessible to every human being.**