



Aseret Hadiberot -

The First Commandment



I am Adonai Your God.

אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ

ho-tzei-ti-kha a-she'r e-lo-**hey**-kha Adonai a-no-khi
brought you out who your God Adonai I am

מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:

'a-va-dim mi-beit mitz-ra-yim ma-e-retz
from the house of bondage from the land of Egypt



When the Jews exclaimed at Sinai, *kol asher dibber Adonai na'aseh* (“all that the LORD speaks we will do” [Ex. 19:8]), they signified an abandonment to God’s will for their lives. In other words, they *first* chose obedience to God’s voice before they understood the language (or terms) of the covenant. Only later, after Moses wrote the book of the covenant (*sefer habrit*) did they add *v'nishmah* (and we will hear/obey [Ex. 24:7]). The Jews *first* chose to do whatever the LORD commanded and then hoped to “hear” these words in order to understand their meaning. As Anselm said, we believe *in order to* understand. The decision to serve God comes first, and then comes understanding.

According to Jewish tradition, God created the universe itself on the condition that Israel accepted the Torah. Each of us is called to likewise order our lives as if the existence of the universe depends upon our faith. Abraham was declared *tzaddik* on account of his faith, and redemptive history depended upon his obedience.

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֹר:

And God spoke all these words, saying: (Ex 20:1)

Notice that the prelude to the giving of the Ten Commandments begins with the statement that “God spoke *all* these words.” Jewish Midrash states that the Ten Commandments were spoken *all at once*, in a single divine utterance, and then repeated one-by-one to the Israelites. The earth was said to have been completely silent, and even the waters from rivers ceased flowing.



Note further that the LORD identified Himself as *Elohim* (not YHVH) when proclaiming them, indicating His role as Judge of the universe. The phrase “all these words” is said to be pregnant with all that the Judge of the universe ever intended to communicate to humanity, including all the other mitzvot that would later be codified in the Torah. And unlike some of the other commandments given to Israel, God used the second person *singular* (not plural) for the verbs throughout: *you* (singular) shall not steal. Every Jew heard the Divine Voice personally (as well as his or her descendants), and every Jew is said to have been present at Sinai. Anyone who disregards these commandments does so at his or her own peril.

The first commandment is the most important of them all, for from it derives the authority for all of the others. The statement, *anokhi Adonai eloheykha*, "I am the LORD your God" includes the idea that there is only one God, who is Judge and Master of the universe.

Note that the word *anokhi* (“I”) is used instead of the more common word *ani*, suggesting the uniqueness of God. The word *eloheykha* (“your God”) is in the second person singular, rather than in the plural. Each person (individually) must recognize that the God who created him or her is entirely unique, without rival, and entirely sovereign.

There are no mediators in this encounter -- the soul stands before God *alone*. We know from Exodus 20:18-21 that the Jews were unable to withstand hearing these commandments and asked Moses to be their mediator. Moses, by God’s grace, was given the ability to receive the full content of the Torah at Sinai on behalf of Israel, and later Yeshua Himself became the Mediator of the better covenant than that ratified by the elders of Israel at Sinai.

It is interesting that God used the phrase *asher hotzeitikha mei’eretz mitzraim* (“who delivered you from the land of Egypt”) instead of appealing to Himself as Creator of heaven and earth. Why? The sages comment that this was to instill a sense of gratitude among the Jews, since they were especially chosen to be delivered by God’s direct intervention, and this was unique among all the nations of the earth. The phrase *mibeit avadim* (“the house of slaves”) alludes to the fact that the Egyptians were descendants of Ham (Gen. 10:6), and the Israelites were actually made slaves in a house of slaves.

The First Commandment is absolutely basic and fundamental to all else that follows. Until we are personally willing to accept Adonai as our God, the rest of the commandments are not likely to be obeyed.

The God of Israel is calling us to obey the glorious truth that He alone is our God. *Are we willing to obey?*