



Aseret Hadiberot -

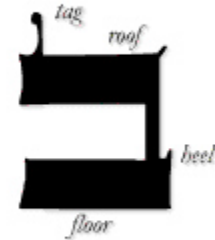
The Second Commandment



Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי:

'al-pa-nai	a-chei-rim	e-lo-him	yih-yeh-le-kha	lo'
before me	others	gods	you shall have	Not



You stand before Adonai

The Second Commandment actually spans four verses (Ex. 20:3-6) that contain four separate prohibitions against various aspects of idolatry. The first part, *lo yiyeh-lekha elohim acheirim*, can be rendered, “There shall not be to you the gods of others,” which logically flows from the First Commandment that we must attribute all power to the one true God alone. The phrase *elohim acheirim* should not be understood to mean that actually are other gods other than the God of Israel, but is a reference to the (so-called) gods of other nations or peoples. Since God is eternal and omnipresent, the expression *'al-panai* (literally “before My face”) means forever and every place. Idolatry of any kind applies at all times and to all generations.

Do not make idols

The following verse (Ex. 20:4) explains in detail what the various profane manifestations of *elohim acheirim*, the “gods of others,” are:

לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל
וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ:

Lo ta'aseh-lekha fesel v'khol-temunah asher bashamayim mima'al
va'asher ba'aretz mitachat va'asher bamayim mitachat la'aretz.



Lo ta'seh-lekha fesel... “You shall not make for yourself a carved image.” The Hebrew word *Pesel* is often translated as “graven image” or carved image,” and refers to any three dimensional image (regardless of how it may be produced) that is meant to represent the divine. Connected with this prohibition is any form of human idealization as represented by a statue (e.g., of Pharaoh or a bust of Caesar).

v'khol-temunah asher bashamayim mima'al ba'aretz mitachat... “and [you shall not make for yourself] any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below.” The key word here is *temunah*, often translated “likeness.” *Temunah* seems to be connected to the idea of “form” or “pattern,” which has been generalized to refer to any symbolic representation of the divine. Connected with this prohibition is the astrological deification of the sun, moon, and stars, or fetishes that involve geographical locations. Ritual magic and animism is thereby prohibited, as is any form of demonolatry (Deut. 32:17).

Do not worship or serve idols

The following two *pesukim* (Ex. 20:5-6) complete the Second Commandment:

לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא
פֶּקֶד עֵוֹן אָבֹת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שְׁלִישִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים לְשָׁנָאִי:
וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשׁוֹמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָי:

Lo-tishtacheveh lahem v'lo ta'ovdem, ki anokhi Adonai Eloheykha El Kana,
pokeid `avon avot `al-banim `al-shileishim, v'al-ribei'im l'sonai.
v'oseh chesed la'alafim, l'ohavai ul'shomrei mizvotai.

Expressing idolatrous worship is said to involve one (or more of the following):

1. Prostrating yourself before an idol (in adoration or reverential fear)
2. Offering sacrifices to idols (i.e., offering korbonot or any gift)
3. Eating before idols (i.e., partaking of meat offered to them)
4. Drinking before idols (i.e., performing any libation or drinking to them)

These verses also link *Elohim* (God as Judge) with the LORD *YHVH* (Adonai, reflecting God's attributes of compassion and mercy).



YHVH identifies Himself as *El Kana*, the Jealous God (a designation repeated elsewhere in Scripture (Ex. 34:14, Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 1 Kings 19:10, 14)) in memory of the “marriage ceremony” between Israel and God. A Jew who engages in idolatry is like a spouse who willfully engages in adultery (indeed, idolatry is a form of spiritual adultery). The LORD watches us lovingly and closely, like a faithful and passionate husband watches over his beloved wife.

God is entirely committed to our relationship with Him, but are we putting other desires, affections, or interests ahead of His love? Do we demonstrate our love for God by being faithful to Him?

Visiting the sins of fathers upon children

Pokeid 'avon avot al-banim... “Visiting the sins of fathers upon children.” God’s memory is perfect, and His retribution is sure; however, He *defers* punishment and allows the sinner (and his children) to repent and turn to Him. God will wait “until the third and fourth generation” until the measure of sin is complete, once again allowing us to turn away from the idols of our fathers and return to Him. Note, however, that this judgment comes to those who are said to *hate* God. By embracing the sins of your fathers, you may eventually be hardened into a hatred of the LORD and reckoned as one of His enemies.

Showing kindness to thousands

The Tosefta Sotah (3:4) mentions that the measure of God’s steadfast love (*chesed*) for the one who loves Him is no less than 500 times greater than His retribution upon the faithless. How so? The word *alafim* (“thousands”) is a dual plural in Hebrew, indicating at least 2,000 (generations). If God punishes to the fourth generation for sins, His love extends at least 500 times more to those who walk in love with Him (2,000/4=500).

But how do we demonstrate love for the LORD? By *keeping* or *guarding* (*shomer*) His commandments (1 John 5:2-3, John 14:21; etc.).

Praise the LORD for His mercy and grace and love! For those of us who are trusting in Him for salvation, we can rejoice that His mercy extends even those who have come from lives of brokenness and sin.