

- 2 Buber thus explicates the first part of the passage: (Moses, p. 102):  
 The first part of this verse summarizes the negative aspect of a decisive point of view. "In order that Israel might come here to God it was necessary for that to befall the Egyptians which had befallen them."  
 Buber thus regards the beginning of the verse in a negative retributive light in contrast to the Mekhilta echoed by Rashi. The latter reinterprets it as a favourable positive action.
- 3 Cf. Berurei Ha-middot which provides an illustration:  
 The retribution meted out to Egypt tells us nothing of God's love for Israel. When a judge rescues an innocent man from the clutches of a well known villain and murderer it tells us nothing about the judge's feelings for the victim. All we know is the judge has carried out the dictates of justice. Similarly the plagues that rained on Egypt for their villainous conduct did not themselves indicate God's love for Israel. The Mekhilta therefore points out that they truly did because God had old scores to settle with the Egyptians etc. . .
- 4 Weiss in: Ha-mikra Ki-demuto, pp. 60-63, remarks on the antithetical relationship between the two verses. Their common denominator—the extreme and sudden transitions — retribution comes like a bolt from the blue and the miracle of deliverance too comes in an unexpected fashion. We can thus add another feature to the metaphor — not only swiftness but the suddenness and unexpectedness of deliverance.
- 5 On the Bible, 18 Studies, ed. N. Glatzer, Schocken 1968.
- 6 From: Moses, The Revelation and the Covenant, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1958, p. 162 from his essay on "Upon Eagles' Wings", pp. 101-109.
- 7 In the first draft of his translation of Exodus, Buber opted for the singular: *auf Adlers Fluegeln* = "on an eagle's wings", a rendering adopted by most previous German translators, both Jewish and non-Jewish, till Rosenzweig in his comments to the draft pointed out that it must be translated in the plural, adding that this plural was all-important. [All the English versions follow the Hebrew: "on eagles' wings" with the apostrophe after the *s*.]
- 8 Cf. Rambam on the conditions governing Torah observance: "a person cannot possibly observe the precepts (of Judaism) when he is sick, hungry or thirsty, in battle or under siege" (Commentary to Mishnah Sanhedrin X). These Midrashim apply the same principle to the acceptance of the Torah.

ANOKHI

The Ten Commandments begin with the declaration: "I am (*anokhi*) the Lord thy God" and conclude with the injunction "thou shalt not covet".

Much discussion is to be found in our commentaries both old and new, centering round the question whether the opening phrase of the Decalogue "I am the Lord . . ." constitutes one of the Ten Commandments, since, in contradistinction to what follows, it is not phrased in the form of either a negative or positive precept. It stands out in splendid isolation possessing the character of a declaration rather than a commandment. This point is made by Crescas, the renowned Spanish Jewish philosopher (1340-1410) in his work Or Ha-shem:

He who includes among the list of positive precepts belief in the existence of God falls into a common error. The very character of the term *mizvah* indicates by definition, that it can only apply to matters governed by free will and choice. But faith in the existence of God is one of those things which are not governed by free will and choice. Consequently the term *mizvah* (commandment) cannot apply to it.

Abravanel advances a similar view:

The phrase "I am the Lord thy God . . ." constitutes no commandment, either dogmatic or practical, but is merely a preface to the subsequent commandments and injunctions, a declaration making known to the Children of Israel, Who was addressing them . . .

Rambam, however, in his *Sefer Ha-mizvot* (Book of Divine Precepts) and in his famous Code considers the first verse of the Decalogue to constitute a positive *mizvah*. Moreover, he makes it into the first and foremost *mizvah*, laying down that it embodies the “most fundamental of fundamentals and the pillar of all sciences”. Here are the relevant citations:

מצוה א' היא הציווי אשר ציוונו בהאמנת האלוהות, והוא שנאמין שיש שם עילה וסיבה הוא פועל לכל הנמצאים והוא אמרו "אנכי ה' אלהיך".

The first *mizvah* is that He commanded us to believe in the Deity, that is, that we believe that there is a cause and motive force behind all existing things. This idea is expressed in the statement: “I am the Lord thy God.

(Sefer Ha-mizvot, Mizvah I)

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע, שיש שם מצוי ראשון, ממציא כל הנמצאים וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת הימצאו... וידיעת דבר זה הוא מצות עשה, שנאמר "אנכי ה' אלהיך". וכל המעלה על דעתו שיש שם אלוה אחר חוץ מזה, עובר בלא תעשה, שנאמר "לא יהיה לך אלוהים אחרים על פני" וכופר בעיקר, שזהו העיקר הגדול שהכל תלוי בו.

It constitutes the most fundamental of fundamentals and pillar of all sciences to know that there is a first cause bringing into existence all existing things, and that all that exists on heaven and earth and between them, exists only through the truth of His existence . . .

The knowledge of this concept constitutes a positive precept, as it is said: “I am the Lord thy God”, and whosoever it enters his mind to think that there is any other god besides, transgresses thereby a negative precept, as it is said: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”, and repudiates a fundamental principle, since this is the most important principle on which everything depends.

(Code, Yesodei Hatorah I, 6)

A significant variation between Rambam's wording of this precept in the *Sefer Ha-mizvot* and the Code has been observed. In the former, he calls on us to *believe* in the Deity. In the latter, we are no longer enjoined to *believe* there is a first cause or informed that

the *belief* in this concept constitutes a positive precept. He writes that it is fundamental “to *know* there is a first cause . . . and that the *knowledge* of this concept constitutes a positive precept”.

A well-known rabbinic dictum cited by Rambam in his Guide affords a clue to the change in wording:

R. Simlai expounded: Six hundred and thirteen precepts were transmitted to Moses at Sinai . . . Said R. Hamnuna, “What is the textual support (for this figure)?—“Moses commanded us Torah” (Deut. 33, 4). TORaH adds up to 611 (*tav* = 400; *vav* = 6; *resh* = 200; *heh* = 5). *anokhi* and *lo yihyeh* (the first 2 commandments of the Decalogue: “I am the Lord” and “You shall have no other gods”) are not counted since they heard them directly from God (and not via Moses).

(Makkot 23b)

This idea is further elaborated by Rambam:

They mean that these words (the first two commandments) reached them just as they reached Moses our Teacher. But it was not Moses who transmitted it to them. For these two principles, I mean the existence and unity of God, are knowable by human speculation alone. Now with regard to everything that can be known by demonstration, the status of the prophet and that of everyone else is equal . . . The Torah states: “Unto thee it was shown . . .”<sup>1</sup>)

Malbim makes an interesting attempt to accept Rambam's view of *anokhi* as a commandment and yet meet the objection raised by Crescas:

In his Code Rambam deliberately changed the wording from “believe” to “know”. He wished to stress the intellectual basis of this precept. This as he pointed out in the Guide is based on the rabbinic dictum that we heard the first two commandments of the Decalogue directly from God, implying purely intellectual apprehension. In other words, the whole of Judaism apart from these two precepts is based on faith, faith in Moses as the messenger of God; faith that all that he commanded constituted the authentic message of God. But these two commandments — the existence and oneness of the Divinity is attained by the direct exercise of men's intellectual faculties. The Lord implanted these concepts in him



his being thy God not the reason for it. His role as your Lord consists of this bringing out, this intervention in your life, this direction given you, this leading of you from Egypt to this point. Hosea evidently understood the verse in this way too: "I the Lord am thy God from the Land of Egypt".

This close linking of "thy God" and "who brought thee out", the latter defining the former as a restrictive relative, provided Rabbi Yehudah Halevi with an answer to the famous question he posed Ibn Ezra and which he put in the mouth of the King of the Khazars<sup>3</sup>: The latter had criticized the rabbi's declaration of faith which echoing the opening words of the Decalogue went: "We believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt".

Here is the relevant citation from Ibn Ezra:

R. Judah Halevi, may he rest in honour asked me: Why did the text read: "I the Lord am thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt" and not: "who made heaven and earth and made you too"? This was my answer to him. Know that not everyone is capable of attaining the same level of faith. Some believe in God on the basis of hearsay. Those in authority tell them it is written in the Torah given by God to Moses. Should a heretic question their faith they are dumbfounded because they don't know what to answer. One who aspires to master the sciences which are stepping stones to the desired goal will see the work of God in the animal, mineral and vegetable around him, in the human body, the workings of every limb . . . he will master astronomy . . . and the laws of nature. The ways of God will lead the philosopher to a knowledge of God. This is what Moses meant when he said: "Make known to me Thy ways and I shall know thee" (Ex. 33, 13). The Almighty stated in the first commandment: "I the Lord am thy God". Only a person of deep intellectual attainments will be satisfied with this formulation. The message of "I (am) the Lord" will satisfy the intellectual elite of any nation.

Now God had performed signs and wonders in Egypt till He brought them out from there to become their God. Thus said Moses (Deut. 4, 34): "Has God tried to take one nation from another". In other words, God did for Israel what He did for no other people . . . Moses referred to the impact of the miracles the Almighty performed in Egypt when he stated

(4, 35): "You were made to see that you might know that the Lord He is God". Everyone saw them — both the scholar and the layman, old and young. He also added to the impact through the revelation on Sinai when they heard the voice of God (4, 36) "From the heavens did He cause thee to hear His voice, to instruct thee."

Finally he referred to the absolute conviction that there is no God besides Him, to be attained by the believer through clear proofs: "Know this day and keep in mind that the Lord He is God, there is no other". "I the Lord" was meant for the intellectual; "who brought thee out" for the non-intellectual.

But Judah Halevi's answer is completely different<sup>4</sup>. Here is a summary following Isaak Heinemann<sup>5</sup>:

All other medieval authors, in presenting Judaism pass from the general to the particular. They dwell first on the justification of faith in God and consider hereby to have proved the justification of religion as a contact with God and as a belief in historical revelation.

But Halevi does not start with natural phenomena and from there proceed to the Creator. The fact of revelation, recognised in ancient times and in their own days is the proof of the belief in God; whereas the attribution of organic wonders to a cosmic intelligence is firstly less convincing and acceptable, and secondly only leads to a God of metaphysics, and not to a God of religion who is concerned for the individual and expects a definite reaction from him.

Fundamental for Halevi is the distinction between Aristotle's God, to whom "speculation alone conduces" and the God of Abraham for whom "the soul yearns". Moses does not invoke the Creator in pressing Pharaoh to let the people go but the "God of the Hebrews".

Heinemann observes that Ibn Ezra's answer we cited above is diametrically opposed to Halevi's. For the latter, faith in the Creator of philosophical theology is inferior to the religious experience of God's miracles. He who has discovered God in the abnormal will recognise Him in the "wonders of everyday". Even an image such as "God's hand", or the apostrophizing of God as light has more effect on us than all abstractions. Halevi unlike Ibn

Ezra teaches us that metaphysical conceptions of God are a poor substitute for the real thing and are designed for those who are incapable of rising to the level of faith.

Note that Halevi does not explain the phrase *ehyeh asher ehyeh* in philosophical abstract terms as does the Rambam (“the existing that is existent”) but: “The existing one, existing for them *whenever they seek me*. Let them seek for no stronger proof than My presence among them and accept Me accordingly”. If this then is the true connotation of *ehyeh asher ehyeh* then God had made Himself known both to Moses at the first revelation and Israel on Sinai as the One who was always in contact with them: “I the Lord am thy God who brought thee out of Egypt”.

Let us now return to the end of the verse to the two last words: *mi-bet ‘avadim* “from the house of serfdom”. What is the purpose of this latter prepositional phrase when Egypt has already been mentioned by name? This extended delineation of Egypt as a “house of serfs” throws into bold relief by contrast the all-pervading purpose of their release therefrom:

בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת־הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם פֶּעַב דִּין אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה.

**On bringing the people out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain.** (3, 12)

They were redeemed from the *serfdom* of man so that they could *serve* God. Prior to the prohibition of serving anyone or anything beside God in the second commandment: “Thou shalt not bow down to them nor *serve* them” the phrase “from the house of *serfs*” is added to underline the link between the first and second commandments<sup>6</sup>.

Benno Jacob draws attention to the contrast between the two phrases — “from the land of Egypt” “from the house of serfs”. The former was the centre of ancient culture, the home of the wise men, famed for its pyramids and art. But for Israel it was nothing

more than a house of serfs. The whole grand superstructure was built on human slavery. In Benno Jacob’s view the last two words of the first commandment are meant to teach us that “if a land of culture has no room for freedom then the servant of God renounces culture”. Accordingly: “I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of serfs!”

#### Questions for Further Study:

1. *Anokhi* implies we should know and love Him with all our hearts, cling to Him and be ever aware of His presence and the fear of Him should never depart from us.

(Ibn Ezra, Short Commentary)

How does Ibn Ezra, in the light of the above scan the syntactical structure of our verse?

2. For what purpose does Ibn Ezra quote Deut. 4, 34–36, 39 in the extract giving his answer to Judah Halevi?
3. Does Ibn Ezra understand the subject of 4, 34 as referring to God with a capital G or merely “a god” with a small G?
4. Abravanel makes the following comment on Halevi’s question:

The text employs three terms (to describe God) (1) the special four letter Name “the Lord”; (2) “thy God”; (3) “who brought thee out of the land of Egypt” indicating three motivations for obeying His commandments and observing them. The first by reason of His being the Lord — a name connoting His essence through which He created the universe, deriving from a root meaning “existence” i.e. who brought into existence and created all. In other words, since I gave you existence and being — it is only right that you observe My commandments. The second aspect — to be thy God — i.e. watching over and guiding you. No star or guardian angel rules your destiny. I alone am thy God who leads you and therefore you are obligated to observe My commandments. The third aspect: I re-

leased you from Egypt — a forbidding country ruled over by a forbidding monarch, appropriately known as a house of serfs, a land of no return for those imprisoned therein. My kindness in securing your release from there warrants that you carry out My commandments and walk in My path — as it is stated: “My servants they are whom I released from the land of Egypt”.

How does Abravanel answer his question?

#### NOTES

- 1 See p. 364: The Guide of the Perplexed, translated with introduction and notes by Shlomo Pines, University of Chicago Press 1963. Efordi in his commentary to the Guide writes: “they can be proved by human logic without a person needing to be a prophet — that is the meaning of the rabbinic description *mi-pi ha-gevura* [literally “from the mouth of the force” but usually rendered “directly from God”] i.e. through human intelligence the existence and unity of God can be attained by demonstration.”
- 2 A non-defining or non-restrictive clause is usually enclosed by commas in English and as Jespersen notes (Mod. Engl. Grammar III 82) “might be discarded without serious injury to the precise understanding of the sentence as a whole”.
- 3 Kuzari 1, 12: Shouldst thou O Jew not have said that thou believest in the Creator of the world, its Governor and Guide?”
- 4 See Kuzari I, 19–25.
- 5 See his Hebrew article in *Sinai*, IX (5701), p. 125. [We have preferred here in the English adaptation to confine our exact quotations to his introduction to the abridged English edition of the Kuzari appearing under the title Three Jewish Philosophers, Temple Library, Harper Torchbooks, New York 1965, pp. 12, 17, 22. (T)]
- 6 This association between the first and second commandment underlay Buber and Rosenzweig’s efforts to find an adequate German equivalent for the Hebrew root *a’v’d* in the varying forms in which it appears prior to the Ten Commandments. Their problems find expression as early as 1, 13–14: “The Egyptians made the children of Israel *serve* (*vaya’vidu*) with rigour . . . embittered their lives with hard service (*‘avodah*) and with all *service* (*‘avodah*) in the field, all their *service* (*‘avodatam*) with which they made them *serve* (*‘avdu*) with rigour”. In his first proof Buber rendered *vaya’avidu* “verknechteten”

and *‘avodah* “Arbeit”. But Rosenzweig insisted that the German rendering employ a derivative of the same lexical item in all the five cases where the root *a’v’d* occurs in the original. He considered the German “Fron” the most satisfactory choice. But since they had decided to render *nogsim* (“taskmasters” or “slave-drivers”) “Fron-voegte” this lexical item was already “used up”. Hence Rosenzweig suggested “versklavten, Sklavendienst, mit jeglicher Sklaverei”. But subsequently they decided to render *noges* as “Treiber”. The word “Fron” became free to be used for *‘avodah* the Egyptian bondage. But when they reached 5, 9: “Intensify the serfdom (*ha’avodah*) of the people” Rosenzweig observed: “Ich habe inzwischen gesehen, dass “awaudo” doch moeglichts mit Dienst oder Zusammensetzungen mit Dienst uebersetzt werden muss, wegen “Gott dienen” u. wegen so einer kuehlen Pharaostelle”. But Buber was not convinced that “dienen” adequately transmitted the bitterness and ruthlessness of the slavery as did “Fron”. He continued to use “Fron” both as nominal and verbal. But when he reached 9, 2 “Let My people go that they may serve (*vaya’avduni*) Me” Rosenzweig again raised the problem that the translation had failed to employ the same lexeme as did the Hebrew, and observed: “Es ist doch arg dass wir Fron sagen”. Accordingly when they reached the Ten Commandments they translated *mi-bet ‘avadim* “aus dem Dienst = Froenerhaus, in order to stress the link with *lo ta’ovdem* (Thou shall not serve them”). But in the final version Buber retracted and rendered the Hebrew root *a’v’d* everywhere from 1, 13 onwards by “Dienst — dienen” to underline the association between Egyptian *‘avodah* from which they had been redeemed and the *‘avodah* of God for the sake of which they had been brought out. Later translators failed to perceive the idea symbolised by the recurrent lexical pattern, burying the associative link by arbitrarily varying the translation of the Hebrew root *a’v’d* in the different contexts. Cf. the “scientific” translation of Noth 1959 which uses *Arbeit* and renders *mi-bet ‘avadim* — “Sklavenhaus”, *lo ta’ovdem* “dienen” thus failing to reproduce for his readers an all-important nuance of the text.\*

\* [Similar difficulties face the English translator but none have made any attempt at “transference”. Cf. NEB “land of slavery”, AV “house of bondage”. Ultimately Buber–Rosenzweig selected the “Dienst — dienen” as the one facilitating the association between the *serfdom* of Egypt and *service* of God. In English *serve* — *service* — *servile* — *serf* — *serfdom* — *servitude* constitute the related lexical items that lend themselves closest to conveying the associations of the Hebrew forms of *a’v’d*. In this fact perhaps the English translator is faced with a less difficult problem than the German. Thus

starting with chapter 1 (13-14) — “The Egyptians imposed on the children of Israel ruthless *servitude* . . . they embittered their lives with hard *service* and with all kind of *servile* work in the field, all the *servitude* they *served* on them was applied ruthlessly”. The child asks: “What is this *service* to you?” God proclaimed His part in releasing them from the land of Egypt, from *serfdom* (literally: “house” or “domain” of serfs) in the first commandment, and ordered them not to bow down to idols nor *serve* them in the second. Admittedly like the German “Dienst”, the word “service” in English does not convey the humiliation and cruelty of the word “slavery”. But something is bound to be lost in translation and each translator has to decide his terms of reference beforehand. (T)]

## THE SECOND COMMANDMENT: NO OTHER GODS BESIDES ME

We shall now devote our attention to the second commandment. First, let us examine the syntax.

The fact that the predicate: *yihyeh* is singular and the subject: *elohim aherim* is plural is not by itself anomalous. There are many similar instances in Holy Writ, particularly when the predicate precedes the subject.<sup>1</sup> With the verb “to be” in Hebrew: *hayah* we often find such lack of concord both in gender and number. Ibn Ezra cites Gen. 1, 14: “Let there (*yehi* = “it” singular) be lights”<sup>2</sup> and Deut. 22, 23: “When there (*yihyeh* = “he”) will be a young girl, a virgin”.

The fact, however, that the Biblical text does not seem consistent in its usage on this score has prompted other commentators, not satisfied with this surface matter-of-fact approach, to seek an explanation in the deeper, semantic structure of the particular text. One of them Or Ha-ḥayyim observes on our text:

The syntax reflects the semantic implication that once he makes another god he will find he cannot confine himself to the exclusive worship of the True God, however sincerely he wishes to. He will necessarily make many gods once the exclusiveness of the One is undermined. That is why the text reads *lo yihyeh* (“it shall not be”) in the singular and ends in the plural *elohim aherim* “other gods”. Once he starts to worship one of them he will end up worshipping many, witness the reproofs of the Hebrew prophets regarding the polytheism of Israel.

But psychologically true as is the commentator’s observation it hardly qualifies for a true reading of the text itself.