

SEPHARDIC INSTITUTE

511 Ave. R Brooklyn, NY 11223-2093
Rabbi Moshe Shamah, Director

718 998 8171 Fax: 718 375 3263
Rabbi Ronald Barry, Administrator

בס"ד

Parashat Yitro Part III On Decalogue Variants

1. General Remarks

The two formulations of the Decalogue in the Torah (Exod. 20:2-14 and Deut. 5:6-18) differ in a number of ways. Most of the variations appear to be slight – the presence or absence of a *vav*, use of a synonym or a different manner of expressing the same idea. Several, however, are clearly significant. We will not discuss the widely divergent opinions on this matter except to touch briefly on the view of Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089 –1164), one of the leading exponents of *peshat* commentary on the Bible.

In Ibn Ezra's opinion there is no essential difference if a word in the Torah or in other parts of Scripture was written one way or another, for example, with or without a *vav*. The prophet, as is the case with all scribes, may vary his style, sometimes writing this way, sometimes that way. Ibn Ezra posits that many variants exist "because the Torah guards the meanings, not the words." Thus, there may be no special reason why in writing about a subject a second time in the Torah a synonym was substituted for a particular word or phrase that was used the first time – the meaning is what counts. In addition, a word that is not a synonym may be substituted or added even when quoting a spoken statement if it contributes to a fuller comprehension of what was said. After all, prophecy was not transmitted through dictation but through concepts that the prophet was responsible to channel into writing.

Modern Bible research, particularly during recent decades, has compellingly demonstrated what the sages had taken for granted (although they were usually not dedicated to *peshat* in their public teachings), that variants are invariably purposeful and were intended to transmit an additional dimension of meaning to what was explicitly stated. The Torah text has been shown to be punctilious and specific,

extremely sophisticated. While it may be read with value by all on their level, it addresses the most highly attentive, capable and conscientious readers with literary artistry. It often presents insights through subtle nuances in syntax, grammar and diction that could only have resulted from the intention to be meaningful. Deft and discreet intertextual associations and symbolic allusions are common.

Thus, both Decalogue versions are equally worthy of study, and each variant (we will take them as they are attested in the Masoretic Text) may be assumed to have a purpose or message.

If it could in fact be determined which Decalogue version was formulated first, it surely would be helpful in gaining deeper insight into the purpose of the variants. Analysis of the variants themselves may point the way to recognition of the original sequence. It is the thesis of this study that there is significant internal evidence present in the texts of the Decalogue to accomplish these ends.

In this regard it is helpful to review an aspect of the views of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon regarding the many variations between Deuteronomy and the other four books of the Torah. He was of the opinion that as Deuteronomy – for the most part – is presented as Moses' personal historical retrospective, despite his writing under G-d's prophetic inspiration, his narration of historical events should not be thought of as containing a significant degree of allegorical expansion or hyperbolic exposition. It must hew close to the historical record. The other four books, however, constitute prophecies from G-d that, as regards strict historicity, are not restricted to merely surveying the historical record; there may be substantial expanded dimensions to the material that is recorded in them. Some of these expansions may be straightaway recognized; the full interpretation of

these elaborations, however, was part of the Oral Torah from their inception.

To illustrate, consider the two Torah passages concerning Amalek's attack against Israel (Exod. 17:8-16 and Deut. 25:17-19). The Deuteronomic passage is presented from beginning to end as a strictly historical account, while the corresponding account in Exodus very much appears to contain an allegorical dimension, as pointed out by the Mishnaic Sages (*m. Rosh. Hash.* 3:8). They ask, *וכי ידיו של משה עושות מלחמה או שוברות מלחמה* – “Is it Moses' hands that make the war or break the war?” The answer to the rhetorical question is “of course not.” The Mishnah then proceeds to provide an allegorical interpretation that goes beyond the historical particulars of the underlying subject being narrated.

2. Concerning *Temunah*

There is a variance between the two Decalogue statements in how the prohibition against making a sculptured image/idol is formulated. In Exodus we read *לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ פֶסֶל וְכָל תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְכֹי' ,* “You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image or any likeness of whatever is in the heavens above, the earth below or in the seas beneath the earth.” (The conjunctive *vav* connecting *pesel* and *temunah* obviously has the meaning here of “or” as it often does.) The *pesel* (sculptured image) and the *temunah* (likeness) are both objects of the preceding verbal clause “You shall not make,” both denoting man-made artifacts constituting idols. The prohibition of these images and likenesses encompasses any case in which they are a representation of any item or shape in the heavens, on earth or in the seas.

However, the verse does not actually contain a word for the “item” or “shape” that is in the heavens, on earth or in the seas that the command refers to in prohibiting the making of an artifact that represents it. After mentioning the artifacts that one is forbidden to make, which are understood to be idols, it merely states *אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְכֹי' ,* “that are in the heavens above, on earth below or in the seas,” as if the artifacts themselves are in the heavens, on earth or in the seas. Those items or shapes of which the forbidden artifacts are representations are not mentioned or referred to! It is an extraordinary absence, surprising the reader that he must mentally furnish the phrase “of

all items or shapes” that are in the heavens, on earth or in the seas, especially considering the importance of the prohibition and its comprehensiveness and wordiness.

In Deuteronomy, however, the verse is formulated slightly differently: *לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ פֶסֶל כָּל תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם* without the *vav*. The absence of that letter creates two possibilities in interpreting the phrase, both grammatically correct. It may be that *כָּל תְּמוּנָה* is an expansion of *pesel* (a sculptured image, any likeness) that would include artifacts similar to *pesel*, thus having a meaning very close to (though not identical with) the Exodus version. Similar expanding constructions are common in Deuteronomy (cf. 15:21; 16:21) and this may merely be an instance of the Deuteronomic manner of articulation.

Or, in contrast to Exodus, *כָּל תְּמוּנָה* may not be referring to a concrete man-made artifact at all, but denotes the shape or image of the items in the heavens, on earth or in the seas that the *pesel* would represent. In this approach *כָּל תְּמוּנָה* would be in the construct state and the meaning of the verse would be, “Do not make a sculptured image of any likeness that is in the heavens above, etc.” Unlike the Exodus formulation, only one term – *pesel* – would designate the artifact prohibited to make.

The word *temunah*, denoting the shape or appearance of an external item that one is prohibited to represent with an artifact or to worship, occurs five times in Deuteronomy 4, the chapter immediately preceding that in which the Decalogue appears. All five attestations refer to revelation:

- *utmunah enekhem ro'im* (“but a likeness you did not perceive” [v. 12])
- *ki lo re'item kol temunah* (“for you saw no likeness” [v. 15])
- *pesel, temunat kol samel* (“a sculptured image in the likeness of any icon” [v. 16])
- *pesel, temunat kol* (“a sculptured image in the likeness of anything” [v. 23])
- *pesel, temunat kol* (same as previous [v. 25])

In none of these phrases can *temunah* be given the meaning of a man-made artifact. *Temunah* referring to a form or likeness also appears elsewhere in Tanakh (Num. 12:8; Ps. 17:15; Job 4:16). Tellingly, besides the single appearance in the Exodus Decalogue, the

word *temunah* in the sense of a man-made artifact is not attested a single time in Tanakh. Translating it in the Deuteronomic Decalogue as “likeness,” consistent with its other occurrences, surely appears indicated, and thus the problem in the Exodus formulation does not exist in Deuteronomy. There is no lack of a word that refers to the item or the shape of that which is in the heavens, on earth or in the seas that the verse prohibits to make a representation of.

This appears to indicate that Deuteronomy was the first version and that Exodus, subtly relying upon the Deuteronomic formulation for the full expression, expanded the scope of *pesel* with the coinage of a new term, *temunah*, to refer to man-made artifacts that serve as idols. (For an example of a similar pattern of textual dependency see our discussion on the linkage between Exodus 13 and Deuteronomy 6–7 in our *Parashat Bo Part II: On Exodus 13* study.)

3. *Zakhor* and *Shamor*

In Exodus, the Shabbat commandment is introduced with *zakhor* (“remember, keep in mind”); in Deuteronomy, the introductory word is *shamor* (“observe, protect”). The rest of the opening clause is identical in both: “the sabbath day to keep it holy.” If only one version was explicitly proclaimed at the lawgiving – a reasonable assumption – and the other expounded upon the first, whatever that mechanism may have been, which formulation was first?

In other scriptural passages *shamor* is invariably the standard usage with Shabbat. Thus, the extensive passage dealing with Shabbat in Exodus 31 contains three attestations of various forms of the *sh-m-r* stem with Shabbat: אָט שְׁבֵתִי תִשְׁמְרוּ (Exod. 31:13); וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת הַשְּׁבֹתָה (v. 14) and וְשִׁמְרוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשְּׁבֹתָה (v. 16). In Leviticus, the phrase אָט שְׁבֵתִי תִשְׁמְרוּ appears three times (Lev. 19:3, 30 and 26:2); in Isaiah, the שְׁמַר שְׁבֹתָה usage appears twice (Isa. 56:2, 6.) Regarding *zakhor*, however, besides the one attestation in the Exodus Decalogue, there is not a single other such usage associated with Shabbat in Tanakh. Surely this points toward viewing *shamor* as being considered more suiting the nature and comprehensive regulations of Shabbat and as the “original” Decalogue word. *Zakhor* – which calls forth memory – appears to be a type of biblical midrash, an expansion that brings a valuable variation into the Shabbat picture. This

suggests a possible approach as to what might have transpired.

Assuming that the Exodus *zakhor* is drawn from the Deuteronomy Shabbat passage, the following explanation presents itself. In the Deuteronomic explanation for observing Shabbat, the word זָכַרְתָּ (“and you shall remember”) is employed once, albeit not to remember Shabbat itself but to recall Israel’s past slavery. In Exodus, that part of the Deuteronomic Shabbat formulation does not appear (a reference to creation “substitutes” for it). Accordingly, the *z-kh-r* word-root may have been chosen to maintain the connectedness with the other Decalogue formulation and utilized to remember a different object – the Shabbat day itself. In this way, the combination of the two Shabbat formulations (*shamor* and *zakhor*) provides a more comprehensive prescription for fulfillment of the precept, and the passage is enriched with intertextual linkage. The audience receiving the Exodus formulation, while given a new explanation for Shabbat, is also reminded of the explanation provided in Deuteronomy.

Another word that appears in the Exodus formulation that does not appear in the Deuteronomy one is נָנוּחַ (“and He rested”). This may be another instance of the Exodus Decalogue drawing from that portion of the Deuteronomy Decalogue that is not to appear in its formulation. In Deuteronomy, the word נָנוּחַ (“he may rest”) refers to the slave having rest on Shabbat, part of the Deuteronomic explanation for Shabbat that does not appear in the Exodus version. Exodus’ use of the word נָנוּחַ in describing G-d having rested on the seventh day is the only attestation in Tanakh of this word stem in relation to G-d.

It should be noted that זָכַרְתָּ and נָנוּחַ are key words in the two interrelated explanatory clauses given for the Shabbat precept in the Deuteronomy Decalogue that were omitted in the Exodus Decalogue. Thus, the Exodus version acknowledges its connection to that of Deuteronomy.

4. The Reason for the Shabbat Commandment

In the Exodus version of the Decalogue the explanation given for observing Shabbat is that it commemorates G-d’s creation: “For in six days Hashem created the heavens and earth, the sea, and all

that is in them, and rested on the seventh day” (Exod. 20:11). That explanation does not appear in the Deuteronomy Decalogue. There, the explanation for Shabbat reads: “in order that your male slave and female slave may rest as you do. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Hashem your G-d redeemed you from there...therefore Hashem your G-d has commanded you to make the Shabbat day” (Deut. 5:14-15).

In Deuteronomy, the passage fully and clearly informs us of two related purposes or reasons for Shabbat: “in order (לְמַעַן) that your male slave and female slave may rest as you do” and so that “you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and Hashem your G-d redeemed you from there...therefore (עַל כֵּן) Hashem your G-d has commanded you to make the Shabbat day.” In this formulation there is no ambiguity whatsoever about why Shabbat was commanded; not only does the verse distinctly spell it out, but it also definitively informs us that it is providing the reason with the unambiguous terms לְמַעַן (in order) and עַל כֵּן (therefore).

In Exodus, the connection to the reason for Shabbat, “for in six days G-d created the heavens and earth and rested on the seventh day,” is made with *ki* (“for”), a less definite term to articulate a purpose compared to Deuteronomy’s לְמַעַן and עַל כֵּן. In addition, in Exodus there is not any statement explicitly specifying “this is G-d’s reason” for commanding this law, such as Deuteronomy’s עַל כֵּן, which reinforced the reason furnished by לְמַעַן. And the explanation “for in six days G-d created the heavens and earth and rested on the seventh day” is a statement of fact that points to a correspondence. It merely implies a reason without actually articulating it. It is left to the recipient of the message to elucidate why desisting from work on the seventh day as G-d rested on the seventh day constitutes an appropriate act commemorating G-d’s creative activity. It is an unusual formulation.

The Exodus passage does employ a “therefore” (עַל כֵּן) in the Shabbat passage, furnishing a reason, but for a very different syntactical purpose. Indeed, the Exodus עַל כֵּן is unusual and has a most surprising connection with what precedes it in the verse. It provides information that is essentially extraneous to the reason Israel must observe Shabbat, although it may be interpreted as indirectly related to it. The עַל כֵּן informs

us of matters in G-d’s domain, namely, since He created the heavens and earth in six days and rested on the seventh day He chose to bless and sanctify the Shabbat day.

In other words, after the passage provides the rationale for observing Shabbat, it proceeds to a “therefore,” leading the reader to expect that the forthcoming statement will be another detail or a fuller explanation of why we are commanded to observe Shabbat. That is how the עַל כֵּן functions in the Deuteronomy case and as it usually does everywhere. Instead, it furnishes an explanation as to why Hashem blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. This is information on a related facet of the subject but not serving the anticipated purpose; it appears to be a proclamation that does not belong, in a first instance, within the formulation of the reason for a commandment.

However, if the Deuteronomy version was earlier, we may assume that a process similar to what we suggested in the previous section regarding וְזָכַרְתָּ and וְיָגִיד may explain the עַל כֵּן. In order to maintain the linkage with the original Decalogue version, the Exodus formulation duplicated the עַל כֵּן format of the Deuteronomy explanation that it was not going to incorporate and, employing it in a manner that suited its explanation, expounded another important concept relevant to Shabbat.

Thus, three key terms of the Deuteronomy version that represent the three clauses that were not to appear in the Exodus version were adapted for use in that version in a creative manner. It is noteworthy that each of these three terms begins or is part of the beginning of one or another of these clauses.

Finally, explaining that the reasons for Shabbat are to provide rest for the slaves and to prompt the Israelites to recall that they too had once been slaves are apropos to the immediate historical context in which the Decalogue was proclaimed. The more abstract explanation of commemorating creation befits a more contemplative situation and is more suitable to the realm of prophetic midrash. The amount of time between the formulations of the two versions is not relevant to this discussion; at this point we are merely addressing the question of which was the original

formulation, allowing the second to refer to it in its expounding and expanding.

5. כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוְּךָ

In the Deuteronomy version, two precepts include a note to the effect that Hashem had previously commanded them to Israel: Shabbat and the honoring of father and mother. Both contain the phrase כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוְּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ (“as Hashem your G-d had commanded you”). There is no such comment in the Exodus version. Some have considered this an indication that the Exodus version was first because it does not include any interjections by Moses, who presumably related exactly G-d’s words. In his fortieth year review, though, just as he chose to insert in the midst of his words “as Hashem your G-d had commanded you,” referring, they presume, to the original Decalogue proclamation, he can be supposed to have taken other modifying liberties, accounting for the variants (see Ibn Ezra).

However, while not a simple matter, Moses’ insertion of “as Hashem your G-d had commanded you” does not present a challenge to the thesis that the Deuteronomistic version was first. Since Moses was reciting the Decalogue long after the event, it is very likely that he deemed it appropriate at certain points to remind his audience that he was enunciating G-d’s commandments as originally transmitted. The reasons he inserted the reminder only when dealing with the precepts of Shabbat and the honoring of parents are eminently understandable, as we will discuss shortly. Thus, “as Hashem your G-d had commanded you” does not provide any evidence that Moses made any modifications in reciting the content that might account for the variations.

Some sages view “as Hashem your G-d had commanded you” to be harking back to Marah, the pre-Decalogue experience, regarding which the Torah stated וַיִּשְׁפֹּט לָהֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (“There He set for it [the nation] statute and ordinance” [Exod. 15:25]). These sages identify “statute and ordinance” as Shabbat and honoring of parents respectively (*b. Sanh.* 56b). That they did not take the reminder phrase as referring to those two commandments in the original Decalogue proclamation rather than to the ambiguous Marah experience is significant. It seems to indicate that they

understood those words to have been said by Moses in the initial transmission of the Decalogue, which he repeated verbatim in Deuteronomy; they apparently assumed that everything he recited in the Deuteronomy version was precisely in accordance with the original proclamation. That school of thought viewed the Deuteronomistic version to be the initial one.

However, that talmudic statement concerning Marah, which appears to be aggadic in nature, is one view in a dispute (as recorded in the *Mekhilta*), and it does not cite the evidence for its position. Moreover, as we explained with considerable support in our *Parashat Beshallah Part I* study, the וַיִּשְׁפֹּט לָהֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל passage may be introducing establishment of the covenant relationship as part of the preparation for the Sinai lawgiving.

If the “as Hashem your G-d had commanded you” statement does not refer to Marah but to the initial proclamation of the Decalogue and it was Moses’ decision to insert those words in his fortieth year review, what might have been his reason to add the phrase only to Shabbat and honoring parents?

Such a statement could not have been added to the first two commandments as Hashem proclaimed those in the first person and Moses quoted Him verbatim in first person. The third commandment, speaking of our obligation to respect His name, is a thematic continuation of the first two. Although formulated in the third person, it fits right in with the previous two, and would not be suitable to receive a motivational reminder that would separate it somewhat from them. The last five commandments, formulated in a terse, apodictic style, contain no third person word. Whether or not they were originally part of what was transmitted through Moses’ mediation, they are unmistakably perceived as G-d’s words. It is only the commandments of Shabbat and the honoring of parents, as they contain third-person phraseology, that lent themselves to the addition of the motivational clause “as Hashem had commanded you.”

We will discuss some of the variations in the tenth commandment formulations in our study on that commandment.