

The Decalogue was given 3 times, in פרשת ואתחנן, פרשת יתרו and פרשת קדושים. If one looks through the first section of קדושים, one finds the entire context of the Decalogue. The main distinction between ואתחנן/ יתרו and קדושים is that קדושים uses the plural form while the other two use the singular form. It is reasonable that the Decalogue should be formulated in plural, yet it appears twice in singular form. There are many examples where the Torah mixes plural and singular. For example, in the chapter of שמעו, והיה אם שמוע, the Torah switches back and forth between singular and plural forms. It is natural in the Hebrew language to switch back and forth between singular and plural (e.g. אשר פקד משה (ואהרן)).

Rashi asks why was the Decalogue presented in singular form only? Let us first examine the Ramban's approach to this problem. He says that all the commandments were formulated in singular form to warn the people that any individual who transgresses the commandments will be punished. Gd addresses Himself to each individual and warns him not to be misled and follow the majority in sin. The individual can never claim that he was just following the crowd, that he was corrupted by society around him. Many Jews would prefer to be observant even though they find themselves caught up in a senseless secular life. They would observe commandments if they could resist social pressures. However they find it difficult to be an outcast from society, be it a society that shuns a religious, spiritual existence or one that is corrupt and amoral. So they succumb to the social pressure they face.

The Torah emphasizes the importance of the individual in times of catastrophe. We find many situations where the community at large felt that all hope for survival was gone, they were ready to simply surrender. In each case, select individuals saved the community in times of adversity. Chazal say that לא מאסתי refers to the time that Gd sent Ezra and Nehemiah to rescue the generation that arose after the destruction of the first Temple. לא געלתי refers to Mordechai and Esther. לכלותם refers to Matisyahu and his sons. להפר בריתי refers to Antoninus and Rebbe, Rabbi Judah the Prince. This statement of Chazal is noteworthy in that it does not mention the fact that Gd rescued them in each of those generations. Why does it say that Gd "gave" the generation these heroes and leaders? At times of communal despair and national suicide, when Judaism seemingly can no longer survive, Gd bestows individuals on the community that change the destiny of the Jewish nation. They are the redeemers. Without Mordechai and Esther the Jewish community would have been obliterated. The courage of the individuals saved the people. Judaism believes in the ability of the individual to alter Jewish history. Such an individual understands the suffering of the individual and the community. Gd addressed the Decalogue to such an individual.

Rashi answers the question of why the Torah used the singular form in a different way. It provided Moses with the opening to defend and rescue the people at the episode of the golden calf by claiming that the Decalogue was given to him alone, as evidenced by their being presented in the singular form. Since the Jewish People were never given the commandments, they did not transgress.

How did Rashi derive that Moses argued that the Decalogue was given only to him? Because of the way that Moses phrased the question: “how could Gd indict the Jewish People?” After all, until recently they were slaves. Gd answered they violated the first law of the Decalogue that outlawed idolatry. Moses jumped to their defense, asking Gd to forgive them. Moses did not accept their guilt. Even though they committed the offense and made an idol, he still pleaded for them. Apparently Moses defense strategy was to argue that Gd did not address Himself to the nation, but rather to him alone, so the laws of the Decalogue were not yet binding upon them and hence were not punishable for the grave sin they committed.

When Moses descended the mountain and saw the Jews celebrating around the idol, his first reaction was to break the Tablets. Chazal say that Gd congratulated Moses for breaking the Tablets. Chazal say that at Sinai, the Jewish People were the bride, Gd כביכול, the groom and the Tablets were the קדושין, the object of value through which the betrothal was consummated. Sometimes a contract is created through the instrument of money, other times through a document. An individual can appoint an agent to turn over the instrument of קדושין on his behalf to his prospective bride. So Moses was the agent who was given the task to hand over the contract instrument, the Tablets. Moses was to teach them what Gd commanded at Sinai, how to live a moral life. When he decided to break the instrument, he broke the contract and the people were no longer bound. Indeed, in this way, Moses prevented the contract from taking effect.

Gd appreciated the difficulty inherent with taking slaves out of bondage and turning them into a holy people. To become a holy nation, they must be trained and educated. When Gd gave Moses the Decalogue at Sinai, He told Moses that he, Moses, alone understands Gd and he must transmit the laws over time to a people still focused on the fleshpots of Egypt. At that time the people were not involved in the agreement. Moses descended the mountain and quickly assessed the dire situation facing the people. In order to save them from the requisite associated harsh punishment, Moses decided to cancel the agreement and destroyed the Tablets.

Why did Gd change the process for the second set of Tablets and require Moses to make the extra effort of carving and dragging stones up the mountain? There are 2 different types of agents with regards to betrothal: שליח להולכה (agent to deliver, who acts on behalf

of the prospective husband) and שליח לקבלה (agent to receive, who acts on behalf of the prospective bride). The difference between them is that שליח לקבלה creates the קדושין once the agent receives the instrument. However a שליח להולכה retains the same power as the sender. Had the husband himself delivered the קדושין, it would not take effect until he completes the delivery. His emissary is also required to deliver before the קדושין take effect.

Moses was a שליח להולכה for the first Tablets. The marriage between Gd and the Jewish People did not take effect until he delivered the קדושין to the people. Since ultimately the delivery never took place, there was no marriage. Gd informed Moses with the second Tablets his role will change. To prevent a recurrence of the same episode, this time Moses you must assume the role of שליח לקבלה. Before ascending the mountain the second time, Moses informed the people that he was going to meet Gd to attempt to atone for their sin. Why was it necessary to inform the people of his plans to ascend the mountain again? After all, Moses met many times with Gd without advising the people of his plans. He informed the people that if he is successful in his request that Gd forgive the people and restore His bond with them, the קדושין will apply immediately upon his receiving the Tablets and they will be bound immediately by the Decalogue. He will not be able to employ the same defense he used last time, that they were not yet bound by the Decalogue because Moses was a שליח להולכה. Moses required their consent to be their שליח לקבלה and therefore informed them prior to embarking on his mission.

The Torah says that Gd took us out of בית עבדים, the house of slaves. Why the emphasis on the house of slaves? According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch there are 2 types of slaves. The first is a free man who is defeated in war and is forced into slavery. He bristles at his slavery as it contradicts everything he knew as a free man. He anxiously anticipates the opportunity to throw off the yoke of slavery and be free again. Another type of slave is one whose ancestors were slaves, perhaps for many generations. Such a slave cannot appreciate freedom. The Jews were enslaved for many years in Egypt. The Torah tells us that after Pharaoh became sick, the people cried out to Gd. Why didn't they cry out to Gd earlier? They did not pray before under intolerable conditions because slavery was so ingrained in them. They accepted their state of slavery, physically and psychologically.

The Torah tells us the Jewish People were redeemed from the house of Pharaoh. Some slaves were given by the state to deserving citizens who were Pharaoh's subjects. A slave in the home of cruel masters has a very difficult life. However sometimes a slave may be fortunate to find himself in the home of a master with some compassion and find life tolerable. The majority of the Jews were slaves who were forced to work for the state. Slaves of the state invariably find their masters to be sadists. The Torah tells us that some

Jews were in private homes where some were treated better while others were terribly abused. However, the worst position was to be a slave to the state, to Pharaoh. During the Holocaust, the concentration camps were noteworthy for the state-institutionalized and sanctioned brutality against the Jewish inmates by the sadistic barbarians selected by the Nazi state װ"מ' to run those camps. The same was true in Egypt as it was in Nazi Germany.

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