

# Ten Commandments - Not Just For Jews

Category: Shemos, Yisro

*We Jews have taken culture from the Chinese — after all, every Jew eats Chinese food. But have they taken anything from us?*

## American Jewish Life

You know, there are many things an Israeli Jew must learn if he or she wishes to get used to American Jewish life.

For starters, the Israeli must start eating Chinese food. Every self-respecting American Jew frequently visits a Chinese restaurant.

But sadly, one will probably never hear that the Chinese love Jewish food. One has yet to meet a Chinese individual in a kosher restaurant asking for gefilte fish or cholent.

So we can ask the question: Did the Jewish Nation also contribute something to Chinese culture?

Today, we read the Aseres HaDibros, the famous Ten Commandments. Are the Ten Commandments for the Jews only? Or do they pertain to the rest of the world too?

In other words, when G-d uttered the Ten Commandments and the entire Nation of Israel stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai, were those intended just for the Jews? Or is there a lesson there for the other peoples of the world too?

Now, most of the commandments can be said to pertain to the nations of the world.

They too are obligated to believe in G-d. They too are forbidden to worship idols. They too need to honor their parents. But there's one Commandment that creates a problem. Does anyone know what that Commandment is?

That's right: Shabbos! This mitzvah does not pertain to the nations of the world. On the contrary—the Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 58:2) tells us that it is forbidden for a non-Jew to observe the Shabbos. And if this Commandment doesn't apply to the nations of the world, this teaches us that all ten don't really apply to them either.

## The Two Versions

As is known, the Ten Commandments are written a second time in the Torah, in the portion of Va'eschanan. But when you compare the text of the Commandments as they appear in this week's Parshah of Yisro to how they appear in Va'eschanan, we discover that there are differences. And what's interesting is that the main change is in the fourth Commandment, the command to observe Shabbos. There, there is a change that many of you may be familiar with: In our Parshah, the Torah says, "Zachor es yom haShabbos"—remember the day of Shabbos, but in Va'eschanan, it says, "Shamor es yom haShabbos"—guard or observe the day of Shabbos.

But that's not the only change in this one Commandment—even in the reason for the Commandment there is a change. Here, the Torah says that the reason for Shabbos is "For in six days did G-d create the Heaven and the Earth... and He rested on the seventh day" (Shmos 20:11). In other words, the reason we are to keep Shabbos is that, as everyone knows, G-d created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh. And so, we are required to observe the Shabbos to remember that G-d created the universe.

But in the second set of Commandments, in Va'eschanan, there the Torah writes a different reason for observing the Shabbos: "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the L-rd your G-d took you out; therefore, He commanded you... to make the Shabbos day" (Devarim 5:15).

What's behind these changes between the first Ten Commandments and the second Ten Commandments?

## Two Aspects of Shabbos

In the Midrash (Pesikta Rabasi, start of Chap. 23), the Sages are quoted saying

something very interesting that sheds light on the subject of “zachor and shamor,” of remembering and guarding the Shabbos. “Rabbi Yuden says, ‘zachor’ was given to the nations of the world and ‘shamor’ was given to the Nation of Israel.”

What Rabbi Yuden is saying here is that zachor, remember the Shabbos, is an order for all the nations of the world. Every human being, whoever he or she is, must remember.

But how is one to accomplish this? Here we come back to the Chinese.

In ancient China, over 2,000 years ago, a “week” of work consisted of ten days. The ancient Chinese apparently would work for nine days and the tenth day would be a day of rest. And in ancient Egypt, the workweek was also ten days.

Even relatively recently in history, the French conqueror Napoleon tried to reinstitute the ten-day week—and in truth, it makes a lot of sense. It’s a lot simpler and easier to calculate the days and weeks with a nice round number like ten.

And in truth, there is no real reason that a week should be seven days. The fact that a year is 365 days is simply because it’s based on the cycle of the sun.

The concept of a month is also dependent on the natural order, because a full orbit of the moon is about 30 days (actually 29 and a half days.) Likewise, the concept of a 24-hour day is based on the natural order—one night and one day comprise one full day. But what’s this week? There’s nothing in the natural order that takes seven days to complete!

The only reason, my friends, is the Book of Genesis. There we learn that that G-d created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh. Therefore, any human being alive in our world today, who lives by the calendar of a seven-day week, is essentially keeping Shabbos, whether he wants to or not. By the very fact that he’s off from work on Saturday, he’s acknowledging that G-d is the Creator of the universe.

And therefore, in the Ten Commandments listed in this week’s Parshah which apply to the nations of the world as well, it says “zachor” the day of Shabbos—remember it, because “in six days did G-d create the Heaven and the Earth”—a

reason that applies to every human being.

On the other hand, the Ten Commandments in the portion of Va'eschanan, which were spoken exclusively to the Jewish Nation, state "shamor" in the Commandment on Shabbos. There, it tells us that one must observe and guard the Shabbos—for the Jew, it's not enough to remember that today is Shabbos; he needs to observe the Shabbos. And therefore, the reason for Shabbos given there involves the Exodus from Egypt—because this is a reason for Shabbos that pertains to Jews alone. Only the Jews left Egypt.

## **Why is the Portion Called Yisro**

This tells us something amazing.

The Rebbe asked numerous times: Why is the Torah portion of the Ten Commandments named specifically after a man who was not Jewish? And on the contrary, he had worshiped every idol and false god in the world!

Additionally: the story of Yisro appears in the Torah between the Splitting of the Sea and the Giving of the Torah—but couldn't Yisro's story be inserted somewhere else? Apparently, it cuts the flow of the narrative, the story line, of the Exodus from Egypt. From the beginning of the Book of Shmos we read progressively about the Exodus—and suddenly the whole story is cut off by someone appearing, like one long parenthetical quote on Yisro.

The question is stronger according to the opinions that say that Yisro came to the desert after the Giving of the Torah. But even according to the opinions that Yisro came to the desert before the Giving of the Torah, there is an axiom that "there is no preceding and following in the Torah"—meaning, the Torah is not written in chronological order. And if so, the Torah didn't need to interrupt the flow of the most important saga in Judaism: the Exodus from Egypt!

Perhaps the Torah wants to teach us that the Ten Commandments in the portion of Yisro pertain to the nations of the world too.

As the Talmud (Tractate Zevachim 116a) says, "'And Yisro heard': Rabbi Eliezer HaMudai says, 'He heard about the Giving of the Torah and thus came, because when the Torah was given to the Nation of Israel, G-d's Voice blasted forth from

one end of the world to the other, and all the kings of the nations were seized with trembling in their halls, and they uttered praise unto Him.”

Perhaps this is another reason why the first word in the Ten Commandments is “Anochi,” not “Ani.” Both words mean “I.” But the Midrash says that Anochi is ancient Egyptian, not Hebrew—meaning that G-d began the Ten Commandments specifically in Egyptian so that the nations of the world would understand that it pertains to them too—and that they too must stand by them.

Now it may be true that we got Chinese food from the Chinese. But they got their seven-day week from us, and a lot more too. And that serves as a reminder and a symbol that there is a Creator Who created His universe in six days and rested on the seventh.