

**Biblical**Exodus 3:1-15

<sup>1</sup> Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?" <sup>4</sup> When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> And He said, "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. <sup>6</sup> I am," He said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup> And the Lord continued, "I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings. <sup>8</sup> I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup> Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt."

<sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> And He said, "I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."

<sup>13</sup> Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" <sup>14</sup> And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup> And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you:

This shall be My name forever,  
This My appellation for all eternity.

Deuteronomy 11:13-21

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the Lord your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, <sup>14</sup> I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil — <sup>15</sup> I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle — and thus you shall eat your fill. <sup>16</sup> Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. <sup>17</sup> For the Lord's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the Lord is assigning to you.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a -symbol on your forehead, <sup>19</sup> and teach them to your children — reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up; <sup>20</sup> and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates — <sup>21</sup> to the end that you and your children may endure, in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to assign to them, as long as there is a heaven over the earth.

**Rabbinic****Sefer Ha'agadah (Book of Legends)**

It happened that while R. Meir was expounding in the house of study on a Sabbath afternoon, his two sons died. What did their mother do? She put them both on a couch and spread a sheet over them. At the end of the Sabbath, R. Meir returned home from the house of study and asked, "Where are my two sons?" She replied, "They went to the house of study." R. Meir: "I looked for them there but did not see them."

Then she gave him the cup for *Havdalah*, and he pronounced the blessing. Again he asked, "Where are my two sons?" She replied, "They went to such-and-such a place and will be back soon." Then she brought food for him. After he had eaten, she said, "My teacher, I have a question." R. Meir: "Ask your question." She: "My teacher, a while ago a man came and deposited something in my keeping. Now he has come back to claim what he left. Shall I return it to him or not?" R. Meir: "My daughter, is not one who holds a deposit required to return it to its owner?" She: "Still, without your opinion, I would not have returned it."

Then what did she do? She took R. Meir by his hand, led him up to the chamber, and brought him near the couch. Then she pulled off the sheet that covered them, and he saw that both children lying on the couch were dead. He began to weep and say, "My sons, my sons, my teachers, my teachers. My sons in the way of the world, but my teachers because they illumined my eyes with their understanding of Torah."

Then she came out with: "My teacher, did you not say to me that we are required to restore to the owner what is left with us in trust? 'The Lord gave, the Lord took. May the Name of the Lord be blessed' " (Job 1:21).

**Mishnah Avot: 1:1**

MOSES RECEIVED THE TORAH AT SINAI AND TRANSMITTED IT TO JOSHUA, JOSHUA TO THE ELDERS, AND THE ELDERS TO THE PROPHETS, AND THE PROPHETS TO THE MEN OF THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE.

**Talmud Baba Metzia 59b**

And this was the oven of 'Aknai. [R. Eliezer and R. Joshua begin to have an argument over whether Ahnai's oven was in fact kosher or not]...

On that day R. Eliezer brought forward every imaginable [absolutely correct] argument, but they did not accept them. Said he to them: 'If the halahah agrees with me [if my position is the correct position], let this carob-tree prove it!' Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place — others affirm, four hundred cubits. 'No proof can be brought from a carob-tree,' they retorted.

Again he said to them: 'If the halahah agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!' Whereupon the stream of water flowed backwards — 'No proof can be brought from a stream of water,' they rejoined...

Again he said to them: 'If the halahah agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!' Whereupon the voice of God cried out: 'Why do you dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halahah agrees with him!'

But R. Joshua arose and exclaimed: 'It is not in heaven.' What did he mean by this? — Said R. Jeremiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to the voice of God, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai.

MedievalSaadia Gaon: by Rabbi Jacob Staub

Saadia offers us two approaches to a rational understanding of the commandments. First, he states that “logic demands” four things:<sup>18</sup>

- 1) that whoever does something good be compensated either by means of a favor shown to him, if he is in need of it, or by means of thanks, if he does not require any reward. . . .
- 2) that he that is wise does not permit himself to be treated with contempt or to be insulted. . . .
- 3) that the creatures be prevented from wronging each other in all sorts of ways. . . .
- 4) (that) a wise man . . . give employment to an individual who performs a certain function and . . . pay him a wage for it, merely in order to confer a benefit upon him, since this is something that redounds to the benefit of the worker without hurting the employer.

Gersonides: by Robert Eisen

Because he has never witnessed a miracle, Gersonides bases his observations on the biblical accounts. Adhering to Aristotle's thought, Gersonides presents some basic assumptions, such as (1) God cannot intervene in nature, (2) God cannot change His will, (3) Nature behaves in accordance with laws. According to Gersonides, miracles cannot be a regular occurrence since natural phenomena and laws regularly changing through miracles would signify a defect in the natural order. Furthermore, an event that has already taken place cannot be reversed miraculously as if it has not taken place. Gersonides concludes that while God is the source of miracles, miracles follow the laws of nature. If they seem magical to human beings it is because these exceptional phenomena exist on a higher level of nature than the level with which human beings are familiar and comfortable.

*" . . . the turning of a stick into a snake can be accomplished by natural processes over an extraordinarily long period of time by the stick acquiring its form [i.e., of the snake] and relinquishing [its own] form until it becomes a snake. The miracle is thus in its being generated [i.e., the snake] without intermediary steps which normally occur in the course of nature. . . . Nothing can be generated miraculously if it cannot also be generated by natural process over an extended period of time."*

Maimonides: Guide for the Perplexed

We must bear in mind that all such religious acts as reading the Law, praying, and the performance of other precepts, serve exclusively as the means of causing us to occupy and fill our mind with the precepts of God, and free it from worldly business; for we are thus, as it were, in communication with God, and undisturbed by any other thing. If we, however, pray with the motion of our lips, and our face toward the wall, but at the same time think of our business; if we read the Law with our tongue, whilst our heart is occupied with the building of our house, and we do not think of what we are reading; if we perform the commandments only with our limbs, we are like those who are engaged in digging in the ground, or hewing wood in the forest, without reflecting on the nature of those acts, or by whom they are commanded, or what is their object. We must not imagine that [in this way] we attain the highest perfection; on the contrary, we are then like those in reference to whom Scripture says, “Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins” (Jer. xii. 2).

ModernSpinoza: God is the World

**PROP. XIV.** *Besides God no substance can be granted or conceived.*

*Proof.*—As God is a being absolutely infinite, of whom no attribute that expresses the essence of substance can be denied (by Def. vi.), and he necessarily exists (by Prop. xi.); if any substance besides God were granted, it would have to be explained by some attribute of God, and thus two substances with the same attribute would exist, which (by Prop. v.) is absurd; therefore, besides God no substance can be granted, or, consequently, be conceived. If it could be conceived, it would necessarily have to be conceived as existent; but this (by the first part of this proof) is absurd. Therefore, besides God no substance can be granted or conceived. *Q.E.D.*

*Corollary I.*—Clearly, therefore: 1. God is one, that is (by Def. vi.) only one substance can be granted in the universe, and that substance is absolutely infinite, as we have already indicated (in the note to Prop. x.).

*Corollary II.*—It follows: 2. That extension and thought are either attributes of God or (by Ax. i.) accidents (*affectiones*) of the attributes of God.

Buber: I-Thou

TO MAN THE WORLD IS TWOFOLD, in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks.

The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.

The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*.

The other primary word is the combination *I-It*; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words *He* and *She* can replace *It*.

Hence the *I* of man is also twofold.

For the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*.



PRIMARY WORDS DO NOT SIGNIFY THINGS, but they intimate relations.

Primary words do not describe something that might exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence.

Primary words are spoken from the being.

If *Thou* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-Thou* is said along with it.

If *It* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-It* is said along with it.

The primary word *I-Thou* can only be spoken with the whole being.

The primary word *I-It* can never be spoken with the whole being.

**Contemporary****Kaplan: The Future of the American Jew**

The belief in God is belief in the existence of a Power conducive to salvation (to achieving goodness, justice and harmony) which is the fulfillment of human destiny. God is not the conception of the ordering principle in the universe, but of a power predisposing humans to their ultimate human good, to salvation and fulfillment.

The cosmos as a whole is so constituted as to make for human salvation, provided each person does her share learning about and living up to the requisite conditions. To view the cosmos this way is to believe in God.

God, where do I find you, whose glory fills the universe? I find you wherever my mind is free to follow its own bent. Wherever words come out from the depth of truth, wherever tireless striving reaches its arm towards perfection, wherever humans struggle for freedom and righteousness, wherever the scientist toils to unbare the secrets of nature, wherever the poet strings beauty in lyric lines, wherever glorious deeds are done.

**Heschel: God in Search of Man**

God is not hiding in a temple. The Torah came to tell inattentive man: “You are not alone, you live constantly in a holy neighborhood; remember: love they neighbor God as thyself.” We are not asked to abandon life and to say farewell to this world, but to keep the spark within a flame, and to suffer His Light to reflect in our face. Let our greed not rise like a barrier to this neighborhood. God is waiting on every road that leads from intention to action, from desire to satisfaction.

**Heschel with MLK**

The day we marched together out of Selma was a day of sanctification. That day I hope will never be past to me - that day will continue to be this day.... May I add that I have rarely in my life been privileged to hear a sermon as glorious as the one you delivered at the service in Selma prior to the march. For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying.

**Heschel on Miracles**

The sense for the “miracles with are daily with us,” the sense for the “continual marvels,” is the source for prayer. There is no worship, no music, no love, if we take for granted the blessings or defeats of living. No routine of the social, physical, or physiological order must dull our sense of surprise at the fact that there is a social, a physical, or physiological order. We are trained in maintaining our sense of wonder by uttering a prayer ... to pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery which animates all beings, the divine margin in all attainments.

**Larry Kushner on Diversity of Practice**

You and your brother or sister share the same parents. Yet even though your parents are obviously the same people to you and your sibling, give or take a few year, pretty much the same home, same values, social milieu, how remarkable that your relationships with them are profoundly different. The rules of your respective parent-child relationships are poles apart. What you must do to be a good son or daughter is different from what your brother must do. It is like that with religious traditions too. Though we all share a common “parent,” the “rules” of how we must be faithful to that relationship vary from one person and one religion to another. Each is true and holy and proper. Indeed for one person to try to be a good child according to the rules of his brother or sister would be a disaster.