

Belief in God

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The second time the Ten Commandments are mentioned, at the end of the forty years, there are some minor differences. Such as "Keep the Shabbat" instead of "Remember the Shabbat." Or "In order that He will be good to you" which is added in the second version of the command to honor one's parents. "And do not commit adultery," whereas in the first version it is simply "Do Not." But those relating to God remain exactly the same.

Yet there is a debate amongst the early masters after the Talmud as to whether the first statement "I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt" counts as a command or not. Maimonides says yes, but Hilchot Gedolot says no.

I have always thought it strange that there is no command in the Torah that says, "You must believe in the Lord your God." And from a philosophical point of view this makes sense. You can command someone to do something. But how can you command someone to believe anything? How can you check if they really do?

Naturally this doesn't take anything away from the fact that God underpins everything in Jewish life. Without Divine presence, Divine history, Divine Law there would be nothing to set ourselves apart from most other religions and cultures. But the question remains, if there is no command to believe in God. What is there?

God simply says "I am." That means there is something there that we need to relate to. But how do we? Some of us are rational, some mystical, some brilliant, others average. There are so many different ways of relating to life and reality. It is up to each one of us. We are challenged to find our way to encounter God, within the only parameter the Torah gives, that there is only one God. That remains unmovable and immutable throughout life on earth. The rest is up to us.