

Standing for Aseret Hadibrot: **Honour to Hashem, or Possible Avodah Zarah?**

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1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 12a (Davidson Edition translation)

וקורין עשרת הדברות "שמע", "והיה אם שמוע", "ויאמר", "אמת ויציב", ונעבדה, וברכת כהנים.

The Gemara related above that the priests in the Temple read the Ten Commandments, along with the sections of Shema, VeHaya im Shamo'a, VaYomer, True and Firm, Avoda, and the priestly benediction.

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: אף בגבולין בקשו לקרות כן, אלא שפכר בטלום מפני תרעומת המינין.

Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: Even in the outlying areas, outside the Temple, they sought to recite the Ten Commandments in this manner every day, as they are the basis of the Torah (Rambam), but they had already abolished recitation of the Ten Commandments due to the grievance of the heretics, who argued that the entire Torah, with the exception of the Ten Commandments, did not emanate from G-d (Jerusalem Talmud). If the Ten Commandments were recited daily, that would lend credence to their claim, so their recitation was expunged from the daily prayers.

תנא נמי הכי, רבי נתן אומר: בגבולין בקשו לקרות כן, אלא שפכר בטלום מפני תרעומת המינין.

That was also taught in a baraita that Rabbi Natan says: In the outlying areas, they sought to recite the Ten Commandments in this manner, but they had already abolished their recitation due to the grievance of the heretics.

רבה בר בר חנה סבר למקבעינהו בסורא, אמר ליה רב חסדא: קבר בטלום מפני תרעומת המינין.

The Gemara relates that several Sages sought to reinstitute recitation of the Ten Commandments, as Rabba bar bar Hana thought to institute this in the city of Sura, but Rav Hisda said to him: They already abolished them due to the grievance of the heretics.

אמימר סבר למקבעינהו בנהרדשא, אמר ליה רב אשי: קבר בטלום מפני תרעומת המינין.

So too, Ameimar thought to institute this in the city of Neharde'a. Rav Ashi, the most prominent of the Sages in that generation, said to him: They already abolished them due to the grievance of the heretics.

2. Rashi there (original text restored in Moznaim/Wagshal Edition of the Talmud, note 9):

מפני תרעומת המינין – שלא יאמרו לעמי הארץ אין שאר תורה אמת ותדעו שאין קורין אלא מה שאמר הקדוש ב"ה ושמעו מפיו בסיני: המינין – תלמידי ישו.

Because of the grievance of the heretics – that they should not say to the unlearned that the rest of the Torah is not true, and this can be proven by the fact that they only read what the Holy One, Blessed be He said and they heard from him at Sinai. The heretics – the students of Jesus.

3. For an interesting read about the translation “10 Commandments”, as well as a discussion of some Christian sources that support this view, see <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23504347>.

4. Professor Eliezer Bashan, “Should we Stand for the Reading of the Ten Commandments?”, Bar Ilan University Daf Parashat Hashavua

Arising for the reading of the Ten Commandments first appears, to the best of our knowledge, in a responsum of Maimonides which relates a dispute over this issue.

From the Query: In one community they were accustomed to stand during the reading, until a wise rabbi came there and annulled that custom, instructing them to sit when it was read and preventing them from standing ... and he[the rabbi]included in his reply that anyone who wishes to stand when the Ten Commandments are read from the Torah scroll should be reproached, because to do so is the way of heretics who believe that the Ten Commandments have more importance than the rest of the Torah, and whenever the heretics believe differently from our Rabbis, of blessed memory, we must distance ourselves from them.

Maimonides' reply: That which the late rabbi instituted, to sit, is proper and his proofs are correct... and there is nothing to add to them. And it would be proper to do this in every place where they are accustomed to stand; one should prevent them from doing so because of the possible damage to belief, as some people may imagine that there are various levels of Torah and that only some parts are exalted, and that is a very

bad thing... The claim of the opposing sage that in Bagdad and several other cities they did this [i.e. stood for the Ten Commandments], is by no means a proof. For if there are sick people, we do not make the healthy sick in order to render them all equal, rather we would try to cure each sick person... The Rabbis have already taught us that there is no difference between one who denies the Divine nature of the entire Torah and one who claims that a single verse 'Moses authored on his own'. There were among the heretics (minim) those who believed that only the Ten Commandments were given from Heaven and the remainder of the Torah was said by Moses himself, therefore the daily reading of the Ten Commandments was eliminated. And it is strictly forbidden to treat part of the Torah as if more exalted than another part. (Responsa of Maimonides, Blau Edition, Jerusalem, 1960, § 263).

Despite Maimonides' unequivocal answer, popular custom prevailed and people continued to stand during the reading of the Ten Commandments. For example, Rabbi Shmuel Abohav (1610 - 1694) was asked by the community in Reggio di Calabria, Italy, if it is correct to observe the custom of standing during the reading of the Ten Commandments. In his reply he states: "We rule to observe this custom which has spread over most of the congregations of Israel". He justifies standing as an expression of honor and reverence, "As if we were welcoming the Holy Presence (Shechina) on this great and awesome occasion (of Matan Torah). In his opinion "there no longer exists the fear that the claims of heretics would affect believers the sons of believers". In other words, past objections to standing were no longer relevant. He sums up: "Wherever this custom is observed let people cling to the customs of their fathers since their intention is for the sake of Heaven" (D'var Shmuel, Venice, 1702, § 276).

Similarly, the Hida (Haim Yosef David Azulay, 1724 -1806) ruled: "Since all are now accustomed to stand during the Ten Commandments, it would seem that everyone must stand, for even though this is really not the law (she-eino min hadin), since the entire community does so, it becomes obligatory for everyone. Otherwise, the masses will think that he who remains seated is doing so out of disrespect for the law, God forbid" (Tuv Ayin, #11, bound in one volume with Yosef Ometz, Leghorn, 1798). The conclusion of the Hida is that the custom to stand obligates every member of the congregation to stand, even though the law is otherwise.

5. Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 56a (Davidson Edition translation)

אמר רבי אבהו התקינו שיהיו אומרים אותו בקול רם מפני תרעומת המינין ובנהרדעא דליכא מינין עד השתא אמרי לה בחשא:
Rabbi Abbahu said: The Sages instituted that the people should recite it aloud due to the grievance of the heretics. It was instituted to prevent the heretics from claiming that the Jews are surreptitiously reciting inappropriate statements. The Gemara adds: In Neharde'a, where there are no heretics, they recite it surreptitiously even now.

6. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, Responsa Yechaveh Daat 1:29 (Bashan translation)

ובאמת שנעלם מעיני קדשם של כל האחרונים הנ"ל מה שפסק רבינו הגדול הרמב"ם בתשובה הנ"ל, שיש לבטל המנהג של הנוהגים לעמוד בשעת קריאת עשרת הדברות...

There is still a danger of the claims of heretics. And in truth the holy eyes of those later Sages seem to have missed what our great Rabbi Maimonides wrote in the above mentioned responsum, that one should annul the custom of those who are accustomed to stand during the reading of the Ten Commandments...

7. Mishnah Berurah, Orach Chaim 1:16

בצבור – מפני הכופרים, שיאמרו: אין תורה אלא זו. ובפרט בזמנינו...

In public – due to the heretics, who will say: there is no Torah other than this. This is especially relevant in our times...

8. Torah and Horaah Newsletter, Yisro 5777

To conclude, let me cite the following anecdote. A young scholar was invited to become rabbi in a small old community. On his very first Shabbat, a hot debate erupted as to whether one should or should not stand during the reading of the Ten Commandments. Next day, the rabbi visited 98 year-old Mr. Katz in the nursing home. "Mr. Katz, I'm asking you as the oldest member of the community," said the rabbi. "What is our synagogue's custom during the reading of the Ten Commandments?" "Why do you ask?" asked Mr. Katz. "Yesterday we read the Ten Commandments. Some people stood, some people sat. The ones standing started screaming at the ones sitting, telling them to stand up. The ones sitting started screaming at the ones standing, telling them to sit down..." "That," said the old man "is our custom."