THE SECOND COMMANDMENT: Carving images.

As we have already explained (see here) the Ten Commandments (in Hebrew: the Ten Declarations or enunciations) include more than “ten” commandments or precepts. According to Maimonides, there are thirteen precepts (Mitzvot) in the Ten Commandments of Shemot (Ex.20). It is particularly the Second Commandment which makes the difference. In other words, the Second Commandment includes four Mitzvot, in this case, four prohibitions.

1. lo ihiye lekha: “You shall not have other gods beside me”, i.e., the prohibition to conceive of believe in the existence of other gods or divine forces independent of God.

2. lo ta’ase lekha: “You should not to make yourself a carved-image or any figure that is in the heavens above, that is on the earth beneath, that is in the waters beneath the Earth”.

3. lo tishtahave: “You shall not bow down to them”

4. lo ta’obdem: “You shall not worship them”. Last time we dealt with the Ten Commandments we explained “you shall not have other gods besides me” .

Now, we will briefly review the Mitzva: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image”. This Mitzva teaches us that there is only one God, who is invisible and non-anthropomorphic (=cannot be represented in human terms) who can neither be visualized nor represented by any image.

While for Nahmanides (Ramban) the prohibition of carving an image refers specifically to an image meant to serve as an object of worshiping,for Maimonides the Tora forbids the making of some images even when we don’t have the intention of worshipping them. This is an additional restriction on carving images, or a fence around the serious offense of idol worshipping.

Illustrations: In Hilkhot ‘abodat kokhabim chapter 3:10 Maimonides explains that the prohibition to make decorative image applies specifically to protruding human images (e.g., a statue). In 3:11 he says that the representation of the sun or the moon is forbidden even in a drawing or a painting (‘al haluah).

WATCH

The Palestinian idea of a lasting peace

