The Magic Word of the First Commandment

THE MOST IMPORTANT WORD

The First Commandment is not simply a preamble.It indicates a specific order to be fulfilled: recognizing God as your ELOQEJA (□□□□□).

In its simple form the word ELOQIM is usually translated by "God." But in the Tora this same word ELOQIM sometimes should be understood as "Creator" and other times it must be understood as "Sovereign", "Supreme Authority", "Lawmaker".

Let's see a couple of examples:

The first verse of the Tora Genesis 1: 1 says *"In the beginning ELOQIM created the heavens and the earth."* In the creation account the word ELOQIM, which is repeated 35 times, always means God / Creator.

THE TEMPTATION OF SELF SUFFICIENCY

But a few chapters later, in Genesis 3: 5 the same word ELOQIM acquires a different meaning: When the snake wants to tempt Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree says: God does not want you to eat this fruit because He knows that the day you do it "you will be like ELOQIM, you would know good from evil." In this verse the Tora clearly does not use the word ELOQIM as God / Creator. The snake does not tell Eva that when she eats the forbidden fruit she will have super-powers or she will perform miracles. In this context, as the snake itself clarifies, ELOQIM refers to an ethical, moral and legal dimension. *"If you eat the forbidden fruit – the snake hints – you will have the power to know by yourself the difference between what is right and what is wrong, and you will no longer need God to know how to proceed."* God is not just the

Creator. God is also ELOQIM: the REFERENT of what is right and what is wrong.

The word ELOQIM with this meaning is very common in the Tora.

I will present one more, very important example of the word ELOQIM meaning God / Sovereign.

SHEMA ISRAEL

In Shema Israel we say: *"HaShem is our ELOQIM HaShem is one*". The Sages of the Talmud explain that when saying this verse we must "accept the yoke of the Divine Reign" (□□□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□). That is, we should mentally recognize God as the "only" Sovereign, and therefore, we mentally accept to submit ourselves to His laws. Again, this is not a theological issue. It is not about accepting that God exists: that goes without saying! The Shema Israel is about declaring that God is our Sovereign. That we accept His laws, voluntarily.

This last point is critical: The Ten Commandments were not "imposed" by God upon the Jewish people. Six days before the Ten Commandments were revealed, God proposed to the Jewish people to celebrate a covenant: The Children of Israel will be God's chosen People, God will grant them the land of Israel and will guarantee that the Jewish people will be "treasured" by Him (= will never disappear). The Jewish people, on the other hand, recognize HaShem as our Sovereign and therefore accept the Tora as our National Constitution. The Ten Commandments are the first "formal" laws that the people of Israel receive as part of this covenant. And that's why the Ten Commandments begin with the presentation of God as our Sovereign.

MENTAL FREEDOM

Finally, a very important point to understand the First Commandment. The Jewish people were enslaved by Pharaoh for 140 years (according to Maimonides). After those 6-8

generations of brutal slavery the Hebrews were absolutely programmed to obey Pharaoh. Pharaoh decided not only what to do with the time of the Israelites: he also decided at will if a Jew would live or die. The mental submission was absolute. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of slaves no longer had neither the will nor the imagination to rebel or disobey. Fear absolutely paralyzed them. It is challenging, if not impossible, to imagine the difficulty of the Jews to mentally free themselves from the yoke of Pharaoh and his guards who exercised total physical and emotional control over the Hebrews. With this historical context as a background, we must reread the First commandment as a call for the psychological freedom of the Jewish slaves: *You are no longer under the jurisdiction of Egypt. You no longer have to fear Pharaoh. I have delivered you, I have rescued you and I have chosen you as My people, and You have agreed to enter into a covenant with me. From now on, it is no longer Pharaoh, but "I HaShem, who is Your new Sovereign."*