

...ניחד יתרו. שמות יח:ט	And Yitro was jubilant... Exod. 18:9
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The news of the events in Egypt reached Yitro, Moses' father-in-law, and he responds with joy. The word ניחד comes from the root נ.ד.ח which is to rejoice. It's also possible to hear a hint of the word ניחד-together suggesting that Yitro had a moment of **אחדות-solidarity** with Israel. And because Yitro is a bit of a wordsmith, it's also possible that there is also a hint of the word ניחד-puzzle (wordplay) here. The jubilant Yitro expresses his solidarity with Israel in a blessing that is a verbal puzzle. Or at least a set of similar sounding syllables that all rhyme with **YAD** ^{see chart}. And speaking of echoes and hints, lest we think that the choice of wording here is a coincidence, let's go back to the story of the Binding of Isaac where the exact same phrase ידעתי עתה-now I know is used. Is there a connection between the

Yitro's Blessing	Rhymes with AD
ברוך ה' אשר הציל אתכם מיד מצרים ומיד פרעה אשר הציל את העם מתחת יד מצרים: עתה ידעתי כי גדול ה' מקלה האלהים כי בדבר אשר דנו עליהם: (יהי)	Baruch AD -onai - mi- YAD mitzrayim u-mi- YAD - mi-tahat YAD mitzrayim ata YAD ati ki GAD ol AD -onai - ki VAD avar asher ZAD u (18:10)

The Angel to Abraham	Yitro to Moses
The angel stops Abraham and exclaims: now I know that you (Abraham) fear God.	Yitro blesses God for rescuing Israel from Egypt, now I know that God is greater than all gods.
כיו עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלהים אתה ... כי נער אשר עשית את הדבר הזה because you did this thing (subjected Isaac) (Gen. 22:12)	עתה ידעתי כי גדול ה' מקלה האלהים כי בדבר אשר דנו עליהם: yes, in just that matter (the splitting of the sea) in which they were presumptuous against them! (Exod. 18:11)

Binding of Isaac and the Splitting of the Sea? Both were near death experiences: Isaac nearly died at Moriah, the people nearly died at the Sea. Abraham lifted his hand over Isaac; Moses lifted his hand over the Sea. God stopped Abraham; God split the Sea. The Binding of Isaac was the culminating moment that linked God with Abraham. The Splitting of the Sea was the culminating moment that linked God with the Children of Israel.

I bore you on eagle's wings (Exod. 19:4)
 This is how God describes the rescue of Israel from Egypt. This metaphor conveys protection. God protected Israel the way an eagle protects her eaglets. This photo is an illustration of that scenario. We have no idea how common this sight is, but it is quite stunning. Ornithologists have observed the behavior of eagles and

commented that when they teach their young to fly, they often have to rescue them when they fail to flap properly. The metaphor thus can also be understood then as a metaphor of rescue.



The Ten Commandments
 The depiction of the Ten Commandments on two tablets is quite common. It is found in almost every synagogue, on Torah shields, in sculpture and art and as the emblem of US Army Jewish chaplains. The history of this iconography is a great question. What is the earliest record of this depiction? According to Prof.



Marc Tzvi Brettler, of Duke University, *This is a late artistic tradition, imported into Judaism from Christian art, based on the form of the Roman diptych. Not all Christian art adopted this convention; Michelangelo's Moses (created 1513-15) shows Moses with two rectangular tablets. This is certainly how they would have been imagined in antiquity; at least this is how they appear in the Dura Europos synagogue, and how the rabbis seem to have imagined them (b. Baba Batra 14a; Exodus Rabbah 28:1) – despite the many synagogues that (under Christian influence) include depictions of rounded tablets. Additionally, it is surprising that artistic representations show writing on only one side of the tablets, while Exodus 32:15 explicitly states that it was written on both front and back. Brettler lists another common misconception, namely that each tablet contained five commandments. This makes no sense at all because the second tablet would only contain 26 words as opposed to 146 on the first. See the table:*



Commandment	Hebrew	Words	Letters	Ranking by Words	Ranking by Letters	God's Name Mentioned
I am the Lord	אנכי	9	71	5	6	1
No other gods	לא יהיה לך	50	343	2	2	1
Misuse of God's name	לא תשא	17	98	3	4	2
Remember Shabbat	זכור את	55	392	1	1	3
Honor your Parents	כבוד את	15	96	4	5	1
No Murder	לא תרצח	2	6	7	8	0
No Adultery	לא תנאף	2	6	7	8	0
No Theft	לא תגבול	2	6	7	8	0
No Bearing false witness	לא תענה ברעך	5	27	6	7	0
No Coveting	לא תתמד	15	99	4	3	0

The total number of words in the Ten Commandments (below) is 172. The total number of letters is 1159. The average number of letters per word is 6.74. Coincidentally (or maybe not, you never know) this is similar to the size of the first two paragraphs of the Shema on a Mezuzah scroll. The Mezuzah (left) has 170

שמיני ישראלי ה' אלהינו ה' אחד. אלהות את ה' אלהינו בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך ושלמם לביתך ודברת בהם בשבתך ובביתך בדרך ובשבתך ובמקום קשירתם לאות על ידך והיו כלטפות בין עיניך וכדברתם על מצות ביתך בשבתך והיה אב שמעך ושמעו אב מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום כ'אברהם את ה' אלהים וכלבדו בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם ואתי משל ארצכם בליתו יורה ומלכות אספת ד'אנן ותישלך ויעלה ואתי ועל בשבתך כ'אברהם ואכילת וישלעת השמרו לכם פן יפותח לבבכם וסרתם ועלדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחויתם להם וחרה אף ה' בכם ועל את השמים ולא יהיה משל והאדמה לא תתן את בוקלה ויביתם מהרה מלך הארץ הגובה אשר יהיה פון לבם וישלחת את ד'איו אלה על כלבכם ועל נשילם וקשירתם אתם לאות על ידכם והיו כלטפות בין עיניכם וישלחת אתם ב'ניכם לדבר בהם בשבתך בביתך ובכלבדו

words with 1350 letters. The average letters per word is higher at 7.94, which only tells us that the Shema uses longer words than the Ten Commandments. Could the Ten Commandments have been used in a similar way to the Mezuzah scroll? It's a tempting thought. The Ten Commandments have a prominent place within Judaism and were originally recited daily by the Kohanim in the Temple and by ordinary Jews. But, according

אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם כי אנכי ה' אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אבת על בנים על שלשים ועל רבעים לשנאי ונעשה חסד לאלפים לאהבו ולשמרי מצותי לא תשא את שם ה' אלהיך לשוא כי לא ינקה ה' את אשר ישא שמו לשוא זכור את יום השבת לקדשו ששת ימים תעבד ועשית **כל מלאכתך** ויום השביעי שבת לה' אלהיך לא תעשה כל מלאכה אתה ובנך ובנד עבדך ואמתך ובהמותך וגרך אשר בשערך כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ את הים ואת כל אשר בה וינה ביום השביעי על כן ברך ה' את יום השבת ויקדשוהו כבוד את אביך ואת אמך למען יארכו ימך על האדמה אשר ה' אלהיך נתן לך לא תרצח לא תגבול לא תנבא לא תענה ברעך עד שקר לא תתמד בית רעך לא תחמד אשת רעך ועבדו ואמתו ושורו וחמרו וכל אשר לרעך

to the Talmud, the recitation of the Ten Commandments was eliminated from the daily liturgy in order to rebut the heretics who claimed that only those commandments were given at Sinai, but the rest were not. To them, the liturgical practice by the devout was stopped. (Berakhot 12a)

(א) אָמַר
לְהַם
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ,
בְּרַכּוּ בְּרַכְהוּ
אֶתְהוּ, וְהוּ
בְּרַכּוּ.
קְרָאוּ
עֲשֵׂת
הַדְּבָרִים,
שְׁמַע,
וְהִיָּה אִם
שְׁמַע,
וַיֹּאמֶר...

After the priests completed laying the parts of the daily offering on the ramp, they went to the Chamber of Hewn Stone to recite *Shema*. **The appointed priest** who oversaw the lotteries in the Temple **said to** the priests: **Recite a single blessing** of the blessings that accompany *Shema*. **And** the members of the priestly watch **recited a blessing**, and then **they recited the Ten Commandments**, *Shema* (see Deuteronomy 6:4–9), *VeHaya im Shamo*a (see Deuteronomy 11:13–21), and *VaYomer* (see Numbers 15:37–41), the standard formula of *Shema*.

The longest commandment of the 10 is the 4th - Shabbat. It is also at the center of the text. God's name appears in it 3 times, more than any of the other commandments. This underscores the importance and centrality of Shabbat. What makes Shabbat different from all the other commandments?

זְכוֹר
אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת
לְקַדְּשׁוֹ:

Be mindful
of the Sabbath day,
to hallow it.

In the biblical view of reality, the flow of time is not arbitrary, nor is it governed by nature, nor may it be structured by any human sovereign or power. The flow of time is structured by God in discreet units of seven days, consistent with the way God structured the universe. The message of Shabbat is that *you ought to structure your time*, the way God structured the universe. This demands your mindfulness, that when the seventh day comes, *you shall hallow it*.

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים
תַּעֲבֹד
וַעֲשִׂית
כָּל-מְלַאכְתְּךָ:

For six days,
you are to labor,
and are to make
all your work,

יוֹם הַשַּׁבְעִי
שָׁבַתוּ לָהּ
אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה
כָּל-מְלַאכְתָּהּ
אִתְּהוּ
וּבְנֵי-אִיִּמְךָ
עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ
וּבְהֵמַתְךָ וּגְרֶךָ
אֲשֶׁר בַּשַּׁעֲרֶיךָ:

but the seventh day is Sabbath for God: you are not to make any work, you, your son, and your daughter, your male and female servant your beast, and your sojourner who is within your gates.

But because God rested on Shabbat, *you*, *human-being-created-in-God's-image* also rest. But the commandment doesn't only say *you*. Why does it also have to specify everyone else? Lest you think that it only applies to *you*, the *head of household*, and that therefore, everybody else in your orbit must serve *you* so that *you alone* would have a day of rest, it specifies *everyone*. Shabbat is the great equalizer. Everybody is entitled to experience the dignity of work for six days and the dignity of rest on the seventh. Shabbat, in the words of the late Rabbi David Hartman z'l (whose 10th yearzeit is this week) *is the mediative principle for spirituality in the Judaic tradition* and allows for the experience of *otherness*. Even the person who is subservient to you. That person is entitled

to Shabbat. Shabbat is a subversive political institution. It undermines human power and authority over other human beings. While acknowledging slavery as a feature of antiquity, the Torah subverts it.

כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת-יָמִים
עָשָׂה ה'
אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ
אֶת-הַיָּם
וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּם
וַיָּנַח
בַּיּוֹם הַשַּׁבְעִי
עָלֶיכוֹן
בְּרַךְ ה'
אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת
וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ:

For in six days
God made
the heavens
and the earth,
the sea
and all that is in it,
and he rested
on the seventh day;
therefore
God blessed
the Sabbath day
and he hallowed it.

Divine cessation from doing sets in motion the rhythm of the universe. What does it mean to *bless* a day? In *blessing* God transfers a divine essence, power, goodness, from God to the day. But *blessing* it is not sufficient. God *hallows* it by setting it apart, to giving it the uniqueness of the Shabbat Peace or.....*Shabbat Shalom!*

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