

Repetitive Repetitions (Emor)

“The mantram becomes one’s staff of life and carries one through every ordeal. Each repetition has a new meaning, carrying you nearer and nearer to God.” — Mahatma Gandhi

Since the invention of literary critics, which likely followed the invention of authors by a matter of minutes, there has been no shortage of complaints about repetition in writing. The reader may take it as a personal affront to the intellect. *We understood it the first time*, they think.

And yet the Bible is filled with repetition. Certain phrases return again and again. Among the most familiar, besides “And God spoke to Moses, saying,” is the recurring declaration: “I am God,” appearing throughout a wide range of commandments.

At first glance, one is tempted to ask: *Yes, understood. We are aware of who is speaking. There seems to be no confusion on this point. Why the constant reminder?*

Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 22:33 offers an answer. He explains that the phrase “I am God” points back to the First Commandment, the foundation of the entire covenant: belief in God Himself. Before any command can carry meaning, there must first be recognition of the Commander.

Without that foundation, commandments become customs, habits, or moral suggestions. With it, they become acts of service.

That is why the Torah repeats the phrase so often. It links action to faith, deed to source, obedience to relationship. The reminder is not for God’s sake, but for ours. Human beings forget. We drift. We perform motions while losing sight of meaning. So the Torah returns us, again and again, to first principles.

Some truths are not diminished by repetition. They are strengthened by it.

Despite the protests of critics everywhere, some things are worth hearing over and over and over.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the Executive Training team at INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France. Great institution and program!