

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

by Rabbi Dovid Green

In this week's parsha we read about one of the most significant events in the Torah. That is the giving of the Torah by G-d to the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai. The entire nation comprising of millions of people heard G-d's voice at this awesome event. The waves of this event are still rippling in the world and shaping world history in profound ways. It is noteworthy that this event, and not the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt are the basis of our faith. We do not accept miracles as a basis for our religion. We do not accept the word of one enlightened individual claiming connections with G-d as a basis for a religion. It is only because our great great...grandparents stood at Mount Sinai and heard G-d's voice that we committed ourselves to serve G-d by keeping His commandments.

The Talmud tells us that there are 613 commandments in the Torah that we are obligated to follow. Of these 365 are negative (don't's), and 248 are positive (do's). Many are tied to living in Israel, many are laws regarding sacrifices and the Temple. Many still apply today, although some temporarily don't apply as there is no Temple and no sacrifices. Since the Ten Commandments are in this week's parsha, it's worth while examining what they really demand from us. Briefly, we'll discuss each one.

1. I am G-d, your L-rd, who brought you out from the land of Egypt from the house of servitude.

This is a precept to cultivate one's faith in G-d. Indeed, it is axiomatic to our beliefs that everyone has an innate spark of faith by virtue of the holy soul inside them. We are enjoined by this commandment to fan this spark and make it burn warmly and brightly.

2. You should not have any gods of others before Me. This commandment demands exclusive worship of The One G-d. One may not even consider the possibility that any other powers exist not under G-d's jurisdiction, or even any powers which share control of the universe with Him. This is one of the three commandments which we are expected to give our lives for rather than transgress. One should not serve other powers in any way, even if the act is an act of disgrace. There was a form of idol worship in ancient times which was performed by throwing stones at the idol. This would still be forbidden.

3. Do not invoke the name of G-d your L-rd falsely. We may not swear in G-d's name falsely. This can be done in four different ways. a. Swearing that a man is a woman, or that a stone is gold. b. swearing for nothing; i.e. that a stone is a stone. c. swearing not to perform a commandment. d. swearing to do the impossible; i.e. to fly etc.

4. Remember the Sabbath day to make it holy. This commandment involves verbally sanctifying

the beginning and ending of the Sabbath. Rabbinically, this is done by reciting blessings while holding a cup of wine which acknowledge the institution of the Holy Sabbath. Part of making The Sabbath holy is wearing fine clothing, eating fine foods, spending time with family, and setting it aside for enjoyable pursuits. There are also many activities which go into the category of "melacha," loosely translated as "work," to refrain from doing on the Sabbath.

5. Honor your father and your mother. Honoring is considered a positive act. It involves the "do's" of dealing with parents. Among them are bringing them food and drink, helping them dress (if they need it), and standing up for them when they enter. Elsewhere the Torah commands us to "fear" our parents, dealing with the "don't's". Among them are not contradicting a parents words, and not calling a parent by their first name.

6. Don't kill. One should not kill unless it is for self-defense. One who unnecessarily kills is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. This is another one of the three precepts for which we must give our lives rather than commit.

7. Don't commit adultery. We are commanded to control ourselves and not give in to our desires when doing so would be a forbidden act. A man having a marital relationship with another man's wife is forbidden. Similarly, a married woman having an extramarital relationship is forbidden by this same prohibition. This too is one of the three precepts for which we must give our lives rather than commit.

8. Don't steal. This is a commandment prohibiting kidnapping. Not stealing is mentioned elsewhere in the Torah.

9. Don't give false testimony. Here the Torah forbids us to use our credibility to establish things as facts which we are not sure of. Needless to say, this includes lying, but it even includes one testifying based on another's word as if he himself was a witness; even if the information is from a reliable source.

10. Don't covet. One should not desire other people's things. This commandment forbids us to pressure someone to sell us something he really doesn't want to sell. This is even when we are offering a better than fair price. The advice given to avoid desiring someone else's things is to imagine they are on the moon, and completely out of our reach. Something which is not mine is not in my world. It is unavailable, and unattainable, so I will take my mind off of it. Proper fulfillment of this commandment depends a great deal upon one's degree of satisfaction with his portion in life.

These are the commandments which G-d conveyed to the Children of Israel at the time of the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai approximately 3,300 years ago. It is amazing to note how much the noble aspect of societies and civilizations have embraced these as truths. It was all based on this earth-shaking event without which the Jewish Nation would have assimilated and faded away long ago.

Good Shabbos.

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