

Shabbat Parashat Yitro

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Weekly Teaching by Rabbi Mitch
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The 10 Commandments(Exodus Chapter 20: 1 - 14)

- 1) *I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods besides Me.*
- 2) *You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them....*
- 3) *You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.*
- 4) *Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work...*
- 5) *Honor your father and your mother that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you.*
- 6) *You shall not murder.*
- 7) *You shall not commit adultery.*

- 8) *You shall not steal.*
- 9) *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
- 10) *You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife..., or anything that is your neighbor's.*

This Shabbat we re-experience God's revelation and the receiving of the Ten Commandments. Too often humanity treats the "Commandments" as really nicely inspired divine "suggestions". Or, people treat the Commandments like a test, figuring if they get six out of ten right then they "pass".

Judaism posits that we are to observe 613 Commandments and I believe that if we are to keep our Jewish identity we have to seriously struggle with wearing the yoke of all of God's commandments. However, for humanity at large, I would happily sign for the collective observance of the 10 Commandments.

Western Civilization is built upon the ethical consensus taught within Judaism, Christianity and Islam; the entire human family is required by God to observe the Ten Commandments. These Ten Divine and

authoritative proclamations teaches us how we are, in fact, to be a "civilized" world.

The first four Commandments address our religious obligations:

- There is a God; who teaches us right from wrong; and we should not waver in our moral fidelity
- We should not worship false gods; money, cars, celebrities; etc.
- We should be truthful in our speech and actions.
- We should observe our Sabbath; recalling that we work to live and not live to work.

How are we doing with these first four?

Do we recognize there exists Truth with a capital "T"? Are we willing to pursue an ethical course of action even if it isn't easy?

Are we spending more time with our material pursuits than our energy on creating spiritual meaning and purpose within our lives; binding ourselves more closely with those we love and who love us?

Does our speech reflect Truth; do our actions pass all tests of being ethically transparent and accountable?

And, do we take the time to "rest" and enjoy a Sabbath. For Jews, this means anchoring ourselves with the eternal sign of our covenant; our observance of Shabbat. And, for all human beings leaving behind the mundane actions required from our labors so as to pursue not just "quality time" with our loved one, but also "quantity time".

Moving from our religious obligations that frame our ethical living, we then specifically are given six more commandments by which our moral duties are clearly articulated.

- Honor our parents; and the wisdom of all of our elders
- Live a life by which we do everything possible to refrain from improper killing; always preferring non-violent solutions to crisis whenever viable.
- Remaining loyal in our familiar relationships.
- Respecting the property of others and never taking shortcuts in procuring any item of value.
- Refrain from all forms of lying, slander, and gossip.
- Never desire what another has with envy; rather be thankful they have secured something of value and be more motivated to ethically succeed for yourself.

The first four commandments help us cultivate our relationship with God and then utilize this catalyst for how we interact with the rest of the world. The last six commandments specifically teach us that our belief in God is of no value unless our ethical behavior is always manifested in our interactions with the rest of our human family.

The Ten Commandments really are the foundation of Civilization and "Civil" behavior.

We are to hear God's words and imagine the possibilities for the world if all of humanity observed these Ten Proclamations. And, with our imagination prompted, we are to re-double our own dedication.

It's never easy. The world around us appears too often to be sinking within a moral abyss. Cheating is prevalent; the pursuit of holiness is too often pushed aside for reaching for both the mundane and the profane.

Where is our personal integrity in all of this? How are we willing to change? Will we set limits for ourselves and our children and grandchildren?

This Shabbat we re-experience theophany; experiencing the receiving of

God's law.

Let's walk away from God's Holy Mountain newly invigorated; newly committed to putting forth a stronger moral consciousness. Let's actively live a life of constant meaning and purpose; valuing our relationship with God, those we love and who love us as well as our particularistic spiritual heritage and our universal spiritual heritage. The world we imagine, we can bring to fruition.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch