

## 10 Commandments

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Typically, I see the world in two columns: Right or wrong. Yes or no. For years I have been working toward seeing the grey in between the black & white. While studying this week's Torah portion, Yitro, in which the Ten Commandments are revealed to the Israelite People, I recalled this story<sup>a</sup> that everyone at Mount Sinai – no matter one's age, gender expression or capacity – everyone heard the voice of GD according to their own ability to understand.

I retell this teaching to remind myself that life isn't simply a set of rules; rather, life is made of up a broad spectrum of ideas, values and experiences.

In Yitro, we read the Ten Commandments, our covenant with GD. While reading them this year, I thought about how easily I fall into rigid patterns of thinking rather than seeing the gray. Then I recalled that there are numerous midrashim, or interpretations around the Israelite people's acceptance of the Ten Commandments. Some interpretations say we were so reluctant that GD coerced us by holding Mt. Sinai over our heads, so that if we didn't accept the covenant we'd become instant dust. Another interpretation is that all the other peoples of the earth were invited by GD first, but declined GD's covenantal offer, and so it came to us quite passively. And some teach that the Israelites knew it was our destiny to be in relationship with GD, comparing the Ten Commandments with a Ketubah, the wedding contract between our People and GD.

It's also taught that in spirit, all of us were actually there at Sinai. However, since my memory isn't sharp enough to remember two or three millennia ago, I can't say for certain which, if any of the three stories did happen. While I can't give the one 'right' answer to how the Israelites came to be in covenant with GD, I can and do decide how I personally relate to that covenant by living my life through my actions, in how I treat others, and perhaps most telling, how I act when I think no one is watching.

Now, if you had to propose "rules to live by", what would they be? Does the Golden Rule cover it all? Marketing gurus put forth that the Platinum Rule, "treat others the way THEY want to be treated" turns the focus to understanding what others want. The Platinum Rule reminds us that things that work for us do not necessarily work for others. Similarly, I have found that the Ten Commandments as written in most English translations, doesn't necessarily 'speak' to me as a Queer Jew living in San Francisco. So, how can I connect with this important piece of Torah text? Well, I love creating

liturgy which speaks to my sensibilities. I base it in our traditions and the heritage passed down to us through the generations. I use language that resonates with my brain and thoughts which touch my heart. In this way, I strive to make the Torah, and Judaism, relevant to my life, today.

When I first started writing this drash I thought that I was going to propose commandments which 'meant' something to me. But as I studied, I realized that if I wrote ten new commandments, or five, or even one "new and improved" commandment, I would be weakening my connection with Sinai.

So, without rewriting history, or the Torah, here's how I have reworded the 10 commandments for my 2017/5777 sensibilities. You can listen to mine, or think about how you might write them:

You shall realize that only the Source of All is worthy of worship  
You shall not willingly bow down to another  
You shall not lie while swearing you're telling the truth  
Keep the Sabbath in order that Sabbath may keep you  
Honor all those who have touched your heart  
You shall not intentionally harm nor murder  
You shall not violate the agreements of your relationships  
You shall not steal  
You shall not lie when asked to bear witness, no matter the consequences  
You shall not covet; as the richest person is one who is satisfied with what they already have

By rephrasing the Ten Commandments, they have become more real to me – more relevant. And by engaging with and connecting the words to my life, they help me navigate through the many shades of gray I am dealing with in this complicated world. May we all be blessed with a Shabbat that recharges our bodies, minds and spirits – and may you come to understand that which has been revealed to you.