

Torah Tidbits from Rabbi Larry Moldo

For those who missed it this past Shabbat, the abbreviated G-rated intention of the 10 statements by God are as follows:

1. I am God. You know this because you are no longer in Egypt.
2. No, really. I am, and I don't look like anything else you have ever seen, so don't pretend that I do.
3. Don't think that you know me completely. I am not at your command.
4. If you want to be a little like me, then take the same day off that I did, every week.
5. Of course, I was part of your personal creation, so treat my partners in that event (otherwise known as parents) with respect.
6. I worked hard to create things, so don't murder them.
7. It's even harder pairing people up, so don't mess with that.
8. I own everything, so don't try to grab part of what I own that I haven't arranged for you to have.
9. Don't try to get other people in trouble (especially by lying) - you all have enough trouble staying out of trouble yourselves.
10. Don't think too hard about what other people have. That's not why I became partners with you.

The Torah text follows up the big flashy stuff with a week of laws. We don't live in the flashy moments, after all - we live in the regular, day to day stuff. How do we treat each other? How do we act responsibly? How do we remind ourselves every day that the other person is worth our while, because they were, like us, created by God?

So the portion goes into the beginning details of how to best act, and what some of the punishments are when people don't act well. Cases covered include Israelite slaves - both male and female; Homicide - accidental and intentional; Disrespecting parents - physical and verbal abuse; Human trafficking; Assault and battery - among equals, collateral damage, power trips; Negligence - the ox, the pit, destruction and fire; Theft, robbery and embezzlement; Watching over and borrowing; Seduction; Witchcraft; Bestiality; Idolatry; Abusing the unfortunate; Lending money; Civility; Debts to God; Dead animal; Moral integrity; Helping your enemy with their property; Judicial integrity; Sanctified time - Sabbatical year, Shabbat, Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot.

God reviews how the process of entering the land should look.

Moses sets up pillars, sprinkles blood on them and writes a covenantal document, to which the people respond, "Na'aseh v'Nishma!" (Action and reflection, over and over) [With a bit of humor: Let's build the thing first, and then check the instruction manual to see what went wrong.]

The leaders go for a picnic near God and send Moses to the top of the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights.

In the Torah text we have left the physical space of Egypt, and are no longer subject to slavery by humans. Yet the Israelites keep dragging the past with them, and not in the remembering mode which we often use to good effect, but in a more problematic mode which continues to absolve them of responsibility for their choices. As slaves, they had few choices, and little final responsibility for how they were used. As free people, they are responsible for the use they make of the choices they have.

As we approach Pesach, just a question to ponder: Have we stopped wanting to be slaves to our urge to avoid being responsible for ourselves?