

Shabbat Shalom

FROM CONGREGATION BETH YESHURUN

A special Shabbat message for you from Rabbi Danny Horwitz.



Not even Cecil B. DeMille could do justice to the giving of the Ten Commandments.

The voice of God! The thunder and lightning, the smoke from the mountain, the blaring of the shofar! Moses ascending to meet the Almighty. Special effects galore.

And yet, when we think of the Ten Commandments today, we don't generally associate them with all those pyrotechnics. If we see them visually, we see them within two small tablets. What has lasted in our minds, in our culture, in Jewish tradition? Just the words themselves, the words which spell out some of the basics of society.

This is just as well, because it is the words, not the special effects, which merit understanding and reflection. Take the opening declaration: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." Consider a few salient points on this:

1. Many commentators interpret this as commanding belief in God; Maimonides says: "The first mitzvah is to believe in God's existence, that there is a cause and purposeful force behind all that exists." How well are we doing as a community in teaching such faith? Can we accept that faith in God can BE commanded?
2. Others suggest it is a call to the Israelites to agree to abide by all of the other commandments. Here too we should ask ourselves: do we agree to them? Did we ever? How do we know and understand what is being asked of us?
3. Why does God remind the Israelites, who departed from Egypt a few weeks previously, where they came from? Did they not remember they had been enslaved? Perhaps this is a hedge against the tendency to romanticize the past, a tendency the Israelites have already shown even before Sinai.

Even before we get to the second commandment, there is a good deal that challenges us. Perhaps that's why we need to reread them each year, and to contemplate our response...not to the fireworks, but to the plain message.

Join us this Shabbat at Beth Yeshurun as we stand in recalling and honoring this sacred moment, this lasting message.

Shabbat Shalom!

- *Rabbi Danny Horwitz*

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