

## You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal. (20:13)

The *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, comprise the centerpiece of Hashem's Revelation at *Har Sinai*. They are the basis of our Torah. One would think that when Hashem "introduces" Himself to the people that He redeemed from Egypt, for whom He wrought unparalleled miracles, a nation that had achieved an extraordinarily high level of holiness, the *dor deiah*, generation of knowledge, that these commands would be earth-shattering. Yet, Hashem enjoins them to commit to such common sensical prohibitive *mitzvos* as: do not steal; do not commit adultery; do not murder. One lectures to a group of revered intellectuals concerning profound matters, not subjects that apply to the common person whose background is, at best, murky.

*Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl*, explains that these three sins are relative to the individuals to whom they were given as prohibitions. In other words, the *Lo sirtzach*, "Do not murder," of the *Aseres HaDibros* is different and much more demanding than the "Do not murder" that is applicable to the common man. He quotes this idea from the *Alter, zl, m'Slabodka* who cites the well-known *Mechilta (Mishpatim 15)* which records the dialogue that ensued between Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Yishmael *Kohen Gadol* as they were about to be executed by the Roman murderers. Rabbi Yishmael wept. Rabbi Shimon asked why he was weeping. Rabbi Yishmael responded that this was Hashem's decree, and they should accept it as such. Rabbi Yishmael replied that he was well aware of this. He questioned only why they were being murdered like common sinners. Did they deserve to be treated like "garden-variety" murderers? Rabbi Shimon asked, if perhaps he was having a meal when a poor person had come to his door for alms and he had ignored him. "Absolutely not!" Rabbi Yishmael countered, "I would have guards by the door who would immediately walk the poor man into the house and feed him." Rabbi Shimon asked, "Would it be that a woman came to your door with a *halachic* query and you made her wait?" "Yes," he answered. "A widow came to me with a question, and I asked her to wait while I tied my shoes. This must be the reason." We derive from here that some people are held to a higher, more exacting and demanding standard. When one causes pain, when one negatively touches on the emotions of another Jew, in the Torah's vernacular, it is considered to be tantamount to murder!

The *Alter* applies the same logic to *Lo signov*, citing the *Talmud Chullin 133a* which records Abaye as saying that, although he was a *Kohen* and entitled to the various *matnos Kehunah*, gifts that are given to the *Kohanim*, he stopped taking for himself, because some *Kohanim* needed it more than he did. This, he felt, was akin to stealing. This indicates the standard by which Abaye lived. If he took something which by right belonged to him, but another person needed it more, he considered it stealing. Once again, we see that the Torah's concept of theft is quite different than ours

Last, we come to the *aveirah*, sin, of adultery, which, according to societal norms, is a physical act of infidelity which transgresses the boundaries of marriage. The *Rosh Yeshivah* extrapolates from the incident concerning Reuven about whom the *Talmud* writes: "And he (Reuven) lay with Bilhah,

his father's concubine," (*Bereishis* 35: 22 ) when in fact, all Reuven did was move the bed. Indeed, *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 55b) say that Reuven committed no sin. Why then does the Torah consider his act of moving the bed an ignominious transgression against his father's marital relationship with Bilhah? Obviously, we must say that while what Reuven did was not an act of adultery in accordance with common societal standards, Reuven was held to a higher standard, and on his spiritual plane, this was considered a violation of *Lo signov*.

A similar lesson is derived from the sons of Eili *HaKohen*, whom the *Navi* holds in contempt for their licentious behavior. *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 55b) say, however, that they were nothing of the sort. They delayed the women who were offering *korbanos* after their purification period, thus causing their husbands to wait unnecessarily for their arrival. This act of detainment was cause for men of such elevated spiritual achievement to be in infringement of the prohibitive *mitzvah* of *Lo sinaaf*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* concludes with a powerful *sine qua non* for every one of us. *Chazal* discern the three characteristics which distinguish the national Jewish character: *baishanim*, a sense of shame; *rachamanim*, mercy; *gomlei chassadim*, performing acts of lovingkindness. This means that a Jew must refine the concept of shame, to embarrass more quickly, easier than one who is not a member of the *Am Ha'Nivchar*, Chosen People. He was to be more merciful and exhibit greater adherence to carrying out acts of lovingkindness. If a Jew's compassion comes up short on the Heavenly scale, Hashem considers this failure to be an act of murder! This applies equally to theft and adultery. No one said it was going to be easy, but, then again, being a member of the spiritual *corps d'elite* never is.