



Table Talk

Table Talk: Yitro

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In one of the early episodes of *The Simpsons*, Moses appears before the Israelites and says: “The Lord has handed down to us Ten Commandments by which to live. I will read them in no particular order.”

But the commandments did come in a particular order, as we see in *parashat Yitro* this week, and God saved the most difficult one for last: Thou shalt not covet.

It’s difficult for a lot of reasons, first of all because it’s a law against a feeling, not an action. It’s also challenging because there’s a fine line between coveting and striving. We all strive to be happy, right? We all strive to be better in our careers. We all strive to be comfortable and healthy and to provide for our families. Are we coveting if we strive too much?

Maybe the message in the commandment needs to be approached more straightforwardly. Maybe it means we should be more present. We should appreciate what we’ve got and consider how we can share our good fortune.

To covet or to envy may be the most insidious of sins. We all do it. So why does God command against something that seems like a part of human nature? Maybe it’s because of the serious consequences. Covetousness is the enemy of compassion. It’s the killer of community. It divides us. It demeans us. It makes us meaner, more anxious, more selfish.

At the dinner table this Shabbat, thou shalt not envy the person with the juiciest slab of brisket. Try asking these questions:

1. Everyone envies. So don’t be shy. What do you envy most?
2. Is envy the same as jealousy? If not, why?
3. Do you think God was being unrealistic in commanding against covetous feelings?

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