



## Table Talk

### Table Talk: Yitro

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If the Ten Commandments are so important, why is that most of us can't name them all? Have the Commandments lost their relevance? Are they so obvious, so outdated, or so obscure as to be no longer useful?

That's what Alan Dershowitz seemed to suggest when he wrote, "Not only do the Ten Commandments not belong in public courthouses or classrooms, they do not belong—at least without some amendments and explanatory footnotes—in the hearts and minds of contemporary Americans."

Harsh judgment. But perhaps even Dershowitz would admit that the Ten Commandments still belong in the hearts of minds of people who believe in God. Yitro, this week's Torah portion, is sometimes referred to as the hinge of the Torah, because it's the portion in which God presents the Ten Commandments and enters into a covenant with a band of freed slaves.

In one sense, the Ten Commandments do seem obvious. Did we really need God to tell us not to steal and not to kill? Didn't such rules exist before the Ten Commandments were issued? But the Commandments also work at another level: cementing the pact between humans and God, urging them to consider their actions in a new and more powerful way. How does stealing affect your relationship with God? If you covet, aren't you really saying you're not satisfied with the blessings God has given you? If you murder, aren't you destroying someone created in God's image?

As you sit around the table dinner on Shabbat, try these questions for starters:

1. What do the Ten Commandments mean to you?
2. What impression did they make on you when you heard them as a child?
3. How are the Ten Commandments different from government laws or from something like the Code of Hammurabi?