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RAV, THE JERUSALEM SHUL - BAKA, JERUSALEM

A Heart Bursting with Love

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house... or whatever belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:14).¹ Of the Ten Commandments, this final one may be the hardest to fathom. How can God command man not to experience an emotion that overtakes us naturally, seemingly of its own accord?

The medieval commentator Ibn Ezra contended that we can in fact control it, because this emotion is grounded in logical perception. He offered the following parable. No peasant in his right mind ever thinks he will marry the princess. Since the commoner knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that he will never be admitted to the aristocracy, he does not even covet the princess. She is the very definition of out of his league. Ibn Ezra explained that this is the mindset mandated by the tenth commandment. Everything we acquire in life comes from God; whatever others might have has been apportioned to them by God and is not within the realm of possibility for us. One who has proper faith recognizes this and consequently is not beset by feelings of envy.²



Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz approached this problem differently. He pointed out that we are enjoined to love God with “all of our heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5). The “all” here instructs us that to fulfill this mitzvah, the only thing we must have in our heart is love for God. And “if one’s heart is overflowing with love of God,

then it is impossible to covet anything in this world... It is like a brimming cup to which not a drop can be added.”³

This is not some theoretical construct. These words were lived by Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook. In his poetic, mystical reflections, we discover a man in whom love for God, for his fellow man, and for the world, takes up so much space so as to leave not even a toe-hold for envy:

I love everything. I cannot but love every person, every nation. From the depths of my heart I desire the resplendence of everything, the rectification of everything... I have no need whatsoever to force this feeling of love—it wells directly from the holy depth of Wisdom of the divine soul.⁴

We can overcome feelings of jealousy or

1. In some texts the verse is 13, depending on how the verses of the Decalogue are parsed and numbered.

2. Ibn Ezra on Exodus 20:13 (long commentary).

3. *Sefer Berit ha-Shalem* quoted by *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabalah* on Exodus 20:14.

4. *Arpilei Tohar*, §76.

begrudging others their good fortune by filling our hearts with boundless love. Then, we will naturally rejoice at their success without thoughts of comparison intruding. Covetousness will find no spot in our hearts to take root and produce its fetid flowers.

The final utterance of the Decalogue communicates the divine conviction that man can transcend his selfishness and pettiness that all too often begets conflict. Rav Kook taught that with the Jewish people in particular, this love can be more readily accessed. While the members of other nations share an external identity, the Jewish people share an internal, metaphysical identity, because every individual Jewish soul is a piece of one greater, universal soul.⁵ When we are mindful of this, we are more likely to desire only good and happiness for our fellow Jew.

Rav Kook's love for fellow Jews, his *ahavat Yisra'el*, was not confined to the private stirrings of his spirit recorded in his notebooks. His extraordinary love of other Jews was legendary. One of Rav Kook's closest colleagues and beloved friends was Rabbi Aryeh Levin, "the Tzaddik of Jerusalem." Living in Jerusalem at the same time was a man who was vocally critical of Rav Kook and Rabbi Levin. One day this man became very ill and was brought to the local hospital. On hearing the news, Rabbi Levin rushed, as was his practice, to the hospital to visit the new patient. The patient was astonished to see the good rabbi at his bedside. "Rabbi Aryeh, you must know how I have attacked you and your rabbi over your deeds and practices. I cannot help but ask: From where do you

draw the strength to visit this patient and be so forgiving?" The Tzaddik of Jerusalem responded, "From that very same rabbi whom you oppose and have attacked, have I learned unconditional love." He was referring, of course, to Rav Kook.⁶

The Chassidic master Rebbe Chanoch Henoch Levin of Aleksander once drew attention to the fact that in Ibn Ezra's parable the poor villager stands for the Jew who is supposed to be satisfied with his lot and accepting of his station. The Rebbe adamantly asked, "Why compare the Jew to the peasant; after all, is not every Jew a child of the King? We should envision ourselves as the princess!"⁷ To be part of the royalty requires regal comportment with dignity, grace, and generosity.

When our hearts overflow with warmth and affection for others, there is no room for small-mindedness or pettiness. What is more, we seek everyone's good fortune, and even cheer them on in their achievements. Let us observe the tenth commandment by not only being satisfied with our own God-given lot, but by being happy about what those around us have as well. ■

6. See Dadon, *Sichat Avot*, 102–103.

7. See *Si'ach Sarfei Kodesh ha-Chadash*, 1:76, s.v. לא תחמוד.

Rabbi Goldscheider is the author of the newly published book 'Torah United' (OU Press), featuring divrei Torah on the weekly parasha from Rav Kook, Rabbi Solovetichik, and the Chassidic Masters.

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5. *Orot Yisra'el*, 2:3.