

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:54 pm

Wed. July 22 7:30 pm Tisha B'Av – Unfortunately, due to a family emergency, I had to fly to South Carolina. Thanks to Mark Kotok who will conduct services tonight.

Sat. July 25 9:30 am Shabbat Nachamu Services
For those who observe Tisha B'Av which begins tonight, I wish you an easy fast.

PARSHAT VEETCHANAN
THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. You shall not crave your neighbor’s house or field or male or female slave or ox or donkey or anything that is our neighbor’s.” (Deuteronomy 5:18)

Imagine this situation. I am still paying the monthly financing for my old Nissan, which has passed 100,000 miles. Suddenly my next-door neighbor drives up with a new Lexus or Prius, or maybe even a Maserati. He proudly shows me his new car before driving off. How do I feel? I am human. I will probably feel a bit of envy, even if my old Nissan can still get me from point A to point B.

Envy is a natural emotion. Nonetheless, this week’s Torah reading forbids this feeling. It restates the Ten Commandments, already given earlier in the book of Exodus. Here the wording is slightly different. There in Exodus it says *lo tachmod*, “do not covet.” Here in Deuteronomy, it says *lo titaveh*, “do not crave.” But the idea is the same. I should not desire what someone else has. Or to quote Ben Zoma in the Talmud, “Who is rich? Someone who is happy with their portion.” (Avot 4:1).

Can envy be forbidden? The Torah can forbid certain actions. But can it forbid certain feelings? When I do pastoral counseling and someone expresses a feeling, I always teach that feelings are neither right nor wrong. They simply are. You cannot wish away a feeling. It is simply there. Counseling can help us cope with the feelings we have. But feelings exist.

The Rabbis have some wonderful insights about this. Coveting only exists for something that is realistic. They speak of a poor peasant out working the fields who sees the king’s daughter come by carried in a litter. He thinks, “If only I could marry the king’s daughter, I would no longer have to work the field as a peasant.” This is not what

the Tenth Commandment is referring to. A peasant marrying the king's daughter is beyond the realm of reality. But coveting his neighbor's wife is realistic.

I experienced this directly a few days ago. Currently my wife and I are in Charlotte, NC visiting my daughter and her family. We were originally supposed to fly out of Fort Lauderdale airport Monday morning. American Airlines cancelled our flight and put us on a late-night flight out of Miami Airport (45 minutes further with much more traffic.) We went to Miami Airport that morning, trying to get on an earlier flight. I thought about the people who fly on private jets whenever they want, without dealing with the airlines. But like the peasant and the king's daughter, this was so far out of the realm of reality that it is not coveting.

On the other hand, we were listed for stand-by for some earlier flights. We waited as other people were called and we sat at the gate. Did I feel envy? I confess; yes I did. I guess I broke one of the Ten Commandments this very week that we read them. Eventually we did get on a flight around dinner time with two middle seats. A wonderful gate agent took pity on us and gave us a middle and aisle in an exit row. We made it to Charlotte. Our luggage, which was originally on a much later flight, also eventually made it.

I guess the message is that envy does not solve anything. It simply causes us not to appreciate what we have. Instead of looking at the gifts that others possess, we should thank God for gifts that we possess. Perhaps that is what the Torah is trying to teach us.