

No one will be making a movie about Leviticus 19. Unlike the Ten Commandments, there is no fiery mountain, no thunder or lightning, no smoke, and no fear. At Mount Sinai the people were so afraid that when they "saw" the thunder sounds **they began to tremble and retreat.** (Exod. 20:15). Nothing like that happens in Lev. 19. Compared to Sinai (Exod. 20) Lev. 19 is an intimate conversation. It begins with God speaking to Moses:

דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תְּהִיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי
ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. (ויקרא יט:ב)

Speak to the entire community of the Children of Israel, and say to them: Holy are you to be, for holy am I, the Lord your God! (Lev. 19:2)

Unlike Sinai, Lev. 19 does not enter the Jewish religious imagination, nor does it get reenacted on a regular basis in synagogue ritual. Sinai was so foundational that according to the rabbis, the very act of Torah study or observance of mitzvot is considered to be akin to receiving the Torah at Sinai.

כָּל הַעוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה וּמִקְוֶה, כְּאִלּוּ קִבְּלָהּ מִהַר סִינִי. תַּנְהוּמָא רַהֲא א

When anyone occupies himself or herself with the Torah and fulfills it, [it is] as though he or she had received it from Sinai. Tanhuma Re'eh 1

Lev. 19, is the Rodney Dangerfield of biblical texts: it gets no respect! But the rabbis saw similarities between the Ten Commandments and Lev. 19. Rabbi Levi (Vayikra Rabbah 24:5) claimed that the Ten Commandments were in fact embedded in Lev. 19. This is what he says is similar between the two:

It says there: Exod. 20	It says here: Lev. 20
אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ - <i>I (anokhi) am the Lord your (singular your) God.</i>	אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם - <i>I (ani) am the Lord your (plural your) God.</i>
לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ - <i>You shall have no other gods.</i>	לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם - <i>You shall not make molten gods for yourselves.</i>
לֹא תִשָּׂא - <i>Do not misuse God's name.</i>	וְלֹא תִשְׁבַּע בִּשְׁמִי - <i>Do not take an oath in My name falsely.</i>
זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת - <i>Remember the Sabbath day.</i>	וְנָתַתְּ שַׁבָּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ - <i>And you shall keep My Sabbaths.</i>
כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ - <i>Honor your father and your mother.</i>	אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ - <i>Each of you shall revere his mother and father.</i>
לֹא תִרְצַח - <i>Do not murder.</i>	לֹא תִעַמְדַּךְ עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ - <i>Do not stand by the blood of your neighbor.</i>
לֹא תִנְאַף - <i>Do not commit adultery.</i>	מֹת וְיוֹמֶת הַנָּאֵף וְהַנֶּאֱדָוָה - <i>The adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.</i>
לֹא תִגְנוֹב - <i>You (singular) shall not steal.</i>	לֹא תִגְנוֹבוּ - <i>You (plural) shall not steal.</i>
לֹא תִעֲנֶה - <i>You shall not bear false witness.</i>	לֹא תִלְוֶה רֵעִיךָ - <i>You shall not gossip.</i>
לֹא תַחְמֹד - <i>You shall not covet.</i>	וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹד - <i>You shall love your neighbor as yourself.</i>

Nevertheless, we would say that there are in fact many significant differences between the two texts. For example:

1st thing Exod. 20 says:	1st thing Lev. 19 says:
<i>I am the Lord your God who took you out of the Land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.</i>	<i>You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy.</i>
Most Important Idea: Freedom God is a redeeming God, and most concerned about human freedom and dignity.	Most Important Idea: Holiness God is holy and wants the people of Israel to be holy more than anything else.
Central question: What are the basic responsibilities of a free person?	Central question: What are the basic ways to become holy?

The Ten Commandments are grounded in the idea of Freedom; Lev. 19 is grounded in the idea of Holiness.

These two complimentary ideas generate lists of value concepts that animate the creative tension within Judaism.

Freedom	Holiness
God as Redeemer	God as Holy One
Universal	Particular
The Lord of Hosts. ה' צְבָאוֹת	The Holy One of Israel. קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל
God is King. ה' מֶלֶךְ	You God are my Father. אָבִי אַתָּה
Israel brings God's law to the world.	Israel brings God's name to the world.
Praise God in the Heavens. הַלְלוּהוּ בִּרְקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם	Praise God in his holy shrine. הַלְלוּ אֶל בְּהֶקְדָּשׁוֹ
Eternity. לְעוֹלָם	From generation to generation. לְדוֹר וָדוֹר

When we read the Ten Commandments we are trembling at Sinai. We imagine ourselves about to enter a covenant with the God of the Universe, who is breaking through from his abode in the heavens to communicate his laws to his creatures on earth. We understand ourselves as being God's agent for bringing those laws to the rest of humanity in order to redeem the world, or in the parlance of contemporary Jewish theology, to repair and perfect it. On the other hand, when we read Leviticus 19 we are standing in front of the Tent of Meeting, with Moses conveying to us God's intimate message to Israel. Rather than to perfect the world, the task of being holy is to live a life defined by the sacred bonds and moral concerns listed in Lev. 19, in order to pulsate God's holiness to the world. **The Ten Commandments sees us as teachers of God's laws. Lev. 19 sees us as exemplars of a holy life.** We can contrast the priorities of both of the world views by comparing, for example, the first three commandments of each:

Exod. 20	Lev. 19
לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פָּנָי. <i>You are not to have any other gods before my presence.</i>	אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ <i>Each-man—his mother and his father you are to hold-in-awe,</i>
Idolatry.	Family.

לא תשא את שם ה' אלהיך לשווא <i>You are not to misuse the name of God.</i>	ואת שבתתי תשמרו <i>My Sabbaths you are to keep.</i>
Misusing God's name.	Shabbat.
נכור את יום השבת לקדשו. <i>Be mindful of the Sabbath day, to hallow it.</i>	אל תפנו אל האלילים ואלהי מסכה לא תעשו לכם <i>Do not turn-your-faces to no-gods,</i>
Shabbat.	Idolatry

According to the Ten Commandments, the priorities are in this order: **Idolatry, misusing God's name**, (commonly understood to be swearing falsely, but more compellingly understood as committing evil in God's name) **and Shabbat**. For Lev. 19 the priorities are in this order: **reverence for parents (i.e. family), Shabbat, and idolatry**. What does that tell us?

**The priority for the Ten Commandments is God.
The priority for Leviticus 19 is Family.**

Or to put it differently, *for the Ten Commandments our relationship with God is the defining relationship of our lives. Everything in our lives depends on our relationship with God. For Lev. 19 our relationship with our parents is the defining relationship of our lives. Everything about us is dependent on our parents, even, it would seem, our relationship with God!* These texts are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are in conversation with one another. Indeed, we shape our lives according to both. Sometimes we will be governed by the Ten Commandments, and sometimes we will be governed by Lev. 19. In the Ten Commandments, God sets an agenda for us. But in Lev. 19, our parents structure our world. God's laws determine who we are to become, but the structure of our families and our sacred rhythms are more determinative. Our lives are shaped by the continuous dialogue between both sets of priorities.

Content and Form. Biblical texts convey information through content and form. The way a text is written is often as important as the things the text says. Indeed, *one of the features of biblical texts is that the form often helps us interpret the content*. The Ten Commandments is a list of commands. Lev. 19 on the other hand, almost sounds like poetry. Compare the texts about honoring/revering parents:

כבד את אביך ואת אמך למען יארכון ימיך על האדמה אשר ה' אלהיך נתן לך. <i>Honor your father and your mother, in order that your days may be prolonged on the land that the Lord your God is giving you.</i>	איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שבתתי תשמרו אני ה' אלהיכם. <i>Each-man—his mother and his father you are to hold-in-awe, and my Sabbaths you are to keep, I am the Lord your God.</i>
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The כבד את אביך ואת אמך verse reads rather plainly, with no discernible patterns other than the pauses between phrases. In contrast, the איש אמו ואביו תיראו verse has a distinct iambic-like (**DUM, da DUM, da DUM, da DUM da**) or heartbeat sound to it, and it demonstrates parallelism, a key feature of biblical poetry: the second part dealing with Shabbat, is parallel to the first. This opens up numerous interpretive possibilities. **1. Revere your parents so that you will keep Shabbat: the goal of a family unit governed by reverence and respect is that the family can**

observe Shabbat in all its sacredness. 2. You individually are commanded to revere your parents, but all of you, including your parents are commanded to keep Shabbat. 3. I am the Lord your God, who gave you Shabbat and who blesses your family. 4. Your reverence of parents will enhance your Shabbat, and your Shabbat will enhance your reverence of parents. 5. What if your parents tell you to violate Shabbat? What if these two values collide? Reverence of parents yields to the supremacy of Shabbat, because while you are obligated to revere your parents, you and your parents are obligated to keep God's Shabbat. We do not get any of that texture from the Ten Commandments. What we do get instead is a promise of longevity and satisfaction if we honor our parents, and the implicit warning that our lives would be more difficult and less fulfilling, shorter in span and quality, if we did not honor them. **Reverence and Observance.** Reverence is conveyed by the verb: י.ר.א. Observance is conveyed by the verb: ש.מ.ר. There are numerous places where these two verbs are found parallel to each other, like in our verse. For example:

את שבתתי תשמרו ומקדשי תיראו (ויקרא יט:ל, כו:ב) <i>My Sabbaths you are to observe, my Holy-Shrine you are to hold-in-awe; (Lev. 19:30, 26:2)</i>	Observance of Shabbat. Reverence for Shrines.
סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם. (קה' יב:יג) <i>The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments! For this applies to all mankind. (Eccl. 12:13).</i>	Reverence of God. Observance of all the laws and commandments. (see also Deut. 5:26 and 6:2)
למען ילמד ליראה את ה' אלהיו לשמר את כל דברי התורה הזאת (דב' יז:יט) <i>It is to remain beside him, and he is to read out of it all the days of his life, in order that he may learn to have-awe-for the Lord his God, to be observe all the words of this Torah.</i>	Reverence for God. Observance of all the words Torah.

When you combine all of these examples of parallelism the following picture emerges:

Who or What to Revere:	What to Observe:
Parents	Shabbat
Holy shrines	Commandments
God	All of Torah.

The parallelism of **Reverence and Observance**, י.ר.א. and ש.מ.ר., teaches us that there is one line that links parents, holy shrines and God, and another that links Shabbat, the commandments and all of Torah. There is a lot going on when you compare the Ten Commandments to Lev. 19! **Shabbat Shalom!**

Today is Day 582. We continue to pray for the return of the hostages being held in captivity in Gaza by evil messengers of destruction. May God comfort the bereaved, protect the IDF, heal the wounded and shield Israel from continued Houthi missile terror. Amen!

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Stephen and Barbara Parkoff to commemorate the Yahrzeits of Stephen's parents, Meyer and Cecile Parkoff, z'l.