

The great American fairytale goes something like this: Person is unhappy. Person acquires something new. Person becomes happy and fulfilled. You've seen this countless times - in commercials. Modern American culture drills it into our heads - if we buy this gizmo or that gadget, our problems will be solved. The Joneses have a bigger house or a better car, so we ought to as well. We keep acquiring, but somehow happiness remains elusive.

This week's Torah portion, Yitro, contains the secrets to a happy and meaningful life, hidden in plain sight. Standing at Mt. Sinai, our ancestors experienced Revelation, which is described in the Torah as an overwhelming sensory experience. Amidst the thunder and lightning, they received the *Aseret HaDibrot*, the Ten Commandments or Ten Utterances. While all 613 mitzvot are equally sacred, the "Big Ten" direct our attention to core values that ensure we live sacred and fulfilling lives.

The final mitzvah of the Ten Commandments, "You Shall Not Covet," has always seemed out of place. For starters, how can we be commanded not to feel jealous? Can feelings be commanded? And isn't jealousy built into the human experience?

Medieval commentator Abraham ibn Ezra teaches that "You Shall Not Covet" refers to the feeling of desire for something belonging to someone else, but that the feeling can be overcome by recognizing that what the person desires is completely out of their reach.

Several other commentators, including Rambam, view "You Shall Not Covet" as a prohibition of the actions that coveting leads to (rather than the feeling of envy), for example actively plotting how to acquire something belonging to someone else or stealing. You can want something that belongs to another person, but once you recognize that feeling, STOP. Do not seek to acquire it.

Regardless of whether the prohibition in the Ten Commandments is against the feeling of coveting or the actions that it leads to, we know from experience that jealousy and envy lead us to unfulfilled and unhappy lives. Fixating on what others have is a recipe for being miserable. We read in Proverbs, "A calm disposition gives bodily health; Jealousy is rot to the bones" (14:30). What's the antidote to jealousy? Gratitude.

In Hebrew, "gratitude" is "*hakarat ha-tov*" which literally means "recognizing the good." Instead of looking at our lives and seeing all that we lack, gratitude points us to see all the good that is already ours. Mussar teacher Alan Morinis wrote, "There is no limit to what we don't have and if that is where we focus then our lives are inevitably filled with endless dissatisfaction. This is the ethos that lies behind the great teaching of the Mishnah, which asks (Pirkei Avot 4:1), "Who is rich?" and then answers, "Those who rejoice in their own lot." When you live charged with gratitude, you will give thanks for anything or anyone who has benefited you, whether they meant to or not. Imagine a prayer of thanks springing to your lips when the driver in the car next to you lets you merge without protest, or when the water flows from the tap or the food is adequate."

What small blessings are you grateful for? How can you live each day with a sense of thankfulness and appreciation?

With warm wishes for a Shabbat Shalom,

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