

Hold Thy God (Yitro)

“It chills my blood to hear the blest Supreme rudely appealed to on each trifling theme.” -

William Cowper

The Third Commandment of the famous Ten seems oddly underwhelming. One and Two are the fundamentals of faith (Belief in God and Not Believing in Other gods). Four and Five are Keeping the Sabbath and Honoring ones Parents – fundamentals of Judaism. Six through Ten deal with the underpinnings of a healthy and functional society, Don't Kill, Don't Steal, etc. So why is number Three, Not Uttering God's Name in Vain, so prominent on the list? What's the big deal about a phrase that has become second nature to many people?

Ibn Ezra (on Exodus 20:7) claims that it is its very ease of violating that has placed Do Not Utter God's Name in Vain so highly and that in fact in a certain way it is more important and its effects more dangerous and corrosive than murder, theft or adultery (this does not now become a license in any way to commit any of the above).

The obvious sins, one may often be fearful of doing. One might get caught. But a simple utterance that does not bother or offend most people is easy to do – even unthinkingly. The problem is that flippant use of God's name consistently erodes ones view and relationship with God. God becomes merely another word, another phrase in the arsenal of our vocabulary. God loses meaning. God loses significance. The entire foundation of ones belief and worship may disintegrate as would a termite-infested house. All the other commandments become meaningless when we lose the proper perspective vis-à-vis God.

Ergo, Don't Take His Name in Vain.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To Deni Avdija on his selection to the NBA All-Star Game.