

Maimonides 613 Series

The Ten Commandments: Sixth Commandment: To Kill or Not To Kill

Exodus 20:13

לֹא תִרְצֹחַ

You shall not murder.

Maimonides Negative commandment #289

The 289th prohibition is that we are forbidden from killing each other. The source of this prohibition is G-d's statement (exalted be He), "Do not commit murder." The punishment for violating this prohibition is execution by decapitation. [The death penalty is derived] from G-d's statement (exalted be He), "You must even take him from My altar to put him to death."

The details of this *mitzvah* are explained in the ninth chapter of tractate *Sanhedrin* and the second chapter of *Makkos*.

Pshat - The Surface Level

The first five of the Ten Commandments are written on one square tablet, and the second five are written on another. Theoretically, G-d could have put them all on one tablet. Why two? The Mechilta says that the First Commandment parallels the Sixth, the Second Commandment parallels the Seventh, and so on. The Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder," parallels the First, "I am the L-rd your G-d." What is the connection between them? The Kli Yakar quotes the Mechilta on a verse in Parshas Noach, which states that G-d created man in His image, and therefore whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. Every human being is created in the image of G-d; by murdering another person, you are diminishing G-d in them, thereby denying the First Commandment as well as the Sixth.

We can also see this in the reverse. In Parshas Vayeira, it says that Avraham answered Avimelech, "Because there is no fear of G-d in this place, you would have murdered me." This implies that were it not for the First Commandment, to know and believe in G-d, there could not be a Sixth Commandment even though one could derive logically that killing another human is immoral. Germany prided itself on its advanced culture, system of science, and even ethics; yet, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Germany murdered six million Jews and several million people of other groups and ethnicities. Laws based on human logic alone can be manipulated and changed. If you want to be secure in the prohibition against murder, it must be predicated on belief in and knowledge of G-d's existence.

Remez - The Level of Hints

Rambam tells us in the *Laws of Kings* that the books of the Prophets are replete with allusions to and proofs of the concept of Moshiach. Where do we find such proofs in the Five Books of Moses? One example that the Rambam gives is the concept of Cities of Refuge, cities to where those who had committed accidental murder would run to seek refuge. There were three such cities in the Transjordan and three in Israel proper. The Torah states that "if G-d will extend your borders," another three will be added. Nothing G-d says or does is in vain. (In this statement, "if" means "when".) From this we see a hint to the coming of Moshiach, when another three Cities of Refuge will be added to our expanded borders.

Drush - The Halachic Level

The Rambam writes in the Laws of the Sanhedrin, that the Torah decrees against a person incriminating himself. If Reuven comes to the Bais Din and says, "I murdered Levi on this day, at this time, with this weapon," it means nothing. His testimony against himself is not accepted. The same applies if he comes and testifies that he ate treif--he does not incur the

penalty of lashes. Why? The Radbaz, a commentator on the Rambam, says this is because our bodies do not belong to us. They are on loan to us from G-d, and we have no right to hurt them. If a person incriminates himself, he can make his body liable for lashes, or even decapitation, and we are not permitted to cause harm to our bodies. The Alter Rebbe says in his *Shulchan Aruch* that a person is not allowed to hit himself or wound himself in any way. This is the basis of the prohibition against tattoos, and also cremation.

Sod - The Level of Secrets

We mentioned above the verse, "Whoever spills the blood of man, by man will his blood be shed." If we translate this verse literally, it reads, "Whoever spills the blood of one man into another man..." What does this mean? The kabbalah answers: there are two people inside of us, the G-dly man and the animal man. Every day, we have to pray, to give tzedaka and learn Torah. If instead of this, we use our mind, speech, or action negatively, we are taking the blood, the vitality, of the G-dly soul and spilling it into the animal soul, into evil. We therefore violate the Sixth Commandment simply by sinning. We are "killing" the G-dly soul, taking its blood and giving it instead to the animal soul.

Chassidus - The Essential Level

Chassidus expounds on the Torah's proof of Moshiach cited above, that there will be three more Cities of Refuge after G-d expands our borders. Chassidus asks: why will we need Cities of Refuge after Moshiach comes? There will be no more death, and the spirit of impurity will be swallowed up from the face of mankind. The Rebbe answers: even after Moshiach comes, there will be a choice between life and death, actively refining ourselves and not working on ourselves, good vs. better. The Talmud states, "According to the camel, that is the load." After Moshiach, there will be no more physical death or evil, and the question will be, how much good will we do? Will we challenge ourselves more today than yesterday, or will we take a vacation? If, G-d forbid, we do

not continue to elevate ourselves and the world, to bring more G-dliness in, we are pouring out the blood of the G-dly soul into the animal soul, and we would need to run to a City of Refuge. Nowadays, how do we fulfill this commandment? If we know that we made a mistake, that we sinned, we can do teshuvah, we can run to a City of Refuge--words of Torah and prayer. The Alte Rebbe teaches in Tanya that feeling regret and remorse is only the lower level, the first step, of teshuvah. The higher level of teshuvah is to increase in G-dliness--if yesterday you learned one page of Torah, today, learn two pages. If yesterday you gave one coin to tzedaka, today, give two. May our increasing in G-dliness immediately cause the coming of Moshiach, when we will build the final three Cities of Refuge, and return all our power to our G-dly souls. Amen!