

Shavout 2018 Sermon Slam
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During Shavout we celebrate the giving of the Torah and read the Decalogue, or 10 commandments.

My sermon is on the importance of the Ten Commandments both in biblical times and today.

Nine years ago my oldest daughter became a bat mitzvah, and her portion included the Decalogue. Below are some of the remarks I can remember from my address to her.

-Well, in 2008 we didn't get Hilary, and we didn't get Sarah Palin. But the third time is a charm and thank goodness we have Erica!

Today you entered adulthood as a Jewish woman. Your Torah Portion, Yitro, includes the Ten Commandments.



These commandments are the basis of Judaism, and the foundations of Christianity and Islam. Moreover, the principles of the Ten Commandments are indeed the backbone of humanity.

Yet if we read closely these important words, it is disappointing to me that they are completely void of any reference to women in a positive manner.

In fact, the 9th commandment in Yitro reads: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; nor your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.

Not only are women not mentioned positively, but we are considered as a possession, something to be coveted, equal to a slave or cattle.

Unfortunately, women have not been recognized in Jewish, or any history in a positive manner, and women’s history has not been told.

My great grandmother raised her children alone in Europe, pregnant with my grandmother, and finally came to the US when my great-grandfather was able to send funds for his entire family to join him. Can you imagine? Raising 6 children by yourself for 11 years while living in poverty, subject to pogroms, with no

education and 7 mouths to feed? Then coming to a strange country where she was never able to learn the language?

In today's world, women are still considered property and young girls aren't allowed an education.

Girls are still sold as brides to older men, considered to be their father's property just like in biblical times.

In Pakistan a girl younger than you was shot in the face on her way to school, simply because she was leading the effort for girls to be able to go to school.

I am proud to tell you that I was the first girl in my conservative congregation in New Bedford to become a bat mitzvah on a Saturday morning and read from the Torah in May 1974.

Perhaps the biblical commandments have reached us in the twentieth century?

In The Torah, A Women's Commentary, the commentators state that in ancient Israel, marriage was not an equal arrangement. A man took a woman into his household as a wife (or 2, as we know from Leah and Rachel), but typically a woman could not take a man into her household as a husband. That alone would

seem to account for why “husband” is not mentioned in this verse.

In our democratic society we have a few women in positions of power. Madeline Albright is secretary of State, the country’s chief diplomat. Women have led Western democracies. Women have been leaders, such as Indira Gandhi, Corazon Aquino, and Benazir Bhutto. And Golda Meir is a legend. Yet this handful of women is the exception.

It is my hope that going forward, you and your friends will lead your generation to future greatness and equality.