LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Until now the Book of Ecclesiastes has been very problematic for me. The two part treatise in recent Jewish Bible Quarterly issues, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless", by Etan Dor-Shav is a much appreciated revelation and insight that makes complete sense. Rather than the despairing thoughts of a frustrated old man, in reality and correctly translated the Book of Ecclesiastes is a sermon of appreciation, "following a thematic progression that follows Koheleth's own discovery of meaning."

Thank you very much for including Ethan Dor-Shav's enlightening article.

Condie Erwin Topeka, KS

Sir.

Leo Abrami in the January 2010 issue of the JBQ seems concerned about positive and negative statements in the Ten Commandments in view of whether they are specific laws or general principles. His assumption is that only the positive form of an exhortation can contain a basic principle while a negative is restricted to a narrow area of action. I beg to differ in both areas.

The belief in God may be perhaps the most general statement of value, yet some authorities found it cogent to derive a positive Mitzvah from this general statement. On the other hand, the command to "observe all the Mitzvot" does not yield a specific Mitzvah. It is not the extent of the general significance that is crucial in determining specific obligations or prohibitions. Positive and negative are also irrelevant when measuring importance. Of course, every positive implies a negative. If one is obligated to do something and he does not do it, he is in violation of the commandment, even though his violation is in the passive mode. On the other hand, every negative implies a prohibition of a negative action, and the violator violates by committing that action.

Thus the Ten Commandments, according to those who count the *Taryag Mitzvot*, contain 14 Mitzvot, not 10. While Commandments 1,3,5,6,7,8,9, and 10, contain only 1 Mitzvah each, the second Commandment, concerning idolatry, contains 4 Mitzvot: not to believe in other gods, not to fashion statues,

not to bow to them, not to worship other gods. The fourth Commandment, concerning Shabbat, contains 2 Mitzvot: to sanctify Shabbat by words, not to work on Shabbat. So that, as *Devarim*, Words, the general principles are 10 in number, but the specific acts or refraining from acts are 14 in number. It may also be noted that in terms of Principles, there are 3 Positives and Seven Negatives in the Ten Words. In terms of Mitzvot there are 3 Positives and 11 Negatives.

The 3 Positives, in terms of Principles and Mitzvot are: Belief in God, Remember the Sabbath, Honor your parents. The 11 Negatives are: Not to believe in other gods, Not to make idols, Not to bow to them, Not to worship them in any way, Not to swear falsely, Not to work on Shabbat, Not to murder, Not to commit adultery, Not to steal, Not to testify falsely, Not to covet.

It should be pointed out that while the Torah and the Commandments do not speak in terms of rights but rather in terms of duties, it remains true that every duty implies a right of others which must not be violated, and every right in other Constitutions implies the obligation of others to protect that right.

Jacob Chinitz Jerusalem

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