

THE TORAH AS A PLAYBOOK (AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR US) by Rabbi Moshe Tom Heyn 05/01/17

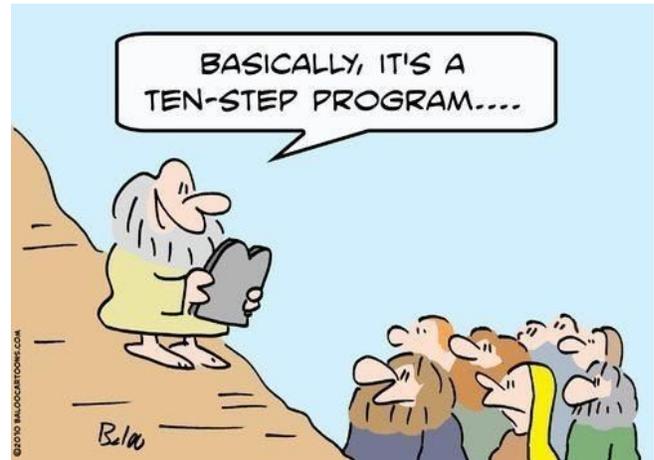
When Moses came down the mountain with a set of carved tablets, he had to explain what they were. We had never seen or received anything quite like them before.

He tried to explain that they were a gift from God, but that didn't work so well. Gifts are usually things we want or like; something fun or pretty. Why would we want those dull-looking tablets? And when he read what was written on them, they seemed even less appealing. After all, we're busy and when we have a little time off, we like to relax. If this gift contains new "commandments" for us to follow, we're not interested.

So Moses tried explaining that they were means for self-improvement. Hmm, that's nice, but we're fine just as we are. Our neighbors could use lots of self-improvement and, come to think of it, our kids, as well. And while we're on the subject, my spouse, my boss, my employees, my friends, and (fill in the blank) could use some self-improvement, but not me.

So Moses tried another approach. Knowing that we like sports and spend billions of dollars on it, he explained that the tablets were a playbook, containing descriptions and diagrams outlining our team's strategies. Now *that* we could understand. But who were we playing against? Moses wasn't around long enough to answer that question.

So for a very long time, we assumed we were playing against other tribes and nations. That didn't always work out so well because they often played by different rules. And when "winning" resulted in the disparagement or suffering of other peoples, it no longer seemed right to many of us.



If Moses was still here, he might have been able to confirm what some of us are beginning to grasp: that we are part of a much larger team which includes other tribes and nations, and that our common objective is not so much the acquisition of wealth or pleasure, but a quest for meaning in the context of a just and prosperous society.

It took us a long time to finally "get it" but, in this light, we can begin to understand and appreciate the value of those tablets. The "commandments" are not simply rules to follow but strategies to help us live meaningful lives and thereby bless our families, our communities, and our world. The occasions on which we come together become opportunities to remember this goal and to make significant progress toward its achievement.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture that has yet to evolve to this level of understanding. Most people are stuck at one of those earlier stages, interested in things that are fun or pretty, in the acquisition of wealth, or in getting ahead. As we can see, these pursuits are much more popular and well-funded than what goes on at Temple Israel.

If you are a member of our congregation, you might not have realized it but you joined a “team.” You thought you just needed tickets for the High Holy Days or a place for your child to become a Bat or Bat Mitzvah. Little did you know, you signed up for something much more ambitious, far-reaching and more demanding. And, as with any team, we need each and every one of our members to pitch in. Fortunately, those who do know the satisfaction and exhilaration that comes with being part of a team.

In the coming days, there will be many opportunities to “get in the game.” We will reaffirm our connection to the Land and People of Israel on *Yom HaZikaron* (Israel's Remembrance Day on May 1st) and *Yom HaAtzma'ut* (Israel's Independence Day on May 2nd). We will have a chance to demonstrate our love and support for Temple Israel at a '70s Disco Casino Night (May 6th). You can join us for our last day of Religious School (May 21st), our Sisterhood Shabbat (June 9th), our outing to the Actors' Playhouse (June 11th), our annual RU'ACH Pride Seder (June 14th), and our Annual Meeting (June 23rd). These are all moments to show that you are a team player.

The coming days are also important because they fall during the “*omer* period” when we count the 49 days (seven weeks) between Passover and the soon-to-arrive festival of Shavuot (May 30-31st). The custom of “counting the *omer*” symbolizes the growth that occurs, day-by-day and stage-by-stage, when we desire to “receive the Torah” as Moses intended it to be received.

Will it seem as dull and useless as it might have seemed to our earliest ancestors? Or will we recognize it as a playbook, containing strategies for living a meaningful life and how we might, as

a team, establish a just and prosperous society? Having come to recognize the Torah's value, are you ready to accept and embrace all that it entails?

As a team, we cannot succeed without the help of each and every one of our members. Only with your participation in the coming days will our Temple achieve its goals for this year. And only with your cooperation and support will we fulfill our purpose, thereby blessing our families, our communities and our world.