

**COMMANDMENT VI.**

**THOU SHALT NOT MURDER.**

## THOU SHALT NOT MURDER

### OBJECTIVE

Though there are many different meanings to each of the commandments covered thus far in this textbook, we have covered what we consider to be the primary area of each of the laws. Yet when it comes to the commandment “Thou Shalt not Murder”, there are two major objectives that must be considered.

**1. To formulate the different types of killing that could be considered as “Murder” by Jewish Law.**

It is sometimes only too obvious that the subject of murder, as covered in the Ten Commandments, deals strictly with “premeditated murder”. Namely, those killings in which there is planning and plotting prior to the actual murder itself. Yet there are times that the term “murder” can include other forms of killing and death as well...these will be investigated in the next few pages.

**2. To describe and clarify those elements that lead up to murder in the human mind and show how an ethical and moral area must sometimes be expanded to include cause as well as effect.**

The tragedy of death and killing and murder of any kind is not a day to day occurrence in our lives. Yet those elements that lead up to murder are emotions that sometimes make up our daily experiences. By showing how a complicated and seemingly overwhelming commandment can sometimes have an effect on our everyday lifestyle is the reason why this particular objective has been added to the text.

### AREAS CONSIDERED MURDER

There are many people who truly believe that any kind of killing could be considered murder. “Anti-Vivisectionists” think that by experimenting on an animal, no matter what the beneficial results for human beings might be, is equal to the worst form of tortuous murder there is. Others think that any form of war is merely a legitimized murder. For example, the famous author and humorist Mark Twain once wrote the following condemnation of war of any kind . . .

There never has been a just one, never an honorable one on the part of the instigator of war. I can see a million years ahead and the rule will never change in so many as half a dozen instances. The loud little handful as usual will shout for war. The pulpit will -- warily and cautiously -- object at first, the great big dull bulk of the nation will rub its sleepy eyes and try to make out why there should be a war and will say, earnestly and indignantly, “It is unjust and dishonorable, and there is no necessity for it”. And the handful will shout louder...before long you will see this curious thing -- speakers stoned from the platforms, and free speech strangled by hordes of furious men who, in their secret hearts are still at one with those stoned speakers -- as earlier -- but do not dare say so.

And now the whole nation -- pulpit and all -- will take up the war cry and shout itself hoarse and mob any man who ventures to open his mouth, and presently, such mouths will cease to open. Next the statesmen will invent

cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience falsities and will diligently study them and refuse to examine and refutations of them and thus will by and by convince himself that the war is just and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception.

On the other hand, in Jewish law itself, the fact remains that wars were fought throughout the course of Jewish history, yet it is also true that not one single Jewish festival or holiday celebrates the waging or the winning of a war. Even the holiday of Hanukkah, though made possible by the winning of a battle, celebrates the rededication of the Temple -- not the victory in war. Nevertheless, the fact still remains that though Judaism, as a faith and a culture, demands that we constantly seek peace, there were still two types of war that the Jew was commanded to fight in -- the *Milchemet Chovah* -- the compulsory or obligatory war (usually a war which involved self-defense) and the *Milchemet R'Shut* -- the optional war (fought for territorial expansion of another country). The problem therefore remains...is war right or wrong or does it depend on the individual's feeling about the particular war being fought? Some of the questions that the Jew and the feeling person must ask himself or herself is, could I fight in a war? Is there a good war and a bad war? Is war murder no matter what war it is?

There are some people who think that certain medical procedures (most notably abortions) are without question a form of murder of innocent victims. The Catholic Church as a whole has come out directly opposed to any form of abortion or birth control because, they say, it is against the sixth commandment -- thou shalt not murder. They believe that the fetus (the unborn child) is a living being and therefore anybody who attempts to abort such a birth is literally killing another human as sure as if they had put a gun to its head. The other side of this issue believes that a mother has a right to her own life and body, and though the fetus may be alive in the mother's womb, it is not alive until it can breathe and be by itself...therefore, these people believe that abortion is not murder but a protection of the mother's rights. What do you think?

Each individual therefore may have a different belief of what real "Murder" is. Dependent upon the situation you are in, your convictions and your own feelings, you must decide what murder is.

Though the problem of the criminal act of murder is a critical one. The areas of cause are just as important if not more so to anyone who lives in this world of ours. From the time of Cain killing Abel, the causes of murder are as fundamental as breathing itself. Not one of us can live through a week without experiencing a hurt or an insult of one sort or another. There is no doubt that some of us are more sensitive than others but no one is immune to hurt feelings, pain, anger or insult.

No matter what the cause of the injury is, there is one common thread that weaves through any anger that we might feel and that is how something *threatens* us. Whether the threat was to our physical selves or our self-esteem, whether the threat was real or imagined, that threat is the real cause of our

hurt and anger. Anything that threatens to hurt our self-image, to threaten the picture we paint of ourselves, the mental portraits we have of who we are...all of these can hurt us.

The Bible is full of such situations from the time that Cain was hurt when God did not accept his sacrifice but took his brother Abel's instead to the time when King Saul became jealous of his General David because people were talking about David's accomplishments more than they were mentioning Sauls. Though you might believe that these incidents are just legends, you must admit that many times legends such as these are based on life's experiences.

When Cain's feelings are hurt, when Cain felt slighted, the results were catastrophic. When Saul's pride got in the way of his judgment, he too tried to murder his supposed rival. The Jewish faith has always been aware of the problem of human hurt and pain, perhaps that is why there are so many examples of how to avoid hurting others and how others should avoid hurting you.

The following few quotes are just a few of the many proverbs on the subject of permitting yourself the right to be angry -- the Rabbi Mendel was accustomed to restrain an angry rebuke until he had investigated the Jewish Law Code to learn whether anger is permissible in this particular instance. But how much genuine anger could he have felt after completing his search? What does this statement mean to you?

“Cherish no hate for thy brother who offends because you have not offended like him. If your fellow man possessed your nature, he might not have sinned. If you possessed his nature you might have offended as he had done”.

A Chassidic Rabbi

Rabbi Jonathan is quoted as saying, “He who rebukes his fellow man in the name of heaven receives a good portion from God”.

Yet there are still other sources that demand that we control our anger and hurt . . . such as the following --

Rabbi Schmelke of Nikalsburg once said, “It may sometimes happen that your hand accidentally strikes you. Would you take a stick and hit your hand for its carelessness, and thus add to your pain? It is the same with your neighbor whose soul is with thine, because insufficient understanding does you harm, should you retaliate, it would be you who would suffer”.

Rabbi Jose once said, “He who guards his honor by heaping scorn on his fellow man has no portion in the world to come”. (*Talmud Yerushalami, Haggigah 2-1*).

Sometimes it is difficult to control anger and hurt when you truly believe that your pride has been hurt, or you either mentally or physically have been threatened. Nevertheless, time after time, example after example seems to show the need to have self-control when anger gets the best of you.

## CASE STUDIES

1. John is usually a very mild-mannered and quite calm type of person. Yet when somebody in school started to talk about his brother in a derogatory manner ... when they called him a cheater and a liar...John became incensed and began hitting the kid who was doing all of the talking. “Say

anything you want about me...but don't talk about my family", John said, when the teacher suspended him. What would you have done in John's place?

2. The squad was just on a simple patrol when a shot rang out from one of the larger huts in the small Vietnamese town. One of the most popular men in the entire squad was killed instantly. The rest of the soldiers were furious...they went into the hut, which seemed to be the town's community gathering place, and started shooting everybody in sight. Over fifty men, women, and children were killed. The soldiers were put on trial for murder...if you were one of the judges, how would you view the case? Are they guilty or not? They were just following the lead of the Commander...were they all guilty? Explain why you would judge them in this case as you have.