

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT AND THE SECOND AMENDMENT

Am I the only one who sees a connection between the second of the Ten Commandments, and the second of the Ten Amendments to the U.S. Constitution? Both are the second out of ten, and both have given rise to different interpretations, especially the second second..

Here they are:

Second Commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down unto them, nor serve them... (Exodus 20:4-5).

Second Amendment: A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. (Bill of Rights, U.S. Constitution).

To me, they are simple enough, but I am neither a Rabbi nor a lawyer. The first one says, don't make a likeness of anything AND worship it. The second says, armed State Militias are OK.

My friend Mae Tupa wrote about the Second Commandment issue in "An Approach to Jewish Art," the first chapter of her book, "The Work of Our Hands." The Second Commandment, she noted, is not "...a prohibition against artistic endeavor...it was meant to discourage idolatry, not art." There is also a threat and a promise, but we will skip that.

Jews, in Biblical times, were not doing the kind of sculpture found in Greece and Rome. They were the people of the book, not the people of the rock. Prior to the diaspora, there must have been Jewish artists and craftsmen doing some pretty fancy weaving, woodworking and metalwork, especially for the Tabernacle and the Temple, but, to play it safe, the art at the time was non-representational. Nothing that could be considered an idol. "Building a wall around the Torah." There was a lot of image worshipping from Abraham's time on, and they did not want to take a chance.

If an artist wanted to make a graven image, a likeness of any thing in the heavens, on earth or below the water, I am sure it would have been all right, (especially cherubs) as long as nobody worshiped it. However, when the children of Israel got Aaron to make them a golden calf, that was a no-no. I read somewhere that they felt it was intended it to represent God, not a competitor. Still, there had been bull worshipping among a lot of other groups, and a calf is a baby bull.

Now, we skip ahead three thousand years, and our founding fathers, having just written the Constitution, discovered that they left out a few things, and came up with additional

protections. The first one was a beauty, guaranteeing freedom of religion, speech, press, peaceable assembly and the right to complain to the Government.

Then, they remembered the problems the English had a hundred years before with a crazy King, and figured it would be a good idea for the people to have State Militias to protect them. There were a lot of anti-Federalists who were afraid that a Federal Government might be a problem here just as a King was in England . So Madison wrote the second amendment to reassure them. States could have a well regulated militia that could be called up in an emergency. Members would each have a nice single shot rifle, meet at the armory, march in parades, go on maneuvers in the summer, and drink beer. The members of the militia will insure the security of a free State, and THEIR right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

Our founding fathers never anticipated the National Rifle Association, and the kinds of weapons we have today. If they did, they would have written, "...the right of the people WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE MILITIA to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed, AND EVERYONE ELSE CAN KEEP AND BEAR ARMS SUBJECT TO FEDERAL, STATE AND/OR LOCAL REGULATIONS."

In 1789, James Madison felt he had to assure the anti-Federalists that their militias can keep their guns, Two hundred years later, what was once interpreted as a collective right was turned into an individual right by the NRA and Justice Scalia. They simply ignored the first half of the amendment, and what was left was the right of people to keep and bear arms. As a result, gun control laws are struck down, gun violence is increasing, and a conservative Congress is unwilling to pass common sense proposals calling for background checks, assault weapons bans, and limiting the size of ammunition magazines.

Wasn't it Charleton Heston who played Moses, bringing the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai, smashing them when he saw the golden calf, and wasn't it the same Charleton Heston, addressing the NRA, holding up a rifle and saying no government will pry it loose from his dead, cold hand? We have come full circle. Gun-toting NRA members have become gun worshippers, violating both the second commandment and the second amendment.

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