

Ve'tchanan 2010/5770 – Ten Rules For Society
Delivered by Rabbi David Baum at Shaarei Kodesh

I recently saw a movie called the Invention of Lying. In this alternate reality, you have a world where everyone is completely honest and no one lies, until one man gains the ability to lie. He uses this gift to become rich and famous. But there was a moment where he was at his mother's death bed that changed everything. She was scared of having no afterlife and he told her a story of what would happen to her after she dies: everyone would receive a mansion, you would have all the food you could eat, etc. The doctors here this and they believe it too because there is no such thing as a lie.

The rest of the movie involves this man, who speaks to the man in the clouds, explaining religion to a world without religion. The way that the writers of the movie play this out is very interesting. This man went into his apartment, and wrote out 10 rules to govern society.

What were some of your ten rules?

Everything you need to know are written on these pizza boxes:



- Number 1: There is a man in the sky who controls everything
- Number 2: When you die, you don't disappear into an eternity of nothingness. Instead, you go to a really great place.
- Number 3: In that place, everyone will get a mansion.

- Number 4: When you die, all the people you love will be there.
- Number 5: When you die, there will be free ice cream for everyone, all day and all night, whatever flavors you can think of.
- Number 6: If you do bad things, you won't get to go to this great place when you die (You get three chances).
- Number 9: The man in the sky who controls everything decides if you go to the good place or the bad place. He also decides who lives and who dies.
- Number 10: Even if the man in the sky does bad things to you, he makes up for it with an eternity of good stuff after you die.

But this wasn't the end, he goes on to explain and amend them because they didn't necessarily work for everyone. There is a funny part of the scene when everyone starts asking him questions and then the screen goes blank and says, 2 hours later. And still, he is answering the same questions.

In many ways, we take the 10 commandments for granted. It is not easy to state 10 of the most important commandments that will rule society.

The Asseret HaDibrot (the ten utterances), according to the mishnah, were originally included in the daily Temple service. Outside the Temple, the people also wanted to include it in the daily service, but they were forbidden to do so in order to refute the contention of heretical sects (minim) that only the Ten Commandments were divinely given (Ber. 12a).

The midrash writes that all the 613 commandments were written on the tablets in the space between the Ten Commandments (Song R. 5:14, no. 2).

As a result, the Decalogue does not form part of the statutory daily liturgy. The only emphasis given to it is that the congregation rises when it is read as part of the regular weekly portions (twice a year in the portions Yitro and Va-Ethannan) and on the festival of Shavuot.

We can see in our own lives here in America how seriously Christians take the Ten Commandments. There was even a court battle recently about whether to have the 10 commandments at a court house. So the Ten Commandments are important, but there are also many other commandments that are important.

There are many questions as to why we have the retelling of this account. First off, why would Moshe have to repeat the actual ten commandments? Why not just remind them about the revelation at Sinai? Also, as you can see, there are some major differences between the first telling and the second telling. Remember, the Torah describes the words

as being “graven” (harut) on the tablets. It's really hard to change words that are graven on a tablet. But more so, these words must have been graven on the people's mouths. These are the 10 most important laws given, so they must have been known.

Let's look at them next to each other.

So why change them?

The Maharal, a famous commentator, writes that the difference in the two versions are not about content, but about where they came from. He tells us that the first four books of the Torah are written from the perspective of the giver, but this book, Deuteronomy, is written from the perspective of the receiver, Moshe being the principal receiver.

If we look at the two versions, we can see that the changes in the second telling help make the commandments more meaningful for those who are to follow it.

Let's look at the Shabbat commandment (5th)

Exodus - “for in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.”

Deuteronomy – Remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Creation is a hard idea to truly grasp (does anyone remember birth?), but the personal experience of being freed from slavery deeply penetrates your core.

The 10 commandments in the Invention of Lying have a theme: if you do good things, you will have an eternity of good stuff after you die, in other words, it's about the afterlife. Olam HaBah is important, but that is not what these laws are about. They are about our relationship with God here on Earth.

In our parashah, before we hear about revelation, we are given a pasuk that our Gabbais say before our Torah service:

וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בִּיקוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם הַיּוֹם (ד:

"You, who remained attached to the Lord your God, are all alive today." (Deut. 4:4)

What does it mean 'to be attached to God'? As the Talmud (*Sotah* 14a) asks, is it possible to cleave to the *Shechinah*, God's Divine Presence, which the Torah (Deut. 4:24) describes as a "*consuming fire*"?

The Sages answered:

"Rather, this means you should cleave to God's attributes. Just as God clothed the naked [Adam and Eve], so too you should cloth the naked. Just as God visited the sick [Abraham after his circumcision], so too you should visit the sick. Just as God consoled the mourners

[Isaac after Abraham's death], so too you should console the mourners. Just as God buried the dead [Moses], so too you should bury the dead."

Rav Kook wrote about this line:

This idea - that we can only attach ourselves to God by imitating His attributes - is a fundamental concept in Judaism. Any other understanding of cleaving to God implies some degree of anthropomorphism or idolatry.

The very existence of ideals, holy aspirations, and ethics in the world and in the human soul mandates the existence of a Divine Source. From where else could they come? Our awareness of the Source of these ideals elevates them, revealing new wellsprings of light and pure life.

I know we think that the 10 commandments are a given, but can you imagine a world without these base rules? This world existed before our Torah was given to us.

The midrash tells us that we should look at the tablets of the Ten Commandments as a wedding ring, symbolizing the marriage of God and the Jewish people. After 40 years, we see that a lot has changed between the relationship between Moses, God and the Jewish people.

This tells us that our relationship is constantly changing, but our obligations to each other stay the same. These mitzvot, as Moshe taught us, are to touch the very core of who we are.

We cling to God in every generation, and when we cling to God by doing these Jewish things called mitzvot, not just 10 of them, but many more; and when we do them, we elevate ourselves and the world around us, we add meaning and purpose to our lives, and in this way we TRULY LIVE.

וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בְּיְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם הַיּוֹם (ד:

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