

The Goal of the Ten Commandments

Think not these laws mere rules set down.

Indeed, they pace the distance

Which raises Man from depths to heights-

Think not these laws but rules-they are

The essence of existence!¹

Why do we emphasize the Ten Commandments? My Senior Rabbi in Tucson taught the following when he did World Wide Wrap: the 613 commandments can be thought of as $6 + 1 + 3$, making 10. The 613 are emanated in the 10. Similarly the 10 commandments can be thought of as $1 + 0$, making the 1 true G-d. The 10 commandments thus emanate the 1 G-d.

Often we erroneously look at the 10 commandments as the blueprint for human existence. Rather than doing so, we need to look at what they signify. There are 10 commandments as a logical, sequential order in how we should act in this world. It begins with the belief in 1 God, which presupposes that one does not believe in any others. If we

¹ Lucille Frenkel, "The Ten Commandments," in *A Jewish Adventure* (Milwaukee, WI: The Eternity Press, 1983), p. 159.

believe in a Creator of the universe, we must hold His Name to the highest of standards, never taking it in vain. Not only do we value His name, but we must act in His example, resting after 6 days of creative work. We further demonstrate this not only by following His example but by honoring those who are made in His image, the most central of whom being one's parents, who are partners with G-d in our creation. Once we honor them, we also acknowledge that each person must be treated with great dignity and respect. We therefore cannot murder another, who is also made in the image of G-d. If we honor that each person is made in the image of G-d, we cannot have relationships with those with whom we are not supposed to. We also would not steal from another in the image of G-d nor would we lie about him/her. Last but certainly not least, we would not be jealous of his/her achievements, instead appreciating what we have and counting our blessings.

The goal of the 10 commandments is not a list of rules but a mindset for **daily living**. It is to understand that each of us has a uniqueness about us, as we are made in G-d's image. Similarly, each of

us has to respect the uniqueness of all the others who are made in G-d's image. Through a mindset of turning to G-d and remembering the Creator's role in our lives, we keep on the straight-and-narrow.

I hope as we continue with Shavuot, our holiday celebrating the giving of the Torah, that we will take these lessons to heart and that we will continue to explore the Ten Commandments not as laws in and of themselves but rather as a theology for how to maximize our daily living.

*For the Jew to choose life
Is not a simple matter,
For life is precisely that substance
Which the nations have consistently denied to the Jew,*

And what is life to the Jew?

*And what is life to the Jew
But every moment of lifebreath
Governed and evaluated by a system of law*

God-revealed in a world God-ruled-

And God,

God is never

A very simple matter.²

² Lucille Frenkel, "The Ten Commandments," in *A Jewish Adventure* (Milwaukee, WI: The Eternity Press, 1983), p. 158.