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"HOW MANY ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?"

If an election were held among the peoples of the world to determine which was the most popular document in the universe, there is no doubt but that most of the votes would be cast in favor of the Ten Commandments. It is the recognized cornerstone of the world's great religions. It is a code which is accepted even by many atheists. It is the model for many great literary works. It is preached, and preached about, more than any other comparable document.

Yet, curiously, the Decalogue or "asseress ha'dibros" crops up in a Jew's talk only in those weeks when the Sidras of Yissro and Va'eschanan are read, for then the Decalogue too is read. Otherwise, the Ten Commandments are a relatively insignificant part of the Jewish religious vocabulary. At a "Eriss Milah" we mention Torah and Good Deeds - not the Ten Commandments. To the parents of a young boy starting on his school career, we express our wishes for a future of Torah - nothing is said of the Decalogue. And to the Bar Mitzvah, unless his birthday be in the week of Parshass Yissro, we speak of Tradition, and education and home and Torah - not of the Asseress Ha'dibross. Now, why is that? Why <sup>despite his observance of, not</sup> does the Traditional Jew <sup>an abnormal attraction</sup> have such ~~a relative apathy~~ for the Ten Commandments which his deviationist fellow Jews ~~do not~~ have? Why does the Orthodox Rabbi preach about the Ten Com'ts so much <sup>less</sup> ~~more~~ infrequently than does the Conservative or Reform rabbi?

The answer is, that the Decalogue <sup>as it is commonly understood</sup> ~~as such~~ is too simple a formula. There is something mighty suspicious about ten easy rules to this complex business of life. The Traditional Jew, perhaps because of his Tradition, or because of his background in scholarship or because of his grasp of reality, is keenly aware <sup>of the</sup> ~~that~~ fallacies of over-simplification, of its tragically disappointing results and even its heretical consequences. Life is a harsh, intricate, complicated affair, and ten <sup>rules</sup> ~~commandments~~ <sup>by themselves</sup> ~~alone~~ are hardly sufficient to solve all its formidable problems.

Our Rabbis already recorded a protest against this <sup>Misunderstanding of</sup> ~~over-emphasis on~~ the Ten Commandments as the wherewithal of religion, as the ten solitary steps with which to solve all problems and cure all ailments. The Talmud tells us that in the Temple, during the Shacharith Services, it was the custom to recite the Decalogue before the Shma. But then the Rabbis decided to

abrogate this traditional recitation: לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת הַשְּׁמִיטָה וְיִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת הַשְּׁמִיטָה

the recital of the Decalogue as a special prayer was abrogated because of the heretics, who

pointed to this recitation of the Decalogue as proof that it was the only important part of

Torah. This decision against the saying of the Decalogue was accepted by the generations, and even until this very day the Ten Commandments are **not** part of our liturgy. And all because of the <sup>( 'J'N</sup>, those ~~heretics~~ who over-emphasized these ten mitzvot to the detriment of all the others, those who sought too easy a cure to too great a problem, those <sup>who</sup> believed to the point of heresy. The Ten Commandments, by themselves, the Rabbis mean to tell us, are by far insufficient.

And our age, my friends, is distinguished by precisely this malady of oversimplification. Ours is an age where attempts are made to solve all knotty moral problems and ethical questions by a few easy steps, by a "rule of thumb". For in what age, other than one <sup>which</sup> looks for simple and childish rules, could a book like "How to Win Friends and Influence People" gain its phenomenal popularity? - - - several disgustingly easy rules on how to become a social success and develop magnetic personality. In what other age could such a "tzimess" be made about a book like "Peace of Mind" which reduces all of Judaism to a few neat psychological principles? For all of our Western Culture is colored by Christianity, a religion which won its millions of converts by boiling down Judaism to its easiest regulations, by accepting the Ten Commandments - and even that not completely - and rejecting most of the rest of the Torah. The sagest advice our contemporaries seek after is that currently available in most of our popular digest magazines - - 10 ways to Happied Married Life, 3 ways to Beat Cancer, 5 ways to Win the Love of Your Children, and other such nonsense.

<sup>despite our unbounded reverence for the T.C.,</sup>  
No, my friends, <sup>on this matter</sup> we must not over-emphasize the ~~Ten Commandments~~ out of all proportion. It is not consistent with the intricacy of life and the complexity of moral and religious experience. And it can lead to outright heresy ~~and degeneration of decency~~. But lest you leave the services today with the impression that the Rabbi this morning preached a sermon against the Ten Commandments, let me assure you that I am in good company. The Rambam, Maimonides, <sup>on this matter</sup> has preceded me, only he was even more emphatic about it. He incorporated his opinion in a strongly-worded legal response to someone who asked him whether it is proper to rise when the Reader reads the Decalogue in the Torah. You know, of course, that in this synagogue and in most synagogues, the congregation rises when the Decalogue is read. However, Maimonides believed that this was against the spirit of Jewish Law. Allow me to quote to you part of his response in English translation: ( in arla )

"It is proper to abolish this tradition (of rising for the Decalogue) wherever it has taken hold, and to teach the people to sit, as they usually do.... in order that there should not result a degeneration of the pure faith...the heretical belief that one part of the Torah is superior to another, a belief which is wrong and evil and deplorable in the extreme..."

Maimonides, then, was also perturbed by this reliance on succinct formulas which results in naturally ignoring the rest of the Torah. And if such a reliance or preference is expressed by rising during the reading of a specific portion of the Torah, then it should be stopped.

The consensus of Jewish thought, then, is that there is no sufficient concise formula or rule which can serve as a key to all life or religion. We may say, with George Bernard Shaw, that the only Golden Rule is -- that there are no Golden Rules.

Yet, I am certain that there are certain questions of which you are aware which remain unanswered. You may wonder: why, then, were the Ten Commandments given separately? You may rightfully ask me: why, if so, was the giving of the Decalogue accompanied by all that <sup>by the elaborate preparatory, by the strange celestial phenomena, by the aura of holiness,</sup> ~~universal dramatic~~ flourish, and the fearful display of the elements which reached its climax in

"anochi"? Obviously, there is something to the T.C. that we have thus far failed to mention.

The answer to that question was already given to us by the great Jewish philosophers. Philo, followed by the Gaon Saadia and the Abarbanel and other beacons of Jewish thinking, insist that the Ten Commandments are more than ten. They believe, very reasonably, that in this case, ten equals 613. And this, according to the laws of religious arithmetic, is a great truth. You see, what they wanted to tell us was that the Ten Commandments mean more than what they say; they are more than a list of ten mitzvos -- they contain, in essence, all 613. They include <sup>P15 N7</sup> hints, of all the other commandments. The entire Torah, all its mitzvos, are latent, in capsule form, in the Decalogue. Thus, for instance, the prohibition of idolatry includes the kernels of all laws relating to idol worship and ritual, and all laws, <sup>It prohibits the worship of gold and pleasure & beauty.</sup> which according to these thinkers, were promulgated as safe-guards against idolatry. "Thou shalt not steal" includes the prohibition of robbing, usury, interest, <sup>graft & influence-peddling</sup> and other ~~torts~~. "Lo sinaff" implies all injunctions against adultery, incest, <sup>immodesty, unchastity and all</sup> and other forms of immoral corruption. With this in mind, we can equate the Decalogue with the whole Torah, and therefore understand its Biblical eminence, <sup>& the great's holy events attending its giving.</sup> Without this realization that the T.C. contain the seeds of all 613 commandments, they are simply ten of the many mitzvos of the Torah, -- not easy formulas to a get-pious-quick type of religion.

The Talmud tells an interesting story of a pagan who approached the great scholar Shammai and said to him: *ה'ייתי ע"מ ליהנות ביהדותך*, "Convert me to Judaism, on the one condition that you teach me the key to the entire Torah during the time that I can <sup>balance</sup> myself on one foot. The pagan wanted an easy formula, a simple rule which will lubricate his entry into Heaven, something like the abracadabra he had pronounced before his idol in his idolatrous days. And Shammai's reaction was - *והיה רגליו רחוקות*, he pushed him away with the measuring-rod, or the constructor's yard-stick, which was in his hand. With this Shammai indicated that any simple rules, like the Ten Commandments as they read literally, are far insufficient. They are like the architect's measuring instrument, they can indicate the limits of faith, but not the body; they can indicate size, but not depth; they can tell you where to build, but not <sup>what</sup> kind of material to build with; they can give you a very general idea of Judaism, but you can not be a Jew with them alone, just as you cannot build with a yard-stick alone.

The pagan then approached the other great religious teacher of that age, Hillel. Hillel, too, did not believe in choosing one mitzva above another, in facile prescriptions, in golden rules. But he knew the mind of this pagan, he understood his background, his pagan theology of simplicity. And so Hillel showed his great pedagogic genius. He told him: I'll give you a rule even easier than the Ten Commandments; even easier than "Love your neighbor as thyself" - and that is, don't hate your neighbor, *אין רשע*, do not do to him what you would not have done to yourself. The pagan was happy beyond description - here it was, an easy cook-book recipe for Judaism. But then Hillel added something - *ואין רשע - כל השאר*, all the rest of Torah is commentary; without Torah this principle cannot be understood, it is meaningless. *אין רשע* - Go ahead, my friend, and study that Torah, if you would understand the rule. <sup>+ all the commandments include it.</sup> For the rule I told you includes all of the commandments. Without them, you remain a pagan, a heathen, an infidel.

In the same way, my friends, the Ten Commandments can become the guiding light of our lives only if *אין רשע*, if they are taken not as ten easy rules, but as ten classes of laws which include all of the Torah which is its essential and vital commentary. To the question "how many are the Ten Commandments?", we must answer "613". There are no easy roads to the Good Life. There are only many hard, tough, unpaved paths - but they are steady, sure and certain, and they lead - to greater, holier and loftier glory. <sup>Benediction - O G-d, give to these who desire Thee the will & the ability to fulfill all Thy commandments. As for the others, let them abide at least by Thy Ten Commandments. Amen.</sup>