

THE BIRTH OF THE BLUES

by Rabbi Label Lam

And G-d spoke all these statements saying: "I am Hashem, your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." "You shall have no other gods before Me." (Shemos 20: 1-3)

These are the first two declarations of the famous "Ten Commandments". What is the importance and necessity of the second statement? After The Almighty introduces that He is G-d, why then do we need to know that there is no other to be had? Who would think of such a foolish thing? Why is there an admonition against idolatry immediately following the bold and open revelation of The Creator Himself?

Our classic commentators tell us that the first of the big ten is the head pin, the impetus for all the positive, active Mitzvos. The second is the driving force behind all the negative or prohibitive Mitzvos. How does that help us?

In a series of classes titled, "The Ten Commandments of Parenting" we used a practical example, an every day dynamic for parents and kids that may help us understand what happens between man and G-d, as well. As listed in the outline, the second commandment for parents is to "have a unified front". Don't let anybody, not even kids to squeeze in between. Let's understand!

Little Jack comes running into the house after school. He waves quickly and casually "Hi!" to his father who's planted there in his seat on the couch. Father stops Jack and asks him where he's off to in such a hurry. Jack informs his father that he's going to get his ball and his glove, his bat and his cleats and join the other guys out on the field just now.

Father shakes his head solemnly and reminds Jack of their prior agreement. "Last night was your aunt's wedding you were up late. The deal was that tonight it would be homework, dinner and early bed!" Dad says firmly. Jack slinks off deeply disappointed dragging his feet in protest and closes a few doors a bit louder than usual.

Five minutes later, though, that same sullen fellow goes running gleefully past his father in the other direction with all his baseball paraphernalia. "Where are you going?" booms Father, amazed at the temerity of his little son. With a confident smile Jack replies, "It's OK Father, I asked Mom!" as he scoots out.

When our father, our boss, our superior commands us to do something it's hard to avoid getting the job done. If The G-d who spoke to the entire Jewish Nation on Mount Sinai also tells me to bind my

head and arm with little black boxes and straps, I'll feel compelled to take my blood pressure every day simply because I was told to perform that specific task.

However, if I am told not to do something, something that I have a built in desire to do, then the devilish genius within begins to search feverishly for a second opinion. Let me find or create a god, a priest, a rabbi, a religion that lets do what I want conscience free. I need it to sleep well through the night.

When parents show a unified front, the word "no" means "no"! That's the greatest gift a parent can give their child. It's known that there are in fact 613 Mitzvos in the Torah. There are 248 activity or positive Mitzvos and 365 inhibiting Mitzvos. We can see from the proportion that there are more things a person ought not do than there are things that a person ought to do to perfect themselves. Imagine you are sending your daughter or son away for a year to some far away place. Which side of the list will be longer and more emphatic, the "always" or the "nevers"?

Maybe now we can understand, that the deep and passionate drive for idolatry is rooted in the need to sanitize and make legal otherwise forbidden behaviors. Even for adults, "no", is a healthy and necessary vocabulary word. It's a moral muscle that requires a lifetime of exercise.

The genius unleashed in avoiding that conflict of higher and lower wills is the source of much pain and anxiety all over the world today. When children drive a wedge between parents, shopping for lenient opinions, issue by issue and when those first two grandiose statements of introduction are consciously or subconsciously pried apart, that is the entrée to classic idolatry and it is also the birth of the blues.

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