

My friends, I have many things I want to touch on in a short time tonight: Cardiac Jews, Letterman Jews, the holiest and most important day on the Jewish calendar, what we stand for as Conservative Jews, the Nine Commandments, and a pet peeve of mine concerning a word that is regularly misused in English, not necessarily in that order. So with so much to cover in so little time, I will jump right in, beginning with Cardiac Jews and Letterman Jews.

Until Rabbi Kahn, *alav hashalom*, came to the Beth El in which I grew up, there was another wonderful rabbi named Harry B. Kellman, *alav hashalom*. Rabbi Kellman used to talk about Cardiac Jews—the people who would say to him, "I never come to shul, Rabbi, but I feel it in my heart." Cardiac Jews.

Letterman Jews is a term I coined myself. If you are familiar with David Letterman's TV show, you know that for

as long as it has been around, one of its nightly features is some sort of Top Ten List. Letterman Jews are the ones who say, "I don't bother with all the unimportant stuff. My religion is the Ten Commandments. That's all I need." They have reduced Judaism to the Torah's Top Ten List. They are the Letterman Jews. My grandfather, may he rest in peace, was a Letterman Jew. By his own admission, he abandoned the Orthodoxy of his shtetle upbringing to become a Letterman Jew. His entire religion was the Ten Commandments.

But the fact is, my friends, that most Letterman Jews are exactly like my beloved grandfather. He professed to keep the Ten Commandments, but in reality, his religion was the Nine Commandments.

All of you have heard of the Ten Commandments, but I would bet a nickel that you are far less familiar with the

Nine Commandments, so let me run down the list for you, condensing some of the longer ones to their essence:

1. I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.

2. You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.

3. You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.

4. Honor your father and your mother.

5. You shall not murder.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

7. You shall not steal.

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Now truth be told, a Letterman Jew may or may not believe that God brought us out of Egypt, but they certainly do not believe in more than one god. The third commandment does not mean we are not allowed to say "Oh my God." It means we are not allowed to commit evil in God's name, like cutting off the head of an innocent man while shouting "Allahu akhbar," God is great. Letterman Jews never do that.

A good Letterman Jew honors his parents, is not a murderer or thief, and does not cheat on his or her spouse. Letterman Jews do not commit perjury, and theoretically at least, they don't covet what belongs to others. Letterman Jews keep the Nine Commandments, but Letterman has a Top Ten list, not a Top Nine list, and Judaism has the Ten Commandments, not the Nine Commandments. What is the difference between the two? What commandment do Letterman Jews tend to forget? The one that is the real number four: Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

Let's go on to the holiest, most important day on the Jewish calendar. It's Yom Kippur, right? Perhaps. But note that no holiday, no ritual practice, is included in the Ten Commandments except Shabbat. The Ten Commandments do not tell us to remember the Day of Atonement and keep it holy. They tell us to remember and

observe Shabbat, to keep Shabbat holy. The only justification for calling Yom Kippur the holiest day of the Jewish year is that the Torah refers to it as שבת שבתון, the Sabbath of Sabbaths. But it is Shabbat, not Rosh Hashanah nor Yom Kippur, that made God's Top Ten List.

For us, as Conservative Jews, we must know that our movement believes strongly in two essential planks in our platform: Shabbat and kashrut. Observing the Sabbath and keeping kosher are at the heart of Conservative Judaism. Do all Conservative Jews pay at least some attention to Shabbat and kashrut? Not all, no, at least not yet. People do grow spiritually over time, so that may change, and we should try to help it change. But in order to do that, we must remove a word from our lexicon when it comes to Jewish observance, or if we do not remove it entirely from our lexicon, we must at least use it correctly. It is one of the biggest obstacles to spiritual growth. The word is hypocrisy.

This is a big pet peeve of mine. People have said to me with the deepest sincerity things like "I can't come to shul on Shabbat, Rabbi—I go shopping Saturday afternoons. It would be hypocritical." Or, "I can't light Shabbat candles at home—we go the movies on Friday nights. I would be a hypocrite if I did something to mark Shabbat and then not fully keep it." And out of the understandable, sincere desire not to be hypocrites, they do not make room for any sort of Shabbos observance in their lives.

My friends, you already have had a taste of my passion for clarity. This is an issue that cries out for clarity. Hypocrisy, which I detest, is claiming to have moral or religious standards that you really do not have. If you pretend you are fully Shabbat observant when you are not, that is hypocrisy. But if you openly light Shabbat candles, have a Shabbat dinner with your family and friends, and then openly go to a movie, you are not a hypocrite, you are

merely inconsistent. Who among us is not? Do you think I have my religious and spiritual life so well worked out that there are no inconsistencies in it? I only wish I had things so well worked out. But I understand the difference between inconsistency and hypocrisy. If Judaism, or Shabbat observance alone, becomes an all or nothing choice, far more will choose nothing. I know that I am preaching to the choir—the very fact that you are here listening to me means you make room for Shabbat in your life. Perhaps you can help me spread the word that adding just a bit of Shabbat to one's life is anything but hypocrisy. It's a step on a spiritual journey, even if the ultimate destination is unknown.

So I've covered all the things I mentioned in the beginning of my talk, and now I will conclude with a little story. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz is a world renowned scholar and teacher. He lectures and teaches mainly in Jerusalem. He was contacted by a secular Israeli Jew who said that he was



interested in learning about Talmud, and wanted to attend Rabbi Steinsaltz's Talmud class. But, he warned Rabbi Steinsaltz, he was not an observant Jew. In fact, he said, he ate bacon for breakfast on Shabbat.

Rabbi Steinsaltz asked a question. Did the man eat bacon for breakfast every day, or only on Shabbos? The answer was that the bacon was a Shabbos only treat. The man explained that he did not have time for a nice breakfast during the work week, but on Shabbat, when he was off, he had time and so he ate bacon only Shabbat. Rabbi Steinsaltz's response to the man touched my heart and soul, and I hope it will touch you as well. Here was the response of an ultra-Orthodox rabbi to a secular Jew who eats bacon only on Shabbat:

He said that a Jew should do something to make Shabbos special, and this man was doing that. Rabbi Steinsaltz said that of course the man's way of making Shabbos

special, eating bacon, was not a way that Rabbi Steinsaltz would ever use. But, he reassured the man, at least he made Shabbat special in his own way, and he was welcome to attend the Talmud class.

My friends, if a rabbi like Adin Steinsaltz can be so welcoming and non-judgmental, so can we. In fact, we *must* be. One of the reasons for Chabad's worldwide success is their nonjudgemental willingness to embrace every Jew no matter how much or little the person observes. They start from wherever they are, and they grow from there.

Let that be something we learn from Chabad. As the choir to whom I am preaching tonight, I urge you to help me bring more and more of our people out to shul on Shabbat. This means reassuring others that no matter what else they might do on Friday night or Saturday, honoring the Sabbath is not hypocritical. It might mean reassuring them

that something that you yourself would never do on Shabbat is still no reason to cut Shabbat out of their lives. Anything one does to make Shabbat special and different from the other six days is a positive step. Just like the Jew eating bacon on Shabbos and studying Talmud with Adin Steinsaltz, be honest about who you are as you travel your spiritual path and be as inconsistent as you want. You might find your inconsistencies make you feel more connected to Judaism than ever before. I hope you'll help me to help others to do the same.