

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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Ought, Can, Don't

A famous philosophical principle comes to us from Immanuel Kant — 'ought implies can.' In other words, you cannot suggest that someone ought to do something unless in fact, they can do it. This same principle is expressed by the Rabbis when they state that one is not allowed to make a rule that the community cannot abide.

The philosopher and wit Sidney Morgenbesser, reflecting on Kant's principle that "ought implies can" joked that in Jewish ethics, "can implies don't." It is certainly true that much is forbidden to one who follows Jewish law. But inside every limitation hides freedom. On

Shabbat not spending money creates time for family, for reading and reflection, a freedom missing during the busy week. If you keep kosher, it frees you to be mindful about what you eat, and connected to both community and Jewish history.

Restrictions can of course be overdone, and prove destructive. But the hedge is more beautiful for being trimmed and the picture for being framed. In a free society we underestimate how liberating it can be to place limits on oneself, and often do not understand that only the one who can say 'no' is truly free.

Violence Is Worse Than Blasphemy

Rabbi Wolpe's new book *David: The Divided Heart* is available now.