

THE #1 BESTSELLER

JORDAN B.
PETERSON

12 RULES
FOR LIFE

AN ANTIDOTE TO CHAOS

“One of the most important thinkers to emerge on
the world stage for many years.” **THE SPECTATOR**

FOREWORD BY NORMAN DOIDGE



Jordan B. Peterson

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An Antidote for Chaos

Foreword by Norman Doidge
Illustrations by Ethan Van Sriver

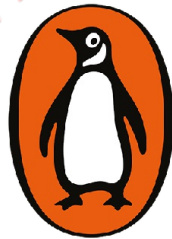


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Foreword

Rules? More rules? Really? Isn't life complicated enough, restricting enough, without abstract rules that don't take our unique, individual situations into account? And given that our brains are plastic, and all develop differently based on our life experiences, why even expect that a few rules might be helpful to us all?

People don't clamour for rules, even in the Bible ... as when Moses comes down the mountain, after a long absence, bearing the tablets inscribed with ten commandments, and finds the Children of Israel in revelry. They'd been Pharaoh's slaves and subject to his tyrannical regulations for four hundred years, and after that Moses subjected them to the harsh desert wilderness for another forty years, to purify them of their slavishness. Now, free at last, they are unbridled, and have lost all control as they dance wildly around an idol, a golden calf, displaying all manner of corporeal corruption.

"I've got some good news ... and I've got some bad news," the lawgiver yells to them. "Which do you want first?"

"The good news!" the hedonists reply.

"I got Him from fifteen commandments down to ten!"

"Hallelujah!" cries the unruly crowd. "And the bad?"

"Adultery is still in."

So rules there will be—but, please, not too many. We are ambivalent about rules, even when we know they are good for us. If we are spirited souls, if we have character, rules seem restrictive, an affront to our sense of agency and our pride in working out our own lives. Why should we be judged according to another's rule?

And judged we are. After all, God didn't give Moses "The Ten Suggestions," he gave Commandments; and if I'm a free agent, my first reaction to a command might just be that nobody, not even God, tells me what to do, even if it's good for me. But the story of the golden calf also reminds us that without rules we quickly become slaves to our passions—and there's nothing freeing about that.

And the story suggests something more: unchaperoned, and left to our own untutored judgment, we are quick to aim low and worship qualities that are beneath us—in this case, an artificial animal that brings out our own animal instincts in a completely unregulated way. The old Hebrew story makes it clear how the ancients felt about our prospects for civilized behaviour in the absence of rules that seek to elevate our gaze and raise our standards.

One neat thing about the Bible story is that it doesn't simply list its rules, as lawyers or legislators or administrators might; it embeds them in a dramatic tale that illustrates why we need them, thereby making them easier to understand. Similarly, in this book Professor Peterson doesn't just propose his twelve rules, he tells stories, too, bringing to bear his knowledge of many fields as he illustrates and explains why the best rules do not ultimately restrict us but instead facilitate our goals and make for fuller, freer lives.

The first time I met Jordan Peterson was on September 12, 2004, at the home of two mutual friends, TV producer Wodek Szemberg and medical internist Estera Bekier. It was Wodek's birthday party. Wodek and Estera are Polish émigrés who grew up within the Soviet empire, where it was understood that many topics were off limits, and that casually