

## Educator's Guide

# Introduction, the Ten Commandments

While you may think you know about the Ten Commandments, this series is nothing like what they covered in Hebrew School. Join us on a journey to reimagine these centuries-old laws as a living, breathing guide to everyday Jewish life, tradition and society.

[Link to video](#)

## Big Ideas

- 1.** The Ten Commandments serve as a foundational framework through which all of the Torah's Mitzvot (commandments) can be categorized, revealing the key principles that guide Jewish life and ethical behavior.
- 2.** By looking deeper at the ideas behind each of the Ten Commandments, we can find key concepts that teach how to live a meaningful and fulfilling life.
- 3.** The Ten Commandments have specific relevance and meaning to Jews living in today's world.

## Essential Questions

- 1.** How might the ideas and concepts behind the Ten Commandments guide us towards living a fuller Jewish and more meaningful life?
- 2.** How might the Ten Commandments reflect the Torah's 613 commandments and key principles?
- 3.** How can we strike a balance between emphasizing key concepts of the Ten Commandments and recognizing the importance of all Mitzvot in the Torah?

## Discussion Questions

- 1. Judaism's Top 10:** If you were to choose a top 10 list of principles, statements, or commands in Judaism, which would you come up with? Look at this [list](#) of the 10 commandments. Which of these would you have left out? What others would you have included? Explain your answer.
- 2. Lost in translation:** This video series argues that translating the “Aseret HaDibrot” as “the Ten Commandments” is a mistake. Using [Mentimeter](#), ask your students how they might translate the title of the “Aseret HaDibrot”. Would they use commands, statements, concepts, essential truths, or something else? What are the practical ramifications of each of these translations, and how does each definition change the way we view the Ten Commandments?
- 3. To sit or to stand?** The Talmud in [Berakhot 12a](#), states that during the time of the Temple, the Ten Commandments would be read out loud, as part of daily prayers. Later on, this practice was abolished “מִפְּנֵי תַרְעוּמַת הַמֵּינִין”, “because of the claims of the heretics”, who would say that only these commands were given at Sinai, and not anything else. This debate continues today around the question of whether one should stand or sit when the Ten Commandments are read as part of the weekly Torah portion. [Maimonides](#) felt strongly ([Responsa 263](#)) that the Talmud’s reasoning still applied and one should sit. However, many synagogues have the custom to stand when hearing the Ten Commandments, to reflect how the Jewish people stood at Sinai when receiving the Torah.
  - Do you think that Maimonides and the Talmudic concern of “the claims of the heretics” is still relevant today? Would you stand or sit when hearing the Ten Commandments?
  - What are the dangers of highlighting certain principles of the Torah over others? How might you counter this claim? If these principles are not more important, then why highlight them?
  - Share a time where your school, camp, or family, highlighted certain principles above others (for example: a good character trait of the week, or certain school rules). Did this lead to concerns that only these concepts were important? Why or why not?

# Learning Activities

## 1. Lesson plan

- Lesson plan: Use our ready-made lesson plan on this commandment [HERE](#).
- Make your own: Use this [blank template](#) to help you choose UED resources for your lesson based on Understanding by Design.

## 2. Seeing Judaism in 3D: Hand out 3D glasses to the students (you can order relatively cheap ones [online](#)) and use them to look at 3D images (you can find many examples in a [Google image search](#)).

- Have students write down what they are able to see while wearing 3D glasses and compare it to what the images look like without them. What has changed?
- How might this serve as an analogy for what the Aseret HaDibrot can add to our perception of Judaism? Ask the students to list examples as part of their answers (note: this exercise can be helpful before one views the video series as well as a summative activity after finishing the series).
- Ask students to share another time in their life when they felt something acted as “3D glasses”, giving them the opportunity for a new perspective. Ask for both Jewish and secular examples.

## 3. 10 Dibrot or 613 Mitzvot? The video referenced an idea by [Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenberg](#), that the use of the term “Dibrot”, or “statements”, instead of commandments or “Mitzvot”, means that all the foundational principles of the entire Torah are contained in the Ten Commandments (See [HaKtav V’HaKabbala, Devarim 4:13](#)). This idea is also mentioned by [Rabbi Saadia Gaon](#) (see [Rashi’s commentary on Exodus 24:12](#)).

- First, write each of the Ten Commandments on separate large post-it notes and post them around your classroom. Then, divide the students up into groups, and give each group 10 Mitzvot from [this list of the 613 Mitzvot](#) (you can choose the ones you feel to be the most meaningful or relevant to your students or life today, or choose at random). Each group should stick their Mitzvot on the post-it notes for the Ten Commandments that they feel contain their Mitzvah.
- Then, ask each group to share where they posted 3 of their Mitzvot and their reasoning. See if any other groups agree or disagree.

- Finally, ask the students if they agree or disagree with the idea of Rabbi Mecklenberg that was shared in the video. Did their opinion change after this activity?

**4. Ritual Mitzvot vs interpersonal Mitzvot:** Traditionally, commentators have divided up the Ten Commandments into two categories: the first five as *Bein Adam l'Makom* (between people and G-d) and the last five as *Bein Adam l'Chavero* (between people and people).

- Ask your students: Do you agree with this breakdown ([see this source from Nachmanides](#))? Do any of the commandments not seem to fit with their side or category?
- Is one category viewed more importantly than the other (ex: is one listed first, does one have more Mitzvot in its list...)?
- What takeaways do you have from the Ten Commandments reflecting both these categories?

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| <p><b><u>Nachmanides, Exodus 20:13</u></b><br/>         And behold, the Ten Statements (Commandments) are five for the glory of the Creator and five for the benefit of man - as Honor your father and your mother is [for] the glory of God, as for the glory of the Creator did He command to honor the father that participated in the formation [of the child]. And five remain for man - for his needs and for his benefits.<br/>         (Translation: Sefaria)</p> | <p><b><u>רמב"ן שמות כ"ג</u></b><br/>         וְהִנֵּה עֲשָׂרַת הַדְּבָרוֹת הַמִּשְׁנָה בְּכָבוֹד הַבוֹרָא<br/>         וְחִמּוּשָׁה לְטוֹבַת הָאָדָם, כִּי כְבֹּד אֶת אָבִיו<br/>         כְּבוֹד הָאֵל, כִּי לְכָבוֹד הַבוֹרָא צִוָּה לְכָבוֹד הָאָב<br/>         הַמְשִׁתֵּתֵף בִּיצִירָה, וְנִשְׁאָרוֹ הַמִּשְׁנָה לָאָדָם<br/>         בְּצָרְכּוֹ וְטוֹבָתּוֹ:</p> |
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## Reflection Questions

- 1. Seeing beneath the surface:** One theme of this video series is that beneath the surface of each of the Ten Commandments lies a wealth of Jewish wisdom and resources that speak broadly about how to live meaningful lives.
  - What are other examples of situations or times where at first glance you only see one thing, but after a deeper look, you see much more beneath the surface?

- Share a time in your life when by looking beneath the surface you were able to gain greater perspective?
2. **Connecting to the Ten Commandments:** Before watching any of the videos in this series, look at a list of the Ten Commandments and share which one speaks to you most and why. After watching the video series, reflect on this question again. Has your answer changed? Why or why not?
  3. **The challenge of being commanded:** In today's age where personal choice is highly valued, how comfortable are you with the idea of commandedness or obligation? Can commandedness or obligation be positive in certain situations? Learn the Talmudic text of [Shabbat 88a](#) and use the reflection questions below as prompts.

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| <p><b>Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88a</b></p> <p>The Gemara cites additional homiletic interpretations on the topic of the revelation at Sinai. The Torah says, "And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; <b>and they stood at the lowermost part of the mount</b>" (Exodus 19:17). <b>Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said:</b> the Jewish people actually stood beneath the mountain, and the verse <b>teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above the Jews like a tub, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial. Rav Aha bar Ya'akov said: From here there is a substantial challenge to the obligation to fulfill the Torah.</b> The Jewish people can claim that they were coerced into accepting the Torah, and it is therefore not binding. <b>Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written: "The Jews ordained, and took</b></p> | <p><b>תלמוד בבלי, שבת פח.</b></p> <p>"וַיִּתְּצֻבוּ בְּתַחְתִּית הָהָר", אָמַר רַב אֲבָדִימִי בַר חֲמָא בַר חֲסָא: מִלְמַד שְׂכַפָּה הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הָהָר כְּגִיגִית, וְאָמַר לָהֶם: אִם אַתֶּם מְקַבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוּטָב, וְאִם לֹא – שָׁם תִּהְיֶה קְבוּרַתְכֶם. אָמַר רַב אֲחָא בַר יַעֲקֹב: מִכָּאן מוֹדְעָא רַבָּה לְאוֹרְיֵיתָא. אָמַר רַבָּא: אִף עַל פִּי כֵן הַדּוֹר קִבְּלוּהָ בִּימֵי אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ, דְּכֹתִיב: "קִיְּמוּ וְקִבְּלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים" – קִיְּמוּ מֵה שְׁקִיבְלוּ כְּבָר.</p> |
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| <p><b>upon them</b>, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them” (Esther 9:27), and he taught: The Jews <b>ordained what they had already taken upon themselves</b> through coercion at Sinai. (Translation: Sefaria)</p> |  |
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- Share your reactions to how the Revelation at Sinai is described in the passage from Shabbat 88a. Is this how you picture the giving of the Ten Commandments?
- Does translating the Ten Commandments as principles or statements instead of commandments change the way you view the giving of the Torah or your relationship with these Mitzvot? Why or why not?

## Further Learning

1. [The Aseret Movement](#), *an organization devoted to embracing the Ten Commandments as the basis for Jewish life, for all Jews, irrespective of religious orientation or level of observance.*
2. Rabbi Benjamin Blech, [The 10 Commandments for Our Times](#) (Aish)
3. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag, [Parshat Kedoshim and the 10 Commandments](#) (The OU). *This article discusses how all of the Mitzvot of Parshat Kedoshim can be found in the Aseret HaDibrot.*
4. Prof. Eliezer Bashan, [Should We Stand During the Reading of the Ten Commandments?](#) (Bar-Ilan University).
5. Rabbi Alex Israel, [Parshat Yitro - The 10 Commandments](#). *This article discusses the breakdown of the Aseret HaDibrot between interpersonal and ritual Mitzvot.*
6. *Unpacked for Educators:*
  - [“The Big 10” Series](#)