

Ten Commandments: Old and New

Source Sheet by Rachel Buckman

Introduction

One name for Shavuot is זמן מתן תורתנו (the Time of the Giving of the Torah). The festival celebrates the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt. The Torah tells us that the people gathered around Mt. Sinai and God spoke to them. The mountain was covered with clouds, there was thunder and lightning, and the sound of the shofar was heard.

The verses below are from the book of Exodus and relate God's words at Mt. Sinai.

Read the text and answer the questions below.

Exodus 20:1-14

שמות כ"א-י"ד

(1) God spoke all these words, saying: (2) I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: (3) You shall have no other gods besides Me. (4) 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. (5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, (6) but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments. (7) 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. (8) Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. (9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. (11) For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it. (12) Honor your father and your mother that you may long endure on the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you. (13) You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (14) 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.

(א) וידבר אלקים את כל-הדברים האלה לאמר: (ב) אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים: (ג) לא יהיה לך אלקים אחרים על-פני: (ד) לא תעשה-לך פסל וכל-תמונה אשר בשמים ובעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ (ה) לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם כי אנכי ה' אלקיך אל קנא פקד עון אבות על-בנים על-שלישים ועל-רבעים לשנאי: (ו) ועשה חסד לאנשים לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי: (ז) לא תשא את-שם-ה' אלקיך לשוא כי לא ינקר ה' את אשר-ישא את-שמו לשוא: (ח) זכור את-יום השבת לקדשו (ט) ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל-מלאכתך (י) ויום השביעי שבת ואלה' אלקיך לא תעשה כל-מלאכה אתה ובנך-זבולך עבדך ואמתך ובהמתך וגורלך אשר בשעריך (יא) כי ששת-ימים עשה ה' את-השמים ואת-הארץ ואת-הים ואת-כל-אשר-בם וינח ביום השביעי על-לון ברוך ה' את-יום השבת ויקדשהו: (יב) כבד את-אביך ואת-אמך למען יארכון ימיו על האדמה אשר-ה' אלקיך נתן לך: (יג) לא תרצח: (יד) לא תנאף: (טו) לא תגנב: (טז) לא תענה ברעך עד שקר: (יז) לא תחמד בית רעך לא-תחמד אשת רעך ועבדו ואמתו ושורו וחמורו וכל אשר לרעך: (יח)

- What is this text usually called?
- Summarize the rules in eight words or fewer.
- Give the rules a title.
- If you could add a rule or two, what would they be?
- What makes the Ten Commandments so special?
- Are the Ten Commandments more important than the other laws included in the 613 mitzvot?

Modern "Ten Commandments"

The phrase "Ten Commandments" has come to symbolize any set of important rules.

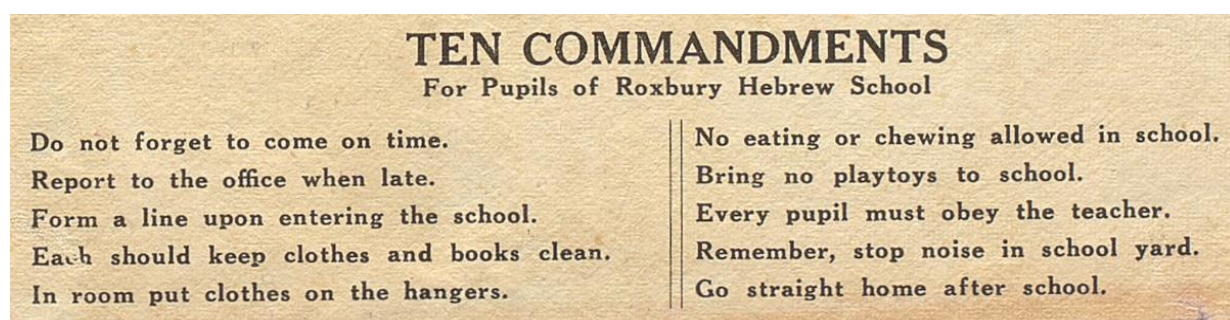
Below are two examples of modern "Ten Commandments."

Look at the rules and answer the questions below.

Primary Source #1

Ten Commandments for Pupils of Roxbury Hebrew School, 1923

This is the English part of a notice that was written in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English for the students at the Roxbury Hebrew School. Roxbury is a suburb of



[Ten Commandments for Pupils of Roxbury Hebrew School, 1923](#)

Boston, Massachusetts.

- Write a new title for these rules.
- Summarize the rules in eight words or fewer.
- Why do you think the rules were written as "Ten Commandments"?
- What is your impression of the rules?
What do they tell you about school in the 1920s?
- Which of the rules, if any, are used in your school today?
- How do the rules in your school differ?

Primary Source #2

The New Ten Commandments, *Davar LeYeladim*

This cartoon was published in the Hebrew children's newspaper, *Davar LeYeladim*.



[The New Ten Commandments](#)

Translation:

To Add to the Festival of the Giving of our Torah Ronit's Dream

You shall not murder/ Plan for reducing the deer population
 You shall not destroy/ Football fields, wild fans
 You shall not throw/ Hot-blooded spectators, football referees
 You shall not covet/ Nest thieves
 You shall not annihilate/ Fishing with explosives
 You shall not trample/ Trampling tourists
 You shall not litter/ Park litterers
 You shall not run people over/ Dangerous drivers

- Write a new title for these rules.
- Summarize the rules in eight words or fewer.
- What is the connection between the illustrations and the rules?
 Why do you think the illustrator chose to depict animals in the cartoon?
- Why do you think the illustrator used the format of the Ten Commandments for his cartoon?
- What rules would you add to the list?

Creating Ten Commandments

Working with a partner or in a small group, choose a topic and compile a set of "Ten Commandments" that you think would be useful rules.

You do not have to have exactly ten rules.

Be prepared to share your Ten Commandments with the whole group.