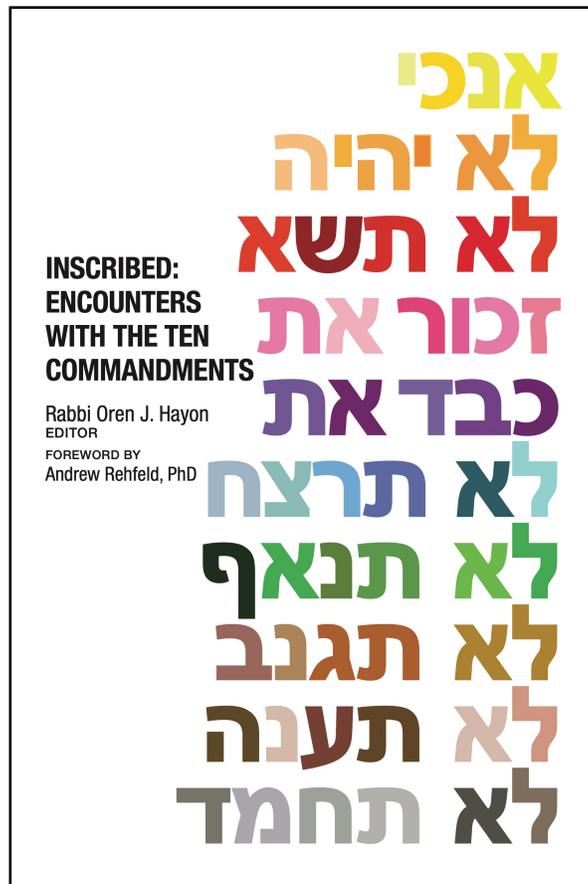


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Encounters with the Ten Commandments

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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

The Ten Commandments represent perhaps the most central, foundational legal framework in the Hebrew Bible. Not only are the laws themselves viewed throughout both classical and modern rabbinic thought as somehow set apart from the other 603, but the dual tablets have become a symbol of Jewish doctrine, even making their way into other Abrahamic traditions. In this book, new (and old) perspectives shed light onto each of the Ten Commandments, showcasing contemporary thought on the ancient text.

This study guide is comprised of two sets of questions. The first, titled “Questions for Deepening Study,” is designed with a study or book group in mind, perhaps as jumping-off points for an adult-ed course utilizing the book. These questions will encourage careful reading of the texts presented, leading to academic study and discussion. The second set of questions, titled “Questions for Emotional Growth,” is designed to evoke open and personal discussion more loosely tied to the text, potentially also as prompts for sermons or for personal introspection.

There are three questions in each set for each essay. These questions are not meant to serve as a full lesson plan or curriculum, nor are they by any means exhaustive; they are simply there to help start a conversation.

1 FIRST COMMANDMENT

God's Identity: Perspectives from Jewish Philosophy

Rabbi Kari Hofmaister Tuling, PhD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Hofmaister references Maimonides, claiming that the first commandment is, in reality, a commandment, ordering us to love and fear God (page 3). How does the statement, "I, the Eternal, am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage," inspire love or fear?
2. Rabbi Hofmaister writes, "When we encounter the divine, we do not meet God in an 'I-Thou' relationship—or even an 'I-It' relationship—because in the midst of this encounter we no longer possess a separate and independent 'I'" (page 3). Does this mean we cannot have a personal, one-on-one relationship with God? How does this framework define (or redefine) the relationship?
3. Rabbi Hofmaister quotes Heschel, saying, "Analyze, weigh and measure a tree as you please, observe and describe its form and functions, its genesis and the laws to which it is subject; still an acquaintance with its essence never comes about" (page 4). Can we truly know something's "essence?" How do we differentiate between naming and understanding?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Hofmaister quotes Maimonides, saying, "What is the way of acquiring love and fear of God?" Maimonides asks. In his view, it is an intellectual act: We should engage in contemplation of God. In Maimonides' view, God is completely transcendent, approachable through the intellect, especially through scientific inquiry" (page 3). How may we (attempt to) foster a love and/or fear of God? How might we "approach" God?
2. Rabbi Hofmaister quotes Heschel, saying, "Music, poetry, religion—they all initiate in the soul's encounter with an aspect of reality for which reason has no concepts and language has no names" (page 7). When do we encounter this aspect of reality? How does it make us feel?
3. Rabbi Hofmaister writes, "For Heschel, too, this elusiveness means that we must acknowledge that there is a transcendent meaning to the world, a meaning that we did not create ourselves" (page 8). What is the utility in this doctrine? What does the belief in a "transcendent meaning" do for us?

1 FIRST COMMANDMENT

Revelation as Conversation
Rabbi Joshua Feigelson, PhD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. What is gained and what is lost in viewing the Ten Commandments (largely viewed as a monologue which was accepted by Israel) as a conversation?
2. Rabbi Feigelson writes, “In a post-Shoah world, God remains a part of the conversation in more subtle ways; the nature of the trust between God and the Jewish People has changed. Just as children and parents have one kind of conversation based on a particular kind of trust, and adult parents and children have a different kind of conversation based on a different kind of trust, the nature of the trust at the heart of the covenantal conversation between God and the Jewish People evolves over time” (page 13). How does this evolution of the covenantal relationship affect our responsibility towards the commandments?
3. Rabbi Feigelson references Exodus and Deuteronomy, saying, “We became ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exodus 19:6), and ‘a people consecrated to the Eternal’ (Deuteronomy 14:2)” (page 13). How do these new positions of status redefine our relationship with God?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. When God is not only passive in our lives but, as Rabbi Feigelson puts it, “seemingly utterly absent” (page 11), why do we, as Jews, choose to affirm our place in the covenantal relationship with God?
2. Rabbi Feigelson writes, “In a post-Shoah, climate-changing world, when God’s presence seems more hidden than ever, the notion of God as our conversation partner enables me to conceive of God as listening to me individually, and to us collectively” (page 14). What would we say to God if we knew God were listening? How may this exercise in “telling” God our thoughts be useful?
3. Rabbi Feigelson further proposes, “Especially in a world in which nationalism, including Jewish religious nationalism, can generate a dangerously illusory sense of God’s presence, imagining God as a conversation partner demands that we listen attentively for what is really being said and that we remain humble enough not to claim that we have grasped the fullness of what our interlocutor is trying to say” (page 14). How and where do we best “hear” God? What does God say?

1 FIRST COMMANDMENT

Israel's History of Enslavement as a Prerequisite for Revelation

Elsie R. Stern, PhD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Dr. Stern writes about the idea of *k'ilu*: that each of us must act as though we personally came from Egypt. As she puts it, this is “an act of imagination and will” (page 18). How does this phrase turn from abstract metaphor to reality?
2. Dr. Stern points out the lack of historicity within the Exodus narrative, labeling the text as “myth.” She defines myth as follows: “A story that articulates truths that may or may not be demonstrated by historical experience” (page 18). Stern further claims, “the change in status [of the Exodus] from history to myth has little impact on the centrality of the story for Jewish identity” (page 17). Do you agree? Does a “myth” need to be historically accurate in order to be considered “truth?” Or, like Dr. Stern suggests, is the centrality of the narrative in the identity of the Jewish people enough to solidify the Exodus as “truth” despite its ahistoricity?
3. Dr. Stern posits that this is the only one of the Ten Commandments that does not answer the question, “what does God want?” (page 23). Instead, the commandment describes God as the ultimate source of liberation, both collective and individual, giving us the responsibility to reflect and embody the inherent good of redemption and freedom. How do we best honor this commandment considering its loose connection to the following nine (relatively) concrete commandments?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Dr. Stern connects the (ahistorical, mythical) enslavement in Egypt to Jewish oppressions across time and space—crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, the Shoah, etc. How is Jewish identity linked to our collective ancestral trauma? How is it linked to resilience?
2. Dr. Stern draws a parallel between “I am the Eternal your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 20:2) and “You shall not wrong nor oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:20). How does our redemption inspire both empathy and vigilance in the face of adversity?
3. Dr. Stern sets up the first commandment as a sort of “preamble” to the subsequent commandments, echoing the formulation of the Exodus narrative as a preamble to the Covenant. “I am the Eternal your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt” functions as an appeal to authority and righteousness. How might this commandment sit with someone who wants to live ethically and Jewishly but doubts the historicity of the narrative or the existence of God?

2 SECOND COMMANDMENT

Prohibition of Idolatry
Rabbi Reuven Firestone, PhD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Firestone employs Mircea Eliade's conception of hierophany to propose that "the transcendent can be manifest in the beauty or extraordinary nature of the familiar" (page 28). He cautions, however, that these manifestations of Divine power must not be confused with the Sacred, itself— "this ... is a form of confusion that comes close to idolatry" (page 28). How do we appreciate the miraculous while still respecting and venerating the non-familiar sacred?
2. Maimonides often quotes in his *A Guide for the Perplexed*, "The Torah speaks in the language of man" (*Sifrei B'midbar* 112:2, et al). As Rabbi Firestone points out, we are forced to describe God in corporeal/anthropomorphic/anthropopathic terms in order to conceive of God to any meaningful extent (page 30). How do we know when our imagining of God is helpful for our theology and when it delves into idolatrous territory?
3. Rabbi Firestone presents the question, "How could a relatively small community of people such as Israel have the audacity to consider the Great God of All its 'own' deity?" (page 30). Attempting to answer this question, he sets up the historical framework of the Near East, wherein each individual community venerated its own respective deity. In our "newer" theology, wherein our God is the singular God of all creation, what claim do we have to the Creator of All as our God?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Firestone opens his essay with a description of Rudolf Otto's theoretical framework of the "wholly other"—*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. That is, the sacred is that which is enigmatic (*mysterium*), awesome/terrifying (*tremendum*), and (*et*) fascinating (*fascinans*). When have you experienced such awe that is simultaneously mysterious, alluring, and provoking of tremor?
2. Rabbi Firestone discusses Mircea Eliade's conception of hierophany as a "manifestation of the sacred that we can often feel lying beneath and behind the awesome and the beautiful—and if we allow it, even the ordinary" (page 32). Hierophanies, Rabbi Firestone explains, should not be considered sacred in and of themselves, but rather "allude to something marvelous and extraordinary that must have been the source of their creation" (page 28). How do we best honor God when we experience these manifestations?
3. Can an admittedly human-created object or work serve as a hierophany? That is to say, is there a way to create something which inspires sacred moods and motivations without being considered idolatrous?

2 SECOND COMMANDMENT

Why the Second Commandment Still Matters:

A Conversation with Maimonides

Kenneth Seeskin, PhD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. When discussing the metaphysical necessity of the second commandment, Dr. Seeskin writes, “God cannot be seen and, therefore, cannot be represented adequately in any form whatsoever ... Some things cannot be represented by visual images” (page 37). How do we square this cornerstone of Jewish theology—that of Divine incorporeality—with the biblical examples of “seeing God,” for example, in Exodus 24:10, Isaiah 6:1, Ezekiel 1:26, etc.?
2. Dr. Seeskin references Xenophanes, saying “If horses and oxen could draw pictures, their gods would look remarkably like horses and oxen” (page 40). That is to say, all people seek to view their god as relatable to themselves. To what extent do we view ourselves in the image of God and to what extent do we view God in our image? How can analyzing the reflective nature of theology inform our conceptions of God?
3. Dr. Seeskin references Maimonides, saying “To conjure up any image of God in one’s mind is ... to make the same mistake as erecting a statue” (page 39). If we are not allowed to visualize God, are we able to direct our prayers? To what should we direct prayer if not to an imagined concept?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Dr. Seeskin points out that the second commandment is the only commandment within the Decalogue to mention guilt or punishment. Not only that, but the punishment extends to the fourth generation (page 35). How are children responsible for the sins of their parents? How are we responsible for the sins of our ancestors?
2. The *Shulchan Aruch* outlines details of forbidden representational images, going so far as to ban “two-dimensional images of complete human bodies, angels, or heavenly bodies except for purposes of religious, medical, or scientific study. The rationale is that these things could easily take the place of idols” (page 40). Is this an extreme precaution? To what extent must we “build a fence” around this piece of Torah?
3. Dr. Seeskin proposes that encountering God without a physical conception is relevant “if the religion we practice is to promote a particularly humble way of looking at the world and our place in it” (page 41). In what way are we humbled by worshipping of an ineffable, wholly abstract God?

3 THIRD COMMANDMENT

The Mystical Dimensions of the Divine's Name
Rabbi Mordecai Finley, PhD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Finley writes, "The upper *s'firot*, the 'mystical *s'firot*,' can only be experienced through a consciousness devoid of the outside world and even the consciousness of the self" (page 46). In other words, we may only interact with these aspects when we remove our consciousness from the physical present. Many faith systems attempt to do just this through meditation, ecstatic dancing, and even the use of psychedelic substances. What sets Rabbi Finley's method apart?
2. What are the differences between *hitbon'nut* and *hitbod'dut* as Rabbi Finley describes them? What practices could we take on to fulfill each?
3. Rabbi Finley writes, "In the realm called *Keter*, we go beyond that which renders Being. We rise into nothing else. One becomes a knower of God, a knower of "the Essence" of "the Nothingness." One knows No Thing. One experiences one's own nonbeing, as one experiences Divine Nonbeing as the root of Divine Being. It is fearsome and it is beautiful. And it can change everything. The echo of Nothingness never leaves us" (page 51). Consciousness is both filled and voided with the Divine Essence. There is, ultimately, nothing else." In what ways is this description of the numinous useful? How does this concept change our relationship with the Divine?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Finley writes, "For some people, the map and its terminology interfere with spiritual and mystical experience. For others, like me, the map and its key terms have been a great aid both in spiritual and moral growth as well as a key guide to mystical experience" (page 45). How does a map (be it of mystical dimensions of God's name or of our set liturgy) help us approach God? How may it hinder us?
2. Rabbi Finley writes, "The upper *s'firot*, the 'mystical *s'firot*,' can only be experienced through a consciousness devoid of the outside world and even the consciousness of the self" (page 46). Is this a real, accessible consciousness or is it conceptual? How may the concept (whether attainable or not) assist our practice?
3. Rabbi Finley uses the metaphor of a prism to describe the *s'firot*: "In that moment, one might understand that light is the garment of God (Psalm 104:2). When we see light, we see the shape of the Divine. What we see out in the world are shadows of the colors of the prism on a wall, but we can experience the actual colors on the wall if we go within. In our day-to-day consciousness, we can pause and sense the prism that generates the colors, that which renders Pure Being into being. We might shudder" (page 51). How does this metaphor help our understanding?

3 THIRD COMMANDMENT

God's Name in Theurgy, Amulets, and Magic Spells:
Contemporary Lessons from Ancient Jewish Magic
Rabbi Geoffrey W. Dennis

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Speaking of the commandment as a means of banning the besmirching of God's reputation, Rabbi Dennis points out a contemporary aversion to the concept of blasphemy: "Does God, the Supreme Being, really need legislative protection to secure God's divine reputation against the ill opinion of mere dust and ashes? ... This seems to be a petty regulation which presents God as a fragile and defensive deity" (page 54). Does the concept of blasphemy paint God as fragile or defensive? Does God need our approval or a good reputation?
2. As Rabbi Dennis point out, "While the Torah presents a long list of forbidden magical practices, there is no prohibition against using the Name in ritual worship, or even in rituals which would strike us as magical" (page 55). Clearly, our sensitivity to "magic" has changed with time. How do we view magic in contemporary Jewish culture? What are the differences between ritual worship and ritual magic?
3. As Rabbi Dennis says, "One certainly also finds continuous examples within Jewish traditions of limiting or preventing the use of the Name, most famously by way of euphemisms and substitute words (*Adonai, HaShem, AdoShem, HaKadosh Baruch Hu*), part of a regulatory practice well-known and still widely observed, even among liberal and secular Jews" (page 58). Do we show respect and reverence to God's Name by avoiding its use?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Dennis recognizes a contemporary progressive Jewish difficulty of accepting prohibitions that seem illogical. At the same time, he frames the third commandment as a matter of being mindful in our religious speech. How can limiting our vocabulary (or our options more generally) lead to more mindful living?
2. Rabbi Dennis points out a certain discomfort with public displays of piety such as "have a blessed day" or responding to the question "how are you" with *Baruch Hashem* (page 54). Why are we uncomfortable with religious language in the public sphere? Is it due to secular culture or is there a greater Jewish reason?
3. For millennia, Jews have used amulets, talismans, and incantations bearing sacred text (such as the Tetragrammaton) as a means of divine protection and comfort. How do we use religious language as a means of comfort? Is there still a place in contemporary Judaism for this kind of magic?

4

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Permitted and Forbidden Labor: Legal and Ethical Dimensions

Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Yanklowitz recognizes a possible meaning of a restful Shabbat, saying, “Maimonides teaches the importance of engaging in pleasures that do not just feel good but strengthen us toward our core goals” (page 69). What is the goal of rest? What actions can we take to best accomplish this goal?
2. What connections can we draw between traditional Shabbat observance and Rabbi Yanklowitz’s conceptions of moral and restorative rest? What functions did the traditional model fulfill?
3. Rabbi Yanklowitz points out the diminishing amounts of leisure time in our contemporary American lives. To what extent is this a “Jewish” problem and to what extent is it an American problem? How are the two related? How do we, as Jews, respond?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Yanklowitz writes, “The enterprise of Shabbat is about developing an existential consciousness that other human beings do not exist to serve our desires” (page 64). How can we make Shabbat not only a time of rest and introspection but of deep compassionate connection to others?
2. Rabbi Yanklowitz reminds us that work is no more important than the restorative and meaningful rest that allows our work to flourish. What characterizes “good” rest?
3. Rabbi Yanklowitz quotes the Socheshever Rebbe, the son-in-law of the Kotzker Rebbe, who said, “You can keep every [Shabbat] to the letter of the law, but unless [Shabbat] reaches the deepest and highest place in your heart, you haven’t kept [Shabbat]” (page 71). What does it mean to “keep” Shabbat in our contemporary context?

4

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

“Technology Shabbats”: Unplugging in a Hyper-Connected World

Tiffany Shlain

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Shlain compares the constant use of technology an addiction (page 74). How do we know when a behavior (such as technology use) crosses the line from useful to problematic?
2. According to Shlain, “Thoughtful screen use is so important now that people are more plugged in than ever. Almost four billion people—more than half the world’s population—are connected to the Internet. For the most part, this is a good thing” (page 74). How can we, as Jews, make the best use of the technology available to us?
3. Shlain writes, “Turning off technology is a ritual that can give you back your attention and time, and let you focus on what matters most: the essence of Shabbat: In a way, Shabbat itself is a technology” (page 76). How has the innovation of Shabbat affected Jewish life and the world around us?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. How might a person or family implement a “Technology Shabbat” in their home? What obstacles might they encounter?
2. Tiffany Shlain’s career revolves around technology, and yet she advocates for unplugging once per week. What might it mean to disconnect from such a huge part of our lives on a regular basis?
3. Shlain writes, “We spend [Shabbat] together: journaling, hanging, being in nature, cooking, doing art projects, enjoying each other’s company, or just being. Later, maybe a bike ride, a nap, a board game, a great book. It’s the best day of the week” (page 77). How might you spend your time on a “Technology Shabbat”?

5 FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Honoring Your Father and Mother
Rabbi Laura Geller

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Geller quotes her father, saying, “I bet that because you and your brothers see Mom and me taking care of our parents now that they are old, you will take care of us when we get old” (page 83). In other words, we honor our parents (in part) to model the behavior for our children who will later honor us. What else might we teach to our children through modeling?
2. Rabbi Geller references *Babylonian Talmud, Nidah 31a*: “There are three partners in creating a human being: the Holy One, the father, and the mother. The Holy One says, ‘When a person honors his father and his mother, it is as though they are honoring Me’”(page 83). What are the similarities and differences between reverence of God and reverence of our parents?
3. Rabbi Geller writes, “The Torah doesn’t tell us that it is easy or that all the solutions will be elegant. But it does suggest that there is a reward. For me the reward is not that I will necessarily have a longer life, but that I will have a more peaceful heart” (page 90). Surely, the commandment of honoring and caring for one’s parents is an issue of morality, not of reward. Why, then, does the Torah present a reward for this commandment specifically?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. As Rabbi Geller points out, caring for a parent is a significant burden on a person’s financial, emotional, and physical resources. How can we best support our fellow community members in this difficult but incredibly important endeavor?
2. Rabbi Geller writes, “As we deal with the challenges of our parents’ aging, we need to take a breath and allow ourselves to be present in the moment, paying attention not only to what is happening with our parents but also with ourselves and our siblings. We need to recognize our own sadness as we see our parents, who might have once been so vibrant in our minds and lives, becoming frail and dependent” (page 86). How do we best give ourselves permission to feel difficult emotions without wallowing in our grief?
3. How might the commandment of honoring one’s parents be received by those with toxic relationships with their parents? How might this commandment (or the obligation to care for one’s parents in their old age) be fulfilled by one for whom interaction with their parents is unhealthy?

5 FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Navigating the New Life Stage of Caregiver
Rabbi Richard F. Address

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. RabbiAddress quotes a study by the AARP, saying, “Positive emotions such as being pleased they are able to help (91%) far outweighed the negative. However, over half are stressed (51%) or worried (51%) and many are overwhelmed (40%)” (page 91). Is the mitzvah of honoring one’s parents a mitzvah that should be performed happily? Is it still a mitzvah if it is performed begrudgingly?
2. RabbiAddress references *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 31b–32a*, writing, “Respect is understood to mean not standing in a parent’s usual place or sitting where they usually sit, and by not contradicting them in the midst of a dispute. Honor, in the Talmudic discussion, meant that the adult child is obligated to provide a parent with food, drink, and clothing, as well as assistance in going and coming from their home” (page 93). What are the fundamental differences between honor and respect?
3. RabbiAddress quotes Dr. Michael Chernick, saying, “Parents who have been irresponsible, cruel, neglectful, and harmful to their children have failed to uphold their obligations in Jewish law and practice to their children. Hence, they have forfeited the ‘honor’ and ‘respect’ with which Jewish law entitled them” (page 95). In this interpretation, care in old age is conditional. What other commandments (if any) follow this conditional model?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. RabbiAddress points out, “It is no longer unusual for a person in their sixties to be caring for a parent in their eighties or nineties, while simultaneously helping their adult children, perhaps also their grandchildren, and managing their own life on top of all of this” (page 92). In this situation, how might a caregiver balance their responsibilities toward their parents and children? What happens if someone gets the “short end of the stick?”
2. RabbiAddress writes, “Making choices that dignify and sanctify life are often choices between bad and worse” (page 93). How do we comfort or support those facing such a dilemma?
3. RabbiAddress advises, “We can look to a hierarchy of values as a guide. Our fundamental responsibility is to preserve the dignity and sanctity of human beings...” (page 96). What is your hierarchy of values? Is it ever challenged by circumstance? How do you respond in such situations?

5 FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Number Five
Rabbi Annie Belford

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. In light of Rabbi Belford's essay, how might the commandment to visit and care for the sick interact with the commandment to honor one's father and mother?
2. Rabbi Belford points out the irony in feeding her mother bacon as a vegetarian rabbi. She justifies the decision, saying, "Honoring one's mother is one of the Ten Commandments, and not eating pork is much lower on the so-called list" (page 102). When two mitzvot seem at odds, how do we make the best choice?
3. Rabbi Belford alludes to Oregon's Death With Dignity laws, allowing for a dignified end to inevitable prolonged suffering, saying, "'Mom, remind me if you ever get a brain tumor again that we should move to Oregon!' She nodded vigorously; I think she hated lying powerless in that hospice bed more than I hated watching her lie powerless in that bed" (page 103). Is there a way in which we, as Jews, can square our belief in preserving the sanctity of human life while showing compassion and mercy in those challenging end-of-life situations?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Belford begins her essay with a story about her friend: "When her teenage children would talk back to her, she would hold up her hand, fingers splayed, and shout, 'Number Five!' She was reminding her children, in a way perhaps only rabbis would do, that in talking back or refusing to listen or doing any of the myriad small rebellions children engage in, they were breaking the fifth commandment, and not respecting their mother and father" (page 99). How might we employ similar methods of utilizing Torah values in teaching our children?
2. Rabbi Belford writes, "Everything seemed to mean more, because everything did mean more" (page 101). How does the reminder of our mortality (or, as in Rabbi Belford's case, the mortality of a family member) suffuse our lives with meaning? How might we act were we more cognizant of an impending end of life?
3. Rabbi Belford writes, "That Mother's Day, as we watched Disney movies on the TV in her room, I held her hand. I took a picture of her hand in mine and posted it on Facebook, writing, 'There is nowhere else I would rather be'" (page 103). How do we make the most of the small, seemingly insignificant moments? How do we remind ourselves to be grateful, even at the hardest times?

6

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

”You Shall Not Murder”

Rabbi Harold L. Robinson

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Within the first paragraphs, Rabbi Robinson describes the gap between everyday language and the language of the military (page 105). While this gap exists for almost every profession, the world of military service contains a wide range of experiences, emotions, and decisions-making processes that are foreign to those without access to it, but that are essential for the survival of our country. What other professions bring about similar experiences of isolation? What can we, as outsiders, do to help those who are members of these professions to feel better understood?
2. Rabbi Robinson writes that “In Jewish tradition, murder is distinct from other sorts of sanctioned homicide, such as self-defense and court-imposed capital punishment” (page 109). How is “murder” defined in the sources Rabbi Robinson quotes in his essay? When is this definition useful? When does it fall short (see pages 109–111)?
3. According to Rabbi Robinson, the “dissonance between the warriors’ personal sense of morality is exacerbated by the common mistranslation of the sixth commandment as “You shall not *kill*.” Indeed, under the influence of this mistranslation, our larger society believes that the commandment prohibits all killing (including accidental homicide, self-defense, and in the minds of some, the killing of animals). Vice Admiral James Stockdale (a naval aviator who spent seven years as a POW in Vietnam) spoke of “the healing power” of discovering this mistranslation and learning that the commandment prohibited not killing but murder” (page 115). Does your education fit into Rabbi Robinson’s assessment of the often wrongly translated sixth Commandment? How does its correct translation as a prohibition of murder affect your perception of the commandment?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. The U.S. Army works on our behalf and on the mandate of our government, yet many of us might carry distant or even negative feelings in regard to the military. How can we, as a society, close this gap? How can we, as individuals, become more familiar with the world of the military that is in place to protect us and our rights?
2. On page 115, Rabbi Robinson describes Jewish rituals that help war veterans to return back to civil normalcy. Can you think of similar rituals for similar kind of “returns to normalcy”?
3. Rabbi Robinson writes that “one form of injury first recognized in twenty-first-century wars and now widely applied to the victims of any traumatic stress is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I believe the term is a misnomer. The profound response to the trauma need not be viewed as a disorder, but the perfectly healthy—albeit very difficult—struggle of an individual to integrate the dissonance within

oneself generated by the traumatic experience” (page 114). How much do you know about the psychological result of war experiences? How could you learn more about them?

6

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Police Violence

Rabbi Jonathan Siger

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Siger draws a clear line, saying, “We have an obligation to stop murders from happening by defending ourselves and others, just as we must try to save someone from drowning. In order to preserve innocent life, we must do whatever it takes, even if it means killing an assailant” (page 121). Is there any conceivable exception to this rule? Is killing an assailant always acceptable or can it only be a last resort?
2. Rabbi Siger writes, “In the case of a home invasion, if there is the slightest doubt whether the burglar intends to do personal harm, they are considered a *rodeif*, a murderous pursuer... and the Torah states a principle: ‘If someone comes to kill you, rise and kill him first’” (page 122). According to this dictum, the bar seems fairly low: if a burglar might do personal harm, it is permitted to kill them. How do we, in our contemporary context, evaluate such a situation?
3. Rabbi Siger quotes *Mishnah, Sanhedrin*, “The one who destroys a human life [...] has destroyed the entire world, and whoever saves a single life [...] has saved the entire world,” (page 120) omitting the words “from Israel” at the ellipses. Do we have different responsibilities for our own communities and the global community?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Siger writes, “In discussing the case of the homeinvasion, the sages of the Talmud use the normative love of a parent for their child as a standard for compassion” (page 125). Is this an appropriate model of compassion? Is this the standard or the goal to which we should aspire? How can we achieve this level of compassion?
2. As Rabbi Siger writes, “For most of Jewish history, Jews have lived as subjects of foreign powers or as a disenfranchised minority” (page 126). How does our collective history of oppression, discrimination, and state-sanctioned violence affect our communal response toward police violence?
3. With the understanding that there are both Jewish people of color and Jewish police officers in our communities, how should we respond in the wake of these volatile, loaded, emotional tragedies of police shootings?

7 SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Feminist Reading of the Commandment
Rabbi Darcie Crystal

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Crystal quotes the commentary found in *Etz Hayim*, “Punishment by stoning enabled the entire public to participate and thereby express its outrage against the crime and the threat it posed to God’s authority and society’s welfare” (page 134). Why was adultery punished in this public way? How is God’s authority or society’s welfare threatened by sexual impropriety?
2. Rabbi Crystal writes, “These policies underscore the fundamental wisdom of Jewish tradition: adultery is not only a matter between two individuals; it can compromise the integrity of an entire community” (page 137). How is adultery different from other sins outlined in the Decalogue? What makes adultery especially damaging to societal structures?
3. Rabbi Crystal writes, “While it is not surprising that a rabbinical organization like the CCAR grounds its policies in Jewish tradition and values the biblical prohibition against adultery, it is perhaps more surprising that also many secular institutions — in business, public service, the military, and medical fields — do so as well” (page 136). Is there a difference between the religious and secular prohibition of adultery? Is there a spiritual component to the religious law not found in the secular?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Crystal writes, “When a married person engages in a sexual relationship outside of their marriage, the sacred trust between those spouses is broken. But that violation of trust extends well beyond the two involved in the affair: their children and maybe even other members of their communities may find it difficult to trust those individuals” (page 134). What is the difference between trust between partners and between an individual and their community? How might a transgressors earn back these trusts? Is this even possible?
2. Rabbi Crystal presents a story from the *Babylonian Talmud*: “There was a certain Torah scholar who gained a bad reputation due to rumors about his conduct. Rav Yehuda said: What should be done? To excommunicate him is not an option. The Sages need him, as he is a great Torah authority. Not to excommunicate him is also not an option, as then the name of Heaven would be desecrated” (page 135). Why is this pattern so ubiquitous, then and now? How should we today navigate those situations?
3. Rabbi Crystal quotes Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, saying, “Judaism ... is the sanctification of relationship, the love between husband and wife which is as close as we will ever get to understanding God’s love for us” (page 137). If the relationship between husband and wife is a reflection of the relationship between God and Israel, how has our understanding of God’s love changed with changes in the ethics of relationships?

7 SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Adultery and Deception
Rabbi Eliana Fischel

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Fischel writes, “A man, whether he was married or not, who had sex with a married woman figuratively stole from her husband. The transgression is not one of breaking a covenantal relationship, but rather of theft” (page 143). Why, then, does the prohibition of adultery not simply fall under the following “You shall not steal” commandment? What sets this “theft” apart?
2. Rabbi Fischel writes, “By the end of the 20th century, some Jewish feminist scholars had come out against Jewish marriage altogether because of its origins in property law. Most Jews have not rejected the institution of Jewish marriage; they have simply amended the marriage ritual to be more inclusive” (page 144). When old ideas or traditions become arcane, how do we decide when to excise such practices, and when to alter traditional practice?
3. What is gained and what is lost by redefining adultery no longer in terms of sexual infidelity, but of deception and breach of trust?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. What is the difference in the emotional reaction we feel when something is stolen from us versus when we discover that we were lied to? In what ways do different transgressions against us affect us differently?
2. What traditions should be rethought today? There are movements to amend several Jewish practices like the prohibition of intermarriage, or the custom of circumcision. Balancing our love for our ancestral tradition with contemporary ethics can be challenging. How must we approach each of these debates?
3. What (possibly difficult) conversations should couples have before committing to one another?



EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

The Bible, Intellectual Property, and Authorship Integrity

Roberta Rosenthal Kwall, JD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Kwall writes, “This biblical narrative presents what may be the earliest recorded example of a violation of both attribution and integrity interests. Adam violated God’s right of attribution by misattributing to God words that God did not speak (specifically, the injunction not to touch the fruit). Adam also violated God’s right of integrity by modifying God’s original commandment” (page 154). The rabbinic propensity toward *asu siyag latorah* (“build a fence around Torah”—the rabbinic commandment to protect the laws of Torah by enforcing stricter rabbinic laws) seems to command the opposite of the story of Adam and Eve. What do you make of that seeming contradiction?
2. Kwall explains a form of attribution found in the *Talmud*, saying, “The phrase ‘Rabbi X said’ does not necessarily mean ‘Rabbi X himself said,’ but rather ‘Rabbi X’s later disciples said in his name.’ As a result, authorship of Talmudic material cannot be equated to authorship in the contemporary sense. According to Talmudic culture, the ‘sayer’ of a saying was understood to be repeating the traditions of his teacher and that of earlier masters” (page 154). How does this model of attribution fit or flout our contemporary sensibilities?
3. The previous essay, Rabbi Eliana Fischel’s “Adultery and Deception,” (pages 141–148) presents the biblical definition of adultery as a type of theft. How may we compare these types of theft—sexual and intellectual? How do they each relate to the idea of property theft?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Kwall opens her essay with a story in which an artist’s work (Frederick Hart’s “Ex Nihilo”) is subverted, constituting a “theft” of his intellectual property (page 151). How do we feel when our work or words are subverted, taken out of context, or generally misrepresented? How should we respond?
2. Kwall outlines the legal difference between “Moral Rights” and “Economic Rights” to a creator’s work. What is the difference, not in legality but in ethics and emotional response, between the two?
3. Kwall compares the collective authorship of Talmud (and the difficulties it presents) to the modern collective authorship of digital culture. “In the digital era, artistic creation is often interactive and dependent upon a multitude of voices. Works are often created as a result of audience participation and reinterpretation. In this context, determining violations of an author’s meaning and message are especially difficult” (page 154). What responsibility does a digital author/user have to the original author of the work they reference or build upon? What responsibility do we have as consumers of this media?



EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

”You Shall Not Steal”—Ethics of Consumption

Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Kahn-Troster speaks about the “production chain.” Think of one product you buy regularly and investigate its production chain, from issues such as the treatment of animals, food waste, or environmental concerns to the payment and treatment of workers. Which parts of the production chain are easy to research? What kind of information is not fully accessible to the public?
2. Once you feel informed, compare the findings of your research to the rabbinic principles Rabbi Kahn-Troster outlines on pages 157 and 159–160. Where do you perceive tension between the reality you learned about and the principles put in place by the rabbis? What could you do to ease this tension? (See page 161 for Rabbi Kahn-Troster’s suggestions.)
3. Now that you have made yourself fully aware of the production chain of the product in question, the principle of *takanat hashuk* (page 160) does not apply to you anymore. Find partners in conversation to speak about the responsibility of Reform Jews to make “informed choices” also in the field of consumer behavior?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. At the beginning of her essay, Rabbi Kahn-Troster asks, “What is it about theft that it can radically undermine the trust and responsibility toward others that allow for a cohesive society?” (page 157). On the following pages, she explains that theft is a major breach of the social contract. Try to think about a situation in which you fell victim to such a breach. How have you been able to deal with feelings of rage about injustice, doubt in our legal system, the sense of personal vulnerability, and the fear of having a similar thing happen to you in the future?
2. On page 159, almost in passing, Rabbi Kahn-Troster lists some products we specifically buy to ritually celebrate or commemorate our Jewish calendar. Think about the “Jewish” purchases you have made in the last year. Which of those purchases was made in full alignment with your Jewish values, and which were not? Which of those purchases could you replace with self-made objects? Whom could you partner with for this project?
3. Rabbi Kahn-Troster connects the Ten Commandments to the principle of *tikkun olam* (within Reform theology often translated as the “repair of the world through ethical behavior”). Which of the Ten Commandments seem to be most obviously connected to the repair of the world? Which of the Ten Commandments might only indirectly impact the repair of the world?

9 NINTH COMMANDMENT

Don't Be That Person
Rabbi Michael Marmor, PhD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Marmor references Philo of Alexandria, “He starts with the assertion that those who bear false witness are guilty of corrupting truth, ‘a treasure as sacred as anything we possess in life, which like the sun pours lights on facts and events’” (page 167). Is truth inherently sacred? What utility is there in viewing truth through the metaphor of light?
2. Rabbi Marmor writes, “Spinoza argues that even for strict adherents to the correspondence theory of truth (namely that a statement is true to the degree that it can be shown to correspond to facts in the natural world), there is still a story being told. In each case, we are asked to judge whether the account—which may be given by live individuals, by ancient texts, or by inanimate objects—is plausible. Even when I sit in solitude and ponder an abstract idea, I am in some sense cross-examining a witness” (page 172). Here, Rabbi Marmor defines his own senses and memory as witnesses, commanded not to testify falsely, and his imaginative, mental faculty as a prosecutor, teasing out and questioning his own narrative. How may we confidently believe our truths while trying to be self-critical and questioning what we believe?
3. Rabbi Marmor employs the work of Don Isaac Abarbanel to outline a central difference in the two versions of the commandment. “The medieval exegete Don Isaac Abarbanel suggests that the term employed in Deuteronomy, *shav*, has a wider meaning than *sheker* in the Exodus version. *Sheker* means a lie, a falsehood, while *shav* (often translated as ‘vanity’) covers lies as well as *kazav* (‘something which misleads or disappoints’) and *batalah* (‘nullity,’ ‘something of little worth,’ ‘a waste’). In the Deuteronomy version, it is not just the utterance of a lie which is forbidden, but rather anything irrelevant, nihilistic, wasteful, or confusing” (page 173). Is misleading the same level of wrong as lying? Is there a “hierarchy” of untruth?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Marmor writes, “Truth has always been a rare commodity. A Talmudic teaching [*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 104a*] points out that the word *emet*, “truth,” comprises the first, middle, and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet; they could not be farther apart. The word *sheker*, “lie,” is comprised of letters adjacent to each other. Based on these observations, the *Talmud* concludes that ‘a lie is common, while the truth is rare’” (page 169). How central is the pursuit of truth to Jewish culture? Consider, especially, the centrality of the court system in Israelite law.
2. Rabbi Marmor writes, “We may not have a clear sense of how to navigate the challenges of truth and truthiness, post-truth, and fake news. But however we are to proceed, we will have need of people who hear this biblical utterance as a personal call. If we are to make it, we shouldn’t be that person, the false witness. We should be better

than that” (page 175). In addition to speaking truthfully and honestly (or at least, not speaking falsehoods), we are charged with seeking truth; bringing light into the darkness. How can we best pursue truth in a “post-truth” world?

3. Why was “do not lie” not included in the commandments? What other seemingly-obvious dicta did not make the cut?

9 NINTH COMMANDMENT

“Fake News” and Its Challenges to Journalism

Batya Ungar-Sargon, PhD

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Dr. Ungar-Sargon writes, “The prohibition against giving false testimony is part of a series of laws commanding the Jewish people not only to be honest and just in and outside of the courtroom, but also to be impartial actors” (page 180). What does “being impartial” mean when we are called upon to give testimony—literally, “give our own perspective”?
2. Dr. Ungar-Sargon writes, “Individualism and individual responsibility get lost in crowds, which makes them fundamentally violent, and fundamentally incapable of securing justice. ‘Don’t be following a crowd to do wrong,’ the Torah says” (page 180). Is the commandment saying to be impartial or to come to our own (partial) conclusions?
3. Dr. Ungar-Sargon writes, “‘Don’t even prefer a poor man in his fight.’ God commands us to resist the pressure applied by others, even when they share our own values” (page 180). In a world where the poor are not afforded the same opportunities or representation as those with power or privilege, how may we ensure that we treat those in need equitably and justly without showing bias?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Dr. Ungar-Sargon writes, “It’s not only the art of the toggle that’s been lost. It’s the value of the toggle, too. Instead of poring over images and explaining how to see things differently, we discuss the smirking Catholic schoolboys who mobbed a Native American elder—or who were accosted by him, depending on who you are. We watch a man making his way to the Supreme Court despite sexually assaulting a young girl when he was a teenager—or despite the mob that sought to ruin his life” (page 178). What is the value in seeing the perspective of the other?
2. Referencing Exodus 23:4, Dr. Ungar-Sargon writes, “Even our enemies’ property deserves our good will. The Torah, always sensitive to human nature, knows that even a good Jew will struggle to help her enemy’s lost donkey find its way home” (page 180). How do we force ourselves to do the right thing (return the donkey) in these situations?
3. The basis of the ninth commandment is truthful testimony. Dr. Ungar-Sargon asks us to “toggle” our vision in order to understand other perspectives. How may we be true to our own realities (give truthful testimony) while still allowing for multiple perspectives?

10 TENTH COMMANDMENT

Torah's Thought Crime?
Rabbi Barry H. Block

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Rabbi Block references Rava, saying, “Matters of the heart are not matters.’ In other words, Judaism holds that every human being possesses *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination) and that we are not guilty unless we act upon it” (page 187). Do you agree with Rava? Are our thoughts and feelings irrelevant so long as our actions are pure?
2. Rabbi Block asks, “How can *Tanach* forbid an inclination with which God has created us?” (page 189). What other contradictions exist within our creation? How should we respond to those contradictions?
3. Rabbi Block writes, “The Tenth Commandment, like the First, can be read not as a commandment at all, but rather a warning: ‘Beware the evil inclination!’ We are enjoined to pay attention to our *yetzer*, to guard against its leading us astray” (page 192). In this way, the commandment calls for mindful, dedicated attention to the actions we take to satisfy our impulses. How might we connect this message to the previous commandments?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Rabbi Block asks, “How can *Tanach* forbid an inclination with which God has created us?” (page 189). Why would God endow us with the ability to choose any incorrect action? What is the purpose of our freedom to make mistakes?
2. Throughout the essay, Rabbi Block suggests that certain traits within *yetzer hara* contain both good and bad functions. How may we foster the good parts of ambition and pride, for example, without falling into their propensity to incite evil?
3. If coveting can also be a thought crime, then sin seems to be inevitable. Indeed, as the essay says, *yetzer hara* is a part of our divinely-imposed human nature. What should we do when we catch ourselves “sinning” in our thoughts?

10

TENTH COMMANDMENT

Conquering and Transforming the Impulse to Want What Is Not Yours

Alan Morinis, DPhil

QUESTIONS FOR DEEPENING STUDY:

1. Dr. Morinis writes, “As one recent Mussar teacher put it, you are not responsible for seeing the things that cross your field of vision, but you are responsible for the second glance into the rear view mirror” (page 196). What is the difference between a healthy learning from past experience and dwelling on it?
2. Dr. Morinis writes, “If you are aware that you desire something that is not yours and that you want to avoid the feelings (and any action they might motivate), the most obvious training you could give yourself of the kind Rabbeinu Bachya mentions would involve sidestepping encounters with whatever it is that triggers that reaction in you” (page 196). Is avoidance a sustainable method of limiting our desire?
3. Dr. Morinis references *Mishnah, Pirkei Avot 4:1*, writing, “Ben Zoma rhetorically asks, ‘Who is rich?’ and answers that the truly wealthy person is ‘one who is *samei-ach b’chelko* (“happy with one’s portion”)” (page 197). Is gratitude the opposite of envy? Do we need both of those traits, or is pure gratitude the ultimate goal?

QUESTIONS FOR EMOTIONAL GROWTH:

1. Dr. Morinis opens his essay with an extended parable on how envy leads to other sinful behaviors. Does unchecked envy inevitably lead to sin? How might we foster self-control in the face of desire?
2. Dr. Morinis quotes Shlomo ibn Gavirol, saying, “One who seeks more than one needs hinders himself from enjoying what he has” (page 198). How may we cultivate this gratitude in our own lives?
3. Dr. Morinis writes, “When we transform a tendency to covet, we not only protect ourselves from doing illicit and even illegal things, we also release ourselves from the painful grip of unrequited craving. The end result is freedom from harmful thoughts: a step toward bringing more holiness into one's life and into the world” (page 198). How does this freedom from coveting allow us to bring holiness into the world?