

CHAI MITZVAH AND PROJECT ASERET

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

Study Guide



www.chaimitzvah.org



PROJECT ASERET

www.aseretglobal.org



About this Booklet:

This booklet includes a piece of each of the eleven sourcebooks that comprise the *Aseret: The Big Ten* curriculum. It is ideal for a Tikkun Leil Shavuot discussion.

We hope that you will consider studying the entire curriculum for a full appreciation of the depth that each of the Commandments brings as a Core Value for our lives.

Visit www.chaimitzvah.org or www.aseretglobal.org for more information on the *Aseret: The Big Ten* curriculum.



introduction:

Elie Wiesel said that modern Jewry is like a messenger who is on his way to fulfill his mission and gets hit on the head and is knocked out. When he comes around, he doesn't remember who sent him, where he was going, what his mission is, and even the fact that he is a messenger.

Imagine if the messenger would look through his belongings and come across a little notebook answering all these questions. As he reads it he would start to recall everything written, he would regain his clarity, re-awaken his identity, and revive his passion. Do we have such a notebook?

We do, it's the Ten Commandments. As we explore the underlying meaning of each of the commandments we will discover how they form Core Values.



text: The Ten Commandments, *Aseret HaDibrot*

Contained in just 172 words, the Ten Commandments are our Core Values – they explain who we are, what our mission is, and give us the guiding principles upon which to base our decisions.

I am the Lord, your God	אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
Have no other gods	לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
Do not take God's name in vain	לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא
Keep Shabbat	זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ
Honor your parents	כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ
Do not murder	לֹא תִרְצַח
Do not commit adultery	לֹא תִנְאֹף
Do not steal	לֹא תִגְנוֹב
Do not be a false witness	לֹא תַעֲנֶה בְרַעַב עֵד שָׁקֵר
Do not covet	לֹא תַחְמֹד



conversation:

- Do you have a “notebook?” Something short and simple, containing your core values – the standards of behavior, principles, and beliefs upon which you make your decisions? What would these be?
- In what ways does being Jewish impact your core values?
- Who are we? What is our mission?

10

Diber 10: DO NOT COVET Seeing Your Life as a Gift

We live in a world where many people believe that success comes from money or fame. Others believe that success is measured by things less tangible such as family, love, education, and talents. Envy, or coveting, can cause those who have not achieved “success” to be constantly unhappy. Ironically, those who have achieved “success” are often left bewildered that happiness and equanimity do not necessarily follow from their achievements.

So it seems everybody is kvetching. How can our tradition shed light on this paradox?



texts: What is Success?

SOURCE ONE: *Webster's Definition of Success:*

The attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence.

SOURCE TWO: *Pirkei Avot 4:1*

Ben Zoma would say: Who is rich? One who is happy with his lot.

בן זומא אומר... איזהו עשיר, השמח בחלקו

SOURCE THREE: *Ecclesiastes 9:11*

I have further observed under the sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the valiant; nor is bread won by the wise, nor wealth by the intelligent, nor favor by the learned. For the time of mischance comes to all.

שבתִי וְרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי לֹא לְקַלִּים הַמְרוֹץ וְלֹא לְגִבּוֹרִים הַמְלַחֲמָה וְגַם לֹא לְחַכְמִים לְחֵם וְגַם לֹא לְנִבְנִים עֶשֶׂר וְגַם לֹא לַיְדָעִים חֵן כִּי־עֵת וּפְגַע יִקְרָה אֶת־כָּלֵם



conversation:

- What is your definition of success? What is your definition of wealth?
- What does it mean to be “happy with your lot?”
- What is the relationship between being “happy with your lot” and ambition?
- What does the text from Ecclesiastes tell us about achievement, merit, and success?

9

Diber 9: FALSE WITNESS The Power of Speech

Human speech allows us, amongst other things, to collaborate, advocate, give comfort, but also to cause pain. There is a responsibility that comes with the unique power of speech. Sometimes saying something negative is actually positive, for example, warning a friend not to do business with a crook. This is called *Lashon Hara L'toelet*, negative speech for positive consequence. Even so, the *Chofetz Chaim* cautions us to be careful when doing it.

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texts:

SOURCE ONE: *Chofetz Chaim: Rabbi Yisroel Kagan* cites seven conditions:

1. You know it's true
2. You know it's bad
3. You tried to first speak to the person yourself (if that would work)
4. You aren't going to exaggerate
5. You have pure intentions for a positive purpose
6. The positive purpose cannot be achieved in another way
7. No more harm will come to them than it should

SOURCE TWO: *Esther 2: 21-22* At that time, when Mordecai was sitting in the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry, and plotted to kill King Ahasuerus. Mordecai learned of it and told it to Queen Esther; and Esther reported it to the king in Mordecai's name. The matter was investigated and found to be so, and the two were impaled on stakes. This was recorded in the book of annals at the insistence of the king.

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וּמֵרֵדְכִי יָשָׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ קִצְף בְּגִתָּן וְתֵרֶשׁ שְׁנֵי־סֹרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
מִשְׁמַרְי הַסֹּף וַיִּבְקֶשׁוּ לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ: וַיִּזְדַּע הַדָּבָר לְמֵרְדֵּכִי וַיִּגַּד לְאַסְתֵּר
הַמֶּלֶכָה וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְמֶלֶךְ בְּשֵׁם מֵרְדֵּכִי: וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הַדָּבָר וַיִּמְצָא וַיִּתְּלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם
עַל־עֵץ וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּסֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ

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conversation:

- Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to employ *Lashon Hara L'toelet*? In your experience, did all seven of Rabbi Yisroel Kagan's conditions apply?
- Recently it has seemed that there is a free-for-all in politics and reporting. Some say this allows for truthful debate, others say it's not decent and sets a terrible precedent for society at large. What do you think?

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

8

Diber 8: DO NOT STEAL

Priceless Possessions

Stealing by definition means taking something – without having permission or right – that someone else owns or has the right to use.

The Talmud teaches us that borrowing something without asking is also considered theft. However, as with taking something without intent to return, if one is sure that the owner of what is taken or borrowed would have given permission, one does not need to ask. Still, if it is possible to get express permission, one should do so.



texts:

SOURCE ONE: *Talmud, Baba Mitzia 43b*

Rava says, someone who borrows without permission is a thief.

אמר רבא שואל שלא מדעת לרבנן גזלן הוי

SOURCE TWO: *Baba Batra 165a*

Rav Yehuda says in the name of Rav: The majority of people succumb to theft.

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב רוב בגזל



conversation:

- How has technology today changed our sense of personal property? Do we perceive our online shopping history as a personal possession?
- Studies show that we are less likely to take good care of things in the public domain. How has the “shared economy” – Zip cars, Citybikes, Airbnb – changed our relationship to the things we use?
- The laws of theft do not take into account sentimental value. Is this fair? How could this value be evaluated?

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7

Diber 7: DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY When Loyalty is Challenged

We will explore the importance our tradition places on the sanctity of marriage and its message during this time of shifting attitudes about marriage and commitments. A contract is a give-and-take where each party is interested in their own benefit, whereas a covenant is the coming together of two or more parties in order to create something for the benefit of the other, or better yet, the whole. It is a merging of identities from the "I" to the "We." Two primary covenantal relationships for the Jewish people are our relationship with God and in marriage. The ketubah spells out the terms of the marriage contract and the Ten Commandments spell out the terms of our relationship with God.



texts:

SOURCE ONE: *Bereishit 7:17*

I [God] will maintain My covenant between Me and you [Abraham] and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be your God and to your offspring to come.

וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זַרְעֶךָ אִמְרִיךָ
לְדֹרֹתָם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹקִים וּלְזַרְעֶךָ אִמְרִיךָ

SOURCE TWO: *Devarim 4:13*

He declared to you the covenant that He commanded you to observe, the *Aseret HaDivarim*, The Ten Commandments; and He inscribed them on two tablets of stone.

וַיִּגְדַּלְכֶם אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים
וַיִּכְתְּבֵם עַל־שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים:

SOURCE THREE: *Malachi (2:14)*

"She is your friend and the wife with whom you have a covenant."

וְהִיא חֲבֵרָתְךָ וְאִשְׁתְּ בְּרִיתְךָ



conversation:

- What are the responsibilities of each party in a covenantal relationship? Are there essential qualities covenantal relationships possess that others may not?
- Can covenantal relationships be broken?
- Is there a difference between our relationships with other human beings and our relationship with God?
- What is the relationship between loyalty and faith in covenantal relationships?

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

6

Diber 6: DO NOT MURDER

Nurture Life

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks - God in Auschwitz

When I first stood at Auschwitz-Birkenau the question that haunted me was not, "Where was God?" God was in the command, "You shall not murder." God was in the words, "You shall not oppress the stranger." God was saying to humanity, "Your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." God did not stop the first humans eating forbidden fruit. He did not stop Cain committing murder. He did not stop the Egyptians enslaving the Israelites. God does not save us from ourselves. That, according to the Talmud, is why creating man was such a risk that the angels advised against it. The question that haunts me after the Holocaust, as it does today in this new age of chaos, is "Where is man?"

Life is the most basic right we have. Where does this right come from? What is included in it?



text:

SOURCE ONE: *Declaration of independence:*

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men ... laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

SOURCE TWO: *Talmud, Baba Metzia 58b*

A Tanna taught before Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak: Anyone who humiliates another in public, it is as though he spilled blood.

תני תנא קמיה דרב נחמן בר יצחק כל המלבין פני חבירו ברבים כאילו שופך דמים



conversation:

- What is included in the right to life?
- Is "life" limited to the physical? How about the emotional, intellectual, spiritual?
Whose responsibility is it to secure this right?

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

5

Diber 5: HONOR YOUR PARENTS A Dynamic Relationship

The commandment to honor your parents is on the first tablet of the Dibrot, which spell out the relationship between man and God. As we explore this dynamic relationship, we should keep in mind that our tradition views it with great spiritual significance.

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texts:

SOURCE ONE: *Talmud, Kiddushin 30b*

Our rabbis taught, "Three partners are in a person; God, his father, and his mother. When a person honors his father and mother, God says, 'I consider it as if I lived among them and you honored me.'"

ת"ר שלשה שותפין הן באדם הקב"ה ואביו ואמו בזמן שאדם
מכבד את אביו ואת אמו אמר הקב"ה מעלה אני עליהם
כאילו דרתי ביניהם וכבדוני

SOURCE TWO: *Talmud Kiddushin 31b*

The Rabbis taught, how do we respect? And how do we honor?

Respect is not sitting or standing in their place, not contradicting them, nor proving them right.

Honor is providing them with food and drink, helping them get dressed, covering them, bringing them in and taking them out.

ת"ר איזהו מורא ואיזהו כיבוד
מורא לא עומד במקומו ולא יושב במקומו
ולא סותר את דבריו ולא מכריעו כיבוד מאכיל
ומשקה מלביש ומכסה מכניס ומוציא

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conversation:

- The Talmud is giving examples of honor and respect. What would you add to the list? Why are we not commanded to love our parents?
- Why is honoring parents on the first tablet which is about our relationship with God?

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4

Diber 4: SHABBAT Sanctified Time

Based on the language of the Diber, “to sanctify” the Shabbat, in Israel Shabbat is called *Shabbat Kodesh*, the Holy Shabbat, as opposed to the weekdays which are called *yemei chol*, mundane days. At the onset of Shabbat there is a Mitzvah to say Kiddush – a special blessing said over wine which incorporates all these facets. The Rambam explains that it is a fulfillment of remembering the Shabbat.

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texts:

SOURCE ONE: *Rambam Sefer HaMitzvot Positive Mitzvah 155*

זכור – Recall the Shabbat day to sanctify it. “We are commanded to make a verbal declaration when Shabbat enters (*kiddush*) and when it leaves (*havdalah*). We mention the Exodus from Egypt, the sanctity of the day, its exalted character, and how it is distinct from the other days of the week. This is the intent of the words, “Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it,” meaning remember it and sanctify it with a blessing.

היא שצונו לקדש את השבת ולאמר דברים בכניסתו וביציאתו נזכיר במ
יציאת מצרים וקדוש היום ומעלתו והבדלו משאר הימים הקודמים ממנו
והבאים אחריו, והוא אמרו יתברך זכור את יום השבת לקדשו כלומר זכרהו
וקדשהו בברכה.

SOURCE TWO: *Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath*

There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern.”

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conversation:

- **לקדשו** *L'kadsho*, to sanctify it (Shabbat) means to separate for a specific purpose. Based on the Diber, what is the purpose of our rest?
- What is the difference between regular time and “sanctified time?” Is there sacred or sanctified time in your life?
- What does it mean for God to rest? How does it compare to our rest?
- Why do you think it is important that not only you, but everyone around you, including your animals, rest on Shabbat?

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

3

Diber 3: THE NAME IN VAIN

Respect what is sacred

We are meant to seek out the positive expression of each of the Dibrot which are prohibitions. The opposite of desecrating God's name is sanctifying God's name – causing a true and honest impression about God. In fact, we are charged to be holy, just like God is, and in many ways, this can be seen as the Jewish mission.

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texts:

SOURCE ONE: *Exodus 19:6*

In the preamble to the Ten Commandments, God explains that accepting the covenant with Him will mean becoming a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. "Now, if you will listen carefully to my voice, and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."

וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהֵייתֶם לִי סֹגְלָה
מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה
הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

SOURCE TWO: *Isaiah 42:6-8*

I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you, And I have grasped you by the hand. I shall protect you, and help you turn the people back to the covenant, to be a light to the nations – opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not yield My glory to another (people), nor My renown to idols.

אֲנִי ה' קִרְאתִיךָ בְּצַדִּיק וְאַחֲזִיק בְּיָדְךָ וְאַצְרֶךָ וְאַתְּנֶנּוּ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוּר גּוֹיִם: לְפָקֹחַ
עֵינַיִם עֲוֹרוֹת לְהוֹצִיא מִמִּסְגַּר אֲסִיר מִבַּיִת כָּל־אִשְׁבֵי חֹשֶׁה: אֲנִי ה' הוּא שְׁמִי וְכְבוֹדִי
לֹאֲחַר לֹאֲחַר וְתִהְיֶה לִּי לְפָסִילִים



conversation:

- What is the calling to being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation? How does it relate to the covenant?
- Is our role as a "light unto the nations" an active or passive role?
- What do the Jewish people need to do in order to become such a nation?

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

2

Diber 2: DO NOT HAVE ANY OTHER GODS Lies about Power

Not only do we run the risk of mistakenly idolizing powers and concepts we have no control over that are greater than ourselves, we are prone to aggrandizing ourselves in ways that approach idolatry.



texts:

SOURCE ONE: *Devarim 8:12, 17-19*

Perhaps you will eat and be satisfied and build stately houses and dwell in them...

And you will think, "My strength and the might of my hand that has accumulated this wealth for me." But you must remember the Lord, your God, for it is He that gives you strength to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant which He swore to your forefathers, as it is this day.

פֶּן־תֹּאכַל וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבָתִּים טוֹבִים תִּבְנֶה וְיִשְׁבַּתָּ: ... וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ כֹּחִי וְעַצְמִי יָדִי עָשָׂה לִי אֶת הַחֵיל הַזֶּה וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הִנְתֵּן לְךָ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׂוֹת חֵיל לְמַעַן הִקִּים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם כִּי־זֶה

SOURCE TWO: *Kohelet 9:11*

I have further observed under the sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the valiant, nor is bread won by the wise, nor wealth by the intelligent, nor favor by the learned. For the time of mischance comes to all.

שָׁבַתִּי וְרָאָה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי לֹא לְקַלִּים הַמְרוּץ וְלֹא לְגִבּוֹרִים הַמְלַחֵמָה וְגַם לֹא לְחַכְמִים לָחֵם וְגַם לֹא לְנִבְנִים עֶשֶׂר וְגַם לֹא לַיֹּדְעִים חֵן כִּי עַת וּפְגַע יִקְרָה אֶת כָּל־אֶדְמָה:

SOURCE THREE: *Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, Ohr Yisrael, Section 30*

And [there are matters whose truth, in the absence of proof] is only found through clear judgement. And in these matters everyone prides themselves by saying, "I am the one who can see, to me has been revealed hidden insight."

ויש אשר רק בשיקול הדעת הישרה יוסדרו. ובהם מתפאר כל אנוש לאמר "אנכי הרואה עלי נגלו תעלומות חכמה"



conversation:

- What are the tensions between gratitude to God, self agency, and self reliance?
- How can we cultivate a sense of gratitude for one's blessings and achievements in life?
- How does our increasing ability to customize our lives challenge our awareness of God?

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

1

Diber 1: I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD

A call to kindness!

Is belief a Mitzvah?

This Diber is unique in that it is not in command form. It is because of this that some commentators do not count it as one of the 613 Mitzvot. Whether it is or isn't a Mitzvah, it is definitely a Diber, the first of the "Ten Commandments."

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texts:

SOURCE ONE: *Rambam Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandments 1*

This is the Mitzvah in which we have been commanded to believe in God. One should believe that there is a first cause who brings about all existence. This is the intent of the words, "I am the Lord, your God."

היא הצווי אשר צונו בהאמנת האלהות, והוא שנאמין שיש שם עלה וסבה
הוא פועל לכל הנמצאים, והוא אמרו אנכי ה' אלקיך

SOURCE TWO: *Rabbi Yehudai Cerescas The Light of the Lord, introduction*

It is a mistake to count belief in God [amongst the 613 mitzvot] because it is not feasible to have a commandment without a known commander. If believing in God is a commandment, it perforce already assumes the existence of God [and in that case there is no need for the commandment.]

טעה טעות מפורסם מי שמנה במצוות עשה להאמין מציאות האל יתברך זה,
כי לא יצויר מצוה בזולת מצוה ידוע, ולזה, כאשר נעשה אמונת מציאות
האל מצוה, כבר נניח אמונת מציאות האל יתברך

?

conversation:

- Is belief in God a choice?
- A more accurate translation of Aseret HaDibrot, "The Ten Commandments," is the Ten Principles or Core Values. According to the opinion that this is not a commandment, but a statement, what message are we meant to take from it?

Chai Mitzvah was created as a way to engage adults, teens, and families in a Jewish journey throughout their lives. Combining texts to spark discussion, ritual, and social action, Chai Mitzvah provides the framework for a meaningful Jewish journey.

Project Aseret provides a new, powerful way to look at the Ten Commandments as Core Values – universal in nature and the bedrock of Jewish identity – containing profound and relevant principles and beliefs for both individual and communal life.

It is our hope that your Chai Mitzvah/Aseret experience will ignite deeper Jewish engagement and continued growth for you.

This booklet contains a sample of the Chai Mitzvah-Project Aseret Big Ten curriculum. The entire curriculum contains eleven beautifully illustrated monthly source books to promote in-depth conversations on each of the Ten Commandments. Please contact us for more information or to order.



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