

THE
TEN
MASORTI
COMMANDMENTS

Masorti Shabbat – Shavuot 5779/2019

Masorti
Shabbat



שבת מסורתית

MASORTI THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

1 "I am Adonai..."

Rabbi Roni Tabick • New Stoke Newington Shul

אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ



In many ways the first commandment is not a command at all. Rather it is a proclamation of who God is and the kind of relationship we have with the divine. God is Adonai, a personal god, in special connection with us as a people. Moreover, God proclaims that this relationship is borne out through history, as God 'brought us out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery'.

As Masorti Jews, we exist in dialogue with the divine. Our submission to the process of halacha emerges from the profound sense that a human being is not the centre of the universe, and we should not put our own selfish desires first. To submit to halacha is to put something higher than ourselves at the centre of our lives.

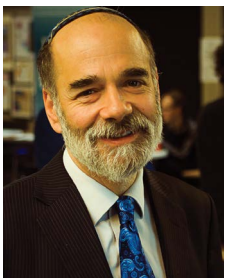
To be Masorti is to believe that experience of God is filtered through history. We are all constrained by the culture we inherit and the world we inhabit. Not only is our relationship with God based on our past, it must be continually tended to and updated, as the infinite gets filtered through the finite experience of the day.

The first of the commandments may not be a command as such, but it is the foundation of what it means to be a Jew.

2 "You shall have no other gods..."

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg • New North London Synagogue and Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism

לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ



I used to think the second commandment 'Make no image or likeness; don't bow down to or worship them,' was about praying to sticks and stones, sculptures and paintings. I relegated its relevance to the realms of ancient history.

I now realise how wrong that is.

Faith, wrote the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, is about our 'ultimate concern'. Everybody has an ultimate concern which describes what they see, consciously or unconsciously, as the goal and purpose of their life. The issue is: what is that concern?

Western societies almost invariably measure themselves by growth, GDP. As individuals, we are constantly invited and incited to assess ourselves by success: job, achievement, income, popularity, numbers of followers on social media. In our celebrity culture, icons are those who tick these boxes most.

If asked whether we worship such 'values' we would say 'no'. But is that the truth?

An astute re-reading of the second commandment (Hasidism is replete with 'creative mis-readings') runs not 'Don't make *for yourself*', but 'Don't make *of yourself* an idol'.

Individually and collectively, we are in acute danger of eclipsing God, the presence of God in nature and the need to serve and care for God's world, by worshipping ourselves.

3 "You shall not take God's name..."

Rabbi Oliver Joseph • New North London Synagogue and the Chavurah

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם ה'



There are seven different names of God found in the Torah. The name thought to have the greatest sanctity is the unpronounced name, made up of the letters yud, hey, vav and hey. This name is used sparingly and never pronounced as written. The commandment of taking God's name in vain is open to the humour of farce. Even in writing this article, I could be open to accusations of taking God's name in vain.

The most famous comedy which addresses this commandment is Monty Python's sketch from the Life of Brian: "You said Jehovah!" A contemporary sketch from Israeli TV opens with Moshe holding the Ten Commandments in his hands, asking: "Any questions?" A woman replies: "A question relating to not saying God's name in vain. Did you

not just say God's name?"

Perhaps humour enables us to appreciate the beauty of our tradition? We take care not to write or print God's name, or to discard pages that contain it. We avoid saying God's name aloud unless in prayer or in study of our sacred texts. Yes, we utter the name of God often. But our attempt is always to write and say God's many names with reverence.

4 "Remember Shabbat..."

Rabbi Chaim Weiner • Director of the Masorti Bet Din

זְכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת



Shabbat is a central observance of Jewish tradition, known well beyond the Jewish world. In early times, Jews were ridiculed as lazy for setting aside one day a week in which they refrained from working. The ancient Romans considered it a sign of moral malaise.

In the modern world, reaction to Shabbat is more mixed; many people appreciate the benefits of turning off for one day a week.

I suspect that in the future Shabbat will be appreciated for another reason. As jobs are replaced by machines, and tasks outsourced to computers, we will start to ask, 'What shall we do with our time if we no longer need to work?'

Shabbat provides the answer. Shabbat was never about just refraining from work. It's about dedicating one day a week to our spiritual lives. Human beings are ultimately spiritual beings. A meaningful life is built on knowledge, culture, society, values and spiritual quests. Shabbat makes space for what is ultimately more important.

Shabbat is a huge challenge. We are challenged to give up potential income, to control our use of technology. But the greatest challenge is learning how to build meaningful lives without the imperative of work. No wonder Shabbat is considered equal to the entire Torah.

5 “Honour your father & mother...” כְּבֹד אֶת אֲבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ

Zahavit Shalev • Student Rabbi and Rabbi's Assistant, New North London Synagogue



The teenage brain is programmed to think adults are fools. I have very vivid recall of thinking this about my parents.

Soon after my mother died, a memory floated to the surface of the time when, as a young adult, I shouted at her, accusing her of not understanding me. My mother - to my surprise - readily agreed. True, she said, she loved me very much but she did not understand me. However, she continued, my feelings were real and I deserved to be understood. (She recommended therapy.)

Now, when my own children tell me I am a fool, I feel equanimity, almost gratitude. I think, wryly: oh well, they are just doing their job. Their disrespect is real, but it is also evidence of their developing minds.

Their disdain is a completely understandable ambivalence about their dependence on me and my power over them. (And also, sometimes I am a fool.)

Our rabbis regarded the fifth commandment as the pivot between the mitzvot on each tablet - one side describing mitzvot between us and God, and the other between us and our fellow humans. But I now see that honouring parents is also the commandment that marks the pivot between generations.

6 “You shall not murder” לֹא תרצח

Rabbi Adam Zagoria-Moffet • St Albans Masorti Synagogue



“Thou shalt not kill”. It really only sounds right that way, doesn't it? (Thanks, King James). Yet, any careful observer who looks elsewhere in the Torah will find a plethora of killing: capital punishment, vicious battles, and interpersonal conflicts that end in an inevitable crime scene. The reason for this apparent paradox is, as usual, a mistranslation which we have internalised in our English-dominated KJV world. The mitzvah is encapsulated in the Hebrew words *lo tirtsach*. The root of our critical verb refers specifically to what we would call murder, that is, an unjust and intentional killing.

Many religions advocate pacifism, from Christianity's injunction to turn the other cheek, to Jainism's avoidance even of accidentally killing insects while walking. Yet Judaism cares little about 'killing'— but a lot about murder. This distinction is what animates so many of the hot button issues that involve religion (abortion, euthanasia, etc.) because being able to distinguish between what is permitted (and even sometimes sanctified) killing and what is murder is not always easy. As a result, understanding what falls under the mitzvah of *lo tirtsach* is critically important, because without a clear grasp of it, we run the risk of blurring the line between life and death in a profound way.

7 “You shall not commit adultery” לֹא תנאף

Rabbi Jeremy Gordon • New London Synagogue



As a newly ordained Rabbi, I wasn't prepared for the damage adultery would wreck on families in the communities I have served - across multiple generations.

The Talmudic tractate Gittin ends with a discussion on the grounds for seeking divorce. While Shammai permits divorce only for some terrible matter, Akiva believes that simply finding another person more attractive than one's spouse should count as sufficient grounds to carefully and seriously break the bond of Kiddushin – sacred exclusivity – that is at the heart of married life. But not adultery!

In pre-wedding meetings with the couples who ask me to officiate at their weddings (and as I write this I'm aware I may be driving others away!) I share this hopefully sobering instruction. Suppose, I suggest, you find yourself at some getaway event, maybe a work retreat at a fancy hotel, and suppose some combination of wine, music, sunsets and the like lead you to find someone enticing in a way that might threaten the sanctity of your marriage, and suppose you find yourself drifting towards this destructive sin – see my face, button up your clothes and get out of there. Get a divorce, if you feel the need. But not adultery!

8 “You shall not steal” לֹא תגנב

Rabbi Daniella Kolodny • Masorti Judaism



The medieval Bible commentator Ovadiah ben Jacob Sforno included the injunction against misleading (*g'neivat da'at*) under the eighth commandment 'you shall not steal'. In the case of *g'neivat da'at*, a person is 'stealing' someone's mind; that is, removing another person's ability to make an honest evaluation. The Talmud warns against misrepresentation, teaching, amongst a number of examples, that a person should not bring a partially full bottle to a mourner's house. This could cause the mourner to think that the reason the bottle was empty, having been placed amongst the other bottles of wine, was that people had consumed it and lead him to the conclusion that the presenter was more generous than he actually had been.

“You shall live by them.” (Lev. 18:5) Ibn Ezra teaches that Torah brings life to a person who lives by its laws. Judaism is an ancient tradition which continues to be interpreted to enable people to live joyful lives through the tradition. Masorti Judaism reads the tradition so that we neither ignore its challenges nor minimize its difficulties. To do so would be engaging in *g'neivat da'at*.

MASORTI 10 HIGHLIGHTS

9 "You shall not bear false witness..."

לא תענה

Rabbi Joel Levy • Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue and the Conservative Yeshiva



The ninth utterance prohibits false witness testimony. This is not a general prohibition on lying, but is connected to the necessity for a correctly functioning legal system within which honest witness testimony is a crucial component.

The language of the ninth utterance is strange. Often translated 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour', the Hebrew actually reads closer to 'Do not answer through your neighbour a lying witness', which seems to make no sense.

Rambam, sensitive to the text of the Torah, claims that 'through your neighbour' refers to someone who includes in his own testimony information that he has heard from a friend. Ibn Ezra admits he spent years searching for a reason why it says 'a witness' rather than 'testimony'. He concludes that the text is actually addressed to someone prone to false testimony. A complete paraphrase might read as follows: 'You, yes you, who are prone to false testimony, do not repeat your neighbour's true testimony!'

If we are, by our nature, liable to be economical with the truth, we must be careful not to pass on what is actually true as our own first-hand experience, thereby creating falsehood.

The ninth utterance is a prohibition on retweeting!

10 "You shall not covet..."

לא תתמד

Chazan Jaclyn Chernett • Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue



The two versions of the Ten Commandments, the first in the Parashat Yitro, the second in Va'etchanan, (the book of Deuteronomy being a Mishneh Torah or reiteration) show a slight difference in order and language, although the message remains the same.

What does it mean to covet? The word *chamod* is used in both versions of the Ten Commandments, and means something desirable, something to be craved or yearned for. In the Deuteronomy version, the word *avah* is also used, and has a similar meaning.

Craving something that belongs to someone else is a desire that we each need to curb or control in ourselves. That 'something' includes people as well as property, but there is no room here to start unpicking

this one! Self-control of our desires is the core of human ethical behaviour and Jewish teaching shows it as paramount!

- 1 TRAINING:** Masorti Judaism supported **2** student rabbis who will start work in our communities this year
- 2 EXPERTISE:** The European Masorti Bet Din worked on **60** cases of conversion, divorce and kashrut supervision
- 3 YOUTH:** Noam gave **450** young people a transformative Jewish experience on camp and in Israel.
- 4 STUDENTS:** Marom social events & pastoral support reached **200** students on **13** university campuses
- 5 GROWTH:** our Community Growth Toolkit saw a **50%** rise in membership at New Stoke Newington Shul
- 6 JEWISH LEARNING:** The Masorti Kollel and Conservative Yeshiva offered high level Jewish learning
- 7 SOCIAL ACTION:** Masorti Judaism supported Our Second Home, a youth summer camp for **35** refugees
- 8 YOUNG ADULTS:** Masorti Judaism supported innovative community models for young people such as Ohel Moed and the Chavurah
- 9 LEADERSHIP:** Merkaz Noam leadership programmes trained our young people to become Jewish leaders for the future.
- 10 ENGAGEMENT:** Masorti Judaism brought our unique message to the wider community and promoted our values in publications, online and in the media

● UK

Masorti Judaism has **6000** members – up by more than **60%** in **15** years

● UK

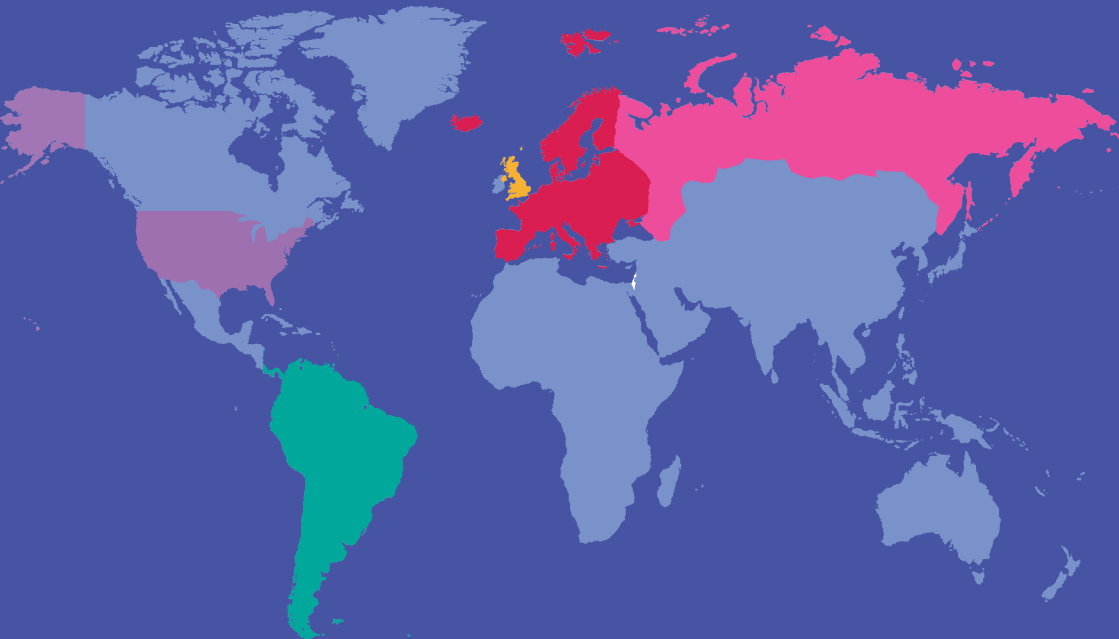
There are **14** active Masorti Jewish communities in the UK

● ISRAEL

There are over **80** Masorti affiliated communities in Israel

● FSU

There are Masorti communities in Kiev, Moscow and St Petersburg



● S. AMERICA

There are **55** Masorti communities in **35** cities across **10** countries in South America

● EUROPE

There are **19** Masorti communities in **18** cities across **9** countries in Europe.

● N. AMERICA

Almost **20%** of North American Jews identify as Conservative / Masorti

● WORLDWIDE

Over **135** communities worldwide are affiliated with Masorti Olami – the global arm of Masorti Judaism

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Masorti Judaism in the UK

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