

10 Bite-Sized Life Lessons to Learn from the 10 Commandments¹

It's the world's best-seller. It's also the most widely distributed book. Some would guess it has sold millions, but in fact it has sold almost 4-billion copies in the last fifty years alone.

It teaches morality and all the do's and don'ts. It can be understood on deep abstract levels as well as on the most practical, down-to-earth planes. It is celestial while also earthy.

It gives practical guidance to living a higher life and is the best self help book ever written.

It, of course, is the Torah.

And this week's Torah portion, Yitro, is when it all began. As the Jewish people camped together around the mountain, the stage was set for the giving of the Torah. Even within the setting of this awe-inspiring drama, infinitely important lessons are embedded that can help us understand ourselves and our purpose in our world.

Here are ten bite-sized nuggets of wisdom that we can apply to our lives **from how, where, and when the Ten Commandments were given.**

1. G-d chose to give the Torah on an elevated mountain. You can elevate your life.

a. Acts 18:1-4

¹After this (his experience in the marketplace in Athens), Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius² had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³**and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.** ⁴**Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.**

b. Phillipians 4:8-9

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—**think about such things.** ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—**put it into practice.** And the God of peace will be with you.

2. A mountain is the same dirt as a plain, but it has been raised. No matter how dirty your life appears, raise it and make of it a mountain.

a. Luke 7:36-50

³⁶When one of the Pharisees invited Yeshua to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷A woman in that town **who lived a sinful life** learned that Yeshua was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. ³⁹When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and **what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.**" ⁴⁰Yeshua answered him, "**Simon, I have something to tell you.**" "**Tell me, teacher,**" he said. ⁴¹"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Yeshua said. ⁴⁴Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, **her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown.** But **whoever has been forgiven little loves little.**" ⁴⁸Then Yeshua said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰Yeshua said to the woman, "Your faith has **saved** you; go in peace."

1) σῶζω (sozo [sode'-zo])—*free from harm, rescue from a hazardous condition or circumstance, save, rescue from bodily peril, real or threatening, free from disease or from demonic possession, free from death, from judgement, from sin.*

b. Luke 19:1-10

¹Yeshua entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Yeshua was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and

¹ Chana Weisberg, *Shabbat deLights, Bereishit/Shemot*, (Chabad.org), pp. 205-207.

² Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (10 BCE – CE 54) was Roman emperor from CE 41 to 54.

climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Yeshua was coming that way. ⁵When Yeshua reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, "**He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.**" ⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." ⁹Yeshua said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For **the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.**"

3. Mount Sinai was a low, unimposing mountain. The gateway to spiritual greatness is humility.

a. Matthew 5:3

³"Blessed are the **poor in spirit** (i.e., *humble*), for ~~theirs is~~ (they *make up*) the kingdom of heaven.

1) Luke 6:20

²⁰Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor (i.e., *humble*), for ~~yours is~~ (you *make up*) the **kingdom of God**."

2) Matthew 5:5

⁵Blessed are the **meek**, for they will **inherit** the earth.

a) Idiomatically, "the meek" is the equivalent of "the poor in spirit" or "humble"—NOT "timid," "submissive," "compliant."

b. Avot 5:19

MISHNAH 19. WHOEVER POSSESSES THESE THREE THINGS, HE IS OF THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER; AND [WHOEVER POSSESSES] THREE OTHER THINGS, HE IS OF THE DISCIPLES OF BALAAM, THE WICKED.⁽¹¹³⁾ **THE DISCIPLES OF ABRAHAM, OUR FATHER, [POSSESS] A GOOD EYE,⁽¹¹⁴⁾ AN HUMBLE SPIRIT⁽¹¹⁵⁾ AND A LOWLY SOUL.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ THE DISCIPLES OF BALAAM, THE WICKED, [POSSESS] AN EVIL EYE,⁽¹¹⁷⁾ A HAUGHTY SPIRIT⁽¹¹⁸⁾ AND AN OVER-AMBITIOUS SOUL.⁽¹¹⁹⁾**

(113) So designated in Jewish literature, as his wickedness is proved by his own willingness, even eagerness, to go with Balak's messengers, and his 'apologies' for not being able to curse Israel; it is he, too, who is said to have counselled the seduction of the Israelites by the Moabite women.

(114) V. supra II, 9. **Abraham demonstrated his generous and ungrudging nature in his dealings with the King of Sodom** (Gen. XIV, 22f.) **and with Ephron the Hittite** (Gen. XXIII).

(115) Abraham's humility is evident from his words: ... I ... 'who am but dust and ashes' (Gen. XVIII, 27).

(116) נפש (soul) is used here of 'desire,' 'appetite,' a meaning which it has already in Biblical Hebrew. שפלה would thus mean 'kept low,' 'subdued.'

Cf. Abraham's dealing with Lot, Gen. XIII. The three above qualities are among those sought for when appointing judges. v. J. Sanh. I, 4.

(117) Balaam's avarice is clear from his own words; v. Num. XXII, 18; XXIV, 13.

(118) A reference to Balaam's claim that he was one that knoweth the knowledge of the Most High (Num. XXIV, 16).

(119) Balaam's 'handling' of Balak, and his attempts at 'outwitting' God, reveal an insatiable desire for power.

4. The Torah was given on a mountain, not a valley. Humility must be complemented by self-assurance.

a. Luke 18:1-8

¹Then Yeshua told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ²He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³And there was **a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'**

⁴"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" ⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And **will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?** Will he keep putting them off? ⁸I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

5. The Jewish people were commanded to "make a boundary around the mountain." Limit self-assurance, so that it doesn't degenerate into arrogance.

a. 1Samuel 15:17-23

¹⁷Samuel said, "Although **you were once small in your own eyes**, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' ¹⁹Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?" ²⁰"**But I did obey the LORD,**" Saul said. "**I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king.**" ²¹The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal." ²²But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than

the fat of rams. ²³**For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.** Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

b. Romans 11:17-24

¹⁷If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. **Do not be arrogant, but tremble.** ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. ²²Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

6. The Ten Commandments were addressed in singular to the whole of the Jewish people; if even one Jew was missing, the Torah could not have been given. You are essential.

a. 1Corinthians 12:14-26

¹⁴Even so **the body is not made up of one part but of many.** ¹⁵Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker **are indispensable**, ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that **there should be**

no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

7. The Ten Commandments were directed at individuals, tailored to each person's spiritual and psychological makeup. You have a unique role and mission.

a. Exodus 3:9-12

⁹And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

¹¹**But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"** ¹²And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

b. Esther 4:12-14

¹²When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And **who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?**"

8. The Torah was given to one united people. Only external façades, bodies, separate us. Deep down we are one.

a. Hebrews 11:39-40

³⁹These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰since God had planned something better for us so that **only together with us would they be made perfect.**

9. The Jewish people were "facing the mountain" ready to receive G-d's word. If you focus on something higher, petty differences disintegrate.

a. Psalms 121:1-8

¹A song of ascents. **I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?** ²**My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.** ³He will not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber; ⁴indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. ⁵The LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand; ⁶the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. ⁷The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life; ⁸the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

b. Isaiah 40:26-29

²⁶**Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:** Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. ²⁷Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹**He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.**

10. At Mount Sinai, heaven and the earth, spirituality and physicality touched for the first time. You can bring Divine consciousness into this finite physical world.

a. Matthew 9:35-38

³⁵Yeshua went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶**When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."**

1) Isaiah 61:1-2

¹The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor ...

b. Galatians 5:13-15

¹³You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, **serve one another in love.** ¹⁴The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.