# 10 COMMANDMENTS: How come we don’t know them better?

In the coming days, we will examine BH the Ten Commandments or □□□□□□ □□□□.
Question: Why the 10 Commandments, despite their notoriety, are not so known and studied? Should not the 10 Commandments be the first text that students study (and memorize !) in every Jewish school?
I think we need a little history to understand what happened …
On the one hand, the recitation of the 10 Commandments is recorded in the Mishna (Tamid 5: 1) as part of the daily liturgy of the Bet haMiqdash (destroyed in the year 68 of the Common Era). Why then we do not recite every day the 10 Commandments anymore?
The first hint is found in the Gemara Berachot 12b where we find several rabbis in the 3rd and 4th-century c.e. trying to re-establish the recitation of the 10 Commandments in Babylonia, but the rabbinical courts did not allow it. Why? The cryptic Hebrew words used by the Gemara are “□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□”, which means more or less “because of the scandalous [ideas and practices] of the heretics”. But what is the Gemara referring to with these words?
In the New Testament, composed around the time of the Gemara, the 10 Commandments are viewed as “the only commandments revealed directly by God”. Therefore they are “the only commandments that are mandatory for Church followers”, implying that all other commandments have not a “direct” divine origin, and therefore are not mandatory. This marginalization of the other 603 commandments served the strategy of the ancient Church, which pursued the formulation of a “reformed Judaism”, a new religion devoid of almost all ritual obligations. To better understand this fascinating subject, I would refer the reader to Paul Johnson’s book, “History of Christianity.” In the first pages of this superb book, Johnson explains that the apostles debated as to what parts of Jewish law should remain compulsory in the “new religion.” Johnson tells us that Romans felt very attracted to Jewish monotheism and ethics, but they were not willing to be

circumcised, to stop working on Shabbat, or limiting themselves to the Kashrut dietary laws, etc. and therefore very few Roman converted to Judaism. The apostles saw a great opportunity: the potential conversion of thousands of Romans to their new religion. And to make things more accessible to prospective converts, which the Church desperately needed, the apostles formulated a "light" version of Judaism (later called Christianity). In this new Judaism, circumcision for example was replaced by baptism; the prohibition of working on the Sabbath day was reinterpreted, and virtually all ritual laws were virtually repealed, except for the 10 Commandments …

The "heretics" mentioned by the Talmud is an unambiguous reference to the first Christian ideologists (the Talmud, especially in later editions, could not be more explicit, because a direct reference to Christianity could easily trigger persecution and killing of Jews, and justify the burning of the Jewish "demonic" books).

In any case, this debate about the 10 Commandments also generated a very famous question: Should we stand up when we hear the public reading of the 10 Commandments in Parashat Yitro and Va'ethanan?

Maimonides said NO. He explained that while the Ten Commandments are viewed for other religions as superior to the other commandments of the Hebrew Bible, to the Jewish tradition, the Ten Commandments are obviously an essential part of the Tora, but they are NOT more important than every other Biblical precept. To emphasize this fundamental concept and to express the Jewish belief in the uniformity of all the mitzvot of the Tora and their Divine origin, Maimonides forbade to stand when the Ten Commandments are read in the synagogue. Standing for the Ten Commandments would constitute a statement that these commandments are superior to the other 603 commandments, as the Church asserts.

In practical terms, Rabbi Obadia Yosef z "l writes that in order not to contradict Maimonides, when the 10 Commandments are read in public, we should invite up to the Tora an erudite or elderly person and stand from the beginning of the Aliya in honor of that person, not as a statement on the "superiority" of the 10 Commandments.

Returning to our original question, why the 10 Commandments are not better known and studied? It is quite possible that

this long debate about the supreme importance other religions give to the 10 Commandments has unfortunately collaborated to our rather superficial knowledge of them.
BH in the coming days will try to remedy this a little bit analyzing the 10 Commandments as a whole, and exploring every commandment in particular.
*To find all the Hebrew texts mentioned in this article, and many more references on this fascinating topic, click here*