

**Asseret HaDibrot:
10 Utterances, Not Commandments- a Discussion
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Subject Area: Torah

Multi-unit lesson plan

Target age: 9th – 12th grades

Learning objectives:

To know and understand the 10 Utterances.

To understand why they are not commandments.

To know and understand how we can live by the same moral and ethical values, today.

Materials: Chumashim (Bibles)

Class 1-2: Introduction

Class 3-4: Utterances 1

Class 5: Utterance 2

Class 6: Utterance 3

Class 7-8: Utterance 4

Class 9: Utterance 5

Class 10: Utterance 6-7

Class 11: Utterance 8-9

Class 12: Utterances 10 and conclusion

Class 1-2: Introduction

The Hebrew name for the 10 commandments is the 10 utterances,(10 Divrot).

20:1 'Daber' in Hebrew is: speak, thing, word.

Read Exodus (Shmot) 19:16 - 20:18

Ask the students what questions they have and record the questions in a "parking lot" to be addressed, as they come up.

The following questions should be discussed in the class.

1. What is the difference between 'Devrot' and commandments?

2. What is the name of the parsha? (Yitro) Is it significant that the parsha with the 10 utterances, GOD's eternal moral code for the Israelites, is named for a non-Jew?
3. Who actually spoke The 10 utterances? (Look at 19:19, 19:25, 20:1. It's unclear.)
4. GOD went down - Moses went up to the mountain (19:20). Is it significant? (partnership? meeting half way?)
5. (19:24) Moses went down - and up. What does it tell us about the path to God?
6. Why two tablets? Why not one? (Division into relationship with GOD and relationship between people. First tablet begins with I am the Lord your GOD; second tablet contains no reference to GOD.)
7. The 10 utterances start with: I am the Lord your GOD and the last two words are "your neighbor." Is that significant? (To be a righteous person, a Tzadik, you should hold God and humanity in your heart at all times.)
8. Were the ten utterances spoken in the singular? plural? Why? (singular = personal)

Class 3 and 4: Utterance 1

First: **I AM** 20:2 (Adonai) who took you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.

Ask: What questions do you have about this text?

GOD introduces GOD's self as the giver of freedom, not the creator of the Universe.

Why? (Personal GOD, who's primary concern is how we treat one another)

1. Is this a commandment to believe in GOD?
2. To whom are the 10 utterances addressed, the individual or the community? (individual)

3. "I the Lord am your GOD": is the way ancient royal treaties begin. (Etz Hayim, page 442 footnote 2. This introduces the parties in the treaty. GOD introduces GOD's self to Israel.)
4. What is the actual treaty here? (I, GOD gave you, the individual, freedom - and this is what you need to do to keep it. Perhaps this is why it these are utterances and not commandments.
5. Are these commandments? A contract? A universal truth? Are they conditional?
6. If a teacher says to the class: "I am (teacher's name) who is your teacher. I give you knowledge (freedom)" what does it say to the class about our relationship? Is it a relationship? Can you identify me now from everybody else in the class? Do you (students), have a choice in this relationship? Do I like you? Do you owe me one? Now compare this to 'I am (Adonai) who is your GOD, who took you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery'.
7. What so important about one God? Why not two? (one universal morality that comes from one supernatural power, not human-based morality) (If there are 2 gods with 2 moralities, whom should we obey?)

You shall have no Gods other than me 20:3

What questions do you have about this text?

1. Is this a promise or a consequence? (If you worship GOD, you will not fear anything else i.e. idols, spirits, power, money, fame, the number 13, horoscope, black cat.)

Class 5: Utterance 2

Second Utterance: You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image. (20:4)

What questions do you have about this text?

1. 20:4 “Lo ta-ase lecha” literally do not do unto yourself: What does that mean? (can be translated as do not make yourself into a god.) Who makes himself into a god? (Pharaoh, kings in some other cultures)
2. Read 20:5. What do you think about this? Is this fair? Does GOD hold people accountable only for their own actions?
3. Is GOD apart from his creation? (GOD is not in trees, do not worship the creation, only the creator 20:3.)

Class 6: Utterance 3

Third: ***Do not use the name of Adonai your GOD in vain...20:7***

What questions do you have about this text?

1. Does this only apply to people who know GOD? (When you know and represent GOD, be a good ambassador for his morals. You should not eat at McDonald's, but if you do, do not wear a kippah.)
2. Does this mean: do not use your religion to do harm?
3. Does this mean: when you say the name of GOD, do it with fear, trepidation, and love?
4. “Do not use” literally means “do not carry.” Is knowing GOD, a yoke? (“Tissah,” Hebrew for carry or travel with means that knowing GOD is not a static thing. It is something kinetic, something that changes, that moves.)

Class 7-8: Utterance 4

Fourth: ***Remember the Shabbat day to keep it holy. 20:8***

What questions do you have about this text?

1. How do you keep Shabbat holy? (kiddush, separation, not interfering with creation, go to services, rest, study, Havdalah.)
2. 6 days shall you labor to make the 7th day holy (20:9)– Is this a description or a condition? Is the commandment to labor for 6 days or to cease from labor on the 7th day? To have a holy 7th day, do we have to labor on the other 6?
3. Read 20:10. Who has to observe Shabbat? (you, your sons and daughters, your slaves, your animals, the strangers in your settlement). Why do you think these different people can't work? Why can't the animals work? (kindness to animals)
4. Read 20:11. Why start by telling us what GOD did? (by keeping Shabbat, we are emulating God)
5. Compare this statement to Deuteronomy 5:12: **Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy**. What is the difference between shamor (observe or guard) and zachor (remember)? (action versus intention)
6. In Genesis 2:3, God makes the seventh day holy. Who makes it holy in the 10 Utterances? (humans) How is that different?
7. Making Shabbat holy comes before honoring your parents. What can we learn from that? (Does observing Shabbat somehow make it easier to honor your parents?)

Class 9: Utterance 5

Fifth: *Honor your father and your mother* 20:12

What questions do you have about this text?

1. Who else are we honoring when we honor our parents? (God gave us life through our parents so in honoring them we honor God).
2. Why is this the 5th utterance? (It connects between the two tablets, between people to God relationship and people to people relationship, like the Jewish Tzadik).
3. Why not “love your parents”? (God does not legislate what is in our heart, our actions and choices are what define us.)
4. ‘Kbd’ can be translated as respect, honor, or heavy. What is the relationship between these three words? (It is not an easy task to honor your parents).
5. What are some ways that you can honor your parents? (how you talk to them, not sitting in their chair)

Class 10: Utterance 6 and 7

Sixth: *Do not Murder.* (20:13)

What questions do you have about this text?

1. What does the order of the last 5 utterances signify? (We go from destroying society to destroying self).
2. What is the difference between *murder* and *kill*? (Murder is always wrong; killing is sometimes necessary).
3. What about war? (just and unjust wars)

Seven: *Do not violate the sanctity of marriage.* (20:13)

What questions do you have about this text?

1. Why is this between murder and stealing? (Maybe it has both qualities in it)

Class 11: Utterances 8-9

Eight: *Do not steal. 20:13*

What questions do you have about this text?

1. Is it all right to steal if no one gets hurt? Is it ever true that “no one” gets hurt? Is paying for one movie but sneaking in to another afterwards stealing? Who do we hurt when we sneak in to a second show? (1. God, 2. The movie theater owner, 3. self) (Another example could be illegal downloading of music)

Ninth: *Do not lie (in court) about your neighbor. (20:13)*

What questions do you have about this text?

1. Is this a commandment against lying?
2. When is it good to lie? (saving innocent lives, “white lie” i.e. not to hurt or embarrass someone)

Class 12: Utterance 10 and conclusion

Tenth: *Do not covet (long for) your neighbor’s house (possessions) (20:14)*

What questions do you have about this text?

1. Is this a commandment against coveting? Is it wrong of me to really really totally want a Wii or an ipod? (no, only your neighbor’s ipod)

Conclusion:

Do you think the utterances are complete? (613 commandments in all)

Why were these 10 singled out? Are there any others that you would single out?

More than commandments, the 10 utterances are the conditions GOD sets up for us to live in freedom. GOD gave this freedom to us; these utterances tell us what we need to maintain it.