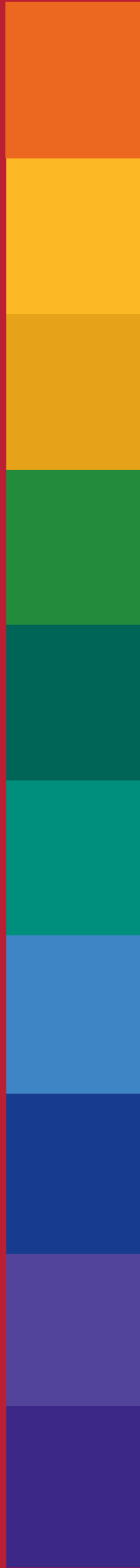


ASERET LEADERSHIP – TOPIC:  
**INTRODUCTION**



**CHAI MITZVAH**  
Grow Your Judaism

[www.chaimitzvah.org](http://www.chaimitzvah.org)



**The Associated**  
Jewish Federation of Baltimore

[www.associated.org](http://www.associated.org)



THE  
**ASERET**  
MOVEMENT

[WWW.ASERETGLOBAL.ORG](http://WWW.ASERETGLOBAL.ORG)



## 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 this 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 a united national purpose and identity?



## 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	אֲנִי 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?
- Can you articulate the Core Values of The Associated?
- How does being Jewish impact on these Core Values?



## introduction: Understanding the Ten Commandments as Core Values

Core Values are the most important principles and beliefs we live with. They form the foundation of our decisions. The way we evaluate situations and our desires are based on them, and as such they determine our behavior. It is in this sense that our Core Values are an essential element of who we are.

Where do our Core Values come from? How do we determine them? This question has been asked by the greatest thinkers throughout time with as many conclusions. We will explore how the Ten Commandments can form the Core Values for the Jewish people.



## text: Spiritual DNA

Tradition has it that when we heard the Ten Commandments at Sinai, the words entered into our souls and we became one with them.

**SOURCE:** *Ohr Gedalyhu*, pg. 96 Vol. 1 Parshat Yitro.

Each Diber was engraved in the souls of the Jewish people and from there they were engraved in the Tablets because the Dibrot were actually alive and become the essential life-force of the Jewish people.

וַיִּגַד לְכֶם אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת  
עֲשׂוֹת הַדְּבָרִים וַיִּכְתְּבֵם עַל־שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים



## conversation:

- How do you think the Ten Commandments and the values they include have affected Jewish and non-Jewish thinking throughout history?

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## introduction: Mass Prophecy

Our tradition tells us that at Sinai, we collectively heard the Ten Commandments directly from God. It is the only time in history that God spoke directly to an entire nation.



## text:

**SOURCE:** *Ralbag, Yitro*

You should know that the *Aseret HaDevarim* [Ten Commandments] contain all the Mitzvot of the Torah. God's intention was that the Jewish people should hear them in a supernatural way, directly from Himself and not from Moses in order that there would be no doubt that they are from God.

הרלב"ג, פרשת יתרו-  
וראוי שתדע כי אלו עשרת הדברים  
מקיפים בכל מצוות התורה,  
ולזו היתה הכוונה האלוהית,  
שישמעו אותם ישראל בזה האופן  
הנפלא, לא מפי משה, כדי שיאמינו  
בהם באופן שלא יישאר להם  
ספק בהם שהוא מהשם יתעלה



## conversation:

- This is the only time God spoke to an entire nation as a mass prophecy. What are the implications that everyone received the Ten Commandments directly from God, as opposed to Moses alone?
- To what extent do you think people in The Associated know and apply the Core Values of the organization?

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## introduction: Contract or Covenant?

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.”



## text:

**SOURCE:** *Deuteronomy 4:13*

He [God] declared to you the covenant that He commanded you to observe, the Ten Statements [Aseret HaDibrot]; and He inscribed them on two tablets of stone.

וַיִּגְדַּלְכֶם לְכֶם אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת  
עֲשֵׂת הַדְּבָרִים וַיִּכְתְּבֵם עַל־שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים



## conversation:

- Which relationships with people in your life would you consider covenantal? Which would be contractual?
- Does the idea that the covenant between God and the Jewish people explain the Jewish mission resonate with you?
- Which relationships in The Associated do you regard as being covenantal?





## introduction: Dibrot, not Mitzvot

Astonishingly, The Ten Commandments is an incorrect translation and a significant mistake at that. In the Torah, the Ten Commandments are called the *Aseret HaDevarim*. The correct translation is the ten “statements” or “utterances.” A *devar*, a statement, means something general and encompassing of many details. The Ten Commandments should really be translated as the Ten Principles or the Ten Core Values.

For this reason we refer to the Ten Commandments as the *Dibrot* (plural) תורבד or when referring to a specific commandment, *diber* (singular) רבד .



## texts:

**SOURCE ONE:** *HaKtav V'HaKabbala 4:13 Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg,*

The Ten Devarim – they are not called the Ten Commandments, even though they are commandments. They are called *Divarim* because the meaning of the term *diber*, as the Rambam says, is the highest generality, including all aspects and manners. If they were called *mitzvot*, it would mean just the specific *mitzvot*. They are therefore called *Dibrot* to express that they are Ten Statements which encompass many details and details of details. They include the entire Torah.

עשרת הדברים - הא דלא קראן עשרת המצות,  
כי גם הלוא נקרא מצוה שמצווה שלא לעשות,  
נראה לומר כי משמעות לשון דבור והבדלו  
מיתר הלשונות הדומות לו, אמר הרמב"ם כי  
השם דבר הונח על המליצה בלשון מהענין  
ההוא הנרשם בנפש, לכן הוא שם כלל גבוה  
כולל כל מיני הדבורים הרבים מאיזה אופן  
שיהיה... אף כאן אלו קרא אותן עשרת המצות  
לא היה במשמעו כי אם עשר מצות פרטיות  
העומדות לבדן, עכשיו שקראן דברות, להורות  
בא שהן עשר דבורים כלליים, כמו שהוא האמת  
שעשרת הדברות כוללים כמה פרטים ופרטי.  
פרטים, והם כלל כל התורה

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**SOURCETWO: Tree from Which Branches Spread** – The *Avodat HaKodesh*: Rabbi Meir ben Ezekiel ibn Gabbai gives a graphic expression of this idea as a tree trunk from which all branches spread out.

*Avodat Hakodesh* 4:34  
The *Aseret HaDibrot* are categories for all the 613 Mitzvot, and they are general principles which emerge from them, and they are the roots and foundations for all the 613 Mitzvot, which are branches that spread out from it.

עבודת הקודש חלק ד' פרק ל"ד  
וזה כי עשרת הדברות כסוגים לכל  
תרי"ג מצות והם כללים היוצאים מהם  
והם שרשים ועיקרים לכל תרי"ג מצות  
והם ענפים המתפשטים מהם

## **SOURCE THREE: The Heart Gives Life to the Body**

The *Kuzari*: Rabbi Yehuda Halevi provides another image, of the heart, which gives life to the entire body. He includes the fact that the Tablets were kept in the Ark.

*Kuzari*: 2:28  
The *Aseret HaDibrot* are the root of wisdom, placed in the ark which is on the level of the heart, and that which flows from it is the book of Torah, was put on its side.

ספר הכוזרי, מאמר שני אות כ"ח  
אמר החבר: אכן שרש החכמה הלא הוא  
עשרת הדברות מופקד בארון אשר הוא  
במדרגת הלב ושלוחותיו הן דברי ספר  
התורה שהושם בצד הארון ככתוב  
ושמתם אותו מצד ארון ברית ה'



## **conversation:**

- Think of a Core Value in your life. How do you express it in your actions?
- Even though they are *dibrot*, they were stated in very practical terms, possibly to make sure that they were not left as purely theoretical ideas. What are the challenges in going from the theoretical to the practical applications of the *dibrot*?
- How does this challenge apply to The Associated?



## introduction: Meaning: *P'Shat* and *Yesod*

### ***P'shat*: The Literal Meaning**

The literal meaning of each commandment is the specific instruction it is giving us. In Hebrew, this level is called *p'shat* פשוט.

Like other mitzvot in the Torah, the Ten Commandments have been codified by the great Jewish thinkers over time. In fact, they are part of the 613 Mitzvot.

These ten “commandments” can be thought of as the paradigm or epitome of the values they are based on. For example, the 6th commandment is *Do not murder*. It literally means “Do not kill a person unjustly,” and is limited to causing someone to lose their physical life. This is the *p'shat*, or literal meaning.

### ***Yesod*: The Underlying Meaning**

Underlying each commandment are the principles on which they are based. These principles, like all principles, are fundamental truths or beliefs that describe our reality. Being general, they can guide many instructions and decisions, not only the specific commandment from which they are derived. In Hebrew, this level is known as *yesod* יסוד, which means “foundation.”

It is this level of understanding which makes the Ten Commandments applicable to day-to-day, minute-to-minute living. In order to live with them this way, each principle and/or belief must be transformed into a guideline for making decisions.



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### conversation:

The simple meaning, *p'shat*, of the dibet "Do not murder," is not to kill a person unjustly. However, the underlying principle, *yesod*, is that since every person is created in the image of God, one must respect, protect, and enhance life. As a guideline for making decisions, it is to nurture your own and others' physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual lives. In short – nurture life!

Throughout our discussions, we will dig deeper into each of the *Aseret HaDibrot*, the Ten Commandments. As an initial exercise, express three of the Ten Commandments as Core Values in terms of *p'shat* (the literal meaning) and *yesod* (the underlying meaning).

P'shat	Yesod
1. <i>I am the Lord your God</i>	1.
2. <i>Have no other gods</i>	2.
3. <i>Do not take God's name in vain</i>	3.
4. <i>Keep Shabbat</i>	4.
5. <i>Honor your parents</i>	5.
6. <i>Do not murder</i>	6. <i>Example: Nurture life.</i>
7. <i>Do not commit adultery</i>	7.
8. <i>Do not steal</i>	8.
9. <i>Do not be a false witness</i>	9.
10. <i>Do not covet</i>	10.

• At first glance, which of the dibrot relates most to your organization's mission?



## supplemental materials:

- **Justice and Morality and the Ten Commandments:** Interesting article from *Habonim Dror* about how the Ten Commandments relate to Social Justice.
- **With Liberty and Justice:** *The Fifty-Day Journey from Egypt to Sinai*, is a book by Joe Lieberman. Passover and Shavuot are two acts in the same drama. The Exodus on Passover remains incomplete without the Revelation on Shavuot. Charting the fifty-day count of the Omer between the two holidays, Senator Joe Lieberman together with Rabbi Ari Kahn presents fifty short essays on the interplay of law and liberty in our lives.
- **ELI Talk – Flexigidity** What is “flexigidity” and how has it ensured Jewish survival and identity? Using the concept of flexigidity — the combined effects of both flexibility and rigidity — Gidi Grinstein asserts that what has sustained the Jewish people for centuries is an ability to evolve within their current environment (flexibility) while simultaneously maintaining a solid core of values from which they don’t veer (rigidity). By maintaining a healthy dynamic between these two extremes, flexigidity will ensure Jewish survival, security and prosperity in the future.



## additional information

There are two versions of the *Aseret haDibrot*, the Ten Commandments, in the Torah. Besides those appearing in Exodus 20:2-14, *Parshat Yitro*, they are “repeated” by Moshe in Deuteronomy 5:6-18, *Parshat Ve'etchanan*. Although the two versions are structurally alike, there are some significant differences between them, especially in the *diber* about Shabbat. The first version says “Remember the Shabbat,” whereas the second version says “Guard the Shabbat.”

There are several opinions that explain the differences. Some say that both versions were given at once. Others say the first version is what was written on the first tablets and the second on the second tablets. Yet others say that the second version is a clarification of the first. Either way, the two versions are equal in significance and always studied in tandem.



## who's who in the texts:

**Eliezer Wiesel** (1928, Romania - 2016, New York), was a Romanian-born American Jewish writer, professor, political activist, Nobel Laureate, and Holocaust survivor who authored 57 books.

**Ralbag: Rabbi Levi ben Gershon** (1288 - 1344, France) was a medieval French Jewish philosopher, Talmudist, mathematician, physician and astronomer/astrologer.

**Rabbi Gedalyahu Schorr** was a prominent American Rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva. He was born in Poland and died in Brooklyn in 1979.

**HaKtav V'Hakabbalah:** Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg was a German Rabbi and scholar of the 19th century.

**Avodat HaKodesh:** Rabbi Meir ben Ezekiel ibn Gabbai was a Kabbalist born in Spain toward the end of 1480, and living probably in the East.

**The Kuzari** is one of the most famous works of the medieval Spanish Jewish philosopher and poet Judah Halevi, completed around 1140. It is regarded as one the most important works of Jewish philosophy.

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.

The Aseret Movement 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.

The Associated strengthens and nurtures Jewish life by engaging and supporting community partners in Greater Baltimore, Israel and around the world.

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



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