



AHAVAT ACHIM  
אהבת אחיכם  
THE FAMILY SHUL



CANDLE LIGHTING 5:12 PM | 17 SHEVAT | FEBRUARY 15, 2025 | HAVDALA 6:16 PM

**שבת פרשת יתרו**

**SHABBAT PARSHAT YITRO**  
Haftorah is Isaiah 6:1-7:6 and 9:5-6.

**KIDDUSH**

Kiddush is sponsored by the Plotnick family to commemorate the yahrzeit of Gail's father Alan Hodes ה"ע, Avraham Nachum ben Moshe.

**FRIDAY EVENING**

**MINCHA** 5:15 PM

SHKIA 5:30 PM

TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM 6:10 PM

**SHABBAT**

**HASHKAMA** 7:45 AM

**SHACHARIT - MAIN** 9:00 AM

POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR 9:30 AM

LAST KRIAT SHEMA 9:31 AM

FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR 11:30 AM

PRE-MINCHA SHIUR 4:25 PM

**MINCHA** 5:05 PM

SHKIA 5:31 PM

**MAARIV** 6:16 PM

**GAME NIGHT**

This Motzei Shabbat is our Game Night and Pizza Fest. Some good old fashion wholesome fun for adults!

**MATZAH SALE!**

Order handmade Pupa Tzelhem shmura matzah through Ahavat Achim! Prices are: \$41 per lb. regular matzah, \$43 per lb. whole wheat matzah, \$36 per box of spelt matzah (6 matzahs), and \$36 per box of oat matzah - (3 matzahs). Order here: [Matzah](#).

**MISHLOACH MANOT**

Purim is rapidly approaching, which means it is time to participate in the shul's Mishloach Manot! The deadline to order is March 3! You can order online here: [Mishloach Manot](#).

**ROUND ROBIN MEGILLAT ESTHER PEREK-BY-PEREK SHIUR**

The Megillat Esther "round robin" will be at Seudah Shlishit on March 8. To present on a perek please contact Andrew Wigod or click here to indicate the Perek you want to speak on: [ESTHER](#).

**MAZEL TOV**

Mazal tov to Stacey & Yitz Finkelstein on the birth of a granddaughter, Devorah Meital, to Leora & Josh.

יגדלו לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים

May they raise her to Torah, chuppah and good deeds



SUNDAY  
2/16

MONDAY  
2/17

TUESDAY  
2/18

WEDNESDAY  
2/19

THURSDAY  
2/20

FRIDAY  
2/21

**WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM**

**SHACHARIT**

8:00 AM 6:20/8:00 AM 6:25 AM 6:25 AM 6:15 AM 6:25 AM

**2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM**

7:25 AM 7:25 AM 7:25 AM 7:25 AM

**MINCHA/MAARIV**

5:21 PM 5:22 PM 5:23 PM 5:24 PM 5:25 PM 5:25 PM

**ZMANIM**

**Earliest Talit**

5:54 AM 5:53 AM 5:51 AM 5:50 AM 5:49 AM 5:47 AM

**Gedolah**

12:38 PM 12:38 PM 12:38 PM 12:38 PM 12:38 PM 12:38 PM

**Shkia**

5:33 PM 5:34 PM 5:35 PM 5:36 PM 5:37 PM

**Tzait**

6:13 PM 6:14 PM 6:15 PM 6:16 PM 6:17 PM

Rabbi Ely Shestack

President Robert Safran

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Feb. 28** - Musical Kabbalat Shabbat.

**March 8** - Esther Round Robin. Click here to sign up to discuss a chapter: [Esther](#).

**March 13** - Purim Break Fast is sponsored by Lori & David Garfunkel to commemorate the Purim Yahrzeit of Herman Klein ה"ע, David's grandfather הליי. **ח'ים בן אברהם הליי.**

**Mar. 29** - Scholar-In-Residence Rabbi Jesse Horn.

**March 30** - Musical Hallel.

**May 3** - Rabbanit Surale Rosen, via Mizrachi Israel 360.

## IN OUR FUTURE

**February 22** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Amy & Stephen Agress to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Rabbi Hyman Agresס"ה, Stephen's father, **הרב חיים בן הרב יהושע.**

**Mar. 8** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Greenes commemorating the Yahrzeit of Elliot's mother, Sylvia Greene ה"ע, Serah bat Ya'akov Tzvi

## BOARD MEETINGS

**February 25** - 8:30 PM via Zoom.

**March 25** - 8:30 PM via Zoom.

**April 29** - 9:00 PM via Zoom.

**May 27** - 9:00 PM via Zoom.

**June 24** - 9:00 PM via Zoom.

## ISRAEL ACTION INITIATIVE

**Tzedakah Fund of the Month-** Zo



Artzeinu, supporting Israeli agriculture and planting "Trees of Life" in memory of those lost; especially our brave fallen soldiers: [Ahavat Achim Trees in Israel](#)

**February 18-20** - Upcoming mission to Kerem Shalom, February 18-20. Learn more or register at [mizrachi.org/bergencounty](#).

## SHIURIM



- RAV SOLOVEITCHIK ON THE PARSHA, Tuesdays at 1:00 PM (<https://zoom.us/j/7291311899>, PW: 112233).
- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via a Whatsapp group, with 3-minute daily Halacha insights. To join email Rabbi Shestack at [rabbishestack@gmail.com](mailto:rabbishestack@gmail.com).
- SHABBAT SHIUR, 40 minutes pre-mincha.
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush, discussing our community's kashrut standards.
- MESORAH-IN-VERSE lecture series at Seudah Shlishit.
- Tzurba M'Rabanan with Zack Doberman, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM. In-person at the shul and via Zoom.
- Mishna Chaburah, led by Jeff Safier, after 7:25 AM Shacharit minyon (≈10 minutes).

## KIDDUSH & SEUDAH SHLISHIT



- Enjoy Scotch at Kiddush, please donate a bottle to the shul from time to time.
- To sponsor a Kiddush (prices start at \$318, plus a bottle of scotch) email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com).
- Want to know the menu for Kiddush? If so, please email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com) so he can put you in the WhatsApp group.
- To sponsor Seudah Shlishit for \$136 (or in the case of multiple sponsors, \$100 per sponsor), email [dmgarfunkel@gmail.com](mailto:dmgarfunkel@gmail.com).

## ע"ה GITA COOPERWASSER YOUTH EVENTS

TBA - TBA

## ע"ה GITA COOPERWASSER SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



- SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS, 2ND - 5TH GRADE: LETIZIA & EMMANUEL; 4 YRS - 1ST GR.: AVIGAYIL, PERRI, & SEBASTIAN
- Youth group for 2nd - 5th Graders starts at 9:00 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on left on entering the social hall.
- Youth group for children 4 years old through 1st Grade starts at 9:15 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on the right upon entering the social hall.
- Parent & Me room opens at 9:00 AM in the Beit Midrash.
- Rabbi Meet & Greet, Friday night, kids can come over to the Rabbi after davening to receive a cup of grape juice and a ticket!
- Children earn tickets for coming to minyan (Friday night and/or Shabbat day), asking the rabbi questions or attending parent-child learning programs! Tickets can be redeemed for prizes.
- Children's corner at Seudah Shlishit, 1st to 5th graders will get 10 Torah questions in 10 minutes from Rabbi Shestack, with special snacks, tickets and more.

## SHALOM BRAUSER, ADULT EDUCATOR/TEEN MENTOR

**February 15** - Teen Mentor

**March 8** - Teen Mentor

**March 22** - Teen Mentor

**April 5** - Teen Mentor

18-25 Saddle River Road

Fair Lawn, NJ 07410

201.797.0502

<http://www.ahavatirim.org>

"THE IAC OF CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM IS DEDICATED TO FOSTERING A STRONG CONNECTION BETWEEN OUR COMMUNITY AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL. WE STRIVE TO SUPPORT ISRAEL'S SECURITY, PROSPERITY, AND PEACE WHILE PROVIDING OUR MEMBERSHIP WITH CHARITABLE, COMMUNAL, AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES, AS WELL AS INFORMATION TO STRENGTHEN OUR BOND WITH THE JEWISH HOMELAND."



## Shevat's Tzedakah Highlight ZO ARTZEINU

*Since October 7th, many have sought meaningful ways to make an impact. With the support of people around the world, Zo Artzeinu - Israel Trees has planted 12,000 fruit trees along the Gaza border over the past year, 10 for each of the 1,200 victims symbolizing growth, resilience, and hope. Tragically, during this time, 600 of our bravest and heroic IDF soldiers gave their lives defending Israel's survival. We cannot let their sacrifice be in vain.*

*We are proud to announce that we are joining the worldwide "United 4 New Trees of Life" Program alongside Shuls, congregations and communities around the globe. Beginning this Tu B'Shvat, we will help plant 18,000 new fruit trees along the Gaza and northern borders, as well as other areas across Israel. They gave their lives for us! Together, we will honor their memory by planting 18,000 new trees, creating new life, and ensuring their legacy endures. These trees and their fruits will yield thousands of new mitzvot, whose merit will be le'ilui nishmat our holy heroes and victims. Together, we will transform tragedy into growth, despair into hope, and loss into LIFE!*

- ✓ *Support farmers and communities in need: Help save their farms while safeguarding the Holy Land!*
- ✓ *Stand strong against terror: Show the world that we are here to stay, and will continue to GROW!!*
- ✓ *Plant 18,000 new fruit trees: In memory of and leilui nishmat the 1,800 k'doshim, creating NEW LIFE!!!*
- ✓ *Share in mitzvot: Participate in mitzvot unique to the Land of Israel and in its blessing! וצוית! אַת-בְּרַכְתִּי לְכֶם" - וַיֹּאמֶר!*
- ✓ *Learning opportunity: Learn about Israel's geography and history with engaging videos from farmers!*





*All participants will share in the many mitzvot associated with these trees and their fruits, including: orlah, teruma, ma'aser, and shmitta. Their merit will also be le'ilui nishmat the victims, elevating their holy souls. The trees will be planted by observant farmers through Zo Artzeinu - Israel Trees, an organization that has already helped plant over half a million fruit trees across Israel. Everyone who participates in planting trees will receive a colorful, personalized certificate, suitable for framing, which can be dedicated in honor or of a loved one. Farmers and communities are already preparing the ground and are counting on us to provide the trees they need to plant.*

***They Gave Their Lives For Us! Plant a Tree to Honor them! Together, we will create new life in memory of those who were tragically taken from us. If we collectively plant an orchard of 100 trees, a personalized sign will be installed at the entrance of our orchard, which anyone can visit when in Israel. Additionally, we will receive a photo of our orchard and its sign to proudly frame and display.***

• ***We will order the fruit trees now.***

• ***Farmers and communities in Israel will prepare the land, and start planting our trees on Tu B'shvat.***

• ***Every participant will receive a beautiful personalized certificate.***

• ***When in Israel, you can visit our orchard and see the trees we helped plant.***

• ***In three years, after the mitzvah of orlah, we can even have a taste of the FRUITS of our labor!***

• ***We will share in ALL the mitzvot associated with the trees and their fruits.***

• ***We will show the world that we are here to STAY while honoring our holy heroes who gave their lives for us all!***

## **ADDITIONAL TZADAKAH RESOURCES**



# Worldwide Jewish News



- On February 6, President Trump signed an executive order sanctioning the International Criminal Court in the Hague accusing their members of unfairly targeting the US and Israel. Trump further claimed that the ICC "has no jurisdiction, no legitimacy and no authority" in the United States.
- In other news, the US administration sent 8 billion in arms to Israel this past week. Subsequent to Trump's remarks regarding taking control of Gaza, Israel's Defense Minister instructed the military to prepare a plan to allow the Palestinians to voluntarily leave the Gaza Strip. Minister of Foreign Affairs Israel Katz said those countries such as Spain, Ireland and Norway which formally recognized Palestinian statehood last year, while condemning Israeli actions in Gaza, should be legally obligated to accept Gazan residents into their countries.
- Stateside on February 6, in Brentwood California, the Jewish CEO of UTA (United Talent Agency) Jay Sure's home was vandalized by masked Pro Palestinian UCLA students who littered his front yard with flyers and caution tape and covered his garage doors with red hand prints. Sure was targeted for his outspoken support of both Israel and Jewish university students who are being harassed and intimidated on college campuses nationwide. No arrests were made.
- February 8th saw the release of three male Israeli hostages, Ohad Ben Ami, Eli Sharabi and Or Levy. Ben Ami and Eli Sharabi were taken captive from Kibbutz Be'eri. Unbeknownst to Sharabi, his wife and two teenage daughters had been murdered on October 7. Or Levy was abducted from the Nova Music Festival where his wife was killed in the attack, leaving behind a three year old son. Upon their release, all three men looked gaunt and malnourished, reminiscent of Nazi concentration camp survivors. They were immediately flown to area hospitals for treatment.
- The world was shocked by both the appearance of the hostages as well as the manner in which they were being paraded around by Hamas terrorists prior to their turnover. In response, the United Nations once again exhibited their moral bankruptcy (as previously exposed by President Herzog) by drawing parallels between the condition of the Israeli hostages and the freed Palestinian prisoners.
- On February 9th, the US imposed new sanctions to curtail international shipping of Iranian oil to China.

# Worldwide Jewish News Continued

- This week our President suspended all foreign aid to South Africa because among other justifications, was the nation's stance in the ICC accusing Israel, not Hamas, of Genocide. Also of concern was the country's cozy relationship with Iran; including the strengthening of their commercial, military and nuclear ties.
- Trump also cut off funding to USAID which was found to have provided money to Hamas and other Palestinian groups.
- Post Super Bowl, Kanye West, a notorious anti-Semite was selling \$20 T shirts imprinted with Swastikas on his ecommerce store. Shopify then shut it down and X also took down his site. In addition, West texted a Jewish staffer 'Hail Hitler'. In response she has sued him.
- February 10th, Trump said Palestinians would have no right of return to Gaza. He hinted that he would possibly withhold aid to those Arab countries who would refuse to take in those Palestinians.
- Additionally, on February 10th, Hamas announced that they were postponing the release of the hostages due to be freed on Saturday, February 15. Our President responded to this declaration by claiming, "All Hell Will Break Loose," if the Israeli captives are not returned on schedule. He also suggested that Israel cancel the cease fire if Hamas did not honor the agreement.
- On February 11th, Netanyahu said he will resume the fighting in Gaza if the hostages were not released on the date originally agreed upon.

**Our brothers and sisters have suffered unimaginable horrors for way too long. The Red Cross and the entire World must demand that they be brought home NOW!**

# Jewish Community Events and Israel

*Israel Film Series, sponsored by the Jewish Federation, presents the documentary "TORN" on Thursday, February 13th at 7:00 pm. The screening delves into the controversy that developed surrounding the 'KIDNAPPED' poster campaign, a grassroots effort to raise awareness about the 240 hostages taken by Hamas on October 7, 2023. These posters became polarizing symbols, sparking intense clashes between pro-Israel and pro-Palestine activists. The film explores the motivations behind the activists and unravels the complexities of this 'paper arm' proxy war. It is followed by a panel discussion with the film creator and others.*



[Click here for more information.](#)



**On March 23, The Israel Elite Hockey League (IEHL) will be playing a showcase game between two of its franchise teams, Hockey Club Tel Aviv and the Jerusalem Capitals, at the UBS Arena (the New York Islanders' home turf) in the USA Challenge Cup in New York. This will be the league's first time playing in North America. Half of the 18,000 arena seats have already been sold.**

**For tickets [click here.](#)**



## TEHILLIM FORTHOSE REMAINING IN CAPTIVITY WEEKLY PROFILE

### **Evyatar David (Evyatar ben Yasmin Gila)**

**Twenty-three, went missing from the Nova music festival on October 7, 2023. Shortly thereafter, his sister Yaela received a message with an image in which her brother can be seen in captivity with Guy Gilboa-Dalal, confirming that they were taken hostage.**

**A native of Kfar Saba, Evyatar loves music and is a talented guitarist. His parents Galia and Avishai, brother Ilay, and sister Yaela have traveled to the United States and publicized Evyatar's plight in Israeli and foreign media. Said Avishai, "Evyatar brightens our lives and those of everyone around him."**





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קהילת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL

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# Purim Mishloach Manot

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14TH ADAR, 5785

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- Audrey & Jack Bickel
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- Natasha & Daniel Borsuk
- Lisa & Aryeh Brenenson
- Bobbie & Heshy Brooks
- Sharon & Adam Brooks
- Saragail Chessin Carpe
- Grace Carrion
- Shifra & John Caruso
- Ellen & Murray Chass
- Laura & Javier Coello
- Avi Cohen
- Britty Cohen
- Jordana & Isaac Cohen
- Lisa & Yossi Cohen
- Elianna & Aaron Czinn
- Debra & Jacob Diament
- Michelle & Zvi Dubin
- Evi & Michael Dworkis
- Rose & Ron Dworkis
- Lisa & Jacob Eis
- Elfie & Jamie Eisman
- Barbara & Ziv Farajun
- Bonnie & William Farbstein
- Stacey & Yitz Finkelstein
- Rachel & Jonathan Frank
- Renee Freund
- Lori & David Garfunkel
- Arkady Geltzer
- Chava & Chayim Goldberg
- Joan & Barry Goldberg
- Ronnie & Mitchell Goldstein
- Tamar & Yoni Gorelick
- Farnaz & David Gorelik
- Naomi & David Gruber
- Risa Goldman & Eli Greenbaum
- Dina & Elliot Greene
- Margo Greenstein
- Esther & Tzvi Hagler
- Ruchama & Jerry Halpern
- Joyce Heller
- Rebecca Berger & Jay Herman
- Gail & Elliott Hershkowitz
- Liz Jacob
- Vicki & Ian Joseph
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- Janie & Hymie Kirschenbaum
- Tova & Ben Kohane
- Sheree & Hazkiel Kor
- Evelyn & Larry Kraut
- Al Kustanowitz
- Melanie Kwestel
- Deborah Lader
- Debbie & Ben Lang
- Eita Latkin
- Vivian Lerner
- Michal & Eliezer Lesser
- Sara & Kenny Levine
- Rena & Marc Liebman
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- Lana & Boris Mihailevsky
- Brett Norton
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- Ray & Steven Wolfson
- Sara Yehaskel
- Stacey & Avi Zanjirian
- Susan Zarabi
- Orit & Eli Zezon
- Esther & Matt Zimmelman

Your name as shown on Mishloach Manot Scroll: \_\_\_\_\_



AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהילת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL

# Board Game Night (for adults)

RSVP BY 2/11!

SATURDAY  
FEB 15

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FOR A NIGHT OF  
GAMING &  
LAUGHTER

THE FUN STARTS AT 8PM

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[events@ahavatachim.org](mailto:events@ahavatachim.org)

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# Covenant & Conversation

YITRO • יתרו

FROM THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ז"צ

*Jonathan Sacks*  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

"I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah.

An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." — Rabbi Sacks

This year's series of essays were originally written and recorded by Rabbi Sacks zt"l in 5772 (2011–2012). These timeless messages are accompanied by a new [Family Edition](#) created to inspire intergenerational learning on the Parsha and Haftara.

## The Custom that Refused to Die

There's an enthralling story about the Ten Commandments and the role they played in Jewish worship and the synagogue.

It begins with a little-known fact. There was a time when there were not three paragraphs in the prayer we call the Shema, but four. The Mishnah in Tamid (5:1) tells us that in Temple times the officiating priests would first recite the Ten Commandments and then the three paragraphs of the Shema.

We have several pieces of independent evidence for this. The first consists of four papyrus fragments acquired in Egypt in 1898 by the then secretary of the Society of Biblical Archaeology, W.L. Nash. Pieced together and located today in the Cambridge University Library, they are known as the Nash Papyrus. Dating from the second century BCE, they contain a version of the Ten Commandments, immediately followed by the Shema. Almost certainly the papyrus was used for prayer in a synagogue in Egypt before the birth of Christianity, at a time when the custom was to include all four paragraphs.

Tefillin from the Second Temple period, discovered in the Qumran caves along with the Dead Sea Scrolls, contained the Ten Commandments. Indeed a lengthy section of the halachic Midrash on Deuteronomy, the

Sifri, is dedicated to proving that we should not include the Ten Commandments in the tefillin, which suggests that there were some Jews who did so, and the rabbis needed to be able to show that they were wrong.

We also have evidence from both the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli, Brachot 12a) and the Jerusalem Talmud (Yerushalmi Brachot 1:8) that there were communities in Israel and Babylon who sought to introduce the Ten Commandments into the prayers, and that the rabbis had to issue a ruling against doing so. There is even documentary evidence that the Jewish community in Fostat, near Cairo, kept a special scroll in the Ark called the Sefer al-Shir, which they took out after the conclusion of daily prayers and read from it the Ten Commandments.<sup>1</sup>

So the custom of including the Ten Commandments as part of the Shema was once widespread, but from a certain point in time it was systematically opposed by the Sages. Why did they object to it? Both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud say it was because of the "claim of the sectarians."

Jewish sectarians – some identify them as a group of early Christians but there is no compelling evidence for this – argued that only the Ten Commandments

<sup>1</sup> Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fāṭimid caliphs*, 1920, volume I, p. 221.

were binding, because only they were received by the Israelites directly from God at Mount Sinai. The others were received through Moses, and this sect, or perhaps several of them, held that they did not come from God. They were Moses' own invention, and therefore not binding.

There is a Midrash that gives us an idea of what the sectarians were saying. It places in the mouth of Korach and his followers, who rebelled against Moses, these words:

"The whole congregation are holy. Are you [Moses and Aaron] the only ones who are holy? All of us were sanctified at Sinai . . . and when the Ten Commandments were given, there was no mention of challah or *terumah* or tithes or tzitzit. You made this all up yourself."

Yalkut Shimoni Korach 752

So the rabbis were opposed to any custom that would give special prominence to the Ten Commandments since the sectarians were pointing to such customs as proof that even orthodox Jews treated them differently from the other commands. By removing them from the prayer book, the rabbis hoped to silence such claims.

But the story does not end there. So special were the Ten Commandments to Jews that they found their way back. Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, author of the *Tur* (14<sup>th</sup> century) suggested that one should say them privately. Rabbi Joseph Karo argues that the ban only applies to reciting the Ten Commandments publicly during the service, so they could be said privately after the service. That is where you find them today in most *siddurim* – immediately after the morning service. Rabbi Shlomo Luria had the custom of reading the Ten Commandments at the beginning of prayer, before the start of *Pesukei de-Zimra*, the Verses of Praise.

That was not the end of the argument. Given that we do not say the Ten Commandments during public prayer, should we none the less give them special honour when we read them from the Torah, whether on Shavuot or in the weeks of *Parshat Yitro* and

*Vaetchanan*? Should we stand when they are being read?

Maimonides found himself involved in a controversy over this question. Someone wrote him a letter telling the following story. He was a member of a synagogue where originally the custom was to stand during the reading of the Ten Commandments. Then a rabbi came and ruled otherwise, saying that it was wrong to stand for the same reason as it was forbidden to say the Ten Commandments during public prayer. It could be used by sectarians, heretics and others to claim that even the Jews themselves held that the Ten Commandments were more important than the other 603. So the community stopped standing. Years later another rabbi came, this time from a community where the custom was to stand for the Ten Commandments. The new rabbi stood and told the congregation to do likewise. Some did. Some did not, since their previous rabbi had ruled against. Who was right?

Maimonides had no doubt. It was the previous rabbi, the one who had told them not to stand, who was in the right. His reasoning was correct also. Exactly the logic that barred it from the daily prayers should be applied to the reading of the Torah. It should be given no special prominence. The community should stay sitting. Thus ruled Maimonides, the greatest rabbi of the Middle Ages. However, sometimes even great rabbis have difficulty persuading communities to change. Then, as now, most communities – even those in Maimonides' Egypt – stood while the Ten Commandments were being read.

So despite strong attempts by the Sages, in the time of the *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, and later in the age of Maimonides, to ban any custom that gave special dignity to the Ten Commandments, whether as prayer or as biblical reading, Jews kept finding ways of doing so. They brought it back into daily prayer by saying it privately and outside the mandatory service, and they continued to stand while it was being read from the Torah despite Maimonides' ruling that they should not.

"Leave Israel alone," said Hillel, "for even if they are not prophets, they are still the children of prophets."

Ordinary Jews had a passion for the Ten Commandments. They were the distilled essence of Judaism. They were heard directly by the people from the mouth of God himself. They were the basis of the covenant they made with God at Mount Sinai, calling on them to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Twice in the Torah they are described as the covenant itself:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.

Ex 34:27-28

Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you His covenant, the Ten Commandments, which He commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.

Deut. 4:12-13

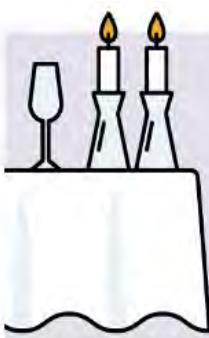
That is why they were originally said immediately prior to the Shema, and why despite their removal from the prayers Jews continued to say them – because

their recital constituted a daily renewal of the covenant with God. That too is why Jews insisted on standing when they were being read from the Torah, because when they were being given, the Israelites "stood at the foot of the mountain" (Ex. 19:17). The Midrash says about the reading of the Ten Commandments on Shavuot:

"The Holy One blessed be He said to the Israelites: My children, read this passage every year and I will account it to you as if you were standing before Mount Sinai and receiving the Torah."

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 12, ed. Mandelbaum, p. 204

Jews kept searching for ways of recreating that scene, by standing when they listened to it from the Torah and by saying it privately after the end of the morning prayers. Despite the fact that they knew their acts could be misconstrued by heretics, they were too attached to that great epiphany – the only time in history God spoke to an entire people – to treat it like any other passage in the Torah. The honour given to the Ten Commandments was the custom that refused to die.



## Around the Shabbat Table

1. How might the experience of receiving these laws as a group have affected Bnai Yisrael?
2. How do you think it felt to hear God's voice at Sinai? Why did it make such a lasting impression?
3. What does the Shema debate tell us about the relationship between written Torah and the Oral Tradition?

● These questions come from this week's **Family Edition** to Rabbi Sacks' Covenant & Conversation. For an interactive, multi-generational study, check out the full edition at <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-family-edition/yitro/the-custom-that-refused-to-die/>