

## The Torah and its Laws

The Torah contains many laws. Jewish people call these laws **Mitzvot** (one is a **Mitzvah**; more than one are mitzvot). Mitzvah which means a *commandment*. Mitzvot can be **imperatives** (things you **MUST** do) or **prohibitions** (things you **MUST NOT** do). The Torah contains 613 mitzvot altogether. Jewish people believe that they should keep as many of the mitzvot as they can. They believe that keeping the mitzvot is the way to live a good life. The word mitzvah is also used to mean any sort of good deed.

You can get an idea of the different sorts of laws that the Torah contains by looking at the list of examples of mitzvot on the next page.

Many Jews think that the most important set of laws is near the very middle of the Torah. The middle book of the Torah is Leviticus. (Jews call it *Vayikrah*). Chapter 19 of Leviticus is sometimes known as the **Holiness Code**. Here are some of the rules that are in it.

- Believe in One God;
- Honour your father and mother;
- Do not harvest right to the edges of your fields - leave some for poor people;
- Do not steal;
- Do not cheat each other;
- If people work for you, pay them on time;
- Do not take advantage of people who are weaker than you (This one actually says: *Do not insult the deaf or place a stumbling block in the way of the blind*);
- Love your neighbour like you love yourself;
- Judge people fairly (especially if you are a judge);
- Do not hurt yourself;
- Treat foreigners who live in your country in the same way as you treat your own people - Love strangers like you love yourself;
- Do not cheat in measurement - weigh and measure things fairly (especially if you are selling things);
- Obey all God's laws.

Talk to your partner or group - Discuss whether you think that these are good laws? Can you think of one or two important new laws that you would make if you were in charge of making laws?

# Here Are Just a Few Examples of Mitzvot

## God and the Torah

### Love God.

- Do not take God's name in vain.
- Know that God is the only God.
- Do not believe in other gods.

- Teach the Torah to your children.
- Talk about the Torah often with your family and friends.

### Signs and Symbols

- Wear tassels on the corners of your clothes.
- Put mezuzot on your doorposts.

### Prayer

- Say grace after meals.
- Read the Shema every night and morning.

### Dealing with other people

- Love your neighbour.
- Love strangers and treat them the way you would like to be treated.
- Don't tell lies.
- Don't hold grudges.
- Don't kill people.
- Don't steal.
- Don't cheat people.
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- Leave some of your crops for poor people to gather.
- Give charity according to what you can afford.
- Be respectful to your parents.
- Judges must try cases fairly and not take notice of whether the defendants are rich or famous

### Keeping the Sabbath and Festivals

- Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy (holy means "special").
- Don't work on the Sabbath.
- Celebrate the festivals.
- Hear the sound of the shofar at New Year.
- Fast on the Day of Atonement.

### Food and Drink

- Only eat animals that chew the cud and have cloven hooves.
- Do not eat animals that have died naturally.
- Kill food animals humanely.
- Don't be too greedy either with food or with drink.

How many mitzvot are there on this page? (Remember, there are 613 altogether in the Torah).

### The Temple

Jews used to have a temple in Jerusalem, but it was destroyed nearly 2000 years ago. Some of the mitzvot are about how the temple should be organised and about how the priests should behave. Jews cannot keep those commandments nowadays because there is no temple and there are no priests.

## The Ten Commandments

*This translation of the 10 commandments comes from a Jewish prayer book. You may find slightly different words and slightly different numbering if you look in an English bible or Christian prayer book, but the meaning will be the same.*

1. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the camp of slavery.
2. You shall have no other gods but me. You shall not make yourself an idol in the likeness of anything which is in the sky above or on the earth below or in the deeps under the earth. You shall not worship them nor serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a demanding God, burdening the children down to the third and fourth generation with their fathers' guilt, if they hate Me, but showing kindness to thousands of generations if they should love Me and keep my commands.
3. You shall not use the name of the Lord your God falsely, for the Lord will not excuse anyone who uses His name falsely.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. You have six days to labour and do all your work, but the seventh shall be a Sabbath for the Lord your God. That day you shall do no work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servant, man or woman, nor your cattle nor the stranger that lives in your home. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, He blessed the seventh day and made it holy.
5. Respect your father and your mother so that the days of your life be fulfilled on the land which the Lord your God gives you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false witness against your neighbour.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's house, you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his servant, man or woman, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbour's.

### The 10 Commandments

These famous rules were the first laws that God gave to the Jewish people. Jews often call them **The Ten Statements**. They are written out twice in Torah.

*You can find them in Chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus, verses 1 - 17 and in Chapter 5 of the Book of Deuteronomy, verses 6-21.*

## Thinking About Laws

Cut out these laws (they are all based on laws in the Torah). Put them in a container and mix them up.

Pick one at a time and with your partner or group try to answer these questions.

Is this a sensible law?

How easy or difficult would it be to keep this law?

Is this a law for everyone or just for Jews?

What is the purpose of this law?

Teach the Torah to your children.

Know that God is the only God.

Be respectful to your parents.

Don't work on the Sabbath.

Wear tassels on the corners of your clothes.

Do not hurt yourself.

Say grace after meals.

Leave some of your crops for poor people to gather.

If people work for you, pay them on time.

Love strangers and treat them the way you would like to be treated.

Do not eat animals that have died naturally.

Don't be too greedy either with food or with drink.