

## CHAPTER 21

# The Teachings of Judaism

### The Torah

When Moses met God on Mount Sinai, he was given the Torah. The word means "law," although it is used in a number of ways. First, it can refer to the first five books of the Bible. Torah can also refer to the whole Bible (the Christian Old Testament), which is known as the written Torah, or Tanach. However, many of the things that God told Moses while he was on the mountain were not written down. This was information about how the commandments were to be applied. Moses passed this information on to the elders by word of mouth, and the elders passed it on to their successors, from generation to generation. This is known as the oral Torah, and in written form it is much greater than the written Torah. There is also a third meaning, the sense in which Torah is a pre-existent idea through which God created the world, and on which He wanted the world to be based.

The written Torah can be divided into three sections:

- ✘ **Torah** (the Five Books of Moses): These contain the stories about the creation of the world, the patriarchs, and the commandments and ethical ideals of the Jewish people set in a historical framework.
- ✘ **Prophets:** The books of *Judges*, *Samuel* and *Kings* continue the history of Israel. They are deeply concerned with the moral problems that historical figures faced. The books of the prophets such as *Isaiah* and *Amos* are mainly concerned with teaching faith, justice and compassion.
- ✘ **Holy Writings:** The books in this section are quite varied and include historical books such as *Esther* and *Nehemiah*; wisdom literature such as *Proverbs* and *Job*; and poetry and songs such as the *Psalms*.

After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Jewish people were dispersed and no longer had their own state. Worried that the oral tradition would be lost, Rabbi Judah the Prince wrote down the oral Torah in about 200 AD. This work is known as the Mishnah and runs to 63 volumes.

In the centuries that followed, the Mishnah was studied and discussed by rabbis in the academies of Jerusalem and Babylon. Rabbi Judah had included an enormous number of different opinions on many topics, and the rabbis wanted to know what they meant in practice. Their discussions were carefully written down by scribes. In about 500, the rabbis combined each paragraph of the Mishnah with the discussions that had taken place around it. The result was a massive work known as the Talmud. Until today the Talmud has been the main subject studied in Jewish academies.

Judaism has always sought to improve the character and behavior of people. These are among the concerns of the Bible and the Talmud. Jews always regarded

Torah study as important because it could lead to good deeds. A first century rabbi expressed the relationship between study and behavior like this:

Anyone whose good deeds are more than his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. Anyone whose wisdom is more than his good deeds, his wisdom will not endure.

Throughout the ages there has always been a special type of literature devoted to character training and guidance for good behavior. The oldest of these is the book of *Proverbs*. It stresses the importance of people learning from their parents and accepting the wisdom of the ages. Here is some advice from that book on the risks of temptation and immorality:

My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck.

When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you.

For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life, keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife.

Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life.

Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.

There are also many other pithy aphorisms in the book of *Proverbs* that stick in a person's mind. They are often composed in verse and, being very catchy, are automatically recalled by the memory at the appropriate moment.



Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.

A kind-hearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth.

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.

*The world stands on three things, on justice, on truth and on peace.*

— Ethics of the Fathers

## Justice

In Jewish teaching, justice is one of the pillars on which the world stands. It is not always easy to achieve, however. Imagine, for example, a rich man and a poor man who commit the same crime and are given the same heavy fine. The poor man might have to sell some of his possessions to pay the fine, while the rich man leaves the courtroom laughing that he got off so

lightly. Is it justice if we treat them the same? On the other hand, is it justice if we treat them differently?

Recognizing the difficulties, the rabbis taught, “If you come too close to fire, you will get burned. If you stay too far away, you will be cold. The art of judgment is to find the right distance.” They realized that at times a judge had to be more severe with some people than with others. They themselves were far more strict with learned people.

They also taught that justice had to be tempered with mercy. “The Lord is merciful and gracious” (Exodus 34:6). The rabbis taught that one should follow the example of God in many things. Since being merciful is one of God’s characteristics, justice and mercy must go hand in hand.

When God was about to create the world, He thought, “If I create it with mercy alone, then sinners will multiply; if I create it with justice alone, how will the world endure? I shall therefore create it with both justice and mercy, and in this way it might endure.”

— Midrash

## Seven Commandments of the Sons of Noah

Judaism teaches that all human beings were created to serve God by living a righteous life. Six commandments that teach the right way of life were given by God to the first man, Adam; one more commandment was given to Noah and his sons. That’s the origin of the “Seven Commandments of the

sons of Noah.” “Sons of Noah” means all humanity, for according to Torah all people are descendants of Noah and his family who were saved from the flood. But this expression also has a deeper meaning. “Sons of Noah” are his spiritual descendants and followers, who inherited his righteousness and ability to follow the will of God in spite of the lack of spirituality in society.

Let us describe briefly the commandments of Noahide code.

### 1. No blasphemy

Blasphemy and cursing God are forbidden. People are expected to develop a sensitive and respectful attitude toward godly matters.

### 2. No idolatry

Idolatry can be either the worship of many gods (polytheism); trying to represent God by an image; or the worship of an object, nature or people. The first is forbidden



because the belief in many gods results in a lack of a consistent moral standard. The second, because God is so far beyond our understanding that He can never be portrayed as an image. The third because we should worship the Creator, and not something that is created.



### 3. No murder

Every human being is very valuable in the eyes of God. Any act that directly or indirectly leads to the death of another person is forbidden. That is why no one should be left without enough money to survive. It is also sinful not to save a human life when one has such an opportunity. Abortion, suicide and euthanasia are not permitted.

### 4. No adultery

Family and all family relationships are considered to be of very high value and importance. Sexual love is necessary for continuing the human species and is also a God-given way for a husband and wife to express their love for one another. That is why this commandment forbids not only adultery but also

incest (sexual relationships between close relatives — parents and children, brothers and sisters) and homosexuality.

### 5. No theft

People and institutions have the right to own and enjoy their property. Theft is taking for oneself any amount of somebody else's property, even a penny.

### 6. No cruelty to animals

In the ancient world there were forms of idol worship that required tearing limbs from live animals and eating them. Jewish thought forbids this as well as causing unnecessary pain to any living creature.

### 7. Justice and law

Human society has the duty to establish and support a system of justice, enforced by courts of law, in order to enable people to live together in harmony. That is why every person should respect the laws of any state as long as they don't contradict these seven commandments. The last commandment also calls us to actively intervene in any events that are obviously unjust.

From the point of view of Torah, anyone who follows all the commandments of this code is considered to be righteous and has his share in the Kingdom to come. The law states that one should live in peace with such righteous people, whatever their

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Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees.  
With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.  
Open my eyes that I may see  
wonderful things in your law.  
I am a stranger on earth;  
do not hide your commands from me.  
My soul is consumed with longing  
for your laws at all times.  
I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.  
I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.  
I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.  
Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth,  
for I have put my hope in your laws.  
I will always obey your law, for ever and ever.  
I will walk about in liberty, for I have sought out your precepts.  
I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame,  
for I delight in your commands because I love them.  
The law from your mouth is more precious to me  
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

— Psalm 119

nationality or religion may be, and if necessary, protect them as if they were members of one's own community.

Jews believe that these seven commandments, seven basic ethical norms, were given to humanity by God as the only foundation for universal morality. This code is the only real basis for dialogue and mutual understanding among people and for the establishment of world peace.

### Freedom and responsibility

I have set before you today life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life.

— Deut. 30:19

Observing all these laws does not limit a person's freedom, since every person is still completely free to choose whether to do good or evil. The laws are not regarded as a burden or a restriction of liberty; on the contrary, Jews regard the law as the guarantor of liberty.

Certain things are decided by God, such as whether a person will be healthy or sick, clever or dull, rich or poor. Jews believe that God makes those decisions each New Year. This is why at the celebration of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) ten days before the New Year, Jews try to forgive anyone who has done them wrong, and search out and ask forgiveness from anyone they might have offended during the past year. Still, within each situation a person is entirely free to make moral choices. This means that each individual is responsible for his or her own actions.

### The Mitzvot

And now O Israel, what does the Lord your God want of you? To walk in His ways ... to keep, for your own good, the commandments of the Lord.

— Deut. 10:12-13

Whereas all human beings have the seven Noahide commandments to keep, Jews must observe many additional rules. They call them mitzvah (plural mitzvot), which means "commandment." Jews use this term when speaking of the rules God wants them to keep. There are 613 mitzvot, of which 248 are positive commandments and 365 are negative commandments, those things Jews are commanded not to do. These additional mitzvot were given to the Israelites by God at Mount Sinai.

During the 40 days on the mountain, Moses received many other commandments apart from the Ten Commandments that were engraved on the tablets of stone. It is this historical event that is the source of the understanding of justice and law which is used in half the world. Here are a few of the other laws that were given about 3,500 years ago:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. — Deut. 10:17-19

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. — Lev. 19:15

Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous. — Exodus 23:8

A thief must certainly make restitution. If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession, he must pay back double. — Exodus 22:3-4

Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. — Exodus 22:23

Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. — Deut. 24:14

Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights. — Lev. 19:35

The mitzvot cover every area of life. They include those activities people usually associate with religion, such as praying or observing holidays, as well as many things which people might not think of as religious at all. Industrial relations, the conduct of a trial, divorce proceedings and the food Jews may or may not eat, all come within the scope of the 613 mitzvot. Keeping the mitzvot requires leading a disciplined life.

## Jewish morality



In Jewish thinking, keeping the commandments is an important part of character training. But morality can never be a matter of simply keeping the rules. People have to develop inwardly. “The mitzvot were given for the purpose of refining the people,” says the Talmud. For Jews, living by the commandments is a way to moral and spiritual development, which is an essential part of serving God. By living in this way, people refine themselves and bring holiness into the world.

Jews believe that by fulfilling the commandments they are communicating with God. An ancient Jewish teaching says that God “wrote Himself into the Torah.” For Jews the commandments are God’s will and wisdom expressed in human speech. By having mitzvot that cover every area of life, the whole of a person’s life can become an act of service to God. Through honoring these commandments, even the smallest action becomes imbued with meaning and holiness. Thus, even ordinary actions such as eating a meal or going to bed are transformed into ways of serving God.

For example, a Jew starts the day by thanking God for waking him up. After this he washes his hands using a jug of water and a bowl that were placed by the side of the bed the night before. This washing of the hands is an act of purification,

as the priests of old used to wash their hands and feet before entering the Temple. Each day is full of opportunities for serving God, so beginning the day is thought of as entering the Temple.

Each mitzvah has something to teach. For example, the laws concerning the punishment of criminals emphasize the need to respect human dignity; those concerned with damages and compensation stress personal responsibility; and the laws on borrowing and lending teach compassion for those less well off than oneself.

One class of commandment, the *chukim*, need special mention as they have no external logic. They are regarded as a test of a Jew’s faith, and observing them

strengthens it. The commandments about eating kosher food are examples of *chukim*. Only certain animals, birds and fish are kosher and may be eaten. Even then, they have to be prepared in a particular way.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.”

— Deut. 6:5

“The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.”

— Psalms 111:10

## Foundations of Jewish piety

The love and fear of God are the two foundations of Jewish piety. Love of God inspires a person to fulfill the 248 positive commandments. Fear is the reason for not violating the 365





negative commandments. Fearing God can mean many things. In its lowest form it means fear of being punished for doing wrong. A higher form of fear is feeling shame at the very thought of sinning. Fear is only the beginning, not the end, of wisdom.

### *Growing in the law*

And these matters which I command you today you shall take to heart. And you shall teach them carefully to your children, and you shall speak to them.

— Deut. 6:6-7

Five is the age for starting to study scripture, ten for Mishnah, thirteen for observing the commandments.

— Ethics of the Fathers

When does a child become an adult? This is not an easy question to answer. First, individuals mature at different ages. Second, there are different kinds of maturity: A person may be mature physically but not emotionally, and vice versa. However, in Jewish law there has to be a certain age at which the majority of individuals are regarded as being on the way to full maturity. That age is 12 for a girl and 13 for a boy. At these ages young people can begin to feel responsible for their own actions.

To mark this transition from childhood to adulthood, there is an important rite of passage called bar mitzvah for boys and bat mitzvah for girls. By this time young people are expected to have learned how to live according to the mitzvot and will be

held responsible for their actions. During a celebration meal they declare their intention to accept the obligations of being an adult. From this point, a young person enters into a covenant relationship with God, both as an individual and as a part of the community.

### *Administering the law*

From the very earliest times, Jews were commanded to set up a system of justice to administer the laws. In the law courts judges would try offenders, settle disputes and issue rulings on religious matters. There were three levels of Bet Din, or courts. Ordinary trials were conducted by a Bet Din of three judges. They questioned the witnesses themselves and, after considering the evidence, gave a verdict. When someone

was standing trial for an offense that carried the death penalty, a Bet Din of 23 judges tried the case. Matters of national importance required a Sanhedrin, a court of 71.

In the courts, circumstantial evidence was never admissible. A person could only be executed if witnesses had given a warning, pointing out the possible punishment, and then actually seen the crime carried out in front of their eyes almost immediately. If a person had heard a scream, and then rushed into a building to find a person standing over a body holding a knife that was dripping blood, the death penalty could not be enforced because no one had actually witnessed the crime. So although the death penalty was always a possibility, it was rarely carried out.

The workings of a Bet Din depend on the careful examination of witnesses by impartial judges. Very high standards of truth and reliability are expected from both. People with a criminal record may not appear as witnesses, nor may dishonest traders or gamblers. A judge too can be disqualified if there is the slightest risk that he might be partial. The Talmud tells the story of a rabbi who was getting into a boat. A man standing nearby put his hand out to help him. As the rabbi thanked him, the man mentioned that he was due to appear before him in court. "In that case," said the rabbi, "I am disqualified from being your judge."

## Suffering

Not to have known suffering is not to be truly human.

— Midrash

One of the questions that vexed Jewish people more than anything else was why there was suffering and how it could be understood. In the Bible there are many stories of people who suffer and how they coped with their suffering. Some notable examples are:

- ✘ Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers (Genesis 37)
- ✘ King David, whose infant child died (2 Samuel 12)
- ✘ Job, who lost his home and family but never complained to God.

As they discussed the Talmud, the rabbis offered some insights into suffering. Suffering is many-sided and has no single explanation. Here are some of their explanations:

- ✘ "If a man should suffer, let him examine his deeds. If he has sinned, let him repent. If he finds nothing, let him attribute his suffering to neglect of Torah study. If this, too, is not so, then for sure his afflictions are sufferings of love."
- ✘ "The righteous suffer for the sins of their generation."





- ✘ “The potter does not test cracked vessels, because if he taps them even once they break. He only tests good vessels, because no matter how many times he taps them they do not break. So God does not test the wicked, but only the righteous.”
- ✘ “Which way leads to the world to come? The way of suffering.”
- ✘ “God says, ‘If I grant you happiness, give thanks; if I bring you suffering, give thanks.’”

The rabbis did not seek to justify suffering, but they accepted it as a fact of life. Even though every effort should be made to prevent and alleviate suffering, it has its positive side and through it people sometimes emerge as better people.

### Something to think about



- How do you understand the statement “Anyone whose good deeds are more than his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. Anyone whose wisdom is more than his good deeds, his wisdom will not endure”? What is the relationship between knowledge and action?
- One proverb says: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” Why do pride and a haughty spirit often lead to committing evil?
- What is more important for you — mercy or justice? Why should justice go together with mercy?
- Do you agree that the Seven Commandments of the Sons of Noah are the basis of universal morality?
- To what extent is one free to choose between good and evil?
- Why do Jews keep the 613 mitzvot?
- How do you understand the statement “Fear is only the beginning, and not the end, of wisdom”?
- When and in what way do people become responsible for their actions? Do you think you have already reached this level of maturity?
- Why is it important to expect very high moral standards from judges?
- Do you agree with the statement that “the righteous suffer for the sins of their generation”? Are people sometimes held responsible not only for their own actions, but also for the conduct of their family and country?

## The Ten Commandments

Although the Ten Commandments are about 3,500 years old, they are still relevant today. They form one of the chief sources of law for much of the world’s population. So we will take a closer look at what they mean and how they might be applied in today’s world.

### 1. You shall have no other gods before me.

The first commandment is about priorities. It means that God is to be loved and honored above all other people or things. God should be first in a person’s life and at the heart of his relationship with everything else. However, this wholehearted love for God does not lead to a lessening of the value of humanity. The commandment only emphasizes the importance of right order. We can, and should, love and respect many people and things as well. The problem always comes when people put something else, which may still be very valuable and important, before God.

## 2. You shall not make for yourself an idol.

This commandment emphasizes the dignity of man. Man is the crown of the creation. Therefore, if man bows down to what is created, he leaves his position as the Lord of Creation and instead becomes its servant. Idolatry is worshiping not only things created by man but even those created by God, such as the sun. It is treating as divine something that is only natural.

Idolatry takes many forms in the modern world. For example, many people appear to worship material goods and prosperity — having the latest fashion is the most important thing to them. Others idolize and hang on every word of pop stars, and some worship the human body through pornography or Mr. Universe competitions. It is not unusual for an individual, the state or a party to be regarded as the ultimate arbiter of truth and law, and the source of social well-being. In the case of nationalism, many people worship their own nation.

Even religions themselves may slip into idolatry when they worship something such as scripture, a tradition, a doctrine or even the religion itself.

## 3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

We communicate with one another through language, and we can only understand each other if we use words in the same way. If words lose their meaning through misuse or overuse, our ability to communicate is impaired. When words such as “God,” “love,” “peace” and “truth” are treated profanely, we can no longer speak to each other clearly about these most sacred and important matters. This limits the depth of our relationships with one another. Since religion is one of the deepest and richest dimensions of human experience, misusing God’s name denigrates that which is most sacred. This has a corrupting effect upon the whole of language.

This commandment is also aimed at the misuse of religion, the numinous power of the holy, to further one’s own ends at the expense of the welfare or lives of others. It provides a check on the authority bestowed to priests, ministers and clergy leaders and guides them away from using fear to compel allegiance to religious demands. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for religious leaders to threaten that God will punish those who disobey or disagree with them.



## 4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

The Sabbath is the last day of the week. According to the story of creation in Genesis, on the seventh day, after seeing that everything He created was “very good,” God rested. The Sabbath, then, commemorates the creation of the world. Life’s meaning is not to be summed up in work or usefulness to others. It is easy to become overly involved in life’s daily tasks, so that one loses sight of what is most important in life. The Sabbath was established for man’s benefit. It is a time for rest, prayer, study, and reflection. It is a family day, a day of joy and peace.

## 5. Honor your father and your mother.

The family is the basic unit of society, and it is through the family that values, traditions, knowledge and skills are transmitted from one generation to another. Thus, a society in which family values are distorted or abandoned is itself distorted and will disintegrate. The



central relationship linking the generations is the relationship between parents and children. A person who dishonors his parents by cursing them or attacking them undermines one of the main pillars of society.

Both parents and children have certain responsibilities toward one another. Parents are expected to feed, clothe and educate their children, and see that they can support themselves. They are expected to raise their children to be moral people. They are to give moral guidance and, more importantly, show a personal example. As the Orthodox priest Alexander Elchaninov said, "In the education of children, the most important thing is that they should see their parents leading an intense interior life." So this commandment is not only for the children but also for the parents. It

says to parents, "Make yourselves the kind of people your child will want to respect." For their part, children are expected to respect and listen to their parents and take care of them, especially in their old age.

When people grow old, they can often no longer work enough to be able to support themselves and contribute to the community. However, the ability to work and the quality of what one can produce are not what decide the value of human life. Although work is important, it is not everything. Even if they can no longer work, old people should be respected and taken care of. Through their life's experiences they have accumulated wisdom and knowledge, a very precious resource which should be inherited by the young. This is why in traditional societies the older a person is, the more highly he is regarded.

### 6. You shall not murder.

In Hebrew, there are different words for different types of killing. The word used here is "*rasah*," which was used to describe the killing by a private citizen of his enemy. This is a premeditated killing committed out of malice. It is to be distinguished from the more general "killing." While it is always wrong to kill, sometimes it happens accidentally and sometimes it can be justified — for example, in defense of oneself or one's country during a war.

This commandment stresses the sacredness of human life. Since life is a gift from God, each person has unique and infinite value. The right to life is the basis of all other human rights, natural and legal, and is the foundation of civilized society. No one has the right to end his or her own life or that of another person.

### 7. You shall not commit adultery.

Sexual love is holy yet natural. It is holy because God is love, and natural because it is created by God. Adultery, though, destroys the most intimate and precious of human relationships — the love and trust between a husband and wife. It is the violation of the covenant between a husband and wife. So this commandment protects this conjugal relationship and the human hearts that would be hurt by such an act.

Furthermore, as well as being a sin against love, by destroying or seriously harming marriage, adultery undermines the family. When sexual order collapses, parental authority also collapses as children cannot respect parents who say one



thing and behave in the opposite way. At the same time, if conjugal love is damaged, the love of the parents for their children may also be compromised. Children may grow without receiving the benefit of the love and guidance from both parents as they need. In this way adultery is also a crime against one's lineage. Since the family is the basis of society, anything that undermines the most holy of relationships undermines all relationships and thus society.

### *8. You shall not steal.*

Stealing is taking, without permission and usually in secret, something that belongs to someone else. This includes fraud and the intentional non-payment of debts, which have the same effect. Stealing is not limited to individuals. Groups, businesses and governments are all capable of stealing.

This commandment teaches us how we should relate to things. Although God created the world and thus is its ultimate owner, He gave humankind the right of dominion over it. This is so that people, created in the image of God, can develop their own creativity and become co-creators. Thus, the things that we own and create are in a sense an extension of our personality. The rule against theft protects the natural desire to own and enjoy one's proper possessions undisturbed. In communities where such a law is observed, people do not lock their doors or worry about keeping their possessions secure. This state of affairs benefits everyone, both the rich and the poor. The rich and powerful are protected from theft, and the less well off are protected from the powerful.

Owning something does not entitle us to do with it as we please. Ownership entails obligations to treat what we own with respect and not to abuse it. Also, people who are wealthy have an obligation to be generous and use their wealth for the benefit of the community. Although Mosaic Law confers the highest sanctity on the principle of personal ownership, human life is far more valuable than property and people were never executed for theft.

### *9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*

Lying poisons human communication and destroys trust. When we lie, we deceive others and we deceive ourselves. Words are very powerful and, once spoken, cannot be unsoken. In the Old Testament, if a person was found to have falsely accused someone of a crime, he would receive the punishment that would have befallen the person he accused.

This commandment protects truth in human relationships and also applies to slander, the telling and spreading of falsehoods about people or groups with the intention of harming them. Such activity is evil, both in its origin — since it springs from envy, hatred, malice and stinginess — and in its effects on those injured and those who are deceived. Unfortunately, religious groups also commit this sin when they attack “competing” religions in order to prevent them from growing.

### *10. You shall not covet.*

Coveting is desiring to own something that belongs to someone else. Of all the Ten Commandments, this is the only one that applies directly to thoughts rather than to external actions. Since evil actions always start from evil desires and thoughts, it is best to nip such desires in the bud. When someone is blessed with good fortune or wealth, we should be happy, not envious. Envy, the sorrow at another's good fortune or the rejoicing in another's misfortune, eats a person up and destroys happiness.

## Something to think about



- What do you think of the idea that the same law should be applied in the same way to everyone?
- What is most important in your life?
- Do you honor or worship anything? If so, why?
- Can you think of examples of language being misused and thereby debased?
- Can you think of any words in your language that have lost their original meaning due to misuse?
- Can parents lose their authority because they have lost the trust of their child?
- How should you behave if you disagree with your parents?
- Why does the Bible make a distinction between murder and killing?
- How does adultery damage individuals, families and society?
- Does adultery always produce feelings of pain and jealousy?
- Do you think people have a moral right to own things?
- Is it ever right to steal?
- What are the responsibilities of those who have wealth?
- Should we always tell the truth?
- What would a society be like if people could not be trusted to keep their promises?
- What happens when a society allows false witness in court?
- Do you envy other people?
- Would it make you secretly happy if some misfortune happened to someone you disliked?

# Lord of the Flies

The novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding is about a group of British schoolboys who are stranded on a desert island. Two of them, Ralph and Piggy, find a conch shell which Ralph blows to call everyone to a meeting. Jack, who is the leader of a choir, proposes himself to be chief. However, it is Ralph who is elected. He gives authority over the choirboys to Jack, and it is agreed that they are to hunt animals for food. To make the meetings manageable, it is decided that the person holding the conch is the one who has the authority to speak. Ralph, with Piggy's advice, decides that the most important priority is to build shelters and keep a fire burning so that they can be rescued.

The children, however, are soon distracted from such tedious tasks by the glamour of pig hunting. They play games and develop rituals around the killing of a pig they catch one day for food. Some of the small children spread rumors of a beast hiding in the forest, and fear starts to corrupt their earlier innocence. As the thin veneer of civilization wears off, their "games" become more and more realistic until a boy, who tries to tell them he has discovered what misled them into thinking there was a beast, is killed.

The relationship between Jack and Ralph becomes more and more tense, and Jack leads the hunters out of the group and sets up his own tribe at the other end of the island. The hunters want to cook a pig they have killed and steal Piggy's glasses to make a fire. This leads to a final confrontation.



## To read

Chapter 11 "Castle Rock" from *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding

