

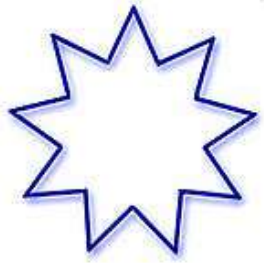


The Ten Commandments

A Bahá'í Perspective

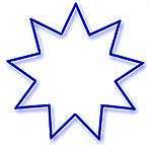


Marco Oliveira



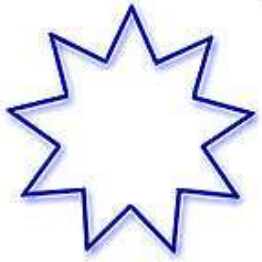
How does the Bahá'í Faith see the Ten Commandments?





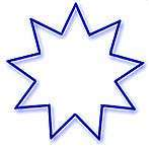
Foreword

- The Ten Commandments are a set of spiritual and social norms, established in the Hebrew Bible, in the Books of Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:4-21.
- These are the heart of Judaism and were later shared by Christianity and Islam.
- Western society and culture was deeply influenced by the Ten Commandments and several other contents of the Hebrew Bible.
- Like Christianity and Islam, the Bahá'í Faith inherited and expanded the moral values exposed in the Ten Commandments.



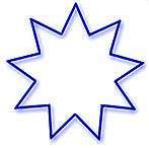
MOSES





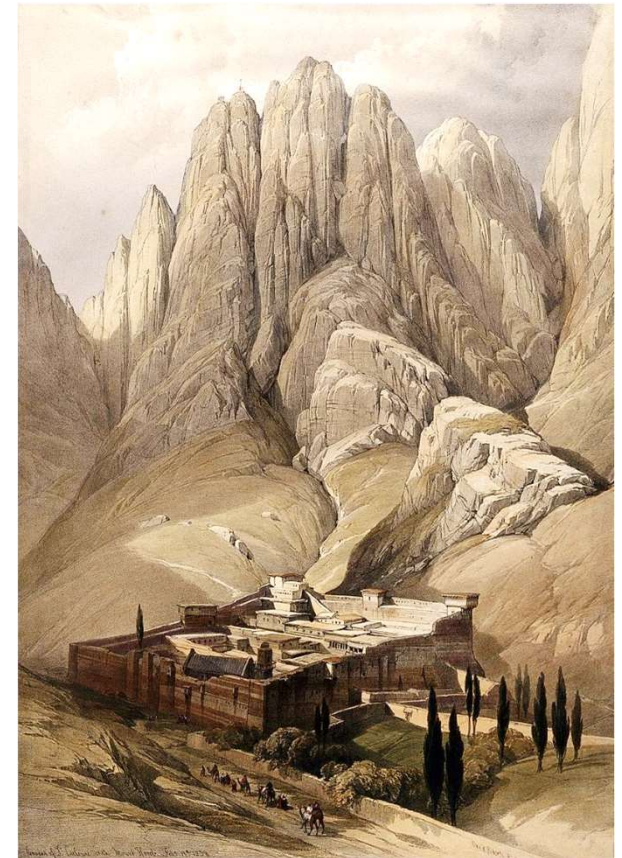
Who was Moses?

- Moses was the Prophet founder of Judaism.
- The Book of Exodus describes Moses as being adopted and raised by an Egyptian princess. In His adult life He became the leader of the Hebrews and lead their escape from Egypt.
- According to the Book of Exodus, God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and renewed His covenant with the Hebrews. Moses then educated the people about many spiritual principles and gave them hundreds of social laws.
- Amongst these the Ten Commandments have fundamental importance.
- Moses is recognized as a Prophet in Christianity, Islam, the Bahá'í Faith.

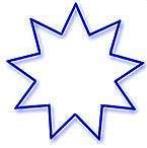


Moses in Bahá'í Faith

- For the Bahá'í Faith, Moses is a Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh describes the story of Moses in the Book of Certitude; in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Moses is referred as “the One Who Conversed with God.”
- According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the spiritual and social laws revealed by Moses lead the Hebrews to a high civilizational development, whose influence reached the Greek philosophers.



The monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, from the south. Coloured lithograph by Louis Haghe after David Roberts, 1849. (source: commons.wikimedia.org)



According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá



Ten Commandments at the Amsterdam Esnoga synagogue
Decalogue parchment by Jekuthiel Sofer 1768.

(source: commons.wikimedia.org)

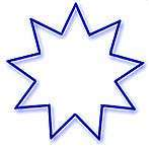
“The essential teaching of Moses was the law of Sinai, the Ten Commandments. Christ renewed and again revealed the commands of the one God and precepts of human action.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.154



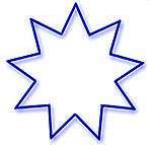
2nd century BCE Nash Papyrus
(source: commons.wikimedia.org)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



Introduction

- The Ten Commandments are a set religious laws.
- Throughout history, the Ten Commandments grew in relevance.
- There are two versions of the Ten Commandments (Exodus and Deuteronomy). The statements in the Commandments focus on the relation with Israel to God, and on social issues.
- The numbering of the statements differs amongst religions. In this presentation we will follow the numbering adopted by the Catholic Church.



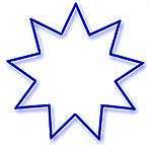
The First Commandment

“I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them...”

Ex 20:2-5; cf. ⇒ Deut 5:6-9

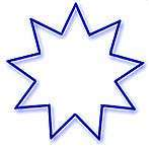


The Ark of God Carried into the Temple
Source: commons.wikimedia.org



A transcendent God

- The belief in a transcendent, omnipotent and loving Creator is a central belief in the teaching of the Manifestations of God.
- Such a belief should be the central axis of human existence. Our lives should reflect this belief.
- This commandment was reaffirmed in the Gospel of Mathew (23:36-39)
- The belief in a unique transcendent God is not compatible with worshiping idols or images.
- The belief in God shouldn't be distorted or replace by ideologies that destroy human society. History shows how harmful these religion-like ideologies were to humanity.



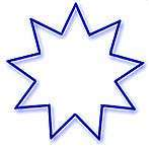
One God

“Take heed lest your devotions withhold you from Him Who is the object of all devotion, or your worship debar you from Him Who is the object of all worship...This is your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, Who hath come to quicken the world and unite all who dwell on earth.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 55.

“There is none other God but Thee, the Omnipotent, the Self-Subsisting; that Thou art God, there is no God besides Thee and that all men shall be raised up to life through Thee.”

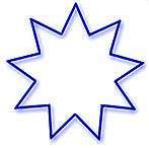
The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, p. 1



Images and Statues

“...Christ admonished the people time and again to heed the Ten Commandments of the Torah and insisted upon their strict observance. Now, one of the Ten Commandments forbids the worship of images and statues. Yet today there are a myriad images and statues in the churches of certain Christian denominations. It is clear and evident, then, that the religion of God does not preserve its original precepts among the people, but that it is gradually changed and altered to the point of being entirely effaced, and thus a new Manifestation appears and a new religion is established.”

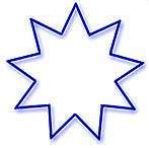
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch 43



The Three False Gods

“God Himself has indeed been dethroned from the hearts of men, and an idolatrous world passionately and clamorously hails and worships the false gods which its own idle fancies have fatuously created, and its misguided hands so impiously exalted. The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshiping.”

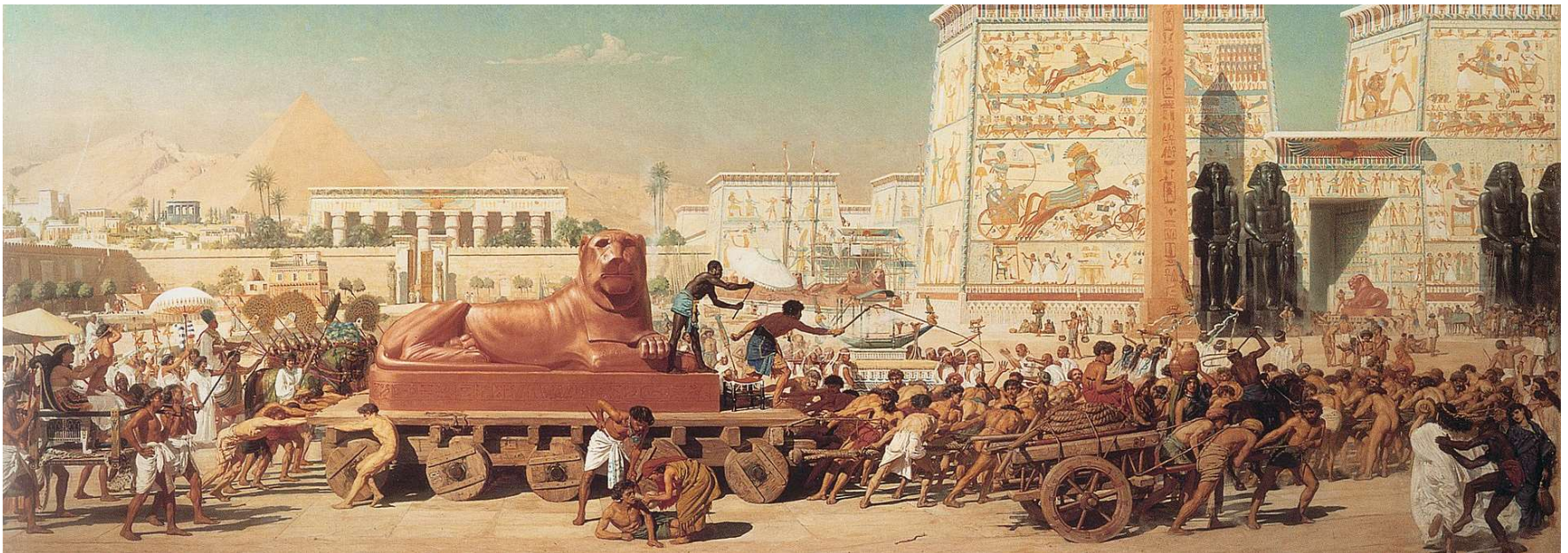
Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 113



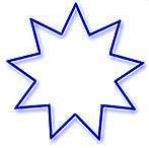
The Second Commandment

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”

Ex 20:7

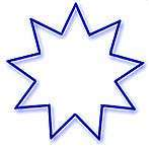


Children of Israel in Egypt (1867 painting by Edward Poynter)
(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)



Virtues

- There are several possible ways to understand this commandment:
 - Don't abuse or misuse of the name of God.
 - Prohibition of blasphemy and curses.
 - Condemnation of perjury and ungodly behavior.
- An interpretation of this commandment affirms the importance of a personal virtues.
- The Bahá'í writings praise a large number of human virtues and the human being should seek “upright character, virtuous deeds and a goodly utterance”.
- References to the “Name of God” appear in several occasions in the Bahá'í writings.



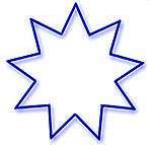
Character, deeds, conduct...

“O people of God! Adorn your temples with the adornment of trustworthiness and piety. Help, then, your Lord with the hosts of goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 120

“Were man to appreciate the greatness of his station and the loftiness of his destiny he would manifest naught save goodly character, pure deeds, and a seemly and praiseworthy conduct.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 172



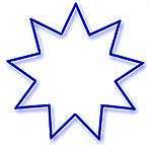
The Third Commandment

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work...”

Ex 20:8-10; cf. ⇒ Deut 5:12-15

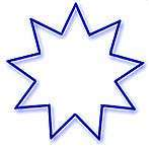


Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur,
1878, Tel Aviv Museum of Art
(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)



A time to be with God

- Having a weekly day of rest is a law and tradition in the Abrahamic faiths. Some religious groups follow (and impose) a strict observance of this law.
- This commandment can be understood as one of those social laws that can change from one revelation to another.
- However, we can understand here an important principle: humans need time to develop their relation with their Creator.
- It does not need to be a appointed day and time of the week; but we should have regular moments of prayer, meditation and communion with God.



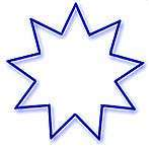
Day of Rest

It is interesting to note that in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* the Law of the Sabbath was not abrogated or forbidden, as are some other things (clergy, slavery, monasticism).

On other writings of Bahá'u'lláh we have guidance on a Bahá'í Day of Rest: Friday.

"Abdu'l-Bahá gives no reason whatever why Friday has been chosen as the day of rest in the Bahá'í calendar. He just affirms it."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer,
July 10, 1939: *Bahá'í News*, No. 162, April 1943, p. 5)
(Compilations, *Lights of Guidance*, Hornby, #372)



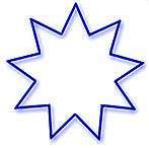
The Fourth Commandment

“Honour thy father and thy mother:
that thy days may be long upon the
land which the Lord thy God giveth
thee.”

Ex 20:12; ⇒ Deut 5:16.

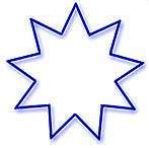


Recha welcoming her father.
Maurycy Gottlieb (1856–1879)
(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)



Parents

- Parents (and older generations) are often a source of wisdom and life experience.
- Family are the building blocks of society. Therefore, the unity of family is essential for the preservation of society.
- Like with other Commandments, the Bahá'í teachings widens this commandment, by affirming the importance of families ties and the rights and obligations of every family member.
- A family is not only a physical and temporary link between parents and their children.
- The spiritual links between parents and their children is also stressed in the Bahá'í writings.



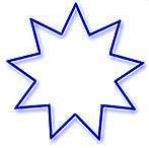
The Tree of Human Life...



(Source: pixabay.com)

“The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due to one’s parents. This teaching hath been mentioned in all the Books of God, and reaffirmed by the Most Exalted Pen.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*,
in Questions section, # 106

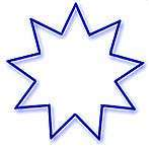


Praying for our parents...

“It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: "Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!" Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.”

The Báb, *Selections From the Writings of the Bab*, p. 94.





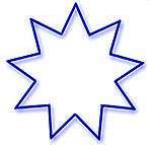
The Fifth Commandment

“Thou shalt not kill.”

Ex 20:13; Cf. ⇒ Deut 5:17

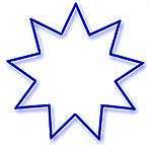


Jan and Hubert van Eyck: The Ghent Altarpiece - The Killing of Abel (1425-29)
(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)



The right to life

- The right to life is considered a basic right in many cultures.
- Murder has always been punished in every culture.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in its 3rd article: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”
- Humans are the fruit of creation and each human being is a unique creature with a unique personality and talent and capacities. Destroying a human being is destroying one of the fruits of divine creation and depriving the world of his/her talent and capacities.
- This raises several questions: How should we punish murderers?



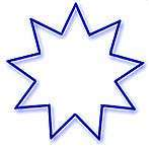
Let no soul slay another...

“...let no soul slay another; this, verily, is that which was forbidden you in a Book that hath lain concealed within the Tabernacle of glory. What! Would ye kill him whom God hath quickened, whom He hath endowed with spirit through a breath from Him.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 45.

“How grievous it is to see how man has used his God-given gift to frame instruments of war, for breaking the Commandment of God ‘Thou shalt not kill’, and for defying Christ’s injunction to ‘Love one another.’”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 42.



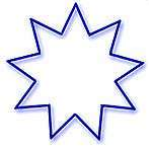
The Sixth Commandment

“Thou shalt not
commit adultery.”

EX 20:14; ⇒ Deut 5:18

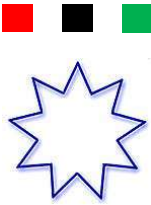


Nathan confronts David (1837)
Bronze bas-relief on the door of the La Madeleine, Paris.
(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)



A “fortress for well-being”

- The preservation of marriage - a spiritual, emotional and physical bond between man and woman - is essential for the preservation of families.
- Such preservation requires a constant effort for both members of the couple, where we have to learn to deal with the ups and downs in a marriage.
- The Bahá'í Faith stresses this commandment as more than an injunction to control our animal impulses. It reaffirms it as an invitation to discover marriage as a source of enormous happiness and satisfaction, a “fortress for well-being” for all the family.



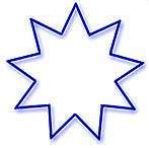
Adultery

“Ye are forbidden to commit adultery, sodomy and lechery. Avoid them, O concourse of the faithful. By the righteousness of God! Ye have been called into being to purge the world from the defilement of evil passions.”

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet - translated from the Arabic,
quoted in *A Chaste and Holy Life*.

“When we realize that Bahá'u'lláh says adultery retards the progress of the soul in the afterlife - so grievous is it - and that drinking destroys the mind, and not to so much as approach it, we see how clear are our teachings on these subjects.”

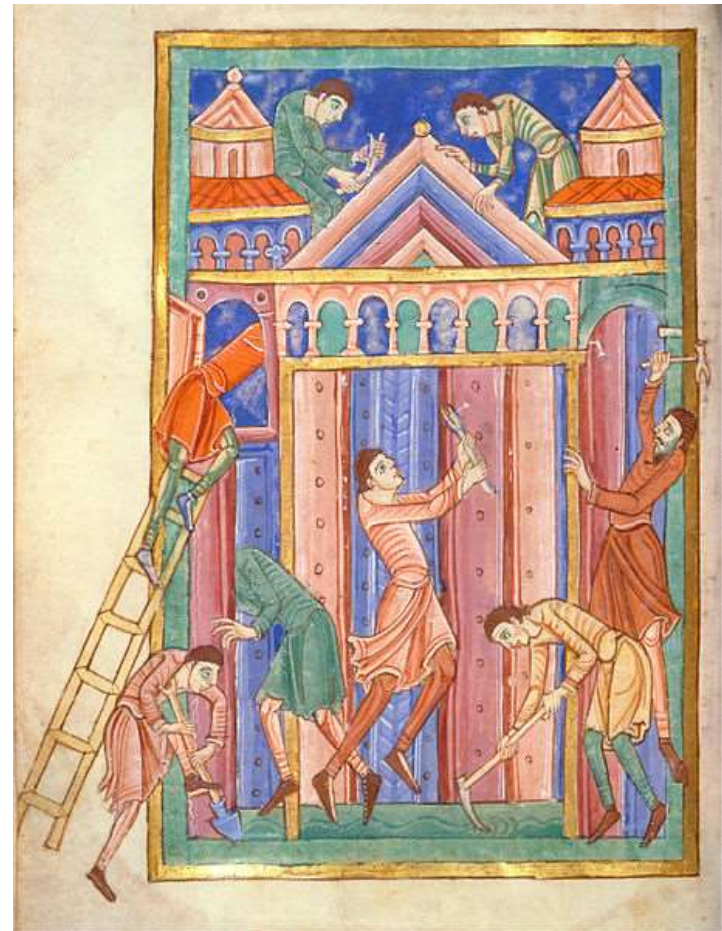
From a letter dated 30 September 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in *A Chaste and Holy Life*.



The Seventh Commandment

“Thou shalt not steal.”

EX 20:15; ⇒ Deut 5:19



Thieves Breaking into the Burial Church of St. Edmund

Alexis Master (1119/1135)

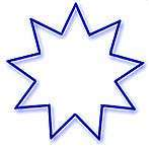
(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)

Stealing

- This is a basic rule for social interactions.
- Respect for the rights and properties of others is essential for a peaceful society.
- Huge differences between rich and poor create conditions where people are force to steal.
- Society must create conditions to minimize crime and treat criminals properly.



Les voleurs d'azulejos, a l'Alhambra
by Jean Charles Davillier, barón, 1823-1883



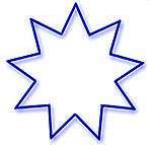
Lay hands on the property of others...

“...no man should enter the house of his friend save at his friend's pleasure, nor lay hands upon his treasures nor prefer his own will to his friend's, and in no wise seek an advantage over him.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, #43

“They who dwell within the tabernacle of God, and are established upon the seats of everlasting glory, will refuse, though they be dying of hunger, to stretch their hands and seize unlawfully the property of their neighbor, however vile and worthless he may be.”

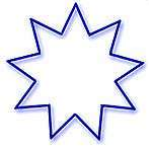
Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleaning from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. CXXXVII



Criminals

“See then how wide is the difference between material civilization and divine. With force and punishments, material civilization seeketh to restrain the people from mischief, from inflicting harm on society and committing crimes. But in a divine civilization, the individual is so conditioned that with no fear of punishment, he shunneth the perpetration of crimes, seeth the crime itself as the severest of torments, and with alacrity and joy, setteth himself to acquiring the virtues of humankind, to furthering human progress, and to spreading light across the world.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 132.



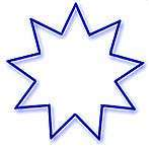
The Eighth Commandment

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”

Ex 20:16; ⇒ Deut 5:20

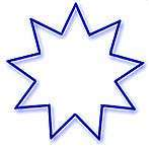


One of the oldest extant copies of the Ten Commandments. C. 30-1 BC (Early Herodian period)
Author unknown, photograph by Shai Halevi
(source: commons.wikimedia.org)



To be worthy of others' trust

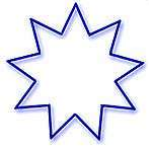
- This commandment has an appeal to a moral virtue: trustworthiness.
- Our words and deeds should show that we are worthy of other people's trust. And we should also trust that other people will do the right thing.
- Trustworthiness can be applied in multiple aspects of life: family, profession, business, education, science, economy, and politics.



Trustworthiness

“Verily [trustworthiness] is the door of security for all that dwell on earth and a token of glory on the part of the All-Merciful. He who partaketh thereof hath indeed partaken of the treasures of wealth and prosperity. Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquility and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitab-i-Adqas, p. 37

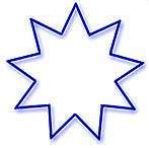


Calumny

- This Commandment also condemns calumny (making of false and defamatory statements in order to damage someone's reputation).

“O people of Bahá! Ye are the dawning-places of the love of God and the daysprings of His loving-kindness. Defile not your tongues with the cursing and reviling of any soul, and guard your eyes against that which is not seemly.”

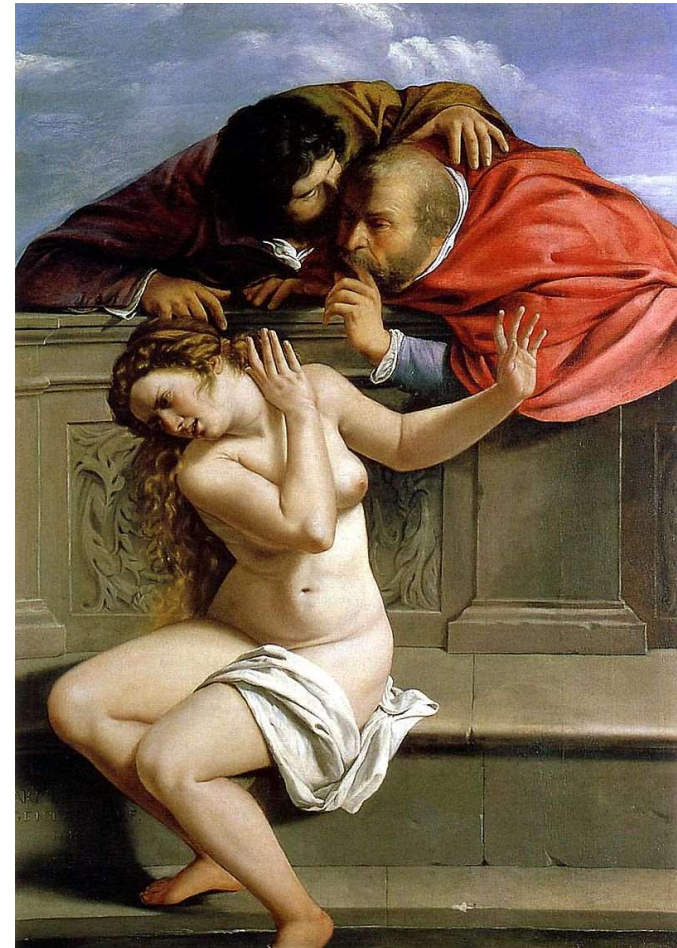
(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p.91)



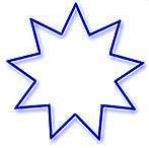
The Ninth Commandment

“Neither shalt thou desire
thy neighbour's wife...”

Deut 5:21

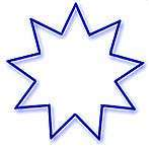


Susanna and the Elders, by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1656)
(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)



Bodily Impulses

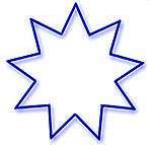
- The ninth commandment deals with the improper sexual desire.
- This is also an injunction to chastity and control of bodily impulses.
- In the Bahá'í Writings we can find several teachings and warnings about this topic.
- Human sexuality is not to be repressed but rather expressed within the context of marriage.



Desire and Passion

“Desire and passion, like two unmanageable horses, have wrested the reins of control from him and are galloping madly in the wilderness. This is the cause of the degradation of the world of humanity. This is the cause of its retrogression into the appetites and passions of the animal kingdom. Instead of divine advancement we find sensual captivity and debasement of heavenly virtues of the soul. By devotion to the carnal, mortal world human susceptibilities sink to the level of animalism.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 184



The Tenth Commandment

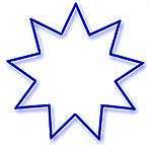
“Thou shalt not covet... nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.”

EX 20:17; ⇒ Deut 5:21



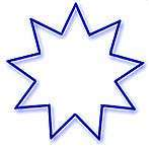
The Worship of Mammon (1909), the New Testament representation and personification of material greed, by Evelyn De Morgan.

(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)



Greed and Envy

- The tenth commandment deals with greed and envy. Coveting means to feel an unreasonable desire for what belongs to another person.
- Greed is the desire for more that is needed; envy is a resentful desire to possess an advantage enjoyed by another. Both are manifestations of human ego.
- It is legitimate and normal for a person wanting to improve his/her living conditions; but it is not correct to do it at expenses of others.
- Today the relevance of this commandment can be seen in the effects of the advertisement industry. How often does marketing impel us to desire unnecessary things? How often do people believe that certain mundane possessions are necessary signs of an improved living standard ?



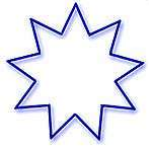
Covetousness

“Disencumber yourselves of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof. Beware that ye approach them not, inasmuch as they prompt you to walk after your own lusts and covetous desires, and hinder you from entering the straight and glorious Path.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVIII



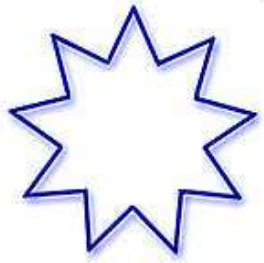
Deadly Sins. Avarice – by Jesus Solana (2012)
(Source: commons.wikimedia.org)



The darkness of greed and envy...

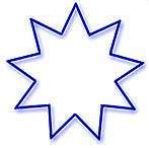
“O children of understanding! If the eyelid, however delicate, can deprive man’s outer eye from beholding the world and all that is therein, consider then what would be wrought if the veil of covetousness were to descend upon his inner eye. Say: O people! The darkness of greed and envy becloudeth the radiance of the soul even as the clouds obstruct the light of the sun. Should anyone hearken unto this utterance with a discerning ear, he will unfurl the wings of detachment and soar effortlessly in the atmosphere of true understanding.”

Bahá’u’lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, 1.11



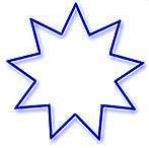
How does the Bahá'í Faith see the Ten Commandments?





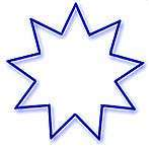
Summary

- The Ten Commandments represent a part of the Mosaic Laws.
- The brevity and numbering of the Ten Commandments made them easy to memorize. They became the backbone of a spiritually oriented society.
- The spiritual principles and social norms of the Ten Commandments are shared by Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith.
- The Bahá'í Faith affirms and renews the Ten Commandments by expanding their scope, clarifying their meanings, and globalizing their range.



Comments and Questions

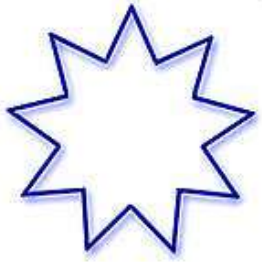
- What is the value of knowing the connection between Bahá'í Law and the Mosaic Ten Commandments?
- The Ten Commandments have been affirmed for the past 3000 years and were never abrogated. Can we say they are part of the spiritual DNA that runs through all of the religions?
- Do the Manifestations of God “inherit” spiritual laws from other Manifestations of God?
- We are told to supplicate to the Concourse on High for assistance, and we are assured of their help. How does praying to the Concourse on High relate to the first commandment?
- Which of the Ten Commandments can be described as a “spiritual law” and which can be described as a “social norm”?



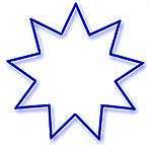
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 - Robert Stockman for the constant support.



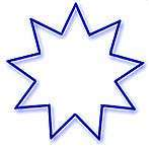


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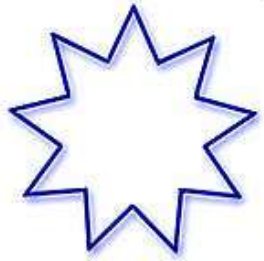
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