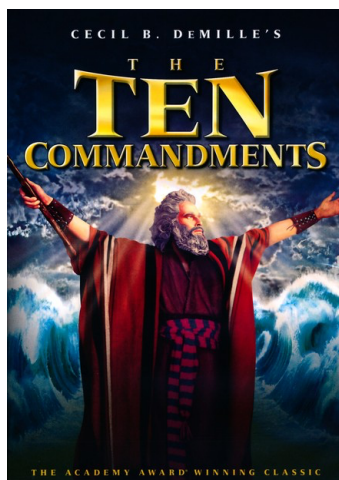


Counting the Ten Commandments

Joshua R. Jacobson



The Ten Commandments. For many of us, those three words still evoke images of Charlton Heston and Yul Brenner, the voice of John Huston, and the spectacle of Cecil B. DeMille.

But there is a problem using those three words as a translation for עֲשֶׂת הַדְּבָרוֹת. Actually there are two problems. (1) Are these statements really commandments? And (2) how do we get the number ten?

If you're looking for commandments, the first commandment would seem to be a disappointment:

— אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

“I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.” There is no “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not.” It doesn’t seem to be a commandment. In fact, in some traditions that sentence isn’t even included as one of the ten.

Actually, how do you say “commandment” in Hebrew? מצווה. And how many *mitzvot* are there? There are 613, not just ten. We don’t say, עֲשֶׂת הַמִּצְוֹת! In the Hebrew Bible, the ten are called דְּבָרִים. We read in the first verse of Exodus, chapter 20, as an introduction to the ten commandments:

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֶר:

And later, in chapter 34:¹

וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלְחָת אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית עֲשֶׂת הַדְּבָרִים

We may be more familiar with the expression עֲשֶׂת הַדְּבָרוֹת. But the term *dibberot* is actually a Talmudic term, not found in the Hebrew Bible.

So then what is a “*davar*” (singular of *devarim*) or a “*dibber*” (singular of *dibberot*)? How do we normally translate that into English? Generally it means a “word.” Hence the technical term “Decalogue,” derived from the Greek *deca* (ten) and *logoi* (words). “Ten words.” Are there only ten words in the Decalogue? Of course not. That would be too literal! Even when we say in English, “what’s the good word?” or “what’s the word on the street?” we don’t expect a one-word answer. Likewise in ancient Hebrew, *davar* could mean a single word, or it could be a pronouncement, or a statement. For example, in Deuteronomy, when Moses was reviewing the plan to send spies to check out

1. Exod. 34:28 and similarly Deut. 4:13, 10:4

the land of Canaan, he recalled saying,

וְנִשְׁלַח אַנְשִׁים לְפָנֵינוּ וַיַּחְפְּרוּ-לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וַיָּשְׁבוּ אֵתֵנוּ דְבָר (Deut. 1:22)

Let's send some men ahead to scout out the land for us, so they can bring back to us a *davar*.

I don't think Moses would have been happy with a one-word report!

There is another reason that some Jews refrain from calling the Decalogue, "The Ten Commandments." Christianity liberated its practitioners from most of the commandments in the Hebrew Bible, emphasizing instead only these top ten, which seemed to have a more universal application.² Perhaps in response to the Christian shift of focus from 613 to ten, the rabbis removed the recitation of the Decalogue from the liturgy. Since the days of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Decalogue had been chanted every day in the morning service just before the *Shema*. Now, in response to the Christian appropriation, Jews would no longer recite עשרת הדברות in the liturgical service.

But what about the number "ten"? It's clear that since ancient times there was a concept of *ten* Divine pronouncements. As we noted above, Exodus 34:28 proclaims:

וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל-הַלָּחָת אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית עֲשֶׂת הַדְּבָרִים

Moses wrote down on the tablets the terms (literally, "words") of the covenant, the Ten Commandments (literally, "words").

How do we count to ten?

Not everyone agrees on what the ten are. The chart below shows three different numerations.³

2. There was one problem. The first verse of the Decalogue proclaims, "God took you out of Egypt," a particular reference to the Hebrew people. And, under Paul and later Constantine, Christianity was seeking to expand its base beyond the land of Israel. How did they deal with this? The solution was to detach this verse from the Decalogue.

3. The Decalogue appears twice in the Torah: once in Exodus chapter 20 and once in Deuteronomy chapter 5. In this study we will deal exclusively on the Decalogue as it appears in Exodus.

Protestant	Catholic	Hebrew
<p>1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.</p> <p>2. 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: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.</p> <p>3. 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.</p> <p>4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, 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, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.</p> <p>5. Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.</p> <p>6. Thou shalt not kill.</p> <p>7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.</p> <p>8. Thou shalt not steal.</p> <p>9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.</p> <p>10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.</p> <p>King James Bible</p>	<p>1. I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.</p> <p>2. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.</p> <p>3. Remember thou keep the Sabbath Day.</p> <p>4. Honor thy Father and thy Mother.</p> <p>5. Thou shalt not kill.</p> <p>6. Thou shalt not commit adultery.</p> <p>7. Thou shalt not steal.</p> <p>8. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.</p> <p>9. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.</p> <p>10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods.</p> <p>Peter Gasparri, "Catholic Catechism" (1932)</p>	<p>1. I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.</p> <p>2. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of 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 unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; And showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments.</p> <p>3. 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.</p> <p>4. 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 in honour of the Lord thy God; on it thou shalt not do any work, neither thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.</p> <p>5. Honour thy father and thy mother; in order that thy days may be prolonged upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.</p> <p>6. Thou shalt not kill.</p> <p>7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.</p> <p>8. Thou shalt not steal.</p> <p>9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.</p> <p>10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.</p> <p>Bloch Publishing Company (1922)</p>

Within Judaism, there are two main controversies:

(1) The commandment(s) not to covet. Is each statement of לא תחמד a separate commandment? Or does the second merely continue the instruction of the first?

לא תחמד בית רעך לא תחמד אשת רעך ועבדו ואמתו ושורו וחמרו וכל אשר לרעך

You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

(2) Is the first paragraph one long commandment?

אנכי יהוה אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אבת על בנים על שלשים ועל רבעים לשנאי ועשה חסד לאלפים לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי

I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Does that paragraph comprise two commandments?

(1) I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.

(2) You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Or does it comprise *these* two commandments (omitting the first sentence)?

(1) You shall have no other gods besides Me.

(2) You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the

fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Or does it comprise four commandments?

(1) I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.

(2) You shall have no other gods besides Me.

(3) You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth.

(4) You shall not bow down to them or serve them.

Is the first sentence (I the LORD am your God) just an introduction to the covenant and not to be included in the Decalogue? As we mentioned above, there is no “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not.” Many Jewish writers, including Josephus⁴ and Philo,⁵ considered that verse to be merely a “prelude” to the Decalogue.⁶ In their counting, the first commandment was “You shall have no other gods besides Me” **לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים**, and the second commandment was “You shall not bow down to them or serve them” **לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם**.

Abraham Ibn Ezra (twelfth-century Spanish rabbi) wrote in his commentary,

I question how the verse **אֲנֹכִי** can be counted in the Decalogue, since it is neither a positive commandment (**מצות עשה**) nor a negative commandment (**מצות לא תעשה**).

Isaac Abravanel (fifteenth-century Spanish rabbi) wrote,

The phrase “**אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ**” constitutes no commandment, neither dogma nor praxis, but is merely a preface to the subsequent commandments and injunctions, telling the Israelites who was addressing them.⁷

So according to these authorities, the Ten Commandments start with “You shall have no other gods besides Me” **לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים**. But that is contradicted by Maimonides who wrote that the first and greatest of the 613 commandments,

... is the command that He commanded us to believe in God, and that we

4. Antiquities, Book III, section 5

5. The Decalogue, 66 and 156

6. The Samaritan Jews also skip the **אֲנֹכִי** commandment. Their Decalogue begins with **לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ** (Thou shalt have no other gods...) and they add an altogether different tenth commandment based on the instruction to carve the laws on Mount Gerizim.

7. Leibowitz, p. 303

believe that there is an Origin and Cause, that He is the power of all that exists. And [the source of the command] is His saying, "I am the Lord your God."⁸

היא הצווי אשר צונו בהאמנת האלהות, והוא שנאמין שיש שם עלה וסבה הוא פועל לכל הנמצאים, והוא אמרו אנכי ה' אלהיך.

One way to count the ten is to examine the paragraph divisions (פרשיות) in a Torah scroll. See figure 1 below. In writing a scroll, scribes leave a blank space to indicate the end of a paragraph.⁹ Let's suppose that the פרשיות are divided in such a way as to show the numeration of the commandments. Using this criterion we see that the first paragraph is presented as one long commandment (including אנכי) and there are two separate "coveting" commandments at the end.

The 1st paragraph begins with אנכי and extends to ולשמרי מצותי.

The 2nd begins at לא תשא and ends at לשוא.

The 3rd begins at זכור and ends at ויקדשהו את יום השבת

The 4th begins at כבוד and ends at נתן לך

The 5th is לא תרצח

The 6th is לא תנאף

The 7th is לא תגנב

The 8th is לא תענה ברעך עד שקר

The 9th is לא תחמד בית רעך

The 10th begins at לא תחמד אשת רעך and ends with וכל אשר לרעך.

8. Maimonides ספר המצוות א. See also Maimonides on Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1:16.

9. A blank space equal to the size of nine letters indicates the ending of a "sealed paragraph" (פרשה סתומה). And an "open paragraph" (פרשה פתוחה) ends with a blank space extending to the end of the column, forcing the next paragraph to begin on a new line.

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים
לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי לֹא
תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם
מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתְּחֹת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם
מִתְּחֹת לָאָרֶץ לֹא תַשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא
תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָדָשׁ פֶּקֶד
עֹן אֲבֹת עַל בָּנִים עַל שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל רַבְעִים
לִשְׁנָאִי וַעֲשֵׂה זִכְרוֹ לְאֶלְפִים לְאַהֲבִי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי
מִצְוֹתַי לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה אֶת שֵׁם יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא כִּי לֹא יִנָּקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה
אֶת שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוּא
זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ שְׁשַׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד
וַעֲשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלָאכְתְּךָ וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ
עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבַהֲמֹתֶיךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ
כִּי שֵׁשַׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת
הָאָרֶץ אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּם וַיָּנֹחַ בַּיּוֹם
הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת
וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ כִּבְדּוֹ אֶת אֲבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ
לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוֹן יְמֶיךָ עִלְיָה אֲדֹמָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
זָתָן לְךָ לֹא תִרְצֹז לֹא
תִזְנֹף לֹא תִגָּנֵב
תַּעֲזֹב בֶּרֶךְ עַד שֶׁקֶר לֹא
תִזְמַד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ לֹא
תִזְמַד אֶשֶׁת רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וַאֲמָתוֹ וַשּׁוֹר וַחֲמֹר
וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ

Figure 1. The Decalogue (Exodus 20) in a Torah Scroll.

But of course there is no punctuation in a Torah scroll, so we can't tell where a verse (פסוק) begins and where it ends. The טעמי המקרא, the cantillation marks created in the eighth to the tenth centuries c.e. by the scholars known as the Tiberian Masoretes, provided an elaborate punctuation system. The most basic punctuation mark is סִלְיָק, a short vertical line placed under the last word of each verse, corresponding roughly to a period dot in modern writing. Let's look at the Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete Bible that contains the Masoretic cantillation marks, a project that was completed in 1009 c.e. Perhaps the Decalogue is divided into ten verses representing ten commandments. Figure 2 shows the Decalogue as it appears in the Leningrad Codex. It is followed by a modern transcription.



Figure 2. The Decalogue (Exodus 20) in the Leningrad Codex.

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים: לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
עַל-פָּנָי לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל | וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם | מַמְעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר
בַּמַּיִם | מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָנָא פֶקֶד עֹן
אָבֹת עַל-בְּנֵים עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים לְשָׁנָאִי: וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאֶלְפִים לְאֵהָבִי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי:
לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת-שֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹא כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר-יִשָּׂא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוֹא:

זְכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁוֹ שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלָאכָתְךָ וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת
לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלָאכָה אַתָּה | וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֵמָתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר
בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת-יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּם וַיִּנַּח
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל-פָּנָי בְּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ: כִּכֹּד אֶת-אֲבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמְךָ
לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ: לֹא תִרְצַח: לֹא תִנְאַף:
לֹא תִגְנֹב: לֹא-תַעֲנֶה בְרֵעְךָ עַד שְׁקֶר: לֹא תַחֲמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ לֹא-תַחֲמֹד אִשְׁתִּי רֵעֶךָ
וְעַבְדּוֹ וַאֲמָתוֹ וְשׁוֹרֹ וַחֲמֹרֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ:

The Masoretes actually provided two sets of punctuation marks, representing two different ways of reading this text. One set divides the text into twelve verses of normal length. The other set divides the Decalogue into ten verses, one verse for each commandment. The system that divides the Decalogue into ten verses is called טַעְמֵי הָעֲלִיּוֹן (high cantillation). Dividing the decalogue into ten verses results in some very long verses (2 and 4), and some very short verses (6, 7, 8). The other system is known as טַעְמֵי הַתְּהִתּוֹן (low cantillation). In this system the second commandment comprises 3 verses, the fourth commandment takes up 4 verses, and the four short commandments (6, 7, 8 and 9) are combined into one verse. But as you look at figure 2 you see the problem: the two sets of *te'amim* are written one on top of the other, making it difficult to tell which cantillation marks accord with which system. Below you will see the solution: the high cantillation and low cantillation separated out.

Exod. 20—ta 'amey ha-'elyon (for public reading)

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים:

לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל | וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר
בַּשָּׁמַיִם | מִמֶּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאֶרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם | מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא-תִשָּׁתַחֲוֶה
לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא פֶקֶד עֹז אָבֶת עַל-בָּנָיִם
עַל-שִׁלְשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים לְשָׁנָאִי וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֱלֹפִים לְאַהֲבִי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי:
לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת-שֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁוא כִּי לֹא יִנָּקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר-יִשָּׂא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ
לְשֹׁוא:

זְכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁוֹ שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלָאכָתְךָ וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
שַׁבָּת | לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וְאַמְתֶּךָ
וּבַהֲמֹתֶךָ וּגְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת-יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ
אֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל-כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת
וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ:

כַּבֵּד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמְּךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּ יְמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן
לְךָ:

לֹא תִרְצַח:

לֹא תִנָּאֵף:

לֹא תִגְנֹב:

לֹא-תַעֲנֶה בְרַעַךְ עַד שֹׁקֶר:

לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רַעֲךָ לֹא-תַחְמֹד אִשְׁתְּ רַעֲךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ וְשׁוֹרׇךְ וְחֶמְרׇךְ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר
לְרַעֲךָ:

Exod. 20—*ta'amey ha-tahton*

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְךָ
אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פָּנַי:

לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר
בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ:

לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָנָא פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבֹת
עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים לְשָׁנָאִי:

וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאֻלָּפִים לְאַהֲבִי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי:

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא כִּי לֹא יִנָּקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ
לְשׁוּא:

זְכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁוֹ:

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלָאכָתְךָ:

וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה | וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ עַבְדְּךָ
וְאִמָּתְךָ וּבְהֶמְתְּךָ וּגְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ:

כַּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוּן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן
לְךָ:

לֹא תִרְצַח לֹא תִנָּאֵף לֹא תִגְנוֹב לֹא־תַעֲנֶה בְרַעְךָ עַד שֹׁקֶר:

לֹא תַחֲמֹד בֵּית רַעְךָ לֹא־תַחֲמֹד אִשֶּׁת רַעְךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ וְשׁוֹרׇךְ וַחֲמֹרׇךְ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר
לְרַעְךָ:

Where does the terminology טעמי העליון and טעמי התחתון (high and low) come from? There are several explanations.

(1) Rabbi Jacob Ben-Tsiyon Emden¹⁰ in his 1768 book, לוח ארש, gives us a musical explanation. He writes that the טעמי העליון are the “high accents”—those which encompass a higher vocal range (such as פֶּזֶר, גֶּרֶשׁ), while the טעמי התחתון, “the low accents,” are generally in the lower pitch range (such as סִלּוּק, טִפְּחָא, תִּבְרִיר).¹¹

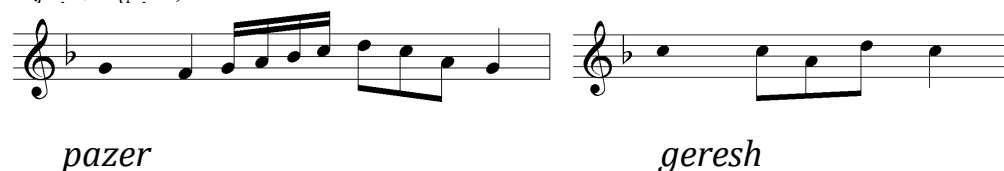


Figure 3. Ashkenazic cantillation—two of Emden’s “high accents.”



Figure 4. Ashkenazic cantillation—two of Emden’s “low accents.”

(2) The same author also points out that the טעמי העליון (upper accents) are for the most part symbols that are placed above the letters (such as פֶּזֶר, גֶּרֶשׁ), while the טעמי התחתון (lower accents) are placed below the letters (such as סִלּוּק, טִפְּחָא, תִּבְרִיר).¹²

(3) in his book, עין הסופר, Rabbi Wolf Heidenheim¹³ points out that most of the טעמי העליון are accents that are found near the beginning of a verse. He is treating the word עליון in the same sense as the word מלעיל. The term מלעיל means near the beginning (the top) of a word, and Heidenheim is using עליון to mean near the beginning (the top) of a verse. The טעמי התחתון are the accents found near the end (i.e. bottom) of a verse.

However, none of these three explanations is completely accurate.

(4) According to Rabbi Shelomo Zalman Hanau¹⁴ (in his book 1725, שערי תפלה) the טעמי העליון (higher accents) are used for the Torah reading on the festival of Shavuot when the בעל קריאה dramatically recreates the Sinai experience,

10. (1697-1776) Germany

11. Weinfeld, p. 85 (citing the work of Rabbi Y. Ben Chaviv in *Eyn Ya'akov*).

12. Weinfeld, p. 85.

13. (1757-1832) Germany

14. (1687-1746) Germany

chanting the words in imitation of the manner in which they were uttered by God — the טעמים of אל עליון. The טעמי התחתון (lower accents) are for the normal recitation by mortals—those of us who live below, here on earth.¹⁵ And that is the genral practice among the Ashkenazim.

(5) Perhaps we can simply think of the high accents טעמי העליון, the ones we use for public reading on Shavuot, as maximally ceremonial, analogous to the expressions “high mass” or “high church.”

As we noted above, in the oldest editions of the Tanakh, the two sets of cantillation marks are superimposed one over the other, leaving the reader confused as to which is which. How did we sort out which טעמי העליון are טעמי העליון and which are טעמי התחתון?

To answer that question, we zoom in on one of the shortest דברות.

לֹא תִרְצַח

As we noted above, the cantillation mark used to indicate the last word in every verse of the Tanakh is סִלּוּק, a small vertical line under first letter of the stressed syllable. We know that in the טעמי העליון, the word תִּרְצַח must be marked with סִלּוּק because it is the last word in this short two-word commandment. But just to the right of the סִלּוּק is another ta'am, טַפְחָא. The same pattern holds true for the preceding word לֹא. According to the rules of cantillation syntax, if תִּרְצַח is marked with סִלּוּק, then לֹא must be marked with טַפְחָא so — לֹא תִרְצַח; and if תִּרְצַח is marked with טַפְחָא, then לֹא must be marked with מְרַכָּא so — לֹא תִרְצַח. The pattern is clear: if a word has two accents, both of which fall below the same letter, the טעם התחתון is written on the right and the טעם העליון is written on the left.

Now, let's return to the first paragraph of the Decalogue.

אַנְכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְּךָ אֱלֹהִים
אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לְּךָ פֶסֶל | וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם | מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ
מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם | מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָנָא פֶקֶד עֹן אָבֹת עַל-בָּנִים עַל-שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים לְשָׁנָא: וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד
לְאֻלָּפִים לְאֹהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתֵי:

Where does the first commandment end? Look at the word עבדים.

15. Weinfeld, p. 100.

עבדים

We see two *te'amim*. אֶתְנַחֲתָא is on the right and סִלּוּק on the left. We have determined that if a word has two accents, both of which fall below the same letter, the טעם התחתון is written on the right and the טעם העליון is written on the left. So, according to the masoretic text, the first *pasuk* in the טעמי העליון should end on the word עבדים. So according to the original masoretic punctuation, the first commandment must be

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:

Rabbi Wolf Heidenheim found an important piece of evidence in support of the authenticity of the siluk on עבדים.¹⁶ Heidenheim claimed to possess a very old *machzor* dating from 5018 (1258 c.e.). The Torah reading for the first day of Shavu'ot was written out according to the ancient custom of public reading: each verse of the Hebrew Scripture was followed by its Aramaic translation (*Targum Yonatan*). The first verse of the Decalogue ended unmistakably with the word עבדים and there were ten verses for the ten commandments.

Why was it necessary to prove this? Because most editions today have a different punctuation. Look at this next example, which shows the first nine words of the Decalogue as they appear in the so-called "Rabbinic Bible."

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

= אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית
עֲבָדִים: , לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
עַל-פָּנָי: , לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-
תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר
בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת
לָאָרֶץ: , לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא
תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָדֹם
פֶּקֶד עֵינָי אֶת עַל-בְּנֵי עַד-שְׁלֹשִׁים
וְעַד-רַבָּעִים לְשָׁנָי: , וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד
קְדָשִׁים לְאֹהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי:

Figure 5. The Decalogue (Exodus 20) in the Rabbinic Bible.

Comparing this text with the original Masoretic text, we notice two important

16. Weinfeld, 97.

differences on the word עבדים. Originally the סילוק had been written to the left of the אֶתְנַחְתָּא, now it is switched to the right. (The conjunctive *te'amim* on the word מבית have also been switched.) The new arrangement implies that the first *pasuk* would end on עבדים in the טעמי התחתון! The טעמי העליון in this text show אֶתְנַחְתָּא on the word עבדים, extending the first *pasuk* all the way to the word מצותי, thus combining the first two commandments into one. That's the opposite conclusion of what we found in the most authentic source, the Leningrad Codex! The Rabbinic Bible (מקראות גדולות) printed in Venice 1524 is the oldest source for this altered version.¹⁷

But wait! There's more! Switching the order of אֶתְנַחְתָּא and סילוק on the word עבדים served to combine the first two *dibberot* of the טעמי העליון into one long commandment, and posed a syntactic problem. The rules of the Masoretic punctuation dictate that אֶתְנַחְתָּא can appear only once in each verse. As can be seen below, אֶתְנַחְתָּא now appears (in טעמי העליון) twice in the newly elongated first verse—once on עבדים and once on לְשִׁנְאִי.

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים
 אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל | וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם | מִמֶּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר
 בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם | מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי
 אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא פֹקֵד עֹון אָבֹת עַל-בְּנֵי עַל-שִׁלְשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים לְשִׁנְאִי
 וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאֻלָּפִים לְאֵהָבִי וּלְשִׁמְרִי מִצּוֹתַי:

Since this was incompatible with the system, one אֶתְנַחְתָּא had to be changed: downgraded to the status of a lesser disjunctive. The solution to this problem was to change the first אֶתְנַחְתָּא on עבדים to רביע.

At first the editors were hesitant to tamper with the masoretic punctuation—the רביע was added but the אֶתְנַחְתָּא was not removed.

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

Eventually, however, the אֶתְנַחְתָּא was removed altogether, leaving only the רביע on עבדים. Then the words אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, which had originally been אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם in both versions (טעמי התחתון and טעמי העליון) had to be changed for טעמי העליון to אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.¹⁸ Here is how the first nine words appear in most modern *machzorim* and *chumashim* (see also figures 7, 8, and 9 below).

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

Why did so many editions follow the example of the Rabbinic Bible rather than

17. Rabbi Mordecai Breuer, p. 61

18. A subordinate phrase before רביע cannot be punctuated with טפחה. It has to be a lower level disjunctive *ta'am*. Keep in mind that רביע is level 3, טפחה is level 2, and גרש is level 4. (Lower numbers indicate a higher level of disjunction.)

the ancient authority of Leningrad Codex? Many rabbis were convinced that everything in the first paragraph (from **אָנְכִי** to **מִצְוֹתֵי**) was just one long commandment. After all, that's how it appears in the Torah scroll (see figure 1). The late sixteenth century Italian rabbi Sh'lomo Norzi (quoting the thirteenth century French Rabbi Hizkiyah ben Manoah), wrote,

With regard to the *dibberot* **אָנְכִי** and **לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ**, there is a “נגינה גדולה” to combine the two of them into one verse, in recognition of the fact that they were both uttered as one commandment (**בדבור אחד**).

Norzi is referring to the fact that in these two *dibberot* (and in only these two) God is speaking in the first person. To cite the Babylonian Talmud (*Makkot* 24a), **מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה שִׁמְעוּם**, the first two *dibberot* were heard directly from God's mouth. While in the first paragraph we see words like **אָנְכִי** and **מִצְוֹתֵי**, in the rest of the Decalogue, God is referred to in the third person. Why did Norzi call this a “נגינה גדולה”? Perhaps to indicate that the melody of cantillation combines the first two commandments into one. Of course the problem is that by treating the first paragraph as one long verse and the two “do not covert” paragraphs combined as one verse, we have a total of only nine verses. And the purpose of the **טעמי העליון** was supposed to be to chant the Decalogue as ten verses.

But there is a powerful clue that has been visible for centuries in many synagogues that supports the Masoretic punctuation—that the first paragraph comprises not one but two commandments (**אָנְכִי** and **לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ**). Since the sixteenth century, most synagogues in Europe have used a standardized image of the **לוחות** as a part of their decoration. Some consider the **לוחות** to be the principal iconic symbol of Judaism.¹⁹



Figure 6. Decalogue iconography in the Seitenstettengasse Temple, Vienna.

The **עשרת הדברות** are arranged on the diptych with one through five on the right

19. The source of the form of the two rectangular tablets with the rounded top is actually derived from the shape of ancient Roman writing tablets. Ironically that shape has become a very Jewish symbol.

and six through ten on the left. This arrangement is reflected in a passage in the *Mekhilta*,²⁰ a collection ascribed to Rabbi Yishmael, compiled in Erets Yisrael around the year 500.

How were the עשרת הדברות arranged? Five on one tablet and five on the other. On the first tablet was written אנכי and opposite was written [the sixth dibber] לא תרצה. On the first tablet was written לא יהיה לך and opposite it on the other tablet was written לא תנאף. On the first tablet was written לא תשא and opposite on the other tablet was written לא תגנב. On the first tablet was written, זכור את יום השבת and opposite on the other tablet was written לא תענה ברעך עד שקר. On the first tablet was written כבד את אביך ואת אמך and opposite on the other tablet was written לא תחמד.

This description in the Mekhilta matches the iconographic usage in synagogues and matches the Masoretic numbering according to the טעמי העליון.

לא תרצה	אנכי
לא תנאף	לא יהיה לך
לא תגנב	לא תשא
לא תענה	זכור את יום השבת
לא תחמד	כבד את אביך ואת אמך

And yet, as we see in three figures below, the defective system, promulgated since the sixteenth-century Rabbinic Bible still persists.

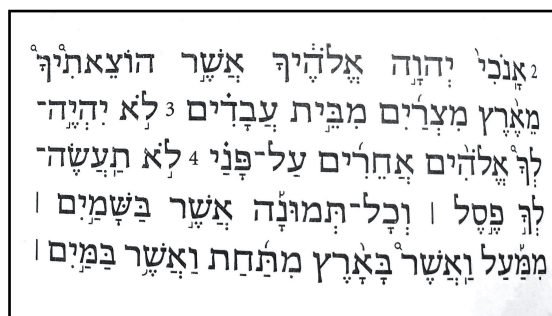


Figure 7. The High Cantillation according to the Etz Hayim Chumash

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ
 מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
 עַל-פָּנָי לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבַמַּעַל
 וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם וּמִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא-
 תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָדָם
 פֶּקֶד עוֹן אָבֹת עַל-בָּנִים עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים לְשֹׁנָאִי
 וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֵלִפִּים לְאַהֲבִי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי לֹא
 תִשָּׂא אֶת-שֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא כִּי לֹא יִנָּקֶה יְהוָה אֶת
 אֲשֶׁר-יִשָּׂא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוּא:
 זָכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁ שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-
 מְלָאכָתְךָ וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-
 מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֶמְתְּךָ וּגְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר
 בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת-יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ
 אֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל-כֵּן בֵּרַךְ
 יְהוָה אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ: כִּבְדֹּר אֶת-אָבִיךָ
 וְאֶת-אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוֹן יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 נָתַן לְךָ: לֹא תִרְצַח: לֹא
 תִנָּאֵף: לֹא תִגְנֹב: לֹא
 תַעֲנֶה בְרֵעֶךָ עֵד שָׁקֵר: לֹא
 תַחְמוֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ לֹא
 תַחְמוֹד אִשְׁתִּי רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וַאֲמָתוֹ וְשׁוֹרוֹ וְחֻמּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר
 לְרֵעֶךָ:

Figure 8. The High Cantillation according to the Koren Chumash.

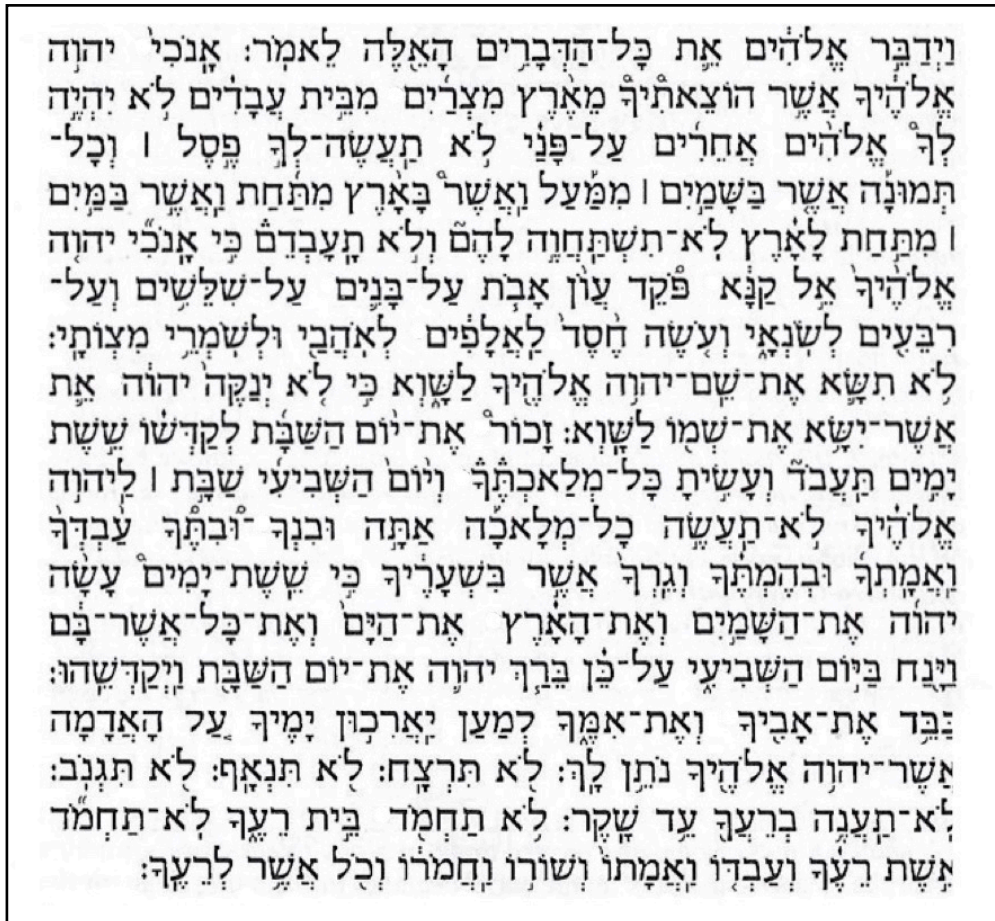


Figure 9. The High Cantillation according to the ArtScroll Shavuot Machzor.

While all authorities seem to agree that the text that we colloquially refer to as the “Ten Commandments” comprises ten important Divine instructions, as we’ve seen, there is considerable disagreement as to how to count the ten. Perhaps this article will inspire synagogue liturgical readers (בעלי קריאה) to return to the original Masoretic conception of these “Ten Commandments” as ten verses.

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