

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND WORLD RELIGIONS

Parashat Yitro 5770

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Grouping the Exodus 20 commandments:

"Literally read, the Decalogue includes 19 different commands and prohibitions." ¹ If the text is further divided into component parts, there are a total of 25 instructions. Christians and Jews believe that there are precisely ten commandments. This is based on the biblical passages: Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13 and Deuteronomy 10:4 which confirm that there are ten. They have grouped them differently in order to add up to 10:

Tradition	1st Commandment	2nd Commandment	9th Commandment	10th Commandment
Ancient Judaism, most Protestants & Eastern Orthodox	Exodus 20:3	Exodus 20:4-6	Exodus 20:16	Exodus 20:17
Current Judaism	Exodus 20:2	Exodus 20:3-6	Exodus 20:16	Exodus 20:17
Roman Catholics, some Lutherans	Exodus 20:3-6	Exodus 20:7	Coveting of neighbor's wife in Exodus 20:17	Rest of Exodus 20:17

The Protestant/Eastern Orthodox order comes from the 1st century Jewish practice; they regard Exodus 20:2 as a preamble. Historians Philo and Josephus from that era were familiar with this grouping. The

Roman Catholic sequence was established by St. Augustine. He based it on the *Septuagint*, a Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures that many scholars believe was translated from circa 250 BCE.

Lack of agreement among various divisions with Christianity and Judaism makes it very difficult to reach a consensus about how the *Ten* should be printed for display in public locations. Usually, the preferences of Jews, Roman Catholics and some Lutherans is overruled, and the Protestant format is chosen.

The Bible makes "frequent reference to "two" tablets...(Exodus 31:18; 32:15; 34:1, 4, 29; Deuteronomy 4:13; 5:22; 9:10, 11, 15, 17; 10:1, 3; 1 Kings 8:9; 2 Chronicles 5:10). According to rabbinic tradition, the purpose for having two tablets was to divide the Ten Commandments under two rubrics. The first tablet, we are told, contained the so-called religious commandments, describing obligations owed to God. The second tablet contained ethical or moral commandments, describing obligations we owe to one another as creatures of God and as fellow human beings."

An alternative interpretation is that the full Ten Commandments was replicated on two duplicate tablets. This would follow the Hittite tradition of making two copies of each treaty: one for the Hittite king and the other for the vassals.

Comparison of ancient Egyptian and Hebrew texts:

A comparison of the Book of the Dead text with the version of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:2-17 is striking. Both consist of a series of negative statements.

Comparing another translation of the Book with the King James Version of Exodus:

- **Book of the Dead:** "I have done away sin for thee and not acted fraudulently or deceitfully. I have not belittled God. I have not inflicted pain or caused another to weep. I have not murdered or given such an order. I have not used false balances or scales. I have not purloined (held back) the offerings to the gods. I have not stolen. I have not uttered lies or curses."
- **Exodus 20:7-16:** "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain....Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery...Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor..."

One major difference between the two documents is that statues of the Gods and Goddesses formed a major part of the ancient Egyptian religion. The religion of the ancient Hebrews forbade any image or statue of Yahweh. Another difference was the Decalogue's emphasis on the Sabbath -- one day of rest each week. It is not found in the *Book of the Dead* or in ancient Egyptian culture.

Alternative sets of Ten Commandments:

Many people have suggested replacements for the Judeo-Christian *Ten Commandments*. These should be more acceptable to persons of diverse faith groups. They are compatible with the multi-faith culture in North America. They promote religious freedom, religious tolerance, and an end to sexism and racism. Because of their lack of religious exclusivity, a school might be able to post one of these sets without risking the division of the student body on religious grounds. They would not marginalize religious minorities, and would thus not add to the risk of school violence. Many of the individual commandments are derived from the *Ethic of Reciprocity* which is a part of almost all religions. This *Ethic* is expressed in Christianity as the Golden Rule.

- **The Standard Ten Commandments:** Believed to have been written by the *Long Island Secular Humanists* in 1999:

We, the members of the human community speak these words, saying.

1. We shall not limit freedom of thought.
2. We shall not cause unnecessary harm to any living thing or the environment.
3. We shall be respectful of the rights of others.
4. We shall be honest.
5. We shall be responsible for our actions.
6. We shall be fair in all matters to all persons.
7. We shall be considerate of the happiness and well being of others.
8. We shall be reasonable in our actions.
9. We shall nurture these values by word & deed in our children, family, friends and acquaintances.
10. We shall not limit inquiring or testing by their consequences, on any matter, including these Commandments.

● **Ten Commandments for the Third Millennium:** Written by a person who would prefer to remain anonymous. It is obviously a religiously inclusive restatement of the Biblical Ten Commandments which would be acceptable to followers of most religions and to secularists as well:

1. Respect and worship any deity within your faith tradition, if you follow one. Value and support the right of others to do the same.
2. Enjoy and support legal guarantees of freedom of religious belief, religious practice, assembly and speech for all.
3. Do not use obscene speech in the name of the deities of any religion.
4. Follow the guidance of your faith or secular tradition every day of the week, because every day is important.
5. Help to establish social safety nets so that the very young, the elderly, the sick, mentally ill, physically disabled, unemployed, poor and broken will receive adequate medical attention and enjoy at least a minimum standard of living.
6. Minimize the harm you do to others and yourself. Treat others as you would wish to be treated.
7. Do not engage in sexual activity with another person, which is coercive, unsafe, manipulative, public, or outside of a committed monogamous relationship.
8. Do not steal the property of others, except in case of emergency (and then only if you attempt to replace or pay for it later).
9. Do not lie, either in or out of court. Be honest and truthful at all times.
10. Attempt to be satisfied with your current standard of living; do not obsess over the possessions of others; that path leads to unhappiness.

This commandment has a weakness that is common to most other rules of behavior. It does not define when, during pregnancy, that human personhood begins. Since there is no social consensus on this point, this timing is not defined here. We will leave it up to the individual.

● **New versions of five of the commandments by Marylin Vos Savant:** In her column in Parade Magazine for 1994-MAR-20, she reverses the last five commandments in interesting ways:

- 6: "Thou shalt not kill" becomes "Heal those who have been harmed."
- 7: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" becomes "Respect everyone."
- 8: "Thou shalt not steal" becomes "Give more to the world than you take."
- 9: "Thou shalt not bear false witness" becomes "Value the dignity of truth."

☸10: "Thou shalt not covet" becomes "Be content with the necessities of life."

- **The Ten Commandments by Lord of Heaven:** This set has appeared on a fascinating spiritual/mystic/humor/religious web site called *Heaven Hell and Purgatory*. ¹ Noting that the "*first draft*" of the Decalogue was excessively negative, the "*latest edition*" is balanced between prohibitive and motivational commandments:

The "*Shalt Nots*"

- ☸Thou shalt not kill.
- ☸Thou shalt not steal.
- ☸Thou shalt not lie.
- ☸Thou shalt not hate.
- ☸Thou shalt not oppress.

The "*Shalls*"

- ☸Thou shall love.
- ☸Thou shall create.
- ☸Thou shall seek knowledge.
- ☸Thou shall have courage.
- ☸Thou shall know thyself.

- **Native American Ten Commandments:** This has been published in many places on the Internet. The author is unknown:

1. Treat the Earth and all that dwell thereon with respect.
2. Remain close to the Great Spirit.
3. Consider the impact on the next six generations when making decisions.
4. Work together to benefit all humanity.
5. Freely give help and kindness wherever needed.
6. Do what you believe to be right.
7. Look after the well-being of your mind and body.
8. Contribute a share of your efforts to the greater good.
9. Be truthful and honest at all times.
10. Take full responsibility for your actions.

A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts - Dr. Andrew Wilson, Editor

THE DECALOGUE

The moral outlooks of most religions are basically quite similar. Just as the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, is the basis of Jewish and Christian ethical values, similar lists of ethical principles may be found in one form or another in the scriptures of most religions. The Qur'an contains several passages summarizing proper ethical behavior which have been called Islamic Decalogues. In Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism we find lists of ten charges or ten precepts for monks and lay people, and there are further condensations into five universal dharmas called samanya dharma. Another comparable list is found in the Buddhist Eightfold Path.

Exodus 20.1-17: These are the Ten Commandments. There is some variation as to how they should be divided. In the Jewish tradition the verse 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage' is regarded as the first commandment, but Christians regard it as a prologue. Most Protestants and Eastern Orthodox Christians reckon 'You shall have no other gods before me' as the first commandment and the prohibition of images as the second commandment. For Jews the second commandment includes both 'You shall have no other gods' and the prohibition of graven images. Lutherans and Roman Catholics likewise regard 'You shall have no other gods' and the prohibition of graven images as together constituting a single commandment, but reckon it the first commandment; they then divide the verse against covetousness into two commandments to make up the ten. See the short enumerations of the Commandments in Psalm 2 4.3-6, p. 229; Hosea 4.1-3, p. 318; Jeremiah 7.1-15, p. 1088.

Say, Come, I will recite what God has made a sacred duty for you:

Ascribe nothing as equal with Him;
 Be good to your parents;
 Kill not your children on a plea of want--We provide sustenance for you and for them;
 Approach not lewd behavior whether open or in secret,
 Take not life, which God has made sacred, except by way of justice and law. Thus does He command you, that you may learn wisdom.
 And approach not the property of the orphan, except to improve it, until he attains the age of maturity.
 Give full measure and weight, in justice--No burden do We place on any soul but that which it can bear.
 And if you give your word, do it justice, even if a near relative is concerned; and fulfill your obligations before God. Thus does He command you, that you may remember.
 Verily, this is My straight Path: follow it, and do not follow other paths which will separate you from His Path.
 Thus does He command you, that you may be righteous.

3. Islam. Qur'an 6.151-53

The charge to avoid the taking of life.
 The charge to avoid taking what is not given.
 The charge to avoid unchastity.
 The charge to avoid falsehood.

The charge to avoid fermented liquor, distilled liquor, intoxicants giving rise to sloth.
 The charge to avoid unseasonable meals.
 The charge to avoid dancing, song, playing music, and seeing shows.
 The charge to avoid the use of flowers, scents, and unguents, wearing ornaments and decorations.
 The charge to avoid the use of raised beds, of wide beds.
 The charge to avoid the accepting of gold and silver.

4. Buddhism. Khuddaka Patha: The Ten Charges

Contentment, forgiveness, self-control, not appropriating anything unrighteously, purification, coercion of the organs, wisdom, knowledge of the Supreme, truthfulness, and abstention from anger: these constitute the tenfold law [for ascetics].

5. Hinduism. Laws of Manu 6.92

Forgiveness, humility, straightforwardness, purity, truthfulness, self-restraint, austerity, renunciation, non-attachment and chastity [with one's spouse] are the ten duties [of lay people].

6. Jainism. Tatthvarthasutra 9.6

Not killing, no longer stealing, forsaking the wives of others, refraining completely from false, divisive, harsh and senseless speech, forsaking covetousness, harmful intent and the views of Nihilists--these are the ten white paths of action, their opposites are black.

7. Buddhism. Nagarjuna, Precious Garland 8-9

The first great vow, Sir, runs thus, I renounce all killing of living beings, whether subtle or gross, whether movable or immovable. Nor shall I myself kill living beings [nor cause others to do it, nor consent to it]. As long as I live, I confess and blame, repent and exempt myself of these sins, in the thrice threefold way [i.e., acting, commanding, or consenting, either in the past, present, or future], in mind, speech, and body. There are five clauses...

The second great vow, Sir, runs thus, I renounce all vices of lying speech arising from anger or greed or fear or mirth. I shall neither myself speak lies, nor cause others to speak lies, nor consent to the speaking of lies by others. I confess... There are five clauses....

The third great vow, Sir, runs thus: I renounce all taking of anything not given, either in a village or a town or a wood, either of little or much, of small or great, of living or lifeless things. I shall neither take myself what is not given, nor cause others to take it, nor consent to their taking it. As long as I live, I confess... There are five clauses....

The fourth great vow, Sir, runs thus, I renounce all sexual pleasures, either with gods or men or animals. I shall not give way to sensuality, nor cause others to give way to it, nor consent to their giving way to it. As long as I live, I confess... There are five clauses....

The fifth great vow, Sir, runs thus, I renounce all attachments, whether little or much, small or great, living or lifeless; neither shall I myself form such attachments, nor cause others to do so, nor consent to their doing so. As long as I live, I confess... There are five clauses....

He who is well provided with these great vows and their twenty-five clauses is really homeless if he, according to the sacred teaching, the precepts and the way, correctly practices, follows, executes, explains, establishes and, according to the precept, effects them.

8. Jainism. Acarangasutra 2.15

Khuddaka Patha: These are the rules of training observed by the monks, with the third charge modified as a concession to lay people (a monk would of course take a vow of celibacy). Lay people ordinarily observe the first five charges. Cf. Dhammapada 246-47, p. 463. Khuddaka Patha, Laws of Manu 6.92, Tatthvarthasutra 9.6 and Precious Garland 8-9: The tradition of ten precepts runs through Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, though elements in the list may vary.

Nonviolence, truthfulness, not stealing, purity, control of the senses--this, in brief, says Manu, is the Dharma for all the four castes.

9. Hinduism. Laws of Manu 10.63

Laws of Manu 10.63: This list of universally applicable dharma for all castes and stages of life is called sadharan or samanya dharma. It is the universal foundation upon which are erected the specific dharmas which differentiate the castes. It is a least common denominator by which Hindu society, for all its variety of castes, roles, and traditions, maintains an ethical consensus. Cf. Chandogya Upanishad 5.10.9, p. 463.

The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering is this Noble Eightfold Path, namely: right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

What is right view? Knowledge of suffering, knowledge of the arising of suffering, knowledge of the cessation of suffering, knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of suffering--this is called right view.

What is right aspiration? Aspiration for renunciation, aspiration for non-malevolence, aspiration for harmlessness--this is called right aspiration.

What is right speech? Refraining from lying speech, refraining from slanderous speech, refraining from harsh speech, refraining from gossip--this is called right speech.

What is right action? Refraining from violence against creatures, refraining from taking what has not been given, refraining from going wrongly among the sense-pleasures, this is called right action.

What is right livelihood? A disciple of the Noble Ones, getting rid of a wrong mode of livelihood, makes his living by a right mode of livelihood. This is called right livelihood.

What is right effort? A monk generates desire, effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind and strives for the non-arising of evil unskilled states that have not arisen... for the getting rid of evil unskilled states that have arisen... for the arising of skilled states that have not arisen... for the maintenance and completion of skilled states that have arisen. This is called right effort.

What is right mindfulness? A monk fares along contemplating the body in the body... the feelings in the feelings... the mind in the mind... the mental states in the mental states... ardent, clearly conscious of them, mindful of them so as to control the covetousness and dejection in the world. This is called right mindfulness.

And what is right concentration? A monk, aloof from the pleasures of the senses, aloof from unskilled states of mind, enters on and abides in the first meditation which is accompanied by initial thought and discursive thought, is born of aloofness, is rapturous and joyful. By allaying initial thought and discursive thought, with the mind subjectively tranquilized and fixed on one point, he enters on and abides in the second meditation which is devoid of initial thought and discursive thought, is born of concentration, and is rapturous and joyful. By the fading out of rapture... he enters on and abides in the third meditation... the fourth meditation. This is called right concentration.

10. Buddhism. Majjhima Nikaya iii.251-52, Saccavibhangasutta

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

5. Sikhism. Adi Granth, Sarath, M.5

Attend strictly to the commands of your parents and the instructions of your teachers. Serve your leader with diligence; be upright of heart; eschew falsehood; and be diligent in study; that you may conform to the wishes of the heavenly spirit.

6. Shinto. Oracle of Temmangu

Children are the clothes of a man.

7. African Traditional Religions. Yoruba Proverb (Nigeria)

Do not despise the breath of your fathers,
But draw it into your body.
That our roads may reach to where the life-giving road of our sun father comes out,
That, clasping one another tight,
Holding one another fast,
We may finish our roads together;
That this may be, I add to your breath now.
To this end:

May my father bless you with life;
May your road reach to Dawn Lake,
May your road be fulfilled.

9. Native American Religions. Zuni Prayer

Oracle of Temmangu: Temmangu is a shrine in Osaka. Its patron deity, Tenjin, who was in life the scholar Michizane Sugawara (845-903), is venerated as a god of education and literature. Schoolchildren will buy amulets of Tenjin for luck at the time of school entrance examinations. Yoruba Proverb: **This means that a man is assessed by the character of his children.** Psalm 78.5-7: Cf. Yebamot 62, p. 258. Zuni Prayer: This prayer is spoken at the close of the novice's initiation. Doctrine of the Mean 20.8: These are the Confucian Five Relations. They are further explicated in the following passage. Book of Ritual 7.2.19: Cf. I Ching 37, p. 260. Tattvarthasutra 6.18.24: Cf. Acarangasutra 1.35-37, p. 739; Tattvarthasutra 9.6, p. 169.

Brethren, a new child is born.
While in the uterus it was a woman's thing;
Safely delivered, it is everybody's child, a native of Nibo, a Nigerian.

He shall grow under the care of his parents;
When mature he will look after his parents.
He shall listen to the good advice of his parents,
He ought not to obey wrong things.

We want truly good children, not any thing at all:
He will grow up industrious, imitating father, mother, and other relations.

No evil child!
Instead of a thief, may it pass away through miscarriage.
The name of the baby is "Chinenye."

10. African Traditional Religions. Igbo Naming Ceremony (Nigeria)

There was always, too, a Pipe child--a girl, unless the keeper had no daughters....

"When I was the Pipe child, whenever my mother took the Pipe bundle outside of the lodge, I took the tripod out after her. I was told how to set the tripod when the camp was about to move, with two of the legs close together and the third far out. Whenever my father made smudge with pine needles, he would give me some and I would chew them and would hold my hands over the smudge. Then I would rub my left palm up to my right arm, my right palm up to my left arm, and then both palms from the top of my head down the sides of my neck and down my breast...

Whenever while I was the Pipe child I got sick my father would put pine needles on me, and then he would take down the bundle and put it on my parents' bed, and would say to me, "Put your arms around your brother [the

Pipe] and pray to your brother so you may get well." [My father] the Pipe- keeper and his wife claim the Feathered Pipe as their son and tell their children that the Pipe is their brother.... Of course the Pipe was not human, but because I was a baby when my father got it I grew up with it and thought just as much of it as of my own blood relatives.

When my father transferred the Pipe to Sitting High I was outside playing. When I was coming home I saw the bundle at Sitting High's door, and when I saw it I started to cry, and when I saw my father I said to him, "Why did you give my Pipe away?" It was just like a person leaving. I was lonesome for it, and felt just as if I had lost a relative or friend. All through my life I have felt the same toward it. All through my life I have made it a point to be present at any Feathered Pipe ceremony. And whenever I went to any ceremony, I would bring something for it....

My father used to tell me, "This Pipe was given by the Supreme Being through Bha'a; the Supreme Being is the father of the Pipe."

11. Native American Religions. Gros Ventres Tradition of the Pipe Child (Montana)

Igbo Naming Ceremony: This prayer was uttered by an elder from the village of Nibo at the naming of his grandson, Chinenye. Notice the phrase 'it is everybody's child', which indicates that raising children is a community responsibility.
Gros Ventres Tradition of the Pipe Child: This testimony is an example of how, in traditional societies, religious education of the young is integral to daily life.

This I ask Thee. Tell me truly, Lord.
Who fashioned esteemed piety in addition to rule?
Who made a son respectful in his attentiveness to his father?

12. Zoroastrianism. Avesta, Yasna 44.7

The gentleman works upon the trunk. When that is firmly set up, the Way grows. And surely proper behavior towards parents and elder brothers is the trunk of Goodness?

13. Confucianism. Analects 1.2

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

15. Judaism and Christianity. Bible, Exodus 20.12

There are three partners in man, God, father, and mother. When a man honors his father and mother, God says, "I regard it as though I had dwelt among them and they had honored me."

16. Judaism. Talmud, Kiddushin 30b

"Do not neglect the [sacrificial] works due to the gods and the fathers!
Let your mother be to you like unto a god! Let your father be to you
like unto a god! Let your teacher be to you like unto a god!"

17. Hinduism. Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11.2

Those who wish to be born in [the Pure Land] of Buddha... should act filially towards their parents and support them, and should serve and respect their teachers and elders.

18. Buddhism. Meditation on Buddha Amitayus 27

Thy Lord has decreed... that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your lifetime, do not say to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say, "My Lord! bestow on them Thy mercy even as they cherished me in childhood."

19. Islam. Qur'an 17.23

One companion asked, "O Apostle of God! Who is the person worthiest of my consideration?" He replied, "Your mother." He asked again, "And second to my mother?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The companion insisted, "And then?" The Messenger of God said, "After your mother, your father."

20. Islam. Hadith of Bukhari and Muslim

Now filial piety is the root of all virtue, and the stem out of which grows all moral teaching... Our bodies--to every hair and bit of skin--are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them: this is the beginning of filial piety. When we have established our character by the practice of the filial course, so as to make our name famous in future ages, and thereby glorify our parents: this is the end of filial piety. It commences with the service of parents; it proceeds to the service of the ruler; it is completed by the establishment of [good] character.

21. Confucianism. Classic on Filial Piety 1

Son, why do you quarrel with your father,
Due to him you have grown to this age?
It is a sin to argue with him.

22. Sikhism. Adi Granth, Sarang, M.4, p. 1200

Rama, "How can I transgress this command of my mother and my father? It is for thee to occupy the throne in Ayodhya, the throne that all revere, and for me to live in the Dandaka Forest, wearing robes of bark! Having spoken thus, the great King Dasaratha made this division of duties in the presence of the people and then ascended to heaven. The word of that virtuous monarch is our law! It is for thee to enjoy the kingdom given thee by our sire, and, taking refuge in the Dandaka Forest for fourteen years, I shall carry out the part assigned

to me by my magnanimous sire. That which my high-souled father... has directed me to do, I regard as my supreme felicity, not the dominion of all the worlds."

23. Hinduism. Ramayana, Ayodhya Kanda 101

We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the child to his weaning is thirty months. At length, when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says, "O my Lord! Grant me that I may be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents, and that I may work righteousness such as You may approve; and be gracious to me in my issue. Truly have I turned to You and truly do I bow to You in Islam."

Such are they from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and pass by their ill deeds: they shall be among the Companions of the Garden: a promise of truth, which was made to them. Paradise, holding the true promise which has been given them.

24. Islam. Qur'an 46.15-16

Brethren, one can never repay two persons, I declare. What two? Mother and father.

Even if one should carry about his mother on one shoulder and his father on the other, and so doing should live a hundred years; and if he should support them, anointing them with unguents, kneading and rubbing their limbs, and they meanwhile should even void their excrements upon him--even so could he not repay his parents. Moreover, if he should establish his parents in supreme authority, in the absolute rule over this mighty earth abounding in the seven treasures--not even thus could he repay his parents. Why not? Brethren, parents do much for their children; they bring them up, they nourish them, they introduce them to this world. However, brethren, whoso incites his unbelieving parents, settles and establishes them in the faith; whoso incites his immoral parents, settles and establishes them in morality; whoso incites his stingy parents, settles and establishes them in liberality; whoso incites his foolish parents, settles and establishes them in wisdom--such a one, just by so doing, does repay, does more than repay what is due to his parents.

25. Buddhism. Anguttara Nikaya i.61

My father, thank you for petting me;
My mother, thank you for making me comfortable;
Thank you for robing me with wisdom, which is more important than robing me with clothes.
Slaves will minister unto you;
Servants will be your helpers.
Children which I shall bear will minister unto you.

26. African Traditional Religions. Yoruba Nuptial Chant (Nigeria)

If your parents take care of you up to the time you cut your teeth, you take care of them when they lose theirs.

27. African Traditional Religions. Akan Proverb (Ghana)

You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

28. Judaism and Christianity. Bible, Leviticus 19.32

My father sent for me; I saw he was dying. I buried him in that beautiful valley of winding waters. I love that land more than all the rest of the world. A man who would not love his father's grave is worse than a wild animal.

29. Native American Religions. Nez Perce Tradition

MURDER

Murder is condemned by all faiths, as by reason itself. Nevertheless, there is often a line between murder and sanctioned violence, and this line is drawn in various ways. In Jainism, and among some Buddhists, Hindus, and Taoists, the concept of absolute nonviolence (ahimsa) encompasses all animals and living beings. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, on the other hand, the scriptural prohibitions against murder are restricted to the killing of human beings.

Some passages in the Christian, Buddhist, Taoist, and Jewish scriptures may be interpreted as teaching that killing a human being is a sin under any and all circumstances. Hence, some in these traditions regard it as wrong to use violent means to defend against harm. Pacifism and objections to capital punishment likewise derive from this scriptural foundation. Other passages, a selection of which are given here, may be interpreted as restricting the definition of murder to an individual killing for selfish purposes. They permit killing in self-defense, permit killing to prevent greater crimes, sanction state enforcement of the death penalty, and support the waging of war for just cause. Nevertheless, killing in such circumstances should still be viewed as evil, albeit the lesser evil. The inferior morality of killing in self-defense or in retaliation is highlighted in the two versions of the story of Cain and Abel from the Bible and the Qur'an. In the biblical story God grants Cain a mark to protect him from retaliation, and in the Qur'anic version Abel shows his righteousness by refusing to defend himself from Cain's aggression.

Related crimes which are treated in the latter part of this section include infanticide, abortion, and suicide. Abortion is a topic of much current controversy in the West--many religious people regard it as a crime analogous to infanticide--yet there is no mention in the Bible. Abortion is often condemned in the scriptures of Eastern religions. We have also selected a few representative scriptural condemnations of suicide. However, certain religions, notably Jainism, approve of religious suicide as an extremely effective means of penance.

You shall not kill.

1. Judaism and Christianity. Exodus 20.13

The essence of right conduct is not to injure anyone; one should know only this, that non-injury is religion.

2. Jainism. Naladiyar 14-15

He who commits murder must be considered as the worst offender, more wicked than a defamer, than a thief, and than he who injures with a staff.

3. Hinduism. Laws of Manu 8.345

Anyone who kills a believer intentionally will have his reward in hell, to remain there. God will be angry with him and curse him, and prepare awful torment for him.

4. Islam. Qur'an 4.92

Only one single man [Adam] was created in the world, to teach that, if any man has caused a single soul to perish, Scripture imputes it to him as though he had caused the whole world to perish, and if any man saves alive a single soul, Scripture imputes it to him as though he had saved the whole world.

5. Judaism. Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4.5

All tremble at the rod. All fear death. Comparing others with oneself, one should neither strike nor cause to strike.

All tremble at the rod. Life is dear to all. Comparing others with oneself, one should neither strike nor cause to strike.

Whoever, seeking his own happiness, harms with the rod other pleasure-loving beings, experiences no happiness hereafter.

Whoever, seeking his own happiness, harms not with the rod other pleasure-loving beings, experiences happiness hereafter.

6. Buddhism. Dhammapada 129-32

In wars to gain land, the dead fill the plains; in wars to gain cities, the dead fill the cities. This is known as showing the land the way to devour human flesh. Death is too light a punishment for such men [who wage war]. Hence those skilled in war should suffer the most severe punishments.

7. Confucianism. Mencius IV.A.14

Victory breeds hatred, for the defeated live in pain. Happily live the peaceful, giving up victory and defeat.

8. Buddhism. Dhammapada 201

A man once came before Raba and said to him, "The ruler of my city has ordered me to kill a certain person, and if I refuse he will kill me." Raba told him, "Be killed and do not kill; do you think that your blood is redder than his? Perhaps his is redder than yours."

9. Judaism. Talmud, Pesahim 25b

Then they came up and laid hands upon Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

11. Christianity. Matthew 26.51-52

Fine weapons are instruments of evil.
They are hated by men.
Therefore those who possess Tao turn away from them....
Weapons are instruments of evil, not the instruments of a good ruler.
When he uses them unavoidably, he regards calm restraint as the best principle.

Even when he is victorious, he does not regard it as praiseworthy,
For to praise victory is to delight in the slaughter of men.
He who delights in the slaughter of men will not succeed in the empire....
For the slaughter of the multitude, let us weep with sorrow and grief.
For a victory, let us observe the occasion with funeral ceremonies.

12. Taoism. Tao Te Ching 31

If a man comes to kill you, forestall it by killing him.

13. Judaism. Talmud, Sanhedrin 72a

Do not take life--which God has made sacred--except for just cause. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, we have given his heir authority to demand retribution; but let him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life, for he is helped by the law.

14. Islam. Qur'an 17.33

O sons of Abdul Muttalib, let there be no retaliation for the act of murder. Do not roam about with a drawn sword... and do not start a massacre of my opponents and enemies. See that only one man, that is my murderer, is killed in punishment for the crime of murder, and that nobody else is molested or harmed or harassed. The punishment to the man who attempted the murder shall take place only when I die of the wound delivered by him, and this punishment shall be only one stroke of the sword to end [his] life. He should not be tortured before his death; his hands and feet should not be cut off, because I have heard the Holy Prophet saying, "Do not cut off the hands and feet of anybody, be it a biting dog."

15. Islam (Shiite). Nahjul Balagha, Letter 47

Suppose a bodhisattva sees that a vicious robber intends to kill many people for the sake of wealth; or intends to harm virtuous shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas; or intends to do other things that will cause him to fall into the Uninterrupted hell. When seeing this, the bodhisattva will think, "If I kill that person, I will fall into the hells; if I do not kill him, he will commit crimes which will lead him to the Uninterrupted hell, where he will suffer greatly. I would rather kill him and fall to the hells myself than let him undergo great suffering in the Uninterrupted hell."

Then, deeply regretting the necessity for this action, and with a heart full of compassion, he will kill that person. In doing this, he does not violate the bodhisattva precepts; instead, he generates many merits.

16. Buddhism. Yogacarya Bhumi Shastra

Nahjul Balagha: `Ali spoke these words as he lay dying of a wound delivered by an assassin. He urged that there be no acts of vengeance outside of the rule of law. Yogacarya Bhumi Shastra: 'Uninterrupted' (Avici) hell is the lowest Buddhist hell.

And recite for them the story of the two sons of Adam truthfully, when they offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted of one of them, and not accepted of the other. "I will surely slay you," said one. "God accepts only of the god-fearing," said the other.

"Yet if you stretch out your hand against me, to slay me, I will not stretch out my hand against you, to slay you; I fear God, the Lord of all Beings. I desire that you should be laden with my sin and your sin, and so become an inhabitant of the Fire; that is the recompense of the evildoers."

Then his soul prompted him to slay his brother, and he slew him, and became one of the losers.

Then God sent forth a raven, scratching into the earth, to show him how he might conceal the vile body of his brother. He said, "Woe is me! Am I unable to be as this raven, and so conceal my brother's vile body?" And he became one of the remorseful.

Therefore We prescribed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a human being, except to retaliate for manslaughter or for corruption done in the land, it shall be as if he had killed all of humankind; and whoso saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the lives of all humankind.

18. Islam. Qur'an 5.27-32

THEFT

Theft means to take property that belongs to another or to the public. It encompasses fraud, usury, extortion, and dishonest trading.

You shall not steal.

1. Judaism and Christianity. Exodus 20.15

Where you did not sow, do not reap.

2. African Traditional Religions. Igala Proverb (Nigeria)

Because what is yours is not yours, how then can you regard what is not yours as yours?

3. Judaism. Talmud, Derek Eretz Zuta 2.5

To take to oneself unrighteous wealth is like satisfying one's hunger with putrid food, or one's thirst with poison wine. It gives a temporary relief, indeed, but death also follows it.

4. Taoism. Treatise on Response and Retribution 5

The wickedness of evil-minded thieves, who secretly prowl over this earth, cannot be restrained except by punishment.

5. Hinduism. Laws of Manu 9.263

As for the thief, both male and female, cut off their hands. It is the reward of their own deeds, an exemplary punishment from God.

6. Islam. Qur'an 5.38

Lo! those who devour the wealth of orphans wrongfully, they do but swallow fire into their bellies, and they will be exposed to burning flame.

7. Islam. Qur'an 4.10

Says Nanak, "To grasp what is another's is as evil
As pig's flesh to the Muslim and cow's flesh to the Hindu.
The Teacher shall intercede for his follower
Only when he has not eaten carrion."

8. Sikhism. Adi Granth, Var Majh, M.1, p. 141

These acts are included in stealing: prompting another to steal, receiving stolen goods, creating confusion to overcharge or underpay, using false weights and measures, and deceiving others with artificial or imitation goods.

9. Jainism. Akalanka, Tattvartharajavartika 7.27

Woe unto the defrauders,
Those who when they take the measure from mankind demand it full,
But if they measure unto them or weigh for them, they cause them loss.

10. Islam. Qur'an 83.1-3

Whoever steals what is considered to belong to others, whether it be situated in villages or the forest, he is to be known as an outcast.

Whoever having contracted debts defaults when asked to pay, retorts, "I am not indebted to you!," he is to be known as an outcast.

Whoever is desirous of stealing even a trifle and mugs a person going along the road in order to take it, he is to be known as an outcast.

11. Buddhism. Sutta Nipata 119-21

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy,
and bring the poor of the land to an end,
saying, "When will the new moon be over,
that we may sell grain?
And the sabbath,
that we may offer wheat for sale,
that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and deal deceitfully with false balances,
that we may buy the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and sell the refuse of the wheat?"
The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob,
"Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.
Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and every one mourn who dwells in it?"

12. Judaism and Christianity. Amos 8.4-8

[Evil-doers] impoverish others for their own gain.
For private ends they neglect public duties.
They break into others' houses to take their property and valuables.
They misdirect the water and light fires to destroy the people's homes.
They upset others' plans so as to prevent their success.
They spoil a worker's utensils to hamper his efficiency.
With violence they seize, with violence they demand.
They delight in fraud, they delight in robbery, they make raids and commit depredations to get rich.
They shorten the foot, they narrow the measure,
they lighten the scales, they reduce the peck.
They adulterate the genuine, and they seek profit in illegitimate business.

13. Taoism. Treatise on Response and Retribution

O ye who believe! Devour not usury, doubling and quadrupling [the sum lent].

14. Islam. Qur'an 3.130

If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him.

15. Judaism and Christianity. Exodus 22.25

Do not men despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry?

16. Judaism and Christianity. Proverbs 6.30-31

Qur'an 3.130: All modern societies agree that usury, when it is understood to mean charging exorbitant interest, 'doubling and quadrupling,' is an evil whose prohibition is consistent with sound economics. But the absolute proscription of usury, when it is understood as prohibiting loaning money for any amount of interest whatsoever, has always proved difficult to practice in a mercantile economy. In the Islamic tradition, the wealthy will often make personal loans at no interest to those in need as a form of charity, but this does not apply to loans for business. Where there is a need to raise capital, either by entrepreneurs or by the state, loans are required, and people with capital will lend it only at a price. Therefore, both Christian and Muslim societies that have tried to enforce this prohibition have often winked at loopholes. One typical loophole is to permit loans from nonbelievers. Thus in Medieval Europe Jewish bankers were the accepted creditors for Christians, and today Western banks are often permitted to lend money in Islamic nations. Today, Islamic banks are developing new policies consistent with the Qur'an. Most notable of these is investment as profit sharing. Banks will lend to entrepreneurs in return for a percentage of the profits rather than for a fixed rate of interest. The bank then prospers as the business succeeds, but makes nothing should it fall into the red. Exodus 22.25: Lending at interest is prohibited specifically in the case where the borrower is poor. Cf. Exodus Rabbah 31.15, p. 177. Proverbs 6.30-31: In traditional Roman Catholic moral teaching, when a person is in dire need he may be justified in stealing food to keep from starving. In that case, food is regarded as 'common property.' Cf. Chuang Tzu 25, p. 1070.

SELFISH DESIRE, LUST, AND GREED

Passion, greed, covetousness, hatred, lust: these emotions dominate the soul, causing blindness and leading to destruction. Every major religion recognizes that suffering and evil are caused by excessive desires or desires directed toward a selfish purpose. Buddhism has summed up this principle in the second of the Four Noble Truths and denotes these desires by the term "craving." Craving is a fetter: poisoning the heart, deluding the mind, and binding people to evil courses of action.

While all religions view selfish desire as baneful and the cause of much suffering, they differ in explaining these selfish desires in relation to human psychology. Buddhism, and similarly Jainism, reject desire of all kinds, even the grasping for existence itself, as harmful and a source of bondage. In the monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and in some texts from Sikhism and Hinduism, the passions of the flesh--which are evil--are distinguished from the healthy ambition for goodness and the passion for God. Chinese religion condemns only excessive desire and selfish desire: Desires themselves may be good if they are in harmony with the Tao. Similarly, Hinduism honors desire when it takes its rightful place within the dharma of family and society; this ambivalence is illustrated from a passage which identifies Kama, the god of desire, with the generative forces of nature.

To these condemnations of selfish desires, the reader may add many additional passages concerned with their renunciation, which may be found in The Noble Truth of the Origin of suffering is this: It is craving that leads back to birth, bound up with passionate greed. It finds fresh delight now here and now there, namely, craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence and becoming, and craving for non-existence.

1. Buddhism. Samyutta Nikaya Ivi.11: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth

Have you seen him who makes his desire his god, and God sends him astray purposely, and seals up his hearing and his heart, and sets on his sight a covering? Who, then, will lead him after God [has condemned him]? Will you not then heed?

2. Islam. Qur'an 45.23

What causes wars, and what causes fighting among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

3. Christianity. James 4.1-3

The man who gathers flowers [of sensual pleasure], whose mind is distracted and who is insatiate in desires, the Destroyer brings under his sway.

4. Buddhism. Dhammapada 48

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.

5. Christianity. James 1.13-15

In desire is man born;
From desire he consumes objects of various tastes;
By desire is he led away bound,
Buffeted across the face.
Bound by evil qualities is he chastised--

6. Sikhism. Adi Granth, Sri Raga Ashtpadi, M.1, p. 61

Envy and desire and ambition drive a man out of the world.

7. Judaism. Mishnah, Abot 4.28

There are three gates to self-destructive hell: lust, anger, and greed.

8. Hinduism. Bhagavad Gita 16.21

Arjuna:

What is the force that binds us to selfish deeds, O Krishna? What power moves us, even against our will, as if forcing us?

Krishna:

It is selfish desire and anger, arising from the state of being known as passion; these are the appetites and evils which threaten a person in this life.

Just as a fire is covered by smoke and a mirror is obscured by dust, just as an embryo is enveloped deep within the womb, knowledge is hidden by selfish desire--hidden, Arjuna, by this unquenchable fire for self-satisfaction, the inveterate enemy of the wise.

Selfish desire is found in the senses, mind, and intellect, misleading them and burying wisdom in delusion. Fight with all your strength, Arjuna! Controlling your senses, conquer your enemy, the destroyer of knowledge and realization.

10. Hinduism. Bhagavad Gita 3.36-41

Clinging, in bondage to desires, not seeing
in bondage any fault, thus bound and fettered,
never can they cross the flood so wide and mighty.

Blinded are beings by their sense desires
spread over them like a net; covered are they
by cloak of craving; by their heedless ways
caught as a fish in the mouth of a funnel-net.
Decrepitude and death they journey to,
just as a sucking calf goes to its mother.

11. Buddhism. Udana 75-76

The fish that is excessively attached to water, without water dies.
For love of the lotus is the humming-bee destroyed,
Finding not the way of escape...
Subdued by lust is the elephant caught,
Helpless under others' power.
For the love of sound the deer bows his head,
Thereby torn to pieces.
Beholding his family, by greed is man attracted,
With wealth involved:
Deeply in wealth involved, regarding it as his own,
Which inevitably he must leave behind.
Whoever with other than the Lord forms love,
Know him to be eternally the sufferer.

12. Sikhism. Adi Granth, Dhanasari, M.5, pp. 670-71

Just as a tree with roots unharmed and firm, though hewn down, sprouts again, even so while latent craving is not rooted out, this sorrow springs up again and again.

If in anyone the thirty-six streams of craving that rush towards pleasurable thoughts are strong, such a deluded person torrential thoughts of lust carry off.

The streams of craving flow everywhere. The creeper sprouts and stands. Seeing the creeper that has sprung up, with wisdom cut off the root.

In beings there arise pleasures that rush towards sense-objects, and such beings are steeped in craving. Bent on happiness, they seek happiness. Verily, such men come to birth and decay.

Folk enwrappt in craving are terrified like a captive hare. Held fast by fetters and bonds, for long they come to sorrow again and again....

That which is made of iron, wood, or hemp, is not a strong bond, say the wise; the longing for jewels, ornaments, children, and wives is a far greater attachment. That bond is strong, say the wise. It hurls down, is supple, and is hard to loosen. This too the wise cut off, and leave the world, with no longing, renouncing sensual pleasures.

Those who are infatuated with lust fall back into the stream, as does a spider into the web spun by itself. This too the wise cut off, and wander, with no longing, released from all sorrow.

13. Buddhism. Dhammapada 338-47

Confucius said, "I have never seen anyone whose desire to build up his moral power was as strong as sexual desire."

14. Confucianism. Analects 9.17

There is no crime greater than having too many desires;
There is no disaster greater than not being content;
There is no misfortune greater than being covetous.

15. Taoism. Tao Te Ching 46

They say that woman is an enticement.
No, No, she is not so.
They say that money is an enticement.
No, No, it is not so.
They say that landed property is an enticement.
No, No, it is not so.
The real enticement is the insatiable appetite of the mind,
O Lord Guheswara!

16. Hinduism. Allama Prabhu, Vacana 91

All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

17. Judaism and Christianity. Ecclesiastes 1.8

Desire never rests by enjoyment of lusts, as fire surely increases the more butter is offered to it.

18. Hinduism. Laws of Manu 2.94

Not by a shower of gold coins does contentment arise in sensual pleasures.

19. Buddhism. Dhammapada 186

Passion makes the bones rot.

20. Judaism and Christianity. Proverbs 14.30

The ignorant one craves for a life of luxury and repeatedly hankers after pleasures. Haunted by his own desires he gets benumbed and is rewarded only with suffering.

The benighted one is incompetent to assuage sufferings, because he is attached to desires and is lecherous. Oppressed by physical and mental pain, he keeps rotating in a whirlpool of agony. I say so.

21. Jainism. Acarangasutra 2.60, 74

The love of money is the root of all evils.

22. Christianity. 1 Timothy 6.10

Wealth is the fountainhead of inordinate craving.

23. Islam (Shiite). Nahjul Balagha, Saying 56

What is that love which is based on greed?
When there is greed, the love is false.

24. Sikhism. Adi Granth, Shalok, Farid, p. 1378

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves wealth, with gain: this also is vanity.

25. Judaism and Christianity. Bible, Ecclesiastes 5.10

Even were the wealth of the entire world bestowed lavishly on a man, he would not be happy: contentment is difficult to attain.

26. Jainism. Uttaradhyayana Sutra 8.16

O my wealth-coveting and foolish soul, when will you succeed in emancipating yourself from the desire for wealth? Shame on my foolishness! I have been your toy! It is thus that one becomes a slave of others. No one born on earth did ever attain to the end of desire.... Without doubt, O Desire, your heart is as hard as adamant, since though affected by a hundred distresses, you do not break into pieces! I know you, O Desire, and all those things that are dear to you! The desire for wealth can never bring happiness.

27. Hinduism. Mahabharata, Santi Parva 177

He who considers wealth a good thing can never bear to give up his income; he who considers eminence a good thing can never bear to give up his fame. He who has a taste for power can never bear to hand over authority to others. Holding tight to these things, such men shiver with fear; should they let them go, they would pine in sorrow. They never stop for a moment of reflection, never cease to gaze with greedy eyes--they are men punished by Heaven.

28. Taoism. Chuang Tzu 14

The gods asked Shiva to revive Kama [Desire], and they said, "Without Desire the whole universe will be destroyed. How can you exist without Desire?" But Shiva replied in anger, "The universe must continue without Desire, for it was he who caused all the gods, including Indra, to fall from their places and become humble, and it is Desire who leads all creatures to hell. Without Desire a man can do no evil.... I burnt Desire in order to give peace to all creatures, and I will not revive him, since he is the evil at the root of all misery. Now all of you should set your minds on asceticism." The gods and sages said, "What you have said, Shiva, is no doubt the very best thing for us, but nevertheless, all of this universe was created by means of Desire, and all of it is the form of Desire, and that Desire cannot be killed. How can you have burnt Kama? You yourself made him and gave him the ability he has just used." But Shiva merely scowled and vanished.

31. Hinduism. Skanda Purana 1.1.21

Acarangasutra 2.1-3: Cf. Bhagavad Gita 16.7-16, p. 397. Chuang Tzu 11: Cf. Tao Te Ching 12, p. 934; Great Learning 7, p. 928. Skanda Purana 1.1.21: Kama, here personified, is the principle of desire. Later, Shiva accedes to the gods' request and revives Kama. The tension between asceticism and desire is a theme which continues throughout the cycle of Shiva myths. Pure asceticism, by whose ardor (tapas) the gods and sages sustain their divinity, and desire, whose energy engenders all life, are apparently irreconcilable, yet both are necessary. Kama (love) is praised as the divine source of all creation in Atharva Veda 9.2.19-20, p. 138.