

Shavuot: The *Shnei Luchot HaBrit* - Worksheet

Name(s): _____

Introduction:

The holiday of Shavuot is also known as *Zman Matan Torateinu*, the time when the Torah was given. According to the Sages, the original Shavuot was the day on which God gave the *Aseret HaDibrot* (also known as The Ten Commandments) to the Jewish People at Mount Sinai. When Moshe came down from Mount Sinai, he brought with him *shnei luchot habrit* - the two (stone) tablets of the covenant.

There are numerous opinions about what exactly was written on those tablets. The most commonly accepted one, and the one we see depicted in art, synagogues, and books, has the first 5 *Dibrot* on one tablet and the second 5 *Dibrot* on a second tablet. Another opinion says that the *Dibrot* mentioned in *Shemot* (Exodus 20) were on one tablet and the *Dibrot* mentioned in *Devarim* (Deuteronomy 5) were on the other.

In this lesson, we will examine how the opinions are based in the text and then discussed by the Sages. Complete the questions below to the best of your ability. These questions will later be reviewed in class.

Questions:

1. Read through the *pesukim* in [Shemot 34:27-28](#)

- (a) According to this text, describe what was written on the tablets that Moshe received. Cite your answer from the text.

- (b) What is left unclear in this text?

2. Read the *Aseret HaDibrot* in *Shemot* and *Devarim*

(a) [Shemot 20:1-14](#)

(b) [Devarim 5:1-19](#)

3. Read the following [Midrash](#) and *then* answer the question below.

“We have learned: There are three partners in the creation of a fetus in its mother’s womb: the Holy One, blessed be He, the father, and the mother. The father fertilizes the egg with white cells that form the brain, the fingers, the whites of the eye, the bones, and the ligaments. The mother fertilizes it with red cells, which form the blood, the skin, the flesh, the hair, and the black of the eyes. Then God gives it the following ten things: a spirit, a soul, the shape of the face, the looks, the auditory ability, the power of speech, the hands and feet motor movements, wisdom, understanding, perception, knowledge, and strength.”

- *Midrash Rabbah, Kohelet Chapter 5*

(a) According to Rabbi Chanina ben Gamliel, how many Dibrot were written on each of the two tablets?

(b) According to the Rabbis, how many were written on each of the two *luchot*?

(c) When it says “all ten” and then “all ten”, what is being referred to?

(d) What is the basis of the Torah text that supports the Rabbis' view?

4. Which of these two opinions makes more sense to YOU? Why did you choose that opinion?

5. Which opinion is the majority opinion? Which is the minority opinion?

6. Read [Shemot 20:1-14](#) and inscribe the *Aseret HaDibrot* into the following table, according to the opinion of Rabbi Chanina ben Gamliel:

Belief in God	

7. Was filling in the chart difficult or challenging for you? Explain why or why not.

8. Suggest a reason why the Commandments were split up in this manner. Explain your answer.

9. The *Midrash* explains the reason for the 5/5 set-up with a *mashal* (parable:

“How were the Ten Commandments written? (The first) five were inscribed on one tablet and (the second) five on the other...’ I am the Lord your God (was written on one), and adjacent to it was written: ‘Do not murder.’ The Torah teaches that anyone who spills another’s blood is considered as if he has defiled God.

This can be compared to a human king who visits his people. They built a statue for him, a portrait, and minted coins (with his image). After some time, they knocked over the statue, defaced his portrait, and devalued his coinage. By insulting the image of the king, they actually insulted the king...”

“On one was written: ‘You shall have no other gods’ and adjacent to it was written: ‘Do not commit adultery’. The Torah teaches us that anyone who worships idols is considered to have committed adultery against God...”

“On one was written: ‘You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain’ and adjacent to it was written: ‘Do not steal’. It teaches us that anyone who steals will come to swearing in vain... (to deny the theft)”

“On one was written: ‘Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it’, and adjacent to it was written: ‘Do not give false testimony’. This teaches us that anyone who desecrates the Sabbath testifies that God did not create the world in six days and that He did not rest on the seventh. Whilst one who observes the Sabbath testifies that God did create the world in six days and that He did rest on the seventh...”

“On one was written: ‘Honor your father and mother’ and adjacent to it: ‘Do not covet’. This teaches us that anyone who covets will eventually beget children who will curse their father and mother and who will honor one who is not his father...This is the reason why the Ten Commandments were written with five commandments on each tablet.” *Mechilta Yitro* Chapter 8

Briefly summarize the *mashal* in your own words:

10. In your own words, what is the *mashal* meant to teach us about the 5/5 set-up of the *Dibrot*?

11. Suggest a thematic connection between each parallel commandment:

(i): Belief in God ↔ (vi): Murder

(ii): _____ ↔ (vii): _____

(iii): _____ ↔ (viii): _____

(iv): _____ ↔ (ix): _____

(v): _____ ↔ (x): _____

12. According to the Rabbis, one tablet of the *luchot* had the *Dibrot* from *Shemot* and the other tablet had the *Dibrot* from *Devarim*. Why do you think that Chanina ben Gamliel's opinion—the minority opinion—became the one that was so widely accepted, even though the Rabbis—the majority—said something different?
