

**Impressum**

Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments

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Compiled by Klaus Bung from ancient sources

**EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION**

In this contribution, Klaus Bung presents five eminently useful rules of life which he has compiled from ancient sources and carefully formulated and tabulated. They are not designed to make God happy but to help us avoid thoughts, words and deeds which, in the long run, lead to misery for ourselves and others, and a list of their positive counterparts which are conducive to happiness for the giver and the receiver. Provocatively, he calls them "The Five Commandments", analyses their underlying ethics, and compares them with the traditional Ten Commandments. Whereas the Ten Commandments are, as their name says, orders given by a god, his "Five Commandments" are not really commandments (orders given by someone) but resolutions which individuals or society can take if they want to have less troublesome and more contented (or happy) lives.

**CONTENTS**

1. The Five Commandments tabulated, and their interactions
2. Three dangerous emotions: desire, fear and anger
3. Precept #1: A beautiful rendering
4. Underlying principle:  
Work for the benefit not of self but of others
5. Who are Others
6. Jews, Israel and Palestine: A Bundist approach
7. The Holocaust
8. The current growth of anti-Semitism
9. Comparison: The Five Commandments vs The Ten Commandments
10. Conclusion
11. Further reading
12. More comprehensive books on the Bundists

# Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments

## 1. THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS TABULATED, AND THEIR INTERACTIONS

THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS		
Prohibitions	Recommendations	Beneficiaries
1. No violence	Acts of kindness	Others
2. No theft	Generous giving	Others
3. No sexual misconduct	Treating the body of others with kindness	Others
4. No sins of speech	Helping others through good use of speech	Others
5. No mind-altering drugs (including alcohol and tobacco)	Consuming healthy foods and drinks as necessary for the welfare of the body	Self: Improves Self-control & Mindfulness

All these apply cogitatione, verbo et opere,  
in thought, words and deeds.

Failing on #5 causes failure in #1, #3 and #4.

Most of the ills that befall individuals and society and are reported daily in the news can be traced back to offending against one of these five precepts. Heeding them and propagating them can help us to avoid such troubles.

## 2. THREE DANGEROUS EMOTIONS: DESIRE, FEAR AND ANGER

In addition, there are three dangerous emotions (traditionally known) of whose pernicious effects we should be aware and which we should try to subdue:

### **desire, fear and anger**

- Desire causes us to offend against #2 and #3, above.
- Fear can cause us to offend against #1 and take unnecessary and counterproductive precautions.
- Anger causes us to offend against #1 and #4

### 3. PRECEPT #1: A BEAUTIFUL RENDERING

In Utting am Ammersee (Bavaria, Germany), I saw a hoarding (billboard) which says:

<p>In diesem Reiche gilt als oberstes Gesetz:          'Was lebt und atmet sollst du gütig schützen!'         Drum schon' auch das Insekt          Und pflück' die Blume nicht, die dich erfreut:          Auch deinem Heil wird's nützen.'</p>	<p>In this reign there is a supreme law:          'Whatever lives and breathes thou shalt lovingly protect!'         Thus you should even spare the insect's life,          And do not pluck the flower which makes you smile:          This will be good for your salvation too.</p> <p>(translated by Klaus Bung)</p>
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### 4. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE: WORK FOR THE BENEFIT NOT OF SELF BUT OF OTHERS

Measure your success and your happiness not in terms of

1. whether **you** have become more successful, gained more money, a better job, more recognition and fame, a better house, a greater salary, but in terms of
2. whether you have given **others** some relief, a moment of happiness, solved one of their problems, rescued them from a difficult situation.

Justification: Even the poorest, most unsuccessful, person will have many chances to do (2). There are always other people who have problems which you can easily solve, whereas "your own" problems may be insurmountable.

These other people can benefit from **your** help, however much of a failure you may be otherwise and however unhappy you may be because your perceived "failure". Therefore (2) is a recipe for success and happiness: there are dozens of tasks which are easy for you. Chose those which you can manage.

But if you seek your happiness in terms of (1), you may be faced with so many obstacles (lack of skills or money or opportunities or connections) that you are bound to fail and therefore become unhappy (aka "mentally ill" in today's popular parlance) because you regard this as failure. It's your perception that matters!

## 5. WHO ARE OTHERS

When seeking to help "others", everybody should be keen to focus on people who are "most different" (who differ most) and who are traditionally least well treated, namely strangers, people of different origin, sex, race, colour, nationality, religion, political party, minorities (the smaller, the more deserving), people who in traditional notions of charity tend to be neglected. This could be called "goodwill to all".

If everybody tackled the problems of life in terms of (2), most conflicts between nations and individuals would disappear, war would disappear, social exploitation and comparative poverty (i.e. excessive riches vs excessive poverty) would disappear, and happiness of all would increase. Everybody would seek his happiness by helping others. It would not have to be imposed by campaigns of political correctness or by authoritarian governments.

## 6. JEWS, ISRAEL AND PALESTINE: A BUNDIST APPROACH

Specifically **Jews**, who have traditionally suffered most from racial prejudice, discrimination and genocide, and some of whom (the "Zionists") are at present vainly (and criminally) trying to create happiness for Jews, not all over the world, but in a state intended only for Jews, at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs, who have to be exterminated in order to create a safe haven "for Jews and only for Jews",

they, and all of us, should take to heart a principle enunciated by Bundist intellectual Dr Emanuel Scherer (1901-1971). This principle invalidates the genocidal objectives of the state of Israel (Jews seeking happiness by passing on to Muslims the genocide they have suffered in the past). Instead, we should seek

**"Rights and justice for Jews everywhere  
without wrongs and injustice to other people anywhere."**

**Emanuel Scherer, 1901-1971**

The same principle could be usefully extended to cover people of all races and religions. It could be intensified by saying that we should seek "the well-being of people everywhere".

#### **7. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PREVENT THE HOLOCAUST**

If, in the popular conception of ethics (decent behaviour), #1 were the most important commandment (which in Judaism, Christianity and Islam it isn't), then despising, insulting, hurting or killing a single Jew for being a Jew would be a despicable behaviour. The Holocaust could not have happened: too many decent non-Jews would have been instinctively appalled and would have resisted.

If we were admonished (and trained) to be kind to animals (even to insects), how much more should we be kind and respectful to another human being!

#### **8. THE CURRENT GROWTH OF ANTI-SEMITISM**

Since the members of "The Jewish Workers' Bund" (aka "The Bund", members known as "Bundists") have, for over a century, opposed the plans and attempts of the Zionist Jews to remove the indigenous Palestinians (Arab Muslims and Christians) from their land (by expelling or killing them), it is extremely important that non-Jews (potential anti-Semites) should know about the Bund and its values and activities.

Such knowledge would reduce the current (2023-2025) global growth of anti-Semitism (in thoughts, words and physical attacks: "cogitatione, verbo et opere") which mistakenly targets all Jews whereas it should be focussed on, and confined to, the criminal activities and aims of Israeli politicians, settlers and army.

I therefore provide below, to the best of my ability, a sadly incomplete list of books on the Bund. If readers will send me additional titles, I will gladly add them.

### **9. COMPARISON: THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS VS THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

A comparison of "The Five Commandments" and the traditional "Ten Commandments" is not easy to make since, contrary to traditional belief, the Ten Commandments are not unchangeably cut into stone but there are several different groupings and numberings in existence. For a good summary of these, see Wikipedia. In the Bible they appear in Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21, and Exodus 34:11-26.

To make visible whether the Five Commandments contain any injunctions which are missing in the Ten, and which injunctions of the Ten are missing in the Five, I will display here only two typical numberings, the Heidelberg Catechism (Calvinist) of 1563 and the numbering which Luther (Little Catechism of 1529) and Roman Catholic catechisms (e.g. "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (1992) have in common.

I will use grossly simplified descriptions for each injunction. The interpretation in each catechism will greatly enrich each injunction.

Roman Catholic and Luther	Heidelberg Catechism	The Five Commandments
1 No other gods	1 No other gods	
	2 No images of God	
2 No swearing	3 No swearing	
3 Keep the Sabbath	4 Keep the Sabbath	
4 Honour your parents	5 Honour your parents	
5 Do not kill, do not harm other people in any way	6 Do not kill, do not harm other people in any way	1 No violence
6 Do not commit adultery	7 Do not commit adultery	3 No sexual misconduct
7 Do not steal	8 Do not steal	2 No theft
8 Do not give false witness	9 Do not give false witness	4 No sins of speech
9 Do not desire inanimate possessions of other people		2 No theft (in thought, words and deeds)
10 Do not desire animate possessions of other people	10 Do not desire other people's possessions	2 No theft (in thought, words and deeds)
		5. No mind-altering drugs (including alcohol and tobacco)

1. The Ten Commandments (henceforth TC) are believed to be valid because they are ordered by God.

The Five Commandments (FC) should be practised because they obviously benefit man and society.

2. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches (Question 5 and 114), we are unable to satisfy all TC with perfection, we are therefore all sinners and condemned to hell and depend for our salvation utterly on God's mercy and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As a result the bulk of Christian teaching and preaching is that Jesus loves us, helps us and saves us and that we should love Jesus, and turn to him in all our needs.
3. Because of the importance placed on (2), improving our behaviour is in Christian churches less important than the fact that our sins can be forgiven: God's justice is tempered by mercy. Eastern religions put more emphasis on the fact that we must, with infinite patience, learn to

improve our behaviour (and our ability and desire to behave well) so that we can, eventually, pass the examination in a "divine court of law", without the need for mercy.

In Christian churches, teaching how we should improve our behaviour is somewhat neglected. Significantly, Luther did not like the letter of James, which emphasises good behaviour ("works"), and called it "a letter of straw" ("eine stroherne Epistel").

4. TC then derive their power from belief in God, FC derive their power from their obvious usefulness in society.

Many people today do not believe that God exists and even if He existed cannot be sure that texts written or preached by humans actually are the word of God, are true or are infallible: there is always space for some doubt. Arguments and injunctions of this type are therefore comparatively weak.

5. Even though most of the ills of modern society are addressed by TC 5 to 10, they are weakened in their effectiveness because, by their position in the second half of the list and their neglect in teaching and preaching, they are considered relatively unimportant or "matters of course" (not requiring much preaching). It is really secular law which punishes offences against TC 5 to 10, therefore the churches have to be less concerned with them; they can take their validity for granted.
6. TC 4 or 5, Honour your parents, can obviously be expanded to "Respect your teachers and treat them with gratitude and affection and do everything in your power to be helpful to them" (as is emphasised in some Eastern traditions). It would be eminently useful in today's society and its schools if this were inculcated into all children from an early age. They owe their bodily life to their parents. To their teachers they owe their mental life, the attitudes and skills they need to be happy and content throughout life. This important injunction is missing in FC.
7. The omission of FC 5 (No drugs, no alcohol &c) in TC is a serious weakness of the TC list.
8. FC are anchored entirely in their obvious benefits for individuals and society. They do not require leaps of faith but merely observing life. They can therefore also benefit the many non-believers in our society.
9. All FC address issues which are daily in the news when usually an "important", famous and successful person, has offended against them (drugs and often resulting deaths, alcohol-based offences, sexual offences, road rage and

anger, knife crimes, theft and burglaries resulting from greed, suicides resulting from inability to deal with the problems of life resulting from not practising FC).

10. Teaching at home and in churches does **not systematically** address these issues. Especially FC #1 (non-violence) is not made the most basic issue and hammered in every week. FC #5 (no drugs) is not included in TC and is therefore not considered a religious issue and therefore not taught, even though it is the cause of so many (and perhaps most) other offences and troubles.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Churches (and mosques &c), parents and secular educators should hammer in the FC, from early childhood onward, so that these become second nature to society and are considered the standard rules of **decent behaviour**. Doing this would not conflict with respect for TC.

Precept #1, non-violence, must be the starting point, and Precept #5 must be of the highest importance (as it is for Muslims) because neglecting it leads to loss of self-control and stupid (or criminal) behaviour in respect of the other four commandments. If this were consistently and patiently practised, there would be less mental "illness", less crime and less unhappiness in our society.

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## 11. FURTHER READING

- Jewish Socialists' Group (2023): The Jewish Workers' Bund: Past, Present and Future. 27 pp. BM 3725, London WC1N-3XX, [jsg@jewishsocialist.org.uk](mailto:jsg@jewishsocialist.org.uk), <https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/other>
- Han, Byung-Chul (2018): "The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today". Polity, Cambridge, UK, 100pp

## 12. MORE COMPREHENSIVE BOOKS ON THE BUNDISTS

- Brossat, Alain, and Klingberg, Sylvia (2016): "Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism", 273 pp. Verso, London, GB
- Goldstein, Bernard (2016): "Jewish Life, Struggle, and Politics in Interwar Poland: Twenty Years with the Jewish Labor Bund in Warsaw (1919-1939). A memoir of interwar Poland" (Introduction by Dr Emanuel Sherer [Scherer]), 486 pp. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA
- Jacobs, Jack (2009): "Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland", 201 pp. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, USA
- Katz, Daniel (2013): "All Together Different - Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism", 306 pp. New York University Press, New York, USA
- Olson, Jess (2013): "Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy", 409 pp. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, USA
- Slucki, David (2012): "The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History", 284 pp. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, USA