The essays in *Broken Tablets*, edited by Rachel Mikva, address the opportunities to restore the words of the Ten Commandments ‘to wholeness by our actions—deeds of heart and mind and body’ (xviii). For this purpose, this book aims to present new interpretations of the Ten Commandments from twelve Jewish spiritual thinkers (Rachel Mikva, Lawrence Kushner, Eugene Borowitz, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, Lawrence Hoffman, Leonard Fein, Levi Weiman-Kelman, Peter Knobel, Richard Levy, Laura Geller, and Manachem Kellner). Each essay intends to locate the meaning of each *mitzvah* within Jewish tradition in order to better understand what should be done or not done to enable spiritual awareness and benefit. The diverse authors—Liberal and Orthodox Jews, Americans and Israelis, women and men, scholars and practitioners—of each chapter in *Broken Tablets* pay tribute to Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf (z”l). A more recent book of collected essays, *I Am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments*, edited by Carl Braaten and Christopher Seitz, (Eerdmans, 2005), was produced with a similar objective by providing fresh interpretations of the Decalogue but written by diverse Christians (Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and Methodist).

An introductory essay by Lawrence Kushner argues that the ‘Ten Words’ have infinite yet united meanings, drawing support from a *midrash* and the *Zohar*. Rachel Mikva also provides an introductory essay in which she explains the title of and the rationale for the book. Mikva asserts that the power of the Ten Commandments cannot be impaired; yet, when a person does not do the *mitzvot* that person fails to allow the restoration of the fullness of God in her being and misses the opportunity to unite with a community ‘around common obligations rather than common interests’ (xx).

The focus of the remainder of the volume is centered upon the individual Ten Commandments and how each *mitzvah* shapes our lives. In fitting rabbinic style, each author turns each commandment over and over again in order to learn things that have not been mastered and, in some cases, things that have not even be imagined. Before each essayist composes a ‘restored’ perspective on each *mitzvah*, Mikva first provides traditional and modern Jewish commentary on each *mitzvah*. Nine of the Ten Commandments are elucidated by rabbis, the lone exception Leonard Fein’s discussion of the Fifth Commandment. Every author stretches beyond the literal words of each commandment with *midrash*, Talmudic passages, and other Jewish religious literature in order to provide lucid, insightful interpretations.
Borowitz’s essay on the first commandment addresses several items: implications for adding English words to the original Hebrew, the sacred divine name, the blend of individualism and corporate concern, a sense of partnership in God’s salvific acts, and the effects of being released from a slavehouse. Regarding the second commandment, Schacter-Shalomi contends that real idolatry today is ‘worship of money, technology, addictions, absolute political systems—even of “Judaism” and of the personal ego,’ not other religions that espouse a-theism (23). Fuchs-Kreimer maintains that in order to obey the third commandment, one must, like Job, learn how to honestly and fully acknowledge God in the midst of a suffering world. Hoffman argues that the meaning of Shabbat should be (re)considered with three modes of understanding—limits, truth, and meaning—and viewed as ‘virtual domain, a virtual world that Jews build on the master plan of Torah; a world where the presence of God cannot be doubted’ (55). The fifth commandment, so says Fein, pertains to honoring a person’s parents with actions even if that person’s father or mother did not deserve honor or was unloving. When children’s feelings for their parents conflict with their behavior, behavior trumps feelings.

Weiman-Kelman’s examination of the sixth commandment extends to questions of suicide, euthanasia, and the consequences of hateful words. In his consideration of ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ Knobel argues that, in Judaism, lifelong procreative monogamous marriage is a mitzvah or sacred obligation requiring an enormous amount of nurturing. Levy contends that the eighth commandment pertains to the theft of ideas, time, and reputations; it also pertains to ‘encouraging stealing by refusing to share the bounty God has temporarily entrusted to us’ (108). In her reflection on the ninth commandment, Geller discusses the degrees of speaking non-truths and when it is permissible to lie by giving a possible litmus test. Kellner concludes the essays by stating that unlike the other nine commandments, the tenth commandment ‘teaches us that while mitzvot are a way of life, they are not ends in themselves, but means to a further end: the formation of a holy character’ (132). Wolf, influential in the lives and teaching of each essayist, offers his gratitude in the concluding chapter.

In some measures, the diverse spectrum of the Jewish thinkers in Broken Tablets makes this book thought-provoking, engaging, challenging, and enriching for anyone who maintains that she observes the Ten Commandments. Even though the essays are brief, they are nevertheless full of learned, creative perspectives on the Commandments. Every essay makes stimulating and unexpected observations. Although the book gravitates toward a Jewish readership—indeed two articles locate and interrogate the other essayists’ arguments in Jewish tradition in typical rabbinic fashion—non-Jewish readers can be substantially challenged by these closer looks at the Commandments. This book is suitable for any larger religious collection in a college or public library.

The short essays on each Commandment generate many unanswered questions about how to do the mitzvot, thus creating one of the laudable contributions of the book. Rabbi Wolf begins to ask some of these questions in his concluding essay (e.g., in response to Levy’s essay, he states
‘[a]re Marxists right when they seek to expropriate from the expropriators?’). Thus, through the power of ancient and modern midrash, the book can move each reader who claims to observe the Ten Commandments further along the path to doing (not just believing!) the mitzvot within a community with common obligations even if a reader does not fully endorse each and every interpretation.