

PENINEI MEHKERE ERES

פניני מחקרי ארץ

HaRav HaGaon Rachamim Moshe Shayo Shlit"a

פרשת ואתחנן תשפ"ו



ולא תחמד אשת רעה. ולא תתאווה בית רעה, שדהו ועבדו.
וְאֶמְתּוֹ, שׂוֹרֹוֹ וְחִמְרוֹ, וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ

"You shall not covet your fellow's wife. You shall not desire your fellow's house, his field, his servant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your fellow." (5:18)

This verse contains the Tenth of the *Aseret HaDibberot*—the prohibition of "לא תחמד" *"You shall not covet."* The arrangement of the verse in the Torah contains a unique feature that requires explanation. In the middle of the commandment there is a break: after the words "ולא תחמד" *"You shall not covet your fellow's wife,"* the *Sefer Torah* leaves a space, as if ending a section, before continuing with "ולא תתאווה" *"You shall not desire your fellow's house"* Nowhere else among the *Aseret HaDibberot* do we find such a division within a single commandment; the breaks appear only between one *dibbur* and the next. What is the significance of this interruption in the middle of the verse?

The *Rambam*, in his *Sefer HaMitzvot*, counts these as two distinct prohibitions. The first is *Mitzvah* 265, the prohibition of "לא תחמד" *"You shall not covet,"* which forbids plotting to acquire something that belongs to another Jew. This is derived from the verse, "ולא תחמד בית רעה" *"You shall not covet your fellow's house."* The *Mechilta* explains: When the Torah says, "לא תחמד", it could be understood to mean that even mere verbal expression constitutes a violation. Therefore, later on, when forbidding the temptation to take precious metals from idols, the Torah states, "לא תחמד... וְלִקְחָתָּהּ" *"You shall not covet... and take it for yourself."* Just as there the prohibition is violated only through an act, so too here, the words "לא תחמד" only assign liability when the desire is acted upon.

The *Rambam* then lists *Mitzvah* 266, the separate prohibition of "ולא תתאווה" *"You shall not desire."* This commandment forbids allowing oneself to dwell upon and crave something that belongs to another, for such desire can ultimately lead a person to devise ways of acquiring it. This is the prohibition conveyed by the verse, "ולא תתאווה בית רעה" *"You shall not desire your fellow's house."* The *Rambam* emphasizes that these are not two expressions of the same prohibition. Rather, "לא תחמד" prohibits taking steps to obtain another person's property, whereas "ולא תתאווה" forbids even the inner desire itself. As the *Mechilta* teaches: It teaches "לא תחמד בית רעה," and elsewhere it says, "ולא תתאווה בית רעה," teaching that one incurs liability for desire in its own right, and for obtaining in its own right.

We thus see that the Torah establishes two separate prohibitions. The first, "ולא תתאווה," forbids harboring desire in one's heart for what belongs to another. The second, "לא תחמד," prohibits acting upon that desire by seeking to acquire the coveted object.

Accordingly, the unusual break in the middle of the commandment becomes readily understandable. Since the verse encompasses two distinct prohibitions addressing two separate stages—first the desire of the heart, and then the act of acquiring that which was desired—the Torah separates them, marking them as independent prohibitions.

If so, however, a difficulty arises. Since these are two distinct prohibitions, one might expect them to be counted as two separate *dibberot*—one of "לא תחמד" *"You shall not covet"* and the other of "ולא תתאווה" *"You shall not desire."* Why, then, do we speak of only the Ten Commandments—and not eleven?

The answer must be that "לא תחמד" and "ולא תתאווה" were spoken as a single *dibbur*, just as our Chachamim teach that "זכור" *"Remember"* and "שמור" *"Guard"* were uttered simultaneously. "זכור את יום השבת" *"Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it"* is a positive commandment, whereas "שמור את יום השבת לקדשו" *"Guard the Shabbat day to sanctify it"* is a prohibition. Although they are two distinct commandments, they were spoken together in a single *dibbur* and are therefore counted as one.

So too with "לא תחמד" and "ולא תתאווה." Although they constitute two separate prohibitions, they were delivered in a single Divine utterance and are therefore reckoned as one commandment among the *Aseret HaDibberot*. This is, in fact, how the *Alshich HaKadosh* explains the matter: "כי זה וזה אמת, לא תחמד" *"Both are true: 'לא תחמד' and 'ולא תתאווה' were spoken in a single utterance—something no human mouth can speak and no human ear can hear."*

The break in the *Sefer Torah* between "לא תחמד" and "ולא תתאווה" serves only to teach that, despite having been spoken together, they remain two distinct

prohibitions.

The *Maharal* of Prague, however, in *Tiferet Yisrael* (Chapter 36), offers a different explanation for why "לא תחמד" and "ולא תתאווה" are considered a single *dibbur*. He explains that one naturally leads to the other. The process begins with desire in the heart—this is the prohibition of "ולא תתאווה." That inner desire then progresses to action, as the person seeks to acquire the object he coveted, thereby violating "לא תחמד." Since the latter prohibition grows naturally out of the former, they are regarded as one *dibbur*. In essence, the root of the transgression lies in the heart; had the person restrained his inner desire, he would never have come to violate "לא תחמד."

A well-known incident is related from the *yeshivah* of the *Maharal* of Prague.

Among the students was a young man from a destitute family. By nature, he was painfully shy, and he was too embarrassed to accept invitations to eat at the homes of local families. Having no money of his own, he

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Not long afterward, however, he was put to the test. One night, lying in bed, hunger gnawed at him and sleep would not come. His yetzer hara gained strength, and he rose from his bed and wandered through the streets of the city. Eventually he came to a house, approached the door, and found it unlocked. He entered quietly and discovered that no one was inside. Before him lay a fortune in gold and silver.”
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often went without food until his hunger became unbearable. Only then, against his better judgment, would he slip into a house or shop and steal a small amount of food to quiet his hunger.

At first, he stole only out of necessity. But as time passed, what began as a means of survival became a habit, and eventually he found himself stealing even when there was no need. The habit had become second nature.

In time, word of the matter reached the *Maharal*. He was deeply pained to hear what had become of his student.

Determined to correct the situation without embarrassing the young man publicly, the *Maharal* announced that he would deliver a major *derashah* in Prague's central synagogue. A large crowd assembled, including all the students of the *yeshivah*. During the course of his address, the *Maharal* spoke passionately about the grave danger of corrupt character traits. He explained that a person first begins by desiring what belongs to another, and from that desire eventually comes to the sin of theft and other transgressions.

The *Maharal* continued:

A person who has become accustomed to stealing should not imagine that the Torah he learns will somehow atone for his wrongdoing. No amount of Torah study or *mitzvot* can repair the sin of theft. A thief has no remedy until he repents wholeheartedly and resolves never to return to his former ways.

When the young man heard the words of his revered teacher, he thought to himself, "the Rabbi is speaking to me." At that moment he resolved to overcome both his inclination and the habit he had developed, accepting upon himself never again to steal.

Not long afterward, however, he was put to the test.

One night, lying in bed, hunger gnawed at him and sleep would not come. His *yetzer hara* gained strength, and he rose from his bed and wandered through the streets of the city. Eventually he came to a house, approached the door, and found it unlocked. He entered quietly and discovered that no one was inside. Before him lay a fortune in gold and silver.

Unable at first to master himself, he took a tablecloth from the table and began gathering the money into it.

Then suddenly he remembered the *Maharal*'s words—that stealing is forbidden.

He withdrew his hand.

Immediately the *yetzer hara* returned with another argument:

"What difference does it make? Steal just this once. You'll have enough money for food for a long time. Afterward you can devote yourself to Torah study, and it will atone for what you've done."

Again, the young man recalled his teacher's words—that Torah study

cannot atone for the sin of theft. Strengthened by that thought, he overcame his temptation and left the treasure untouched.

As he made his way out of the house, he passed through the kitchen and caught the aroma of a fried goose. Hungry as he was, his *yetzer hara* whispered once more:

"At least take the goose. Eat it, and satisfy your hunger."

But he immediately rejected the thought.

"It is forbidden to steal."

He left the house empty-handed, returned to his bed, and finally fell asleep.

The next morning he came to the *Bet Midrash* for prayers. The *Maharal* looked intently at his face and said,

"Tell me—what *Mitzvah* did you perform last night that made your face shine."

The young man then recounted everything that had happened.

Several hours later, a wealthy widow came to the *Maharal*'s home. She told him that she had returned home late the previous evening and had accidentally left her front door unlocked. Thieves had apparently entered and begun gath-

ering all of her wealth, yet by some miracle nothing had been taken. She asked the *Maharal* to pray on her behalf.

The *Maharal* asked her, "How old are you?"

"I am twenty-seven," she replied. "My husband passed away two years ago, leaving me a young widow with considerable wealth."

"Would you be willing to remarry?" the *Maharal* asked.

"Yes," she answered.

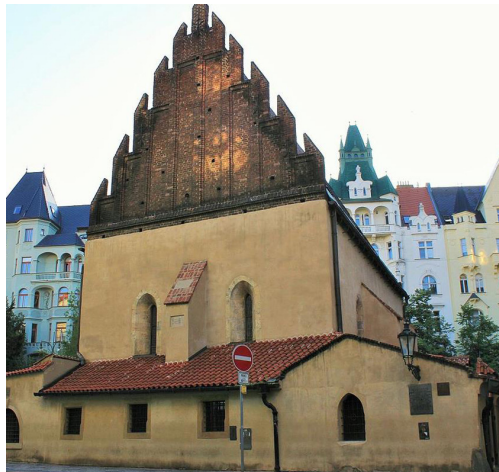
"I have a suitable groom from my *yeshivah*," he told her. "This very evening you shall become engaged. Bring two hundred gold coins so that the groom may be properly clothed, and prepare refreshments together with a meal for the engagement celebration."

She brought the money to the *Maharal* so that he could provide clothing for the groom. Because there was so little time, however, she was unable to prepare a full meal. Then she remembered that she already had a fried goose in her kitchen.

"I'll bring that for the engagement feast," she thought.

That very student was married to the widow in accordance with *halacha*. The marriage proved to be a happy one. She managed the family's business affairs, while he devoted himself entirely to Torah study.

In the end, everything he had once coveted—and heroically refused to take unlawfully—was granted to him legitimately. What he would not seize through sin, Hashem ultimately bestowed upon him with blessing.



Synagogue of The Maharal

This weeks Divrei Torah is dedicated in honor of
R' Moshe Ben Miriam & Batsheva Bat Tzivia

May they merit to live a long and joyous life together, having much nachat from all their children, following In the path of Torah and Mitzvot, along with health happiness, and abundant success,
Amen!