

Do Not Covet: Thought Control?

לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ לֹא-תַחְמֹד אִשְׁתּוֹ רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וְחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ:
(פ)

You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Bava Metzia 5b

אמר ליה רב אחא מדיפתי לרבינא והא קא עבר על לאו (שמות כ. יג) דלא תחמוד

Rav Aha of Difti said to Ravina: But by paying for the deposit instead of returning it, **doesn't** the bailee **violate the prohibition of: "You shall not covet** your neighbor's wife, nor his slave, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" ([Exodus 20:14](#))? One transgresses this prohibition by taking an item from another by force or deceit, even if one pays for it.

לא תחמוד לאינשי בלא דמי משמע להו

The Gemara answers: The prohibition **"You shall not covet" is understood by most people** as referring to taking an item **without** paying **money**. Since the bailee may have been unaware that he was acting criminally, his testimony and his oath are deemed credible.

Mishneh Torah, Rambam, laws of stealing and lost objects, 1

Anyone who covets a servant, a maidservant, a house or utensils that belong to a colleague, or any other article that he can purchase from him and pressures him with friends and requests until he agrees to sell it to him, violates a negative commandment, even though he pays much money for it, as [Exodus 20:14](#) states: "Do not covet."

The violation of this commandment is not punished by lashes, because it does not involve a deed. One does not violate this commandment until one actually takes the article he covets, as

reflected by [Deuteronomy 7:25](#): "Do not covet the gold and silver on these statues and take it for yourself." Implied is that the Hebrew *tachmod* refers to coveting accompanied by a deed.

[ט](#)

כל החומד עבדו או אמתו או ביתו וכליו של חבירו או דבר שאפשר לו שיקנהו ממנו והכביר עליו ברעים והפציר בו עד שלקחו ממנו אף על פי שנתן לו דמים רבים הרי זה עובר [ה] בלא תעשה שנאמר לא תחמוד. ואין לוקין על לאו זה מפני שאין בו מעשה. ואינו עובר בלאו זה עד שיקח החפץ שחמד. כענין שנאמר לא תחמוד כסף וזהב עליהם ולקחת לך חימוד שיש בו מעשה:

[10](#)

Anyone who desires a home, a wife, utensils, or anything else belonging to a colleague that he can acquire from him, violates a negative commandment at the time he thinks in his heart, "How is it possible to acquire this from him?" and his heart is aroused by the matter, as [Deuteronomy 5:18](#) states: "Do not desire...." Desire refers to feelings in the heart alone.

[י](#)

כל המתאוה ביתו או אשתו וכליו של חבירו וכן כל כיוצא בהן משאר דברים שאפשר לו לקנותן ממנו. כיון שחשב בלבו: היאך יקנה דבר זה ונפתה בלבו בדבר עבר בלא תעשה שנאמר לא תתאוה ואין תאוה אלא בלב בלבד:

[11](#)

Desire leads to coveting and coveting leads to robbery. For if the owners do not desire to sell despite the offer of much money and many supplications by friends, the person motivated by desire will be moved to robbery, as [Michah 2:2](#) states: "They coveted houses and stole."

And if the owner stands up against them to save his property, or in another way prevents the person motivated by desire from robbing, he will be moved to murder. Take, for example, the narrative of Ach'av and Navot.

[יא](#)

התאוה מביאה לידי חימוד והחימוד מביא לידי גזל. שאם לא רצו הבעלים למכור אע"פ שהרבה להם בדמים והפציר ברעים יבא לידי גזל שנאמר וחמדו בתים וגזלו. ואם עמדו הבעלים בפניו להציל ממונם או מנעוהו מלגזול יבא לידי שפיכות דמים. צא ולמד ממעשה אחאב ונבوت:

[12](#)

Thus, we see that a person who desires another person's property violates one negative commandment. One who purchases an object he desires after pressuring the owners and repeatedly asking them, violates two negative commandments. For that reason, the Torah prohibits both desiring and coveting. If he takes the article by robbery, he violates three negative commandments.

[יב](#)

הא למדת שהמתאוה עובר בלאו אחד והקונה דבר שהתאוה בהפצר שהפציר בבעלים או בבקשה מהן עובר בשני [ו]

:לאוין לכך נאמר לא תחמוד ולא תתאוה. ואם גזל עבר בשלושה לאוין

Love of Hashem

Ohr Hashem, Chasdai Kreskas II, 5, 5

וזה שאחר שהמניע ההוא חזק החיוב אין המלט ממנו והוא המופת המוחלט אחר שהנחנו אמונה מופתית. הנה החיוב וההכרח מבואר נגלה ומורגש אצלו שהוא נמנע בחקו ולהאמין סותר האמונה ההיא. ולזה אם היה המין הזה מהכרח רצוני המורגש בו בלתי ראוי הגמול והעונש עליו כפי מה שהונח.

Vmb: Josh Amaru

R. Chasdai Crescas, the great medieval critic of the Rambam, asks this question and argues that it is incoherent to command belief, since what we believe is not in our control.[1] God can command us to act but not to believe.[2]

[1] R. Chasdai Crescas, *Or Ado-nai*, Sifrei Ramot, Jerusalem, 1990 pp. 9-10 (Hebrew). R. Crescas also criticizes the idea of a mitzva to believe in God on logical grounds: the very concept of a commandment already implies a Commander, and thus it is at best redundant to have a distinct mitzva to believe in that Commander.

[2] The problem is not limited to the first commandment; it extends at least to the second commandment (to believe in the unity of God) and perhaps to the third (to love God) and fourth (to fear God) as well.

Rambam yesodei HaTorah

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון. והוא ממציא כל נמצא. וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצא:

The foundation of foundations and firmest pillar of all wisdom is, To know that there is a First Being, that He caused all beings to be, and that all beings from heaven and earth, and from between them, could not be save for the truth of His Own Being.

שפת אמת

הרבי מגור ה'שפת אמת' שהקושיא היא עצמה התירוץ. כלומר, מזה שיש חיוב לאהוב את ה', מזה נלמד שיש בטבע של כל יהודי לאהוב את ה' יתברך בכל לבו ובכל נפשו. אלא מה? שזה טמון בעומק הלב ועל ידי הרצון והתשוקה למצוא את האהבה הזאת על זה נאמר: "יגעת ומצאת תאמין".
Man has the potential to find the love for the friend, if you look you will find.

אהבת הרע

רמב"ן

ואם יהיה אוהבו בכל יחפז שיזכה רעהו האהוב לו בעושר ובנכסים וכבוד ובדעת ובחכמה ולא שישווה אליו אבל יהיה חפץ בלבו לעולם שיהיה הוא יותר ממנו בכל טובה ויצוה הכתוב שלא תהיה פחיתות הקנאה הזאת בלבו אבל יאהב ברבות הטובה לחבירו כאשר אדם עושה לנפשו ולא יתן שיעורין באהבה

The phrase "love your neighbor as yourself" is an exaggeration, since the heart of a person will not accept that he love his fellow as he loves himself.

Moreover, Rabbi Akiva has already taught ([Bava Metzia 62](#)), "Your life comes before the life of your fellow." Rather, the Torah here enjoins us that one should love his neighbor with every item with which he loves himself, [to receive] every benefit [that he wish upon himself].

Rambam mitzvah 206

היא שצונו לאהוב קצתנו את קצתנו כאשר נאהב עצמנו ושתהיה אהבתו וחמלתו לאחיו כאהבתו וחמלתו לעצמו בממונו ובגופו וכל מה שיהיה ברשותו אם ירצה אותו ארצה אני אותו וכל מה שארצה לעצמי ארצה לו כמוהו. והוא אמרו יתעלה ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

Is it commanding love?

Rambam Deot 6

מִצְוָה עַל כָּל אָדָם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל כְּגֹפוֹ שְׁנֵאמַר (וַיִּקְרָא יְיָ) "וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ". לְפִיכָךְ צָרִיךְ לְסַפֵּר בְּשִׁבְחוֹ וּלְחַוֵּס עַל מָמוֹנוֹ כְּאִשֶּׁר הוּא חָס עַל מָמוֹן עַצְמוֹ וְרוֹצֶה בְּכָבוֹד עַצְמוֹ. וְהִמְתַּכֵּד בְּקִלּוֹן חֲבֵירוֹ אֵין לוֹ חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

It is mandatory upon every man to love each and every one of Israel even as he loves his own self, for it is said: "But thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (**Lev. 19.19.**). One is therefore, obliged to speak in praise of his neighbor, and to be considerate of his money, even as he is considerate of his own money, or desires to preserve his own honor. "But whosoever glorifies himself in disgracing his neighbor has no share in the world to come" (Yerushalmi, **Hegigah. 2.1**).

Josh Amaru

To say that someone believes instead of knows is to say that he is ignorant of the fact he claims to know. When we talk about knowledge and belief in this way, we treat the proposition as a sort of *thing*, as an *object*, and are talking about whether someone has or possesses that thing. Truth or falsity is simply a property of the thing. If the proposition is true, then he knows it. If it is false, then he merely believes it.[1] When we speak of knowledge in this way, it is clear that there is no problem commanding or obligating someone to know (or believe)

Rabbi Etshalom

Even those who find it difficult to understand the mitzva to love on its simplest level because of the difficulty inherent in the demand to develop this emotion with respect to another person are willing to accept the prohibition of hatred ("You shall not hate your kinfolk in your heart" [*Vayikra 19:17*]) at its simplest level, which prohibits hatred within one's heart.

What is the difference?

To whom does the phrase, "Is there anyone afraid and disheartened" (*Devarim 20:8*) refer? The phrase should be interpreted simply, as applying to a person whose heart is not brave enough to stand in the throes of battle. Once a soldier enters the throes of battle, he should rely on the Hope of Israel and their Savior in times of need. He should realize that he is fighting for the sake of the oneness of God's name. Therefore, he should place his soul in his hand and not show fright or fear. He should not worry about his wife or children. On the contrary, he should wipe their memory from his heart, removing all thoughts from his mind except the war. Anyone **who begins to feel anxious and worry in the midst of battle to the point that he frightens himself**

violates a negative commandment, as it is written: "Let not your courage falter. Do not be in fear, or in panic or in dread of them" (Devarim 20:3). (*Hilkhos Melakhim* 7:15)

Rambam emphasizes that one violates a negative commandment only when he begins to feel anxious and worry, when he creates thoughts of fear in his heart and frightens himself.

If so, it is clear that it is impossible to deny one's natural initial feelings. The Torah demands that one refuse to become mired in these thoughts; rather, he must strengthen himself and have faith in God.

In *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, Rambam writes that one only violates the negative commandment when he actually flees the battle:

The 58th prohibition is that we are forbidden from fearing the enemy at time of war and retreating before them. Rather, it is an obligation to strengthen one's heart and stand strong in the lines of battle. A person who turns away and retreats violates this prohibition. The source of this prohibition is God's statement, "Do not be in dread of them." (*Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, Negative Commandment 58)

Note the relationship between Rambam's statements in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* and in the *Mishneh Torah*. It may be that only when one becomes paralyzed by fear to the point that he cannot fulfill his military duty does he violate the negative commandment.