

עֲשֶׂרַת הַדְּבָרִים

Word Number Eight – לא תגנב

THE EIGHTH WORD IS: *lo tig-nov*

“You shall not steal”



The Eighth Word is “you shall not steal.” Stealing is taking something into your own possession which belongs to someone else. Since God commands us not to steal, this teaches us that God considers ownership of things to be very important. In fact, ownership of property is one of the foundations of society and community. When personal ownership is disregarded or neglected, society and community within society breaks down.

This is because ownership of property is a matter of justice. Since one works to obtain the things he owns, his property represents wages for his work.

Ownership of property begins with God. God is the Owner of all things (קִנְיָה שְׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, Gen 14:19). We confess this each time we pray the Amidah: “Blessed are You, Adonai our God, and God of our fathers; God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob; the great and mighty God, Who is awesome, God Most High, Who bestows good lovingkindness and is Owner of everything....” It is possible, then, to steal from God. How so? If we take from Him something that He has not given us. And how could we do that? First, if we attempt to take for ourselves the glory or honor that belongs to Him. When we credit ourselves as having accomplished something that was actually His work, then we are robbing Him of His glory. In the same way, when we fail to give God the praise He deserves, we are robbing Him of His glory. Secondly, if we use things without thanking Him, we are stealing from Him. Paul teaches, for instance, that “...everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer” (1Tim 4:4-5). What he means by “sanctified” is that it is properly set apart for our use, only when it is done in accordance with the “word of G-d” (=the Bible) and “prayer,” i.e., the giving of thanks and acknowledging God as the One Who is the Giver of all good things. This is why we say a *berachah* (blessing) before we eat—we acknowledge that God is the owner of the food, and in making this acknowledgement, God offers us the food. Failure to give God the proper credit as the One Who brings forth the food from the earth, and therefore is owner of the food, is the same as stealing from Him.

How careful should we be about ownership? We should be very careful! If we find something laying on the ground, or where it appears to have been lost, we should not just presume that it can become our property by taking it. This enters into the command to “love your neighbor as yourself.” If you had lost something, you would hope that the person who found it would try to return it to you. You should therefore have the same perspective: when you find something that does not belong to you, you must do all in your power to return it to its rightful owner. And if we practice this with even the smallest things (like a pencil you may find on the floor), then it will teach us how to act righteously when we find things of even greater value.

Ultimately, obeying this command (like all of the commands) is a matter of faith. If we honestly believe that God will supply all of our needs, then we do not have the desire to take something that belongs to someone else. Whatever I need, God will supply.