

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XVII: Yitro (Ex. 18:1–20:23)

Essay 24. The connection between stealing and using G-d's name in vain

The Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael (20:14) draws a parallel in the Ten Utterances (i.e., the Ten Commandments) between the first five commandments and the last five commandments.¹ I.e., a parallel between the first and sixth commandments, the second and seventh commandments, and so forth. This essay considers the relationship between the third and eighth commandments.

לא תשא - לא תגנב

“Do not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain; for the L-rd will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.” (Ex. 20:7) **“ . . .You shall not steal . . .”** (Ex. 20:13).

חומר השבועה כפר נודע ומפורסם לכל, ומי שגנב סופו לישבע לשקר, ועולה לא מצלחת, ושבועת שקר מכילה כל ממונו.

The seriousness of the oath is already known and famous to all, and as for one who steals, his end is to swear to a lie,² and the olah burnt offering will not be successful for atoning for the sin of swearing a false oath,³ **and a false oath consumes all of his money.⁴**

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¹ Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, 20:14, “How were the Ten Commandments given? Five on one tablet and five on the other. . . . It is written ‘You shall not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain,’ and, opposite it, ‘You shall not steal,’ whereby we are apprised that one who steals, in the end comes to swear in vain, as it is written ‘Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely, and sacrifice to Baal, and follow other gods whom you have not experienced’ (Jer. 7:9), and it is written ‘swearing, lying, murdering, stealing, adultery...’ (Hoshea 4:2). . . . This is why the Ten Commandments were given, five on one tablet and five on the other. These are the words of R. Chanina b. Gamliel.”

² In parshat Kedoshim, we find the verses: “*You shall not steal*; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. *You shall not swear falsely by My name*, profaning the name of your G-d: I am the L-rd.” Rashi notes that the injunction not to steal that is part of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:13) refers to kidnapping, i.e., the “stealing” of a man, whereas in Lev. 19:11, the Torah is talking about stealing money or other property. Rashi further comments on the relationship between Lev. 19:11 and 19:12: “If you steal you will in the end come to deny it, then you will lie (in order to back up your first denial), and ultimately you will swear falsely.” Rashi’s source is Sifra, Kedoshim, Section 2, 5.

³ An olah (burnt) sacrifice was offered for many reasons, including upon a nazir’s completion of his vow. It does not, however, atone for the swearing of a false oath.

⁴ Zech. 5:4 states: “[The curse] shall enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name, and it shall lodge inside their houses and shall consume them to the last timber and stone.” Shevuot 39a adds: “A false oath consumes things that even fire and water do not consume, such as stones.”

ועוד אסור לגנוב דעת הבריות על מנת למקט ולצער, ואף בשבועה אין נשבעין אפילו באמת ומכל שכן באיזו ערמה שבלב.

Further, it is forbidden to deceive someone to aggravate and to cause distress, and even regarding taking an oath, [people] shouldn't swear even regarding the truth, and certainly not about some plot of the heart.

ועוד שכל מקום שהזכרת ה' מצויה חס ושלום עניות מצויה, ומי שמזכיר השם לשוא גורם עניות לעולם בר מינו, וזהו "לא תגנוב" שגנוב הטובה מהעולם, וזהו אורח הגלות.

Furthermore, everywhere that the mention of G-d [in vain] is found, G-d forbid, poverty is found,⁵ and one who mentions G-d in vain causes poverty in the world, may it not happen to us, and this is the meaning of "You shall not steal," that is stealing the good from the world and this is the reason for the length of the exile.

וכל הנהגה מהעולם הזה בלא ברכה פאילו גזול וכו', וכל המברך ברכה שאינה צריכה עובר משום לא תשא.

“Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa said: **Anyone who enjoys the benefits of this world without making a blessing, it is as if he is stealing** from G-d and the community of Israel.”⁶ “Rav, and some say Reish Lakish, and [still others] say Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish both said: **Anyone who makes a blessing that is not necessary violates the commandment ‘Do not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain.’**”⁷

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⁵ Nedarim 7b: “Rav Chanin said that Rav said: One who hears mention of the name [of G-d in vain] by another [individual] must ostracize him. And if he did not ostracize him, he himself shall be ostracized, as wherever mention of God's name [in vain] is common, poverty is also common there.”

⁶ Berachot 35b.

⁷ Berachot 33a.