

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XLV: Va'etchanan (Deut. 3:23–7:11)

Essay 16. Coveting and craving

פסוק "ולא תתאנה", פֶּרַשׁ רַש"י לֹא תִירוֹג, אִם הוּא לְשׁוֹן חֲמֻדָּה, כְּמוֹ "נְחַמְדָּ לְמַרְאֵה" דְּמִתְרַגְּמִינָן "דְּמַרְגַּג לְמַחְזִי" עכ"ל.

A verse in the second presentation of the Ten Commandments reads: “You shall not covet [תחמד] [*tachmod*] your neighbor’s wife. **You shall not crave** [תתאוה] [*titaveh*] your neighbor’s house, or his field, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s” (Deut. 5:18). **Rashi explains:** “[The Targum renders this as] “**don’t desire**” [לא תרוג] [*la teirog*], which is also the language of “**coveting**” [חמדה] [*chemda*], just as “**pleasing to the sight**” [נחמד למראה] [*nechmad le'mareh*] (Gen. 2:9), which in the Targum Onkelos¹ is rendered as “**desirable** [מרגג] [*meragag*] **to behold.**” That is, the Targum says that the word *titaveh* (translated here as “crave”) is a synonym for *teirog* [desirable], but Rashi says this has the same meaning as *tachmod* [covet].

קִשָּׂה דְּבִנְדָאֵי יֵשׁ הֶפְרֵשׁ בֵּין לְשׁוֹן תַּאֲוָה לְלִשׁוֹן חֲמֻדָּה כְּמוֹ שֶׁפֶסֶק הָרַמְבַּ"ם (בְּפֶרֶק א' מֵהַלְכוֹת גְּזִילָה) שֶׁ"לֹא תִחְמַד" הוּא אֶסֶר גָּמַר הַמַּעֲשֵׂה, "וְלֹא תִתְאַוֶּה" הוּא בְּתַחֲלַת הַתַּאֲוָה.

A difficulty is that certainly there is a difference between the language of craving [תתאוה] [*titaveh*] and the language of coveting [תחמד] [*tachmod*], as the Rambam ruled (in chapter 1 of the Mishneh Torah, Laws of Robbery, halachot 9 and 10), that “**you shall not covet**” is violated after the completion of the action, “**and you shall not crave**” is violated at the beginning of the craving.²

* English translation: Copyright © 2021 by Charles S. Stein. More essays are at <https://www.zstorah.com>

¹ Onkelos was a Roman national who converted to Judaism in Tannaic times (c. 35–120 CE). He is considered to be the author of the Targum Onkelos (c. 110 CE).

² Mishneh Torah, Laws of Robbery, halacha 9: “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 Ex. 20:14 states: ‘Do not covet.’ The violation of this commandment is not punished by lashes, because it does not involve a deed. [That is, the commandment is directed to a thought process, not a physical deed. However, as will be explained next, the commandment is not violated until a deed occurs.] One does not violate this commandment until one actually takes the article he covets, as reflected by Deut. 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.”

Mishneh Torah, Laws of Robbery, halacha 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

אם פן למה טרח רש"י להשמיענו שאף לשון תאונה הוא לשון תמדה, אם אדרבא הם משונים זה מזה. ועוד שאם הנה הכל ענין אחד, קשה על הפסוק למה כתב שניהם, דמרתתי למה לי? ויש לומר שרש"י דניק שאף על פי שבדיבורות הראשונות לא כתיב בהו "לא תתאונה".

If so, why did Rashi make the effort to inform us that the language of craving is the language of coveting, if to the contrary one is different from the other? Also, if it's all one matter, a question on the verse is why both were written; why do I need it twice? It can be said that Rashi analyzed that in the first reading of the Ten Utterances, i.e., the Ten Commandments, it is not written in them at all "you shall not crave." That is, Ex. 20:14 states, "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 donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." It only uses the word covet [תחמד] [*tachmod*], and not the word crave [תתאוה] [*titaveh*]. That could be why Rashi decided that "crave" and "covet" had the same meaning.

מכל מקום תחלת התמדה היא התאונה, כמו ו'תחמד למראה' דמתרגמינן דמרגג, ששם פשיטא ודאי שאינו לשון תמדה ממנו. שהרי כשראתה האשה ושהוא נחמד עדיין לא עשתה גמר המעשה כמו שרומז לשון תמדה בשאר הפעמים וכמו שכתב הרמב"ם. ומשום הכי שפיר תרגמו אנקלוס ו'מרגג' לפי שהוא לשון תאונה התלויה בלב קודם גמר המעשה.

In any regard, the beginning of coveting is craving, as "pleasing to the sight," which in the Targum is rendered as "desirable to behold." Because there in Gen. 2:9, where "the L-rd G-d caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad," it's obvious and certain that [pleasing to the sight] is not exactly the language of coveting. For when the woman, i.e., Eve, saw that [the tree of knowledge of good and bad] was pleasing to the sight, she had not yet completed the action, which was to eat its fruit, as hinted by the language of coveting the remaining times it appears, and as the Rambam wrote. Therefore, it is nice that Onkelos translated as "desirable to behold," which is language of craving, which depends on the heart first before the completion of the action. That is, before eating from the tree of knowledge, Eve was guilty of violating the prohibition of craving, and after completing the action by eating the fruit, she also became guilty of violating the prohibition of coveting.

* * *

heart, 'How is it possible to acquire this from him?' and his heart is aroused by the matter, as Deut. 5:18 states: 'Do not desire' Desire refers to feelings in the heart alone."