

Honest Gain

Parshat Achrei Kedoshim

1 Vaykra 19

"Do not steal.

Do not deny [a rightful claim]."

Do not lie to one another.

2 Rashi

לא תגבון ולא תקבשו ולא תשקרו ... ולא תשבעו
NOT DENY FALSELY, AND YOU SHALL NOT LIE ... AND YOU SHALL NOT SWEAR [FALSELY BY MY NAME].
אם גבנת - If you have stolen, טופף לכהש - your end will be to deny falsely; and then
אם קבש - If you have stolen, טופף לשבע - your end will be to swear falsely.

6 Iniquator's Dignity - R. Saadiah - Naach

In Sidrah Shemos, the Torah relates that as Moshe Rabbeinu was about to receive his first prophecy, he was leading his flock toward the desert. Rashi (Shemos 5:10) explains, "Toward the edge of the desert: To distance himself from robbery, so that the flock should not graze in the fields of others." The very next verse tells of the revelation of the burning bush. This is not coincidental. Moshe was surely engaged in lofty thoughts even in the moments prior to his revelation; he had to have been to be in a state of preparedness to communicate with Hashem. Yet, even then, he did not overlook his monetary obligations toward his fellow man. The Torah makes mention of this because it is precisely for this sort of zealousness that Hashem deemed Moshe fit to attain prophecy.

7 With Hearts Full of Faith - R. Salomon

Robbery apparently heads the list of the transgressions we must confess on Yom Kippur. Why is this such a critical transgression? But first let us ask a more basic question. What does it have to do with most of us? Are we robbers? Do we break into other people's houses or hold them up in the street and take their wallets?

Actually, most of us are treading very close to the edge of robbery. In fact, the Gemara states (Bava Basra 165a) that most people step over the line and are guilty of robbery in one form or another. This is, of course, not a reason to feel complacent, to think that we're no worse than other people are. On the contrary, it is a reason for alarm. If this transgression is so widespread that most people are guilty of it, how much more vigilant and circumspect do we have to be to avoid falling into the trap. If the danger is so great, then the precautions must be equally great.

So why is robbery such a prevalent transgression? In what way are so many supposedly honest people guilty of it?

* When the Torah forbids *gezel*, robbery, it is not only referring to burglars and highwaymen, where the robber removes property from the owner's possession and takes it into his own possession. There are also other, more subtle forms of *gezel* that are equally forbidden under this general transgression.

8 One of these alternate forms of *gezel* is called *oshek*, which means withholding someone else's rightful property. If someone lent you an object or asked you to watch it for him for a while and you deny having it, that is *oshek*. If someone lent you money and you deny it or if you are late in paying it back, that is also *oshek*, unless the lender gives you an extension. If you bought a product in a store on credit and do not pay your bill, that is also *oshek*, unless the storekeeper gives you an extension. If you are late with your rent payment, that is also *oshek*, unless the landlord gives you an extension.

3 משה חיים - תולדות

בעשרת הדברות שהיו חרותים על לוחות האבן שהוריד משה רבינו מן השמים חמש מהן היו מצות בין אדם למקום וחמש מהן בין אדם לחברו, ולתת הגא היו גם חלוקים בכתיבתן בסדר זה - חמש על לוח האחד וחמש על לוח השני והעיר בזה בספר בית אלוקים (שער היסודות פרק י"ב) הערה נפלאה, כי הרי המצות שבין אדם לחברו הם קצרים הרבה מן אותם שהן בין אדם למקום ולמדנו כי שני לוחות אבנים היו שוים. על כן "נצטרך לומר כי היתה חקיקת וחינת החמשה דברות האחרונים שבלוח השני גדולה מחקיקת וחינת של הלוח האחד חקיקה גסה מכילה בהי דברות האחרונים הקצרים כל השיעור שמכיל בדברות הראשונים הארוכים כדי שיהיה נקרא ונראה יותר מה שהזכרנו בינינו לבינינו שיעור האדם רע מנעוריו לתאומם ממה שהוא בינינו לבינו יתברך שאין היצר מקטרג עליו על כך."

ובסיבת הדבר איך היצר מקטרג [פי' מסית] עד שבאמת אין אנו מתייחסים למצות בין אדם לחברו באותו דחילו ורחימו כמו למצות בין אדם למקום, ביאר הרש"י דמקור הטעות הוא בזה שאנו חושבים שאנחנו מבינים טעם הדבר ומכירים טובת הענין ואנו עושים מצות אלו מחמת שהשכל מחייבתן ולא משום רצון ה' ומצותו יתברך. ויש בזה שתי טעויות ראשית שאין אנו מרגישים שום דבקות וקדושה במעשים שעושים בין אדם לחברו כמו שמרגישים בשעת נטילת לולב או הנחת תפילין כי אז אנו יודעים כי עושים בדברים נעלמים אשר יסודותן בהררי קודש, משאיכך במעשה חסד וכדומה כיון שהוא מכיר הטובה והסברה בדבר שהוא עושה על כן אינו מרגיש בו יותר מזה כלל. ושנית כיון שמשגיח את המצוה בשכלו הרי הוא גם מגביל את המצוה על ידי שכלו, ומח שאין השכל מחייב בהנהגת בין אדם לחברו כבר חושב האדם שאינו מחוייב. ושנית טעות גמורה הן וכמו שנבאר להלן בס"ד.

הרי ברור מתוך דבריו כי טעות היא מה שחושבים העולם שהמצות בין אדם לחברו הם שכליות כי רק המסתכל בשטחיות אומר כן. אבל המעמיק קצת לחיך עד כמה התורה דורשת הנהגה במדות טובות וראה כי אדרבה אין השכל סובלתו כלל מפני שאין האדם אשר בעפר יסודו מסוגל לעורר כחות אלו בעצמו, וזקא במצות בין אדם לחברו אנו נפגשים בהבדל שני עולמות - עולם הטבע בלי תורה ועולמה של תורה (ועי קובץ שיחות [פניניו שנת תשי"ט] מאמר ראו

Another form of *gezel* is causing damage to other people's property. The Torah deals extensively with the amount and form of payment for every conceivable type of damage — from the person

causing the damage himself to damage caused by his animals, property, fires or obstacles. But no specific *mitzvah* in the Torah specifically defines causing monetary damage to another person's property as a transgression of Torah law. *Rabbeinu Yonah* contends that all forms of damage are included in the general prohibition of *gezel*. When you cause someone damage you are removing from him a portion of the value of his property, and this is considered *gezel*. It doesn't matter if you put it into your own pocket. If you remove it from another person's pocket, it is *gezel*.

10 And how about a worker who does not deliver a full day's work for a full day's pay? The Gemara says that a worker is exempt from saying the Shema, because he is obligated to his employer who is paying him for his time. So what if someone goes to his job and takes his paycheck but spends some time conversing with his fellow workers or making personal telephone calls, not to mention if he takes office supplies home for personal use? Isn't this absolute *gezel*?

12

So why indeed is the prohibition against *gezel* of such prime importance?

If we dig down to the roots of *oshek* and *gezel*, we find the twin evils of *sheker* and *mirmah*, falsehood and deception. Truth would prevent a person from taking property that is not his or talking another person into lending him money when he has no serious intention of repaying it. Falsehood and deception are the ideas, the concepts, while *oshek* and *gezel* are the deeds that result. If a person were not inclined to falsehood, if he were not a dishonest person, he could not do these things.

13 Falsehood, the absence of the attribute of truth, is a sign of extreme corruption. The *Sefer HaChinuch* uses strong language to

describe it (§ 74). "It is well known," he writes, "that everyone considers falsehood abominable and shameful. Nothing is more despicable. Misfortune and curses are found in the homes of those who love it. God is the Lord of Truth, and everything about Him is truth. Therefore, blessing can be found only among those who resemble Him in their behavior, who are truthful just as He is truthful. But those whose behavior is the opposite of His good traits, specifically those who embrace falsehood and are thereby the exact opposite of His traits, will not receive the blessings of joy, peace and pleasure, which are among [God's] traits. Instead the Lord gives an evil person a portion of worries, quarrels and pain.

"Therefore," concludes the *Chinuch*, "the Torah uses an expression to characterize the prohibition against falsehood that it does not use to characterize any other prohibition elsewhere in the Torah. The Torah states, 'Mi'devor sheker tirchak. Keep your distance from false words.' Stay far away from falsehood, because it is so despicable."

even a cent is considered as if he has taken his life." In Heaven, stealing the smallest coin is tantamount to murder!

Gezel can assume very subtle forms. The Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 41a) rules that one who borrows without permission is deemed a robber. Unfortunately, there are many who, wittingly or not, are guilty of this form of *gezel*. Certain general monetary laws are commonly known, but the nuances of these laws are not well known. The following is a case in point: A worker has been hired without any agreement on wages. After the job has been completed, the worker approaches his employer and names a sum equal to or above the accepted rate. A discussion ensues, with the employer succeeding in bringing the figure below the accepted rate. The worker's acceptance of this amount might possibly be due to his fear of arousing his employer's ire. The Chofetz Chaim (*S'fas Tamim* Ch. 5) rules that if the worker is in fact dissatisfied with the payment, then the employer is guilty of withholding wages, a form of *gezel*. To avoid such a situation, the Chofetz Chaim advises that wages always be fixed before the employee begins his work.

14

R. Segal

Which man desires life, who loves days of seeking good? Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit (*Tehillim* 34:13-14).

מירמא, deceit, refers to any word that is spoken with the intent of misleading the listener. Trickery and deceit in money matters are, of course, prime examples of *mirmah*. In *S'fas Tamim* (Ch. 3), the Chofetz Chaim discusses the causes of such negative behavior:

The primary causes of this are a general lack of regard for the laws prohibiting *gezel* and *sheker* (falsehood). The natural result is an irresponsibility toward *mirmah*, which is a combination of *gezel* and *sheker*.

Unfortunately, there are those who conduct their business as if business was outside the parameters of the *Shulchan Aruch*! Trickery, denial of a claim, or even outright robbery from a gentile is, to their minds, permissible. The truth eludes them. *Rambam* (*Hilchos Gezeilah* 1:1) and *Shulchan Aruch* make perfectly clear that to rob a gentile is forbidden. Those who err in these matters do so because such is their desire. As the Chofetz Chaim expressed it, they have no regard for these laws. Such offenses do not occur with those who dread falsehood and are terrified of transgressing the laws of *gezel*.

15

So this is where we must concentrate our efforts all year and especially on Yom Kippur. If we want to take upon ourselves just a single area of improvement, this should be the one, to "desist from the *oshek* in our hands." The Torah demands of us honesty and integrity. Before we can approach God with any hope of acceptance, we have to give back all our ill-gotten gains. We have to pay up what we haven't paid or at least negotiate realistic terms that we intend to honor, even if our creditors have completely forgotten about the money owed to them. And we also have to ask their forgiveness for the wrongs we have done to them. Only then can we have a proper *teshuvah*. Only then can we approach God with clean hands.

Sefer Mitzvos haGadol (the *Smag*) also addresses the importance of honesty but from an entirely different perspective (*Mitzvos Asei* 74): "I have already spoken about this," he writes, "to the exiles of Jerusalem in Spain and other places of exile. Now that the exile is stretching far too long, the Jewish people should turn away from useless worldly pursuits and embrace the Holy Blessed One's seal, which is truth. They should not lie to other Jews or to gentiles or deceive them in any way at all. They should sanctify themselves by refraining even from some things that are permitted to them. For it is written (*Zephaniah 3:13*), 'The remnant of Israel will do no evil, nor will they speak falsehood, nor will deceitful tongues be found in their mouths.'"

Before we come to the startling conclusion of his statement, let us just take a few minutes to take note of the *Smag's* profound advice for those that want to achieve the attribute of truth, for those that seek to develop within themselves absolute honesty and integrity. Listen to the connection he makes. "Turn away from useless worldly pursuits and embrace the Holy Blessed One's seal, which is truth."

19

So let us now return to pick up the thread of the *Smag's* argument. Why is it so critical that the Jewish people become scrupulously honest in this seemingly interminable exile? Why is it important that we avoid even those leniencies that are permitted to us? Because, writes the *Smag*, "the remnant of Israel will do no evil, nor will they speak falsehood, nor will deceitful tongues be found in their mouths." This is a reference to Messianic times when only a remnant of the Jewish people will survive. Who will be left over from the great devastation that will precede Messianic times? Who will be there to witness the triumphant arrival of the Messiah? Who will share in that wonderful experience? Only a small remnant of the Jewish people. And who are these people, the worthy remnant of the Jewish people? They are the people that "do no evil nor speak falsehood nor are deceitful tongues found in their mouths." If we want to be part of that remnant, then we too have to be scrupulously honest. Now that Messianic times are approaching, warns the *Smag*, we must prepare by improving our honesty dramatically.

20 But why is this so? Why will God single out only the honest and truthful people as the survivors of the exile and the witnesses to the Messiah's arrival? What about all the Jews who made great sacrifices to keep Shabbos, to buy *tefillin* and wear them every day? What about the people who moved heaven and earth to find a beautiful *esrog* and *lulav*? What about the people that rose early every morning in the freezing winter and blistering summer and never missed praying with a *minyan*? Why are the people who are honest and truthful so much worthier than all the others who also expressed their devotion and loyalty to God and His Torah?

The answer is that God wants the arrival of the Messiah to be a *kiddush Hashem*, that it should be a sanctification of His holy Name. For this, we need honest and truthful people. The *Smag* explains, "In the future, when the Holy Blessed One will redeem

[the Jewish people], the nations of the world will say, 'He has acted justly, for they are truthful people, and the Torah of truth is in their mouths.' But if the Jewish people deal underhandedly with the nations of the world, they will say, 'Look at what the Holy Blessed One has done! He has chosen for Himself thieves and swindlers!'"

What does enjoying the pleasures of the world have to do with attaining truth? Why should we turn away from worldly pursuits if we want to be truthful? It is to avoid putting pressure on ourselves, to avoid putting our honesty to the test. Being involved in worldly pursuits awakens the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination. It makes a person want more and more things that he really doesn't need. If he can't afford those things he desires, he is tempted to turn to *oshch* and *gezel* to help him acquire them. Soon he finds himself spending so much money on luxuries that he is no longer able to afford the basic necessities of life. He cannot put food on the table or pay for the tuition of his children. And this puts even greater pressure on him to cheat and swindle and seek all sorts of dishonest ways to close the gap in his overstretched budget.

18

If we are accustomed to a life of luxury, there is no end to what we will spend and to the financial difficulties that are likely to arise. And when that happens, it is a short distance to *oshch* and *gezel*. We can only protect ourselves by staying far away from them, by "distancing ourselves from false words." How do we keep our distance? By "turning away from useless worldly pursuits." If we can't afford something, it's not for us. We really don't need all those extra things we have convinced ourselves that we must have. We can manage perfectly well without them. And if we don't want to do without, that is where falsehood begins. That is when there is a grave danger that we may become dishonest. If we want to "embrace the Holy Blessed One's seal, which is truth," we must "turn away from useless worldly pursuits." This is the advice of the *Smag*.

21

When the final redemption arrives, the nations of the world will stand in awe and admiration of God's spectacular revelation on behalf of the Jewish people. So the nations of the world will take a close look at the Jewish people they know, the ones being brought forth from their long exile with such honor and glory. And the nations of the world will wonder, Who are these people? Why should God perform such miracles for them? Why do they enjoy such a special closeness with God? How have they earned it?

Now, where do the nations of the world encounter Jewish people? Do they come into the *yeshivos* and observe them learning the holy Torah with such devotion and enthusiasm? Do they come into the synagogues and see them praying to God three times a day with fervor and intensity? Do they observe them on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with tears flowing freely as they plead with the Creator for His forgiveness? Do they observe them standing on Succos with *esrog* and *lulav* in hand and expressions of sheer joy on their faces? Do they observe them sitting at the candlelit Shabbos table singing the praises of the Creator and speaking words of Torah?

22 No, the nations of the world do not regularly see the Jewish people in any of these settings. They only meet Jewish people in the marketplace, and the way these Jews behave in the marketplace determines the opinion of the nations of the world. If the Jews they meet are dishonest, if they cheat and swindle, if they do not meet their obligations honorably and on time, if they cannot be trusted, if they are underhanded and deceitful, if they excel at trickery, then the nations of the world will consider them inferior. And if God works magnificent wonders to bring them forth from exile with fanfare and honor, they will be dismayed. "Look at what the Holy Blessed One

... they will say. He has chosen for Himself thieves and swindlers! For these people, He had to send the Messiah?"

23 This would be a terrible *chillul Hashem*, a desecration of His holy Name, and God will not allow it. So what will He do? Either He won't bring the Messiah and leave us in exile, Heaven forbid; or He will weed out all the thieves, swindlers and liars so that only an honest "remnant of Israel" is left, people who "will do no evil, nor will they speak falsehood, nor will deceitful tongues be found in their mouths." These are the only people who will emerge triumphantly from exile, because these are the only people whose salvation will bring honor to His holy Name.

But it goes even further than that. If the nations of the world know us only through encounters in the marketplace, then it is not enough to maintain ordinary standards of honesty and integrity. It is not enough to be considered a person of honor and not a thief or a swindler. Because the nations of the world will still be puzzled. They will look at us and say, "All right, these are fine upstanding people. You can't argue with that. But there are many other fine upstanding people in the world. What makes these people so special? Why do they deserve that God should perform such miracles for them?"

24 The nations of the world, of course, do not see us in the *yeshivos* and the synagogues. They do not see us at the Shabbos table. They have no firsthand knowledge about the sublimity and holiness of life according to the Torah. They only know us in the marketplace.

* Therefore, we must be outstanding in the marketplace. We must be so scrupulously honest and truthful with the nations of the world that they will stand in amazement. We must endeavor to make a *kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify His holy Name, with everything we do, even in small ways; if a Jew comes back to a store in the driving rain because he was given too much change and wants to return it, he makes a *kiddush Hashem*. We must use our honesty, integrity and truthfulness to gain the respect of the nations of the world. Then they will understand why God says (*Isaiah 49:3*).

27

Job said to his friends (*Job 16:17*), "Because there is no plunder in my hands, and my prayer is pure (*tefillasi zakah*)." The Midrash comments (*Shemos Rabbah 22:3*), "Rabbi Yehoshua the Kohein said in the name of Rabbi Nechemiah, 'Can there be an impure prayer (*tefillah akurah*)? Rather, it means that if someone whose hands are soiled with *gezel* calls out to the Holy Blessed One, He does not answer him. Why? Because he is praying in a state of sin ... But Job, having no ill-gotten gains, had a pure prayer.

28

... since I have no plunder in my hand, since there is no wrongdoing in my hands, my prayer is pure.""

Listen to the words of the Midrash. God will not heed the prayer of someone "whose hands are soiled with *gezel*." An interesting phrase. "Whose hands are soiled with *gezel*." Job also speaks about the hands. "There is no plunder in my hands." It seems that ill-gotten gains stick to the hands. It is as if the dishonest person has sticky hands, and when other people's money passes through his hands, some of it remains stuck there. When a person with sticky hands prays, God finds it offensive. The stickiness of his hands is like a sediment of impurities polluting his prayer and making it a murky and tainted *tefillah akurah*, an impure prayer.

25

So honesty and the rejection of *oshek* and *gezel* in all their forms are really the keys to our redemption. No matter how much we pray to God and beseech Him to send us the Messiah, we ourselves cannot expect to participate in the final redemption if we are not scrupulously honest. We cannot expect to be numbered among the "remnant of Israel" unless we have made a *kiddush Hashem* in our dealings with the nations of the world. This extends to all sorts of ethical behavior as well, but honesty and integrity in the marketplace are at the very top of the list. And it goes without saying that we behave this way to each other, because that is where it all starts. If we are not genuinely honest and truthful people, if we cheat and swindle each other, it will not help to pretend to the nations of the world that we are people of integrity. We will not be able to fool them. They will see right through our masquerade.

26 Honesty is also critical in another aspect of our lives. We are completely dependent on prayer. We really cannot expect God to favor us and supply all our needs unless we pray to Him. If we want our prayers to reach Heaven, we have to be honest. The only prayers that are heard are those of people who have returned anything in their possession that doesn't belong to them or those who have never done anything that can be considered *gezel* in the first place.

29

This is very worrisome for all of us. We may have fallen into some form of *gezel* quite casually. Perhaps we didn't give it much thought. We may have borrowed something and forgotten to return it. We may have caused someone even a slight damage and not made restitution. But lack of intent does not exonerate us. If we retain money in our possession that is not ours, whether it belongs to someone else or is overdue to be repaid to someone else, we are guilty of *gezel*. And if we stand before God with our sticky hands, He may consider our prayer a *tefillah akurah*, Heaven forbid.

30

R. Sezal

Laxity in monetary matters can have the gravest consequences. Death and the judgments of the Next World do not atone for *gezel* if the sinner has not returned the money or an item of comparable value. His soul will have no rest until it returns as a *gilgul*, reincarnation, and makes proper amends. The Chofetz Chaim (*S'fas Tamim*, Ch. 4) cites an incident from the days of the *Rishonim*, where a man was reincarnated as a horse and worked with all his strength to repay a debt to the man who was now his owner. In an earlier chapter, the Chofetz Chaim cites *Sefer Rokeach* that when a man is reincarnated as a person he is unaware of this fact until after his death, but such is not the case when he is reincarnated as an animal.

31

As is stated in the holy Zohar, man must endure seven judgments before coming to his eternal rest. . . . If, after all the judgments have passed one is found to have been guilty of *gezel* in any of its various forms, the angels who guard the entrance to Gan Eden will not permit him to make his way to the place that has been designated as his. At most, if he has some great source of merit, they will permit him to view his portion from a distance.

He will weep bitterly over his being forced to return to this lowly world, again to be born, again to die, again to endure judgment. . . .

The first question posed by the Heavenly tribunal after a man's death is whether or not he has conducted his monetary affairs in good faith (*Shabbos 31a*). May we merit that when our time comes, we will be counted among those of clean hands and pure hearts.

How does one achieve purity and avoid *gezel, mirmah* and similar sins? The Chofetz Chaim offers the following antidote: "He should reflect regularly on the gravity of the sins and punishments of *gezel* and *sheker*; then he will be saved from them" (*S'fas Tamim*, Ch. 3). Note the term "regularly." Pondering the matter once or twice is not sufficient. Our Sages (*Moed Katan* 27b) tell us that when a person transgresses the same sin twice it becomes to him like something permissible — such is the power of the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination. It follows, then, that the effects of a sin which one has transgressed countless times during his lifetime will not be easily undone. One must ponder the matter again and again until his old attitudes are uprooted and the sin takes on its true look. With regard to monetary matters, one must come to view his friend's money and possessions as he would *hekadesh*, that which has been consecrated for the *Beis HaMikdash*. Just as one would never willfully benefit an iota from that which has been sanctified for Hashem, so must he keep away from that which Hashem has bequeathed to someone else.

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Consulting The Wise, Rabbi Z. Pliskin

RABBI MOSHE FEINSTEIN: "The essence of the prohibition against stealing is that one should not take anything that the Almighty has not given him. Therefore, a person needs to think about all that is in his possession, to determine whether or not it came to him in a permissible manner. Wish to possess only that which the Almighty gives you."

35 *Reflections of R. Rav - Ed. L. Berlin*

We suggested earlier that the awareness of God as *Adon* might have deterred Adam from his sin. What precisely was his sin? In Christian literature, the *etz hada'at* (tree of knowledge) is considered a demonological tree whose mysterious fruit possessed an unnatural potency. Eating it transformed man's nature, causing his fall and corruption. *Hazal*, however, saw nothing unnatural in the tree. They suggest that it was an ordinary plant, the fruit of which was either grapes, figs, wheat or an *etrog* (*Gen. R.* 15).¹² If so, why was the first couple so adversely affected by such commonplace food?

The answer is that the prohibition was intended to teach Adam the concept of *adnut*, that God is not only the world's Creator and Sustainer, but also its Owner. *Vayetzav Hashem Elohim* was a restrictive command intended to teach man that all benefits and pleasures are gifts of God, who offers them selectively and conditionally. They are privileges that are granted, not prizes freely to be taken. Adam viewed the world as ownerless property, *hefker*. He accepted that God was the Creator and Sustainer; this was indisputable to him. But he was unwilling to concede that God had retained proprietary rights over His creation; he refused to recognize any "no trespassing" restrictions. Rather, Adam claimed for himself *carte blanche* rights to partake as he pleased.

36 This, therefore, was his sin, the crime of *gezelah*, robbery; he took that which was not his. *Adnut* insists that life and all its benefits stem from God and are granted only to the extent that we accept His will. We must be ready to surrender, to restrict our appetites, to control our fantasies. If we take possession contrary to His will, we are usurpers and thieves. The change in Adam's situation was due to his punishment, and not to the fruit of the tree.

איש או אשה כי יקשו מכל המצות האלה
 למקול מקול וגו' (ה ו). מה שנאמר
 במרשה אחת דין גזול ונשבע ודין גזול הגר ודין
 טוה'ג דתרומה לבעלים הוא להורות שאיטוב
 גזול אינו רק מחמת שמחטר לחבירו בדבר
 שמצער אותו בזה, שמצד זה מורה היתר לגזול
 מעשיר שאינו מצער כ"כ ויותר מורה היתר
 לגזול גר שאין לו יורשין והוא עשיר שלא
 מפסיד לשום איש אף לא ליורשין, וכ"ש שמורים
 היתר כהן ולד לגזול המתנות ששייך להם כי
 שלהם גוסלין ואין מתסרין לו כלום שהרי צריך
 ליתנם לאיזה כהן ולוי, וחמר לו רק איזה נחת
 רוח, ולכן נקטה אותם התורה במרשה אחת
 להורות שהגזול הוא מה שלוקח דבר שלא נתן
 לו השי"ת. ולכן יתבונן האדם על כל דבר שיש
 לו אם הגיע לידו בהיתר או אם הוא רק מן
 הרבנים שהגיע לו השי"ת שיוכל לגזול, שהרי
 השי"ת במתנה גמורה ברצון טוב, שהוא רק
 הדברים שהרויח בהיתר ובהכרח טובה להקב"ה,
 כמאמרם (ברכות לה א) כאן קודם בריכה לה
 הארץ וכאן לאחר בריכה נתן לבני אדם.

The answer is that all sinning involves thievery. When we indulge in what is forbidden, we are, in effect, taking that which is not ours. This concept may be even further extended. When we use our tongue to slander, we rightfully lose our right to use this organ henceforth. When our hands engage in wrongful deeds, our eyes in lasciviousness, our intelligence in deception, our free will in choosing evil, we, as a result, lose our further rights, *zekhuyot*, over these organs and faculties. "The soul is Yours and the body is Your work," we acknowledge in our penitential prayers.¹⁰ In our daily morning blessings, we thank God for such gifts as eyesight, the ability to stand upright, to walk, to discern, to be free, to observe *mitzvot*. All that we presumptuously call "ours" is really "His." We may use these gifts conditionally, for the period of our lifetime, only with His concurrence and in accordance with His stipulations. When we

sin, these *zekhuyot*, privileges, are forfeited and nullified. Their continued utilization is larceny. The great gift of *teshuvah* (repentance) is that it allows us to reacquire our rights over our lives, our faculties and, once again, to partake rightfully of life's gifts.

38 All sinning emanates from a denial of God's *adnut*. His right to restrict and to deny. Modern man, in particular, insists that he is free, that, indeed, all restrictions are repressions and do harm. *Adnut*, however, insists that man be humbled before God, that he recognize the Master who bestows all gifts. This is the basic rationale behind all the *berakhot* we recite before we partake of life's bounties.²⁰ Life is a gift and a privilege to be used only for holy ends. When we surrender our rights of un-inhibited indulgence, we, in effect, acknowledge a Higher Power who is Master over all.