

**Coveting:**  
**“The Grass is Always Greener on the Other Side”**  
לֹא תִחְמַד וְלֹא תִתְאַוֶּה

The last of the 10 Commandments is the mitzvah of “Do not covet”. The commentators explain that this mitzvah’s elite placement in the Torah signifies that “Do not covet” weighs equally against all of the other 10 commandments combined!

It certainly seems, then, that within this prohibition lies a foundational principle in Torah, and that is, the conviction that everything which happens in the world is directed, and custom-made. Therefore, an individual, for whom this knowledge is entrenched in his heart, will simply not desire the objects of those around him.

In truth, the mitzvah of “Do not covet” is *extremely common*, perhaps even a daily occurrence, and the best way one can guard himself from the trap of lusting for another’s objects is to learn the *halachos* of “Do not covet” in-depth.

In this study session we’ll explore the following topics:

- What is the difference between “לֹא תִחְמַד”, and “לֹא תִתְאַוֶּה”?
- How can the Torah give a commandment regarding ones *emotions/desires*?
- Are day-to-day purchases subject to “Do not covet”?

## 1 – THE BASIC SOURCES: THE WRITTEN & ORAL TORAH DISCREPANCIES

### Source 1. Shemos 20:14

<p><i>“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 belongs to your neighbor.”</i></p>	<p>לֹא תַחְמֹד בַּיִת רֵעֶךָ לֹא-תַחְמֹד אִשְׁתִּי רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתּוֹ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וְחֲמֹרְךָ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ:</p>
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Everyone knows the 10 Commandments, right? Well, it’s interesting to note that the “Top 10” are actually repeated in the Torah: once in Parshas Yisro, and the second in Parshas Va’Eschanan. In fact, there are actually quite a few *differences* between how some of these commandments are worded in their respective Torah-portions. “לא תחמוד” is one of those. Note how this commandment, the last of the “Top-10”, is phrased differently in Parsha Va’Eschanan:

### Source 2. Devarim 5:18

<p><i>“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. You shall not crave your neighbor’s house, or his field, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”</i></p>	<p>וְלֹא תַחְמֹד אִשְׁתִּי רֵעֶךָ וְלֹא תַחְמֹד בַּיִת רֵעֶךָ שְׂדֵהוּ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתּוֹ שׁוֹרְךָ וְחֲמֹרְךָ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ:</p>
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We clearly see 2 distinct concepts here<sup>1</sup>: “לא תחמוד” (Don’t covet), and “לא תאווה” (Don’t desire). The Rambam eloquently explains:

### Source 3. Rambam Sefer HaMitzvoth #265 & #266 – The basic parameters of not coveting and not craving

<p><b>265.</b> We are warned not to arouse in our minds thoughts to make plans in order acquire that which is the possession of one of our brethren. This is the prohibition of “<i>You shall not covet your neighbor’s house</i>”.</p> <p>The Mechilta explains: “DO NOT COVET” – I COULD THINK THIS MEANS EVEN COVETING WITH WORDS, BUT ANOTHER VERSE SAYS “DON’T COVET SILVER AND GOLD”, AND, JUST AS OVER THERE THE PROHIBITION IS ONLY ONCE AN ACTION HAS BEEN PERFORMED, SO TOO HERE. What emerges from this is clear: the prohibition warns us from arousing ourselves to the point where we actually go out and take the object of our desire, and this applies even if he purchases it and gives money.</p>	<p><b>מצוה רסה</b> הזהירנו מהשים מחשבתנו לעשות תחבולה כדי לקנות מה שברשות זולתנו מאחינו. והוא אמרו לא תחמוד בית רעך.</p> <p>ולשון מכילתא לא תחמוד יכול אפילו חומד בדבור תלמוד לומר לומר לא תחמוד כסף וזהב מה להלן עד שיעשה מעשה אף כאן עד שיעשה מעשה. הנה יתבאר לך כי זה הלאו מזהיר מהערים עד שנקח לעצמנו הדבר שאנחנו חומדים אותו ממון אחינו ואפילו לקנותו ולתת בו דמים, הנה זה כלו מי שיעשהו עובר על לא תחמוד.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> There are of course many other variances, for example: In Va’Eschanan it says “his field”, whereas previously this was not mentioned. Also, in Yisro “house” comes before “wife”, whereas in Va’Eschanan the order is reversed. These discrepancies, amongst others, are discussed extensively by the classic commentators, but are simply beyond the scope of this particular learning session.

**266.** We are warned not to arouse in our minds to covet that which belongs to one of our brethren, and to desire it, for this will lead one to make plans to acquire it, as it says in the verse “You shall not crave your neighbor’s house”. These two prohibitions are not the same: the first warns us not to acquire another’s object (out of lust), whereas the second warns us not even to crave it in our hearts to begin with.

The Mechilta explains: IT SAYS OVER HERE “DO NOT COVET”, AND LATER IS SAYS “DO NOT DESIRE”, THE REDUNDANCY COMES TO TEACH US THAT THERE IS A SEPARATE PROHIBITION ON THE COVETING BY ITSELF, AND ON THE VERY DESIRE BY ITSELF.

(The Mechilta continues): FROM WHERE DO WE KNOW THAT IF ONE DESIRES, HE’LL EVENTUALLY COME TO COVET? FOR AS IT SAYS “DO NOT DESIRE...DO NOT COVET”. FROM WHERE DO WE KNOW THAT IF ONE COVETS, HE’LL COME TO STEAL? FOR AS IT SAYS “HE COVETS FIELDS AND STEALS”.

The explanation of all of this is as follows: If one sees an alluring object that belongs to someone else, and desires to acquire it, he’s transgressed “Do not desire”. If his desire swells to the point where he makes actual efforts to acquire it, and he relentlessly pressures the owner to sell it to him, or trade it for something more valuable, by doing so he’s additionally transgressed the prohibition of “Do not covet”, because he acquired something that belonged to his fellow which he did not really want to sell, and only due to the pressure did he eventually do so.

And if the individual refuses to sell or trade the object of his desire, and, out of his lust he forcibly takes it against the others will, he’s additionally transgressed “Do not steal”.

We’ve therefore clarified the distinction between “Do not desire” and “Do not covet”.

**מצוה רסו** הזהירנו מהשים מחשבתנו לחמוד מה שיש לאחינו ולהתאוות בו שזה יהיה מבוא לעשות תחבולה לקנותו, וזהו לשון האזהרה בזה הענין אמרו לא תתאוה בית רעך, ואין שני לאוין אלו בענין אחד אבל הלאו הראשון והוא לא תחמוד מזהיר לקנות מה שיש לזולתנו, ולא שני מזהיר אפילו להתאוות בלבנו לבד.

ולשון מכילתא נאמר כאן לא תחמוד ולהלן הוא אומר ולא תתאוה לחייב על התאוה בפני עצמה ועל החמוד בפני עצמו, ושם אמרו מנין שאם התאוה שסופו לחמוד שנאמר ולא תתאוה ולא תחמוד מנין שאם חמד שסופו לאנוס ולגזול תלמוד לומר וחמדו שדות וגזלו.

ובאור זה שאם ראה דבר יפה אצל אחד אם גברה מחשבתו עליו והתאוה בו עבר על לא תתאוה,

ואם התעסק באהבת הדבר ההוא עד שישתדל להגיעו אצלו ולא יסור מחלות פניו ולהכביד עליו שימכרנו לו או יחליף אותו אליו במה שהוא יותר טוב ממנו הנה כבר עבר על לא תחמוד גם כן אחר שקנה הדבר שהיה לחבירו ולא היה רצונו למכרו אבל הכביד עליו והערים עד שלקחו ויהיה שלו כבר עבר שני לאוין לא תתאוה ולא תחמוד,

ואם נמנע האיש ההוא מלמכור או להחליפו באהבתו בדבר ההוא הנה הוא יקחהו באנוס והכרח בחוזק אהבתו בדבר ההוא בנפשו עובר על לא תגזול, הנה זה ההפרש בין לא תתאוה ולא תחמוד.

In summary, there are 2 distinct, but obviously related prohibitions, one in *emotion*, and the other in *action*:

- “לא תחמוד” means not to covet another’s possessions to the extent that leads one to undertake actual efforts to acquire the object for himself.
- “לא תתאוה” means not to even desire the object in the first place.

## 2 – THINKING-HATS: AN INTRIGUING QUESTION

With this understanding of the two prohibitions in mind, it's useful to ponder the following question: what about regular, day-to-day purchases? For example:

*Jason is leafing through the Canadian Tire springtime catalogue that's been dropped in to his mailbox (despite his "No junk mail, please!" sign). Something catches his eye: the "New & deluxe, mutli-blade, high-efficiency, 2000hp, vintage collector-series supreme 2-in-1 lawnmower & grass-fertilizer!" His eyes light up. He **lusts** to have it. He **must** have it. He grabs his wallet, gets in to the car, drives to the store, hunts down an employee, grabs the lawnmower, throws in all the extra bells and whistles, pays, puts it in to his car, races home with the music blasting, mows the lawn, drops down on the couch exhausted, and returns to the Canadian Tire catalogue.*

**QUESTION:** Has Jason violated "לא תחמוד" and/or "לא תתאוה"? If not, then how would we articulate the difference between this common scenario, and Chazal's description of לא תחמוד and לא תתאוה?

*What do you think??*

Just as in any other topic in Torah, in order to clarify these mitzvohs we need to dive deeper in to the sources. Our plunge: a fundamental dispute between the Rambam and the Raavad on the exact parameters of לא תחמוד and לא תתאוה.

## 3 – RAMBAM VS RAAVAD

### Source 4. Rambam Hilchos Gezeila 1:9-12

**9.** Anyone who desires the servant, maid-servant, house, objects of his fellow, or in general anything which can be acquired, and pressures him relentlessly, until the point at which he acquires the object, even though he gave him a great deal of money, he's violated a negative prohibition, as it says in the verse: "Do not covet". However, he does not receive lashes for this violation, since it involves no action. Moreover, this prohibition is only violated once he actually takes the object which he'd desired, as is alluded to in the verse: "Do not covet silver and gold and take them for yourself", (which implies) coveting which involves and action.

**10.** One who desires his fellows house, wife, objects, and in general anything which could be acquired, from the moment he thinks in his heart "how shall I get

**ט.** כל החומד עבדו או אמתו או ביתו וכליו ושל חברו או דבר שאפשר לו שיקנהו ממנו והכביר עליו ברעים והפציר בו עד שלקחו ממנו אף על פי שנתן לו דמים רבים הרי זה עובר בלא מעשה שנגמר "לא תחמד". ואין לוקין על לאו זה מפני שאין בו מעשה. ואינו עובר בלאו זה עד שיקח החפץ שחמד. כענין שנגמר "לא תחמד כסף וזהב עליהם ולקחתם לדך". חמוד שיש בו מעשה :

**י.** כל המתאנה ביתו או אשתו וכליו ושל חברו. וכן כל כיוצא בהן משאר דברים שאפשר לו לקנותו ממנו. כיון שחשב בלבו היאך יקנה דבר

<p>that?”, and his heart is seduced, he’s violated a negative prohibition, as it says in the verse “<i>do not desire</i>”, and ‘desire’ means in ones heart.</p> <p><b>11.</b> Desire brings to coveting, and coveting brings to theft: for, if the owner does not want to sell, even after having been pressured greatly, he’ll simply steal it from him, as it says in the verse “<i>and they coveted houses and they stole them.</i>” And if the owner stands up to protect his possessions, this may very well lead to actual murder. Go out and learn from the incident of Achav and Navos.</p> <p><b>12.</b> From all this we learn that one who desires is transgressing <i>one</i> prohibition, and one who acquires the object of his desire by means of applying pressure or relentless requests has transgressed <i>two</i> prohibitions. And, if he steals the object, he’s transgressed <i>three</i> prohibitions.</p>	<p>זֶה וְנִפְתָּה בְּלִבּוֹ בְּדַבָּר עֲבַר בְּלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "לֹא תַתְאָנֶה" וְאִין תַּאֲנֶה אֶלָּא בְּלִבּ בְּלִבָּד :</p> <p><b>יא.</b> הַתְאָנָה מְבִיאָה לַיָּדִי תַחֲמוּד וְהַתְחַמוּד מְבִיא לַיָּדִי גְזֵל. שְׂאָם לֹא רְצוּ הַבְּעָלִים לְמַכֵּר אֶף עַל פִּי שְׂהֶרְבָּה לָהֶם בְּדָמִים וְהַפְצִיר בְּרַעִים יְבוֹא לַיָּדִי גְזֵל שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מִיכָה ב ב) "וְחָמְדוּ בְּתַיִם וְגִזְלוּ". וְאִם עָמְדוּ הַבְּעָלִים בְּפָנָיו לְהַצִּיל מִמוֹנָם אוֹ מִנְעוּהוּ מִלְגֹּזֵל יְבוֹא לַיָּדִי שְׂפִיכוֹת דָּמִים. צֹא וְלִמַּד מִמַּעֲשֵׂה אַחָאָב וְנִבּוֹת:</p> <p><b>יב.</b> הָא לְמַדְתָּ שֶׁהַתְאָנָה עוֹבֵר בְּלֹא אֶחָד וְהַקּוֹנֶה דָּבָר שֶׁהַתְאָנָה בְּהַפְצִיר שֶׁהַפְצִיר בְּבְעָלִים אוֹ בְּבִקְשָׁה מִהֵן עוֹבֵר בְּשֵׁנֵי לְאוּיָן. לְכֹד נֶאֱמַר "לֹא תַחֲמַד" וְ"לֹא תַתְאָנֶה". וְאִם גְּזֵל עֲבַר בְּשִׁלְשָׁה לְאוּיָן:</p>
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These rulings of the Rambam are in line with those previously brought in source 3. The Raavad, on the other hand, takes issue with a number of the Rambam’s points:

#### Source 5. Raavad: Attacks on the Rambam

<p>“<i>A great deal of money...</i>” – Says Avraham: Only if the seller says ‘I want’ (i.e. the transaction is done willingly)</p> <p>“<i>However, he does not receive lashes...</i>” – I’ve never seen a greater wonder than this!! How is it possible to have an ‘action’ more than the taking of the object?!? Rather, he (the Rambam) should have said that there are no lashes since the one taking the object is obligated to compensate him, since this is tantamount to being a theft who’s responsible to return the stolen goods, who’s not lashed because of this, so too here, since he’s required to return the object to its rightful owner.</p>	<p>דָּמִים רַבִּים וְכוּ' א"א וְלֹא אָמַר רוּצָה אֲנִי וְאִין לוקִין וְכוּ' א"א לֹא רֵאִיתִי תִימָה גְדוֹל מִזֶּה וְהִיכֵן מַעֲשֵׂה גְדוֹל מִנְטִילַת הַחֶפֶץ אֲבֵל הַל"ל מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא חַיִּיב בְּתַשְׁלוּמִים שֶׁהִיא הוּא כַּגְזֵל שֶׁחַיִּיב לְהַשִּׁיב אֶת הַגְזֵל וְלִפִּיכֵךְ אֵינּוּ לוקֵה וְגַם זֶה חַיִּיב לְהַשִּׁיב הַחֶפֶץ לְבַעֲלָיו</p>
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The Raavad finds the Rambam perplexing on two accounts:

- 1) Firstly, how can the Rambam hold that לא תחמוד has been violated if money has actually been given and the transaction has been mutually completed; isn’t this just a normal business transaction?!?
- 2) Secondly, and more alarmingly, how can the Rambam say that לא תחמוד involves no action; what about all the conniving, planning, pressuring, wheeling-and-dealing, and taking the object?? That’s called a “לאו שאין בו מעשה”?!?

*What’s up with the Rambam???*

#### 4 – UNDERSTANDING THE DISPUTE

##### Source 6. “The Stiepler”, R’ Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky ztz”l, , sefer Birkas Peretz, parshas Yisro

(NOTE: THIS IS A DEEP PIECE. READ IT SLOW AND CAREFULLY)

It appears that we could answer (the Raavad’s attacks on the Rambam) as follows: Even regarding the prohibition of “Don’t covet”, the root of the prohibition is the desire in one’s heart, just as it says in the verse “Do not covet”, which infers desire and will. Only, that the degree of desire that’s included in the prohibition is only to the extent which brings to actually taking the object. Accordingly, the efforts themselves are not the actual prohibition, rather, the desire – which influences the efforts – is the prohibition, and the actual efforts are merely a condition of the prohibition of desire [that is to say that, even after having the desire, he’s not transgressed until the desire has led to the actual outcome of the efforts to acquire the object]. According to this explanation, it’s understandable why this is considered a “prohibition that does not involve an action”, since the actions (i.e. the efforts) are not intrinsically the prohibition, rather a condition.

The Raavad, who comments that the reason that there’s no lashes is because he’s required to return the object, and the Rambam who did not write this reason, are each going according to their own unique line of reasoning:

According to the Raavad, who holds that the essential prohibition is taking another’s object, “do not covet” is certainly subject to the rule of ‘anything that can be returned does not receive lashes’, since he’s obligated in “*return the stolen object!*”

But the Rambam holds that the desire in one’s heart is essentially what is prohibited, only, that a condition of this is that the violation does not occur until the desire leads to actual efforts to attain the object. Even still, it is the desire itself which is essentially prohibited, and there’s no way of ‘repaying’ a desire. And even in the case where the seller does not agree, and by taking the object he’s transgressed “*do not steal*”, and he’s indeed obligated to give back the object, that is only because of the violation of theft, but, regarding “*do not covet*”, the Rambam holds that the essential violation is within ones heart, and this certainly not considered an action.

לכאורה היה נראה לומר דגם בהלאו דלא תחמוד עיקר העבירה היא החימוד שבלב כדכתיב לא תחמוד שהוא ענין תשוקה ורצון רק ששיעור החמדה שיש בו אזהרה הוא חמדה כזו שהביאה לידי תוצאת של השגת הדבר ונמצא שאין ההשתדלות עצמה מעשה של עצם האיסור אלא החמדה המשפיעה על ההשתדלות היא האיסור ומעשה ההשתדלות אינו אלא תנאי בגדר העבירה של חמדה [ שאינו עובר עד שפעלה החמדה לתוצאות כנ"ל] וכל כה"ג שפיר נחשב לאו שאין בו מעשה כיון שאין מעשה בעצם האיסור אלא בהתנאי...<sup>2</sup>

והראב"ד ז"ל שכתב טעם דאין לוקין לפי שחייב בתשלום והרמב"ם ז"ל שלא כתב טעם זה אזלי לשיטתם דלהראב"ד ז"ל שעיקר הלאו הוא נטילת ממונא של חבריו זה ודאי ניתן לתשלומים מדין והשיב את הגזלה

אבל הרמב"ם ז"ל לשיטתו שהחמדה שבלב אסורה אלא שהוא תנאי דאינו חייב על החמדה אא"כ פעלה תוצאות להשגת הדבר אבל מ"מ החמדה היא העבירה והחמדה הלא ניתנה לתשלומים ואע"פ שאם לא נתרצה המוכר וזה שנטלה לא קנאה כלל התם מלבד שעובר בלא תחמוד חייב בתשלומים בהשבה מ"מ זהו עבור העבירה גזולת ממון ולא עבור העבירה דחמדה שבלב ואיסור זה דחמדה שבלב לא ניתן לתשלומים, אך להרמב"ם ז"ל לשיטתו דהחימוד שבלב הוא האיסור אינו לוקה מטעם דהוי לאו שאין בו מעשה.

<sup>2</sup> המשך דבריו: ודומה למה שכ' תוס' שבועות דף ד. דהנשבע על הככר שיאכלנו ואח"כ זרקו לים לאו שא"ב מעשה והיינו כיון שלא הזריקה הוא העבירה רק מה שלא אכלה וע' מש"כ בזה בארוכה בעה"י בקה"י על שבועות סי' ג' עכ"ל של ברכת פרץ עכ"ל

The Steipler explains brilliantly that there is a fundamental dispute between the Rambam and the Raavad as to the root of the prohibition of לא תחמוד. Let's paraphrase:

**יש לחקור:**

*Is the prohibition essentially because it's a minor-form of theft (בין אדם לחבירו), or because it's a self-destructive perspective on life to lust for oneself that which belongs to someone else (בין אדם לעצמו)*

The Raavad holds that לא תחמוד is essentially a prohibition, in **action**, of theft. Therefore, if the seller agrees to the transaction, there's no violation.

The Rambam holds that לא תחמוד is essentially a prohibition of one's **intention**, to desire another's possessions to the extent to which *leads* to action. Therefore, even if the seller agrees, the purchaser has nevertheless transgressed.

**ANSWER:** With these 2 perspectives לא תחמוד well defined, we can now articulate why a regular, day-to-day purchase is certainly not a transgression of לא תחמוד:

Like the Raavad, who holds that לא תחמוד is fundamentally rooted in theft & the non-agreement of the seller, a purchase from a seller who *wants to sell* is just fine!

Even like the Rambam, in so far as the essential root of לא תחמוד is the corrupt inclination of wanting another's object – i.e. for me to have it, and not him! – a regular purchase is not לא תחמוד, since most goods are intended for sale to begin with.

Let's elaborate this last point:

## 5 – COVETING WISDOM

### Source 7. Aruch HaShulchan, Choshen Mishpat 359:10

That which the Rambam writes “anything which could be acquired”, it appears to me that he’s alluding to that which was expounded in the Mechilta: “*DO NOT COVET*” – A GENERALIZATION; “*HOUSE, FIELD, SERVANT, MAIDSERVANT, OX, DONKEY*” – SPECIFICS; “*AND ANYTHING WHICH BELONGS TO YOUR FELLOW*” – ONCE AGAIN A GENERALIZATION. NOW, WHENEVER THERE IS A GENERALIZATION, THEN SPECIFICS, THEN ONCE AGAIN A GENERALIZATION, THE SPECIFICS COME TO TEACH US ABOUT THE GENERALIZATION: JUST AS THE SPECIFICS ARE ALL THINGS WHICH CAN BE BOUGHT AND SOLD, SO TOO THE GENERAL RULE IS ONLY REFERRING TO THINGS THAT CAN BE BOUGHT AND SOLD.

The explanation of this is the following: If, for example, Reuven has learnt some sort of wisdom or knowledge of a trade, and Shimon desires in his heart to also have this wisdom or knowledge of a trade, and he pressures Reuven to impart this wisdom to him as well, one could have thought that this is included in the prohibition of “*Do not covet*”. However, this is exactly what the Torah was excluding: only something which can be bought or sold, that is to say that when it is in Reuven’s possession it is not in Shimon’s, to the exclusion of wisdom or trade-knowledge which are not exclusively bought or sold.

וזה שכתב כל דבר שאפשר שיקנהו ממנו  
נ"ל שכוון למה שדרשו במכילתא לא  
תחמוד כלל בית שדה ועבד ואמה ושור  
וחמור פרט וכל אשר לרעך חזר וכלל והוי  
כלל ופרט וכלל מה הפרט דבר שהוא קונה  
ומקנה אף הכלל דבר שהוא קונה ומקנה  
עכ"ל

וביאור הדבר נראה שאם ראובן למד איזה  
חכמה ואיזה מלאכה ושמעון חמד בלבו  
חכמה זו או מלאכה זו והשתדל והרבה  
רעים על ראובן עד שלמדו והייתי אומר  
שגם זה הוא בכלל דלא תחמוד לזה  
מיעטה התורה דוקא דבר שהוא בקנין  
כשהיא אצל ראובן איננו אצל שמעון  
לאפוקי חכמה ומלאכה אינם בקנינים

The Aruch HaShulchan explains that to desire another’s wisdom or knowledge is **not** a violation of לא תחמוד. Why? Because לא תחמוד means to lust for another’s object – for me to have it, and not him! In so far as wisdom is something which can be shared by all, and is not diminished from one person to the next, there’s no problem.

If we take our understanding of לא תחמוד one step further, we can see why this commandment is actually nothing less than a fundamental perspective on life:

## 6 – THE ROOT OF COVET

### Source 8. Ibn Ezra on Shemos 20:14

**You shall not covet** – Many people have wondered about this commandment, how is that a man not covet in his heart that which is beautiful and all that which appears pleasant in his eyes? I will give you a parable [to explain this]. You should know that a villager who thinks correctly and sees that the king's daughter is beautiful will not covet her in his heart that he should sleep with her; as he knows that this is impossible. And this villager will not think like one of the lunatics that desires that he should have wings to fly in the sky, when it is not possible. This is similar to that which a man does not desire to sleep with his mother, even though she is beautiful, as they have accustomed him from his youth to know that it is forbidden to him. So too must every wise person know that a beautiful woman or money is not attained by a person because of his wisdom or knowledge; rather it is from that which God apportioned to him. And Koheles said, "*(to that) [and to the one that did not toil in it], will he give it as his portion*" (Koheles 2:21). And the sages said (Moed Katan 28a), "Children, life and sustenance - [this] matter does not depend on merit, but rather on the constellation." And because of this, the wise one will not desire and not covet. And once he knows that God forbade him the wife of his friend, it is more removed in his eyes than the daughter of the king is in the eyes of the villager. Therefore, he will 'rejoice in his portion' and he won't place in his heart to covet and desire something that is not his. Since he knows that God did not want to give it to him [and that] he is not able to take it with his power and thoughts and scheming. Hence, he will trust in his Creator, that He will provide for him and that He will do what is good in His eyes.

**לא תחמוד**. אנשים רבים יתמהו על זאת המצוה. איך יהיה אדם שלא יחמוד דבר יפה בלבו כל מה שהוא נחמד למראה עיניו. ועתה אתן לך משל. דע כי איש כפרי שיש לו דעת נכונה והוא ראה בת מלך שהיא יפה לא יחמוד אותה בלבו שישכב עמה. כי ידע כי זה לא יתכן. ואל תחשוב זה הכפרי שהוא כאחד מן המשוגעים שיתאוה שיהיו לו כנפים לעוף השמים. ולא יתכן להיות כאשר אין אדם מתאוה לשכב עם אמו אע"פ שהיא יפה. כי הרגילוהו מנעוריו לדעת שהיא אסורה לו. ככה כל משכיל צריך שידע כי אשה יפה או ממון לא ימצאנו אדם בעבור חכמתו ודעתו. רק כאשר חלק לו השם. ואמר קהלת (לאשר) [ולאדם שלא עמל בו] יתננו חלקו. ואמרו חכמים בני חיי ומזוני לאו בזכותא תליא מלתא אלא במזלא. ובעבור זה המשכיל לא יתאוה ולא יחמוד. ואמר שידע שאשת רעהו אסרה השם לו יותר היא נשגבה בעיניו מבת מלך בלב הכפרי על כן הוא ישמח בחלקו ולא ישים אל לבו לחמוד ולהתאוות דבר שאינו שלו. כי ידע שהשם לא רצה לתת לו. לא יוכל לקחתו בכחו ובמחשבותיו ובתחבולותיו. על כן יבטח בבוראו שיכלכלנו ויעשה הטוב בעיניו.

In this classic piece, the Ibn Ezra gets right down to the core of לא תחמוד. We are often tempted to look at the objects – and life in general – of those around us, and think to ourselves “I wish *I* had that”. To combat this rampant temptation, the Ibn Ezra zero’s-in on what the prohibition of לא תחמוד is teaching us: even though it may seem that ‘the grass is greener on the other side’, it’s not! Rather, as a great man once said: “If life could be any better, it would be!”

**Every person has to know, and trust, that the lot which ה' has given him, is a custom fit.** To the extent to which one internalizes this reality, he’ll not covet. Rather, he’ll live with joy and peace of mind.

### Examples:

- 1) George is out for dinner with his wife, Georgina, at the new fancy dairy restaurant “Cheese N’ Cheers”. As they’re enjoying their entrée, George notices the dish being served to the neighbouring table...and it looks delicious! He *craves* to have it as well...*is George stepping in to “לא תחמוד” territory??*
  
- 2) George enjoyed his previous eating experience at “Cheese N’ Cheers” so much, that, for the upcoming company dinner, he’s convinced his boss that they should have their function there. At the meal, George is once again tantalized by one of the neighbouring dishes. Except, this time it happens to belong to one of his co-workers, sitting next to him at the table. “*That looks sooooo good! Can I have some of those spicy-fries? Please!*”, George pleads. His co-worker, not wanting to appear rude, reluctantly complies. *Is this a violation of לא תחמוד?*
  
- 3) Jeremy participates in a weekly Torah-learning program, and has just completed another amazing learning session regarding the Torah’s perspective of laws governing interpersonal-relationships. Jeremy’s friend, Mark, has heard all about this program, and really wants to learn the materials himself. He persistently bugs Jeremy to make some time to learn together, so that he can give over what he’s learned. *Is this לא תחמוד?*
  
- 4) Aaron is a counsellor at “Camp George”, near Parry Sound, Ontario. One of his 12-year-old campers, Adam, has a fantastic stash of cookies and candies which he’s brought along to last him throughout the summer. One evening, Aaron gets the ‘munchies’ and would really like some of Adam’s candies. *What “לא תחמוד” issues should Aaron potentially be vigilant of?*
  
- 5) Dovi and Shmuli are classmates. Dovi does not want to share his popsicle with Shmuli. Shmuli persists: “*Dovi, really, c’mon, give me a taste, just a lick!*” As the popsicle quickly fades away, Shmuli relentlessly persists. Dovi can’t take it anymore. He gives Shmuli a lick. *Is this לא תחמוד?*