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**Identical Goats on Different Paths Speaks of Us**

**By Rabbi David Bibi**



**Rabbi David Bibi**

You have undoubtedly [figured out] that we have read this first Aliya of Acharei Mot, a total of seven times beginning with the week before Pesach and continuing [to last] week’s [Shabbos reading]. We will read it again on Shabbat and then again six months down the road on Yom Kippur.

The aliyah describes what is perhaps the strangest and most dramatic element of the Avodah – the priestly service on Yom Kippur. It is the ritual of the two goats brought to the High Priest who randomly places lots on each where one will be offered as a sacrifice and the other sent away into the desert “to Azazel.”

The rabbis explain that these two goats were for all intents and purposes indistinguishable from one another. The Talmud teaches that they were chosen to be as similar as possible in size and appearance. Then lots are drawn and although they start out identical, their fates are as drastically different as can be.

The one on which the lot “To the L-rd” fell was offered as a sacrifice. One is literally LeHashem – To Hashem and his blood is sprinkled within the Holy of Holies. The other may think that he has been spared, and although his twin went for a Holy cause, at least he gets to live.

But then the second stands as the Kohen Gadol confessed the sins of the nation. He is then taken away into the desert hills outside Jerusalem. Perhaps again he thinks, they are sending me to freedom to roam these hills in peace. Standing on the cliff, he looks out at his new domain and appreciates his luck. If this goat had any idea of why he was being taken to this rocky cliff, he would not be thinking anything close to these thoughts.

Poor goat, if he only knew that he would end up being tossed off the mountainside into the sharp stones below, he would never think himself lucky.

**The Explanation of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch**

First let us consider the lesson offered by the great, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch who explains that the two goats represent the choices each one of us makes every day of our lives. Two may start out exactly the same, but their fates based on their choices may be polar opposites. We decide to follow the right path which may appear more difficult or the easy path which may appear to be paved and easily crossed.

Some of us choose the moral path and we accept that it comes with sacrifices. We assist others and give charity even though it appears that by giving up our time and money, we lose.

Religiously, we may choose to observe the laws of Kashrut which means we’ll be spending more on food and have considerably less choices. Compare this first individual to the one who chooses a life free from religious or moral rules. He gets to relish in what he sees as a life of earthly indulgences without restriction. He thinks this will bring him joy and happiness, yet we see that forgetting even his end, that most that chose this path don’t even enjoy the initial contentment which eventually loses its appeal.

**The Failure of the Hedonistic Path**

Rav Hirsch explains the word Azazel as a contraction of az azel - strength departs. The hedonistic path will in the end bring us neither bliss nor contentment, but it will eventually zap our strength. He cautions us to endeavor to direct our energies and resources to holier quests which are a guaranteed investment for the future.

This is a beautiful lesson.

Next Wednesday, we commemorate Yom HaZikaron ("Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel and Victims of Terrorism" is Israel's official Remembrance Day, enacted into law in 1963). Recalling the past, I remembered standing at the Teva in the Safra Synagogue in Manhattan and saying a Hashkava or Memorial Prayer on Yom HaZikaron for one man’s brother who died in the Six Day War of 67 and another man’s friend who died in the Yom Kippur war of 73, the thought of the two who begin the same yet follow different paths struck me.

Although Rav Hirsch divides them because of choices made, the thought that the goats had no choice and were selected by lottery or Heaven yielded this second perspective.

**Forty Years Ago in a Tel Aviv Synagogue**

I still recall the first time, almost forty years ago when we were working on the Hilton Hotel and spent a weekend in Tel Aviv and prayed in the Aleppo Synagogue which was near the hotel. On one of the walls was a memorial to fallen soldiers. Although I didn’t know a single one of those who had fought for the Jewish people and gave his life for the cause, I knew every one of their names.

The names on the wall were the exact same names as those of my dearest friend and relatives. There were Gindis and Tawils and Kassins and Suttons and Cohens and Dwecks. And I stood there, not much older than most of those boys on that wall when they gave their lives.

And whether I knew them or not, those boys are and will always be my cousins, my friends and my brothers. Hashem may have sent us on different paths, but there is no question that we are the same. And as a cousin, a friend and a brother, I mourn their deaths as I do each of the soldiers who gave their life for me and for us.

After leaving the Synagogue that morning, I spoke with my son Moses who was spending the year in Israel studying. He was returning from a service on Har Herzl. Mount Herzl has been the site of the main Israeli Defense Forces cemetery since 1949, with graves and memorials dedicated to soldiers who have fallen in the line of duty since Israel’s 1948 War of Independence. He told me of the many people there that day and how he stopped to sit and speak with an older woman as she sat by her son’s grave. She told him all about her son and he was sure that in listening to her, she was in some ways comforted from some of the deep pain she must feel every day of her life.

When we would ask Rabbi Asher Abittan z’tl, about traveling the world to visit the graves of the righteous, he would quote the RIshon LeSiyon. Rav Ovadia Yosef z’sl who would ask why travel the world, quoting the Gadol HaDor, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach who would stand across from the national cemetery on Mt. Herzl and say: "These are the graves of the righteous who died sanctifying Hashem's Name.”.

**Recognizing the Sacrifices of Our Brothers**

When we will again read of the two goats on Shabbat, the two twin goats separated by lottery, we should not only be reminded to make sacrificial choices as Rav Hirsch suggests, we should be reminded of the sacrifices our brothers have made and continue to make for us. We should hold this thought into next week when we remember on Yom HaZikaron and express our appreciation on Yom HaAtzmaut that this period as Rav Ovadia writes, should not only serve as a day to mourn our fallen soldiers whose death is as painful to us as the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash, but it should also serve as a time of self-introspection (Isn’t this what the Omer is about?).

We must strive to uphold the traditions of our ancestors by returning to the Torah as the verse states, “Return to Me and I shall return to you.”

So many of our fallen brethren have made the ultimate sacrifice in order to ensure the continuation of our nation, a nation dedicated to Torah and Misvot. Where is our sacrifice?

If we had iPhones in those days, I would have certainly taken an image of the wall in the Synagogue in Tel Aviv and placed it by my desk as a reminder. If perhaps one of you has an image, please send it to me.

May Hashem avenge their blood and may their souls stand, each as a melitz yashar; an advocate for us, their brothers and sisters, cousins and friends, in the Heavenly courts.

May Hashem end our pain and bring Mashiach Bimhera NeYameynu, Amen!

*Reprinted from the Parshat Acharei Mot 5782 email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

**The Unique Distinction**

**Of a Jew and His**

**Connection to G-d**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



In the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Kedoshim, we find three commandments:

1) "You shall be holy," 2) "Every man shall fear his mother and father," 3) "My Sabbaths you shall keep."

As these three mitzvot appear together, it follows that a connection exists between them.

The first commandment in the sequence is "You shall be holy."

A Jew must be holy, distinct from other nations, for the Jewish people is unique. And yet, the holiness of the Jew, that which makes him different from the gentile, is not expressed in his observance of the commandments. A non-Jew is not obligated to keep the Torah's mitzvot; he has no common ground or connection with them. Rather, the sanctity of the Jew is expressed in his daily behavior, in the way he performs the same mundane actions he seems to share with Gentiles. It must always be apparent that the Jew is different and holy, even when he eats and drinks and engages in business.

A Jew is always connected to G-d, no matter where he is. Jews are a holy people; their holiness is maintained even when they are involved in the most mundane tasks of life.

It is not enough, however, for a Jew to be holy. His function in the world is to have a positive effect on the members of his family and ensure that future generations of Jews will also conduct themselves with holiness. This is alluded to in the second commandment: "Every man shall fear his mother and father," the mitzva of Jewish education.

A person's first educators in life are his parents. From the earliest age a Jewish child's mother and father imbue him with the sense that he belong s to a holy nation.

Significantly, the Torah mentions the mother before the father, as mothers spend the most time with their young children and guide them through their early years.

How do we influence our children -- and ourselves -- to be different from all other nations? The answer is contained in the third commandment: "My Sabbaths you shall keep."

The Shabbat is a sign between G-d and the Jewish people. It strengthens and emphasizes a Jew's belief in the Creator and His constant and ongoing supervision of everything that happens in the world.

Many non-Jews, even those who believe in G-d, mistakenly think that after He created the world G-d left it under the control of natural forces. Jews, however, possess emuna, faith. The existence of the Jewish people is not dependent on nature; G-d watches and guides every Jew with His Divine providence. This is alluded to in the third commandment "My Sabbaths you shall keep," for the Jew's faith is unique to him, strengthening his resolve to be holy.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Kedoshim 5757/1997 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted for Maayan Chai from Likutei Sichot, vol. 27*

**“Do not hate your brother in your heart.” 19:17**

Why does the verse use the plural form –levavecha– for the word “heart” rather than the singular form –livecha? The Torah, in the Keriyat Shema also uses the plural form for the word heart.

The Sages teach one should serve G-d with one’s good inclination and also with one’s evil inclination — with one’s “heartS”. Here too the Torah expects that we beware hating another in our heart and manifesting that dislike from our “good” inclination.

Often a person motivated by hate will reprove another for the sake of a mitzvah. For example, one may yell at another to refrain from talking in the synagogue during the prayers. The Torah does not look at this reproof, motivated by animosity, favorably. One may not hate his brother in his heart –even the “good” inclination. (Rabbi Raymond Beyda-Table Talk)

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*



**Insights on Parshat**

**Kedoshim**

One of the very well-known commandments that appears in this week's reading of the Torah is the injunction not to place a stumbling block in front of someone who cannot see. Interestingly enough, Rashi in commenting upon and in explaining this commandment, does not treat it literally.

The Torah does not deal with people who are so evil as to purposely and knowingly place a stumbling block before someone who is unable to see. Rather, the Rabbis interpreted the words to apply to situations where one's own bias, prejudice, financial interest or social status misleads someone who has approached him or her for advice on an issue.

If I am interested in buying a piece of real estate and I am in the real estate business, and someone approaches me for advice as to whether to purchase that exact piece of real estate, one is forbidden to advise him incorrectly to gain the financial advantage for himself.

**A Blatent Example of the**

**Dangers of Self-Interest**

This is a rather blatant example of how the self-interest of one person can cause an unsuspecting other person who is unaware of the self -interests of the person from whom he is seeking advice. One seeking the advice is blind to the prejudice and self-interest of the person granting the advice and invokes the proverbial stumbling block placed before the person seeking direction. In the canons of ethics that exist in legal and related professions, such behavior is grounds for the accusation of malfeasance and intentional malpractice.

In our complicated and stressful society there have arisen numerous professions devoted to giving advice to others and receiving a fee for so doing. Such professions as financial planners, estate managers and programmers, therapists for both mental and physical wounds, marriage and divorce counselors and other areas in which current society is populated, if not even dominated by these advice givers. No one can expect perfection from another human being and many times the advice or planning that is suggested and adopted may turn out to be destructive. While the Torah does not expect perfection from those from whom we seek advice, it does expect honesty and transparency.

**The Torah Demands Objectivity,**

**Fairness and Intelligence**

There always is a tinge of self-interest on the part of the counselor or therapist involved. After all, this is the manner in which that person makes a living. Yet, as far as humanly possible, the Torah does demand objectivity, fairness, and intelligence when giving such advice, whether it be from a professional in the field or even from a friend or neighbor.

We are repeatedly warned not to volunteer advice to others in areas where we are not requested to, or if we are not expert in those fields. People tend to invest spiritual leaders with knowledge that they may not really possess. It is dangerous and an enormous responsibility to give advice to others.

In biblical times, prophecy was available but in our world it no longer exists. Both the person seeking advice and the one granting such advice should be very careful not to create the stumbling block that will cause the ‘blind man’ to fall.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**Every man shall fear his mother and his father, and My Sabbaths you shall keep (19:3)**

The Talmud teaches that there are three partners in the creation of a human being - the mother, the father, and G-d. It is, therefore, not sufficient for a person to honor only his parents; the third partner, G-d, demands His due as well: "And my Sabbaths you shall keep." (Shuva Yisrael)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Kedoshim 5782 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s parsha sheet – whY I Matter for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn.*

**Harav Yitzchok Kalish, zt”l**



Reprinted from Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia

Harav Yitzchok Kalish ,zt"l Rebbe of Vurka [5539-5608// 1779-1847] was a Talmid of Reb Simcha Bunim Bonhart, the Rebbe of Peshischa. He was also a close friend of the Chidushei Harim of Gur. Both worked tirelessly to help Yidden.

Reb Yitzchok was renowned for having an influence upon many people. Even assimilated Jews formed a close bond with the Rebbe. The Rebbe traveled often to Warsaw to be with his Chassidim for Shabbos.

**A Poor Chosid Needed to Marry Off a Child**

Once, a chosid of the Rebbe, who was very poor and needed to marry off a child, came to the Rebbe with a problem. “I have a cousin who is very wealthy and is able to help me with money,” said the chosid, “yet his servants won't allow anyone to come near him!”

"How much money do you need?" the Rebbe asked. As soon as the chosid uttered the sum of one hundred rubles and gave his cousin’s address, the Rebbe went off to the rich cousin’s house.

“With the help of Hashem, we will get one hundred rubles from your cousin,” the Rebbe said. “Who is asking to see my master?” the servant asked at the door. A few moments later the servant returned to say that his master had no dealings with the Rebbe of Vurka.

Hence, the Rebbe returned empty-handed to the chosid at the host’s house. “One hundred rubles is not simple to get.We must have Bitachon and faith that Hashem will help us!” he said to the dismayed chosid.

The next day, the Rebbe again went and knocked on the wealthy man’s door. This time the rich cousin himself answered the door. Upon seeing his visitor, he shouted at the Rebbe with great anger to leave him alone, and slammed the door shut.

**Sadly the Enraged Cousin Refused to Help**

Once again, the Rebbe placated the chosid and promised him that with Hashem’s help they would have the money a day later. Sadly, the story repeated itself the next day. The Rebbe knocked, “Reb Yid,” the enraged cousin yelled “either you leave peacefully, or I will throw you out!”

Calmly, the Rebbe went back to the awaiting chosid. Although he hadn’t succeeded yet, the Rebbe reassured the chosid that soon he would have the needed amount of money. The chosid believed his Rebbe and promised to be patient. Meanwhile, in Warsaw there lived a Jewish activist named Mattias Rosen, who, even though was an assimilated Jew,helped many Yidden.

Mr. Rosen had special respect for the Vurker Rebbe and would “go through fire and water” to help him. It so happened that Mr. Rosen and the Chosid’s rich cousin frequented the same club. Proudly, the cousin told Mr. Rosen how a Rebbe had come to him three times for Tzedaka, and what treatment he received!

Upon hearing that it was the Vurker Rebbe, Mr. Rosen fired back: "Do you know who you started up with? If you don't go soon to beg for forgiveness, I am afraid for your life! Besides, I will not talk to you again until you beg forgiveness from the Rebbe. You should give him whatever he asks of you!"

**Realizing the Need to Gain Forgiveness**

The rich cousin became pale and frightened, realizing the seriousness of his offense. “How can I ask forgiveness now?” he asked.

“The Rebbe is a warm and forgiving person. Send a coach to pick up the Rebbe, and he will come to you,” Mr. Rosen advised him.

The next day, a coach wagon stopped at the home of the Rebbe's host. A servant came out to do his master’s bidding, kindly requesting that the Rebbe return to the wealthy man’s house.

As predicted, the Rebbe consented and went along with the servant. On the way to the rich man, the Rebbe thought to himself that, although initially he was only going to ask for 100 rubles, the hassle and belittlement he went through called for receiving an extra hundred rubles. Additionally, the Rebbe thought, one hundred rubles would barely cover the chosid’s needs, but with two hundred rubles, there would be a comfortable chasunah and a bit left over for the chosid to live on.

When the Rebbe arrived, the rich cousin begged for the Rebbe’s forgiveness, with tears streaming down his face.he man was ashamed to have treated the Vurker Rebbe the way he did. Now, he was willing to give as much Tzedaka as the Rebbe would request.

“I forgive you,” replied the Rebbe. “The truth is, that I wanted you to help your cousin with one hundred rubles to enable him to marry off his child; but after all that has transpired I’m requesting that you give two hundred rubles for the cause!” "Of course! I will bring the Rebbe the amount right away," exclaimed the relieved tycoon. Two hundred rubles exchanged hands, and the Rebbe thanked the man.

"Your patience and Bitachon in Hashem was rewarded by your receiving double your request,” the Rebbe explained.He handed over the enormous sum to his chosid. The Rebbe wasn’t swayed by the arrogance of a rich person.When the time comes to help a fellow Yid, we must do all we can to assist, and not be turned off by small obstacles (Rabbi Yehuda Z. Klitnick pardesyehuda1@ gmail.com)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Kedoshim 5782 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s parsha sheet – whY I Matter for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn.*

**The Atheist's Faith**

**By Samuel Lebens**

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I may be an academic philosopher, but I’m also an Orthodox Rabbi. Consequently, you may not be surprised to hear that my answer to the question “Is there a G-d?” is a resounding yes. There is a G-d. By the word “G-d,” I mean a supremely good and intelligent being, powerful enough to bring this universe into existence and govern its evolution according to its will.

Sadly, most of my colleagues in the world of contemporary philosophy, at least in the English-speaking world, disagree. Nevertheless, I’m happy to report: my theism doesn’t place me in an insignificant minority. Despite our numbers, some of the greatest, most well-known, and celebrated philosophers of our times are committed theists (Saul Kripke, Alvin Plantinga, Eleonore Stump, Dean Zimmerman, Richard Swinburne, Lara Buchak, and more). What we lack in quantity, we make up for in quality.

**By the word “G-d,” I mean a supremely good and intelligent being, powerful enough to bring this universe into existence and govern its evolution according to its will.**

Of course, atheists often accuse theists of wishful thinking; of creating an imaginary friend in the sky to comfort them in the face of human helplessness and mortality. In actual fact, I think that wishful thinking is often at the root of atheism. Some people would simply rather not believe in G-d.

Here’s an example. The various physical constants that govern our universe, it turns out, are extremely “finely-tuned” so as to be hospitable to the emergence of life. According to most physicists, the chances of our universe having been hospitable to life at all is less than one in a trillion trillion trillion trillion. The atheist physicist Leonard Susskind writes that the conditions for life in this universe are “so incredibly finely tuned that no one could possibly think it accidental.”

The theist doesn’t think it accidental at all. These conditions were established on purpose, by a being powerful enough to govern the evolution of the universe: namely, G-d. So, how does Susskind escape from G-d? He does so by supposing that there exists an infinite number of universes. Suppose you’ve got an infinite number of universes. In that case, the odds might be more than one in a trillion trillion trillion trillion that your universe will be hospitable to life, but some universe or other is bound to get lucky.

**The theist doesn’t think it accidental at all. These conditions were established on purpose, by a being powerful enough to govern the evolution of the universe: namely, G-d.**

To escape the existence of one G-d, the atheist is forced to posit the existence of an infinite number of universes – some of which, presumably, contain very powerful God-like beings of their own. All of this to escape from G-d. Who here is guilty of allowing their psychological desires to lead them to absurd conclusions?

According to the best scientific account of the origins of life, we emerged as the product of natural selection, in a struggle for survival, in which only the best-adapted genes got passed on to subsequent generations. Taking G-d out of this picture, you have to assume that our cognitive faculties were shaped only by the survival needs of Homo Sapiens in Palaeolithic Africa. If that’s true, then should we trust our cognitive faculties?



***There are a lot of atheists out there. Does it actually require faith to maintain that position?***

Perhaps it’s true that evolutionary pressures will generally carve out reliable belief-forming mechanisms. But why think that the mechanisms formed in our Palaeolithic ancestors are reliable in our very new environment? Why think that they would be reliable when forming beliefs about very abstract theories of philosophy and science, which have little bearing on our day-to-day survival?

The point, first argued for by Alvin Plantinga, can be put this way: the theory of evolution, coupled with atheism, undermines itself. If the theory is true, then our species has excellent reason not to trust that the outputs of our cognitive faculties are true in our current environment, especially when thinking about abstract philosophical and scientific topics, such as the origin of species.

But, if you plug G-d into the equation, think of evolution as a mechanism by which G-d allows biodiversity to emerge and assume that G-d has the power to influence the trajectory of the process. If you believe that – as a function of His goodness – He desires to be known and enter into a relationship with cognitive beings, then you needn’t distrust the theory of evolution if and when the evidence leads your cognitive faculties to believe in it.

Let us not forget that the methods of modern science were forged by theists, such as Francis Bacon, Robert Doyle, and Isaac Newton. They believed that every complex phenomenon should have a simple explanation. Their reason for thinking so was their faith that the universe itself was constructed by a law-loving, law-giving, perfectly powerful being who wanted us to live in a world that we could come to comprehend. Without that faith, scientific investigation would seem to be irrational. Perhaps this is why Einstein recognized that “science without religion is lame,” even while declaring that “religion without science is blind.”

**Perhaps this is why Einstein recognized that “science without religion is lame,” even while declaring that “religion without science is blind.”**

According to Richard Dawkins, monogamous romantic love can only appear irrational and counter to the demands of evolution by natural selection. He writes, “Rather than the fanatically monogamous devotion to which we are susceptible, some sort of ‘polyamory’ is on the face of it more rational.” Perhaps monogamy and an exclusive romantic love can serve a short-term Darwinian purpose: to engender loyalty to one co-parent for long enough to raise a human child. There is no discernible evolutionary advantage to monogamy beyond that point.

But have you ever been in love? I imagine you won’t be too quick to conclude that it’s an irrational byproduct of evolution if you have. Such an account simply robs the experience – an experience that we know with more certainty than any scientific speculation – of its tremendous existential significance.

The theist has a better explanation. G-d loves us and wants us to love Him too. As C. S. Lewis put it, the total commitment of romantic love “is a paradigm or example, built into our natures, of the love we ought to exercise towards G-d and Man.” For Richard Dawkins, by contrast, it is a peculiar error in our evolutionary programming that promotes fanatic devotion for no good reason.

Dawkins writes:

“I have found it an amusing strategy, when asked whether I am an atheist, to point out that the questioner is also an atheist when considering Zeus, Apollo, Amon Ra, Mithras, Baal, Thor, Wotan, the Golden Calf, and the Flying Spaghetti Monster. I just go one god further.”

But Dawkins doesn’t get the difference between G-d and all of those false gods. The difference is seismic. I wouldn’t trust the sciences based upon the promises of a being as fickle as Zeus. I’d have no explanation of love if I tried to establish it on the lustful excess of Baal.

To play the role that G-d plays, in my worldview, as the foundation upon which most of our explanations of the universe come to rest, G-d has to have very specific properties – He needs to be a supremely good and intelligent being, powerful enough to bring this universe into existence, and to govern its evolution, in accordance with its will. In other words, He has to be G-d.

Lots more should be said. I haven’t exhausted my reasons for believing in G-d, nor have I responded to some very serious objections. Instead, in these words, I’ve tried to explain, in a nut-shell, and with lots of details overlooked, how my belief in G-d functions as part of my overall explanation of the universe.

Moreover, I’ve tried to show the ways in which refusing to believe in G-d can be philosophically costly. If atheists wonder at my psychological need to cling to G-d, I can say that I wonder equally at their psychological need to reject Him at all costs.

Samuel Lebens is associate Professor in the philosophy department at the University of Haifa, he is also an Orthodox Rabbi and Jewish educator. His first book was a study of Bertrand Russell's evolving theories about the nature of meaning. His second book is a study in the analytic philosophy of Judaism. Sam's academic interests span the philosophy of religion, metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language.

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**Thoughts that Count**

You shall fear every man his mother and father (Lev. 19:3)

Here the Torah uses the word "ish" for "man." Ish generally refers to an adult. The Torah is teaching us that we are obligated also as adults to fear our parents, and that fear shouldn't merely derive from being dependent on them. *(K'tav Sofer)*

You shall not steal (Lev. 19:11)

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