

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Laws Against Larceny

You shall not steal. — Exodus 20:15

The first human crime, some say, was a Sixth Commandment violation, a crime against property: Adam and Eve ate fruit in the Garden of Eden that was not theirs to use.¹

God's laws against theft, the Torah tells us, are nearly as difficult to obey as His laws against sexual sins [See the Fifth Commandment, following].² Most people possess a natural impulse towards larceny, as the Torah defines the term,³ and opportunities to commit the crime present themselves almost constantly.⁴ But few sins do more to disrupt civil society or degrade humanity's capacity to worthily make use of God's good earth. Larceny, the Torah teaches, actually defiles the Earth.⁵

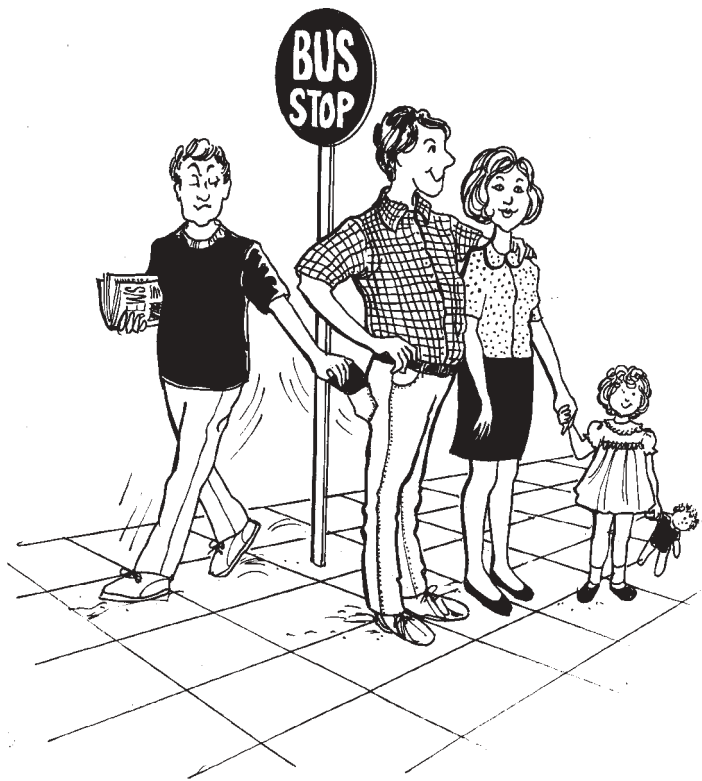
Mystics associate this Commandment with the yellow of the rainbow.⁶

The broad heading or category of Rainbow Covenant law represented in the universal prohibition here goes beyond the protection of property rights and the sanctity of property. It sets out at least two fundamental monotheistic principles:

- Every human being stands on an equal footing before the Lord. Even against a monarch or a saint, the person who has the best claim and greatest right to a thing is the person who already owns it.⁷

- The Lord is the ultimate Owner of all Creation's riches.⁸ The mere things that most people lust after are just "dust" — literally, star dust. Only God and His law are eternal.⁹

Anyone who practices unrighteousness in regard to the possessions of another denies the whole of God's Law and everything that the Bible teaches about God, say the rabbis. "Just as God gave a body to the human spirit as a tool for his human activities, and the body must be respected for the spirit within it; so He gave him (that is, all of us) the Earth with all that is on it and belongs to it so that he may freely acquire it and dispose of it according to his destiny." ¹⁰



The sinner's act of larceny implies that he believes that "the Lord has abandoned the Earth" — that those who sin against their fellow men will not ultimately be punished.¹¹