

Lo Chamad (No Covet)

By Yochanan Zaquantov

In the Ten Commandments we see the tenth commandment to not Covet. Is Chamad, which is the Hebrew word translated as Covet, wrong in and of itself or is it wrong to chamad the items that your neighbor possesses. We will be looking at this and some of the other words that are related to chamad.

So what is chamad?

Chamad (ghah-mad') 2530 is a verb and from the root (Chet-Mem-Dalet) and is found in the New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance (NEHC) on page 437. It is also found in the Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon on page 326. So lets look at some references for this work to find its meaning and also see how it is used.

The first place we are familiar with this word is Shemot (Exodus) 20:14 (17)

14 You shall **not covet** (lo tach'mod לֹא תַחְמֹד) your neighbor's house: you shall **not covet** (lo tach'mod לֹא-תַחְמֹד) your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

What items are we told not to Chamad? We are not to Chamad anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Another place we have seen this same commandment is Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:18 (21)

18 You shall **not covet** (velo tach'mod וְלֹא תַחְמֹד) your neighbor's wife. You shall **not crave** (velo tit'aveh – 183 וְלֹא תִתְאַוֶּה) your neighbor's house, or his field, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Interesting that they translate this as crave here. To crave something is to desire it intensely. The word used here is not chamad but avah. Here we see that we have two different passages, which are used to denote the idea of desire. Let see if this is something of the way we should look at this word.

Shemot (Exodus) 34:24

24 I will drive out nations from your path and enlarge your territory; **[and] no one will covet** (valo yach'mod וְלֹא-יַחְמֹד) your land when you go up to appear before Yehovah your Elohim three times a year.

No one will desire (to take possession) of it.

Bereshit (Genesis) 2:9

9 And from the ground Yehovah Elohim caused to grow every tree that was **pleasing** (**nech'mad נְחַמַּד**) 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.

Here we see that every tree was made desirable to Adam.

Bereshit (Genesis) 3:6

6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a **delight** (**ta'ovah-hu תְּאוֹהֵהוּא**) to the eyes, and that the tree was **desirable** (**vanech'mad וְנֶחְמַד**) as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

Here again a link between avah as desirable/pleasant and chamad as to desire to possess.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 7:25

25 You shall consign the images of their Elohim to the fire; you shall **not covet** (**lo tach'mod לֹא־תַחְמַד**) the silver and gold on them and keep it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared thereby; for that is abhorrent to Yehovah your Elohim.

Besides not coveting or desiring to possess what is another man's possession but also the gold or silver on idols.

Yeshiyahu (Isaiah) 1:29

29 Truly, you shall be shamed Because of the terebinths **you desired** (**chamad'tem חָמַדְתֶּם**), And you shall be confounded Because of the gardens **you coveted** (**bachar'tem בָּחַרְתֶּם** chosen).

Again don't covet or desire the idols. The gardens are not vegetable gardens but the places established to worship other Elohim.

Yeshiyahu (Isaiah) 44:9

9 The makers of idols All work to no purpose; **And the things they treasure** (**va chamodeyhem וְחַמּוּדֵיהֶם**) Can do no good, As they themselves can testify. They neither look nor think, And so they shall be shamed.

It is something one deeply desires to possess. It is a desire that provides no help or knowledge.

Yeshiyahu (Isaiah) 53:2

2 For he has grown, by His favor, like a tree crown, Like a tree trunk out of arid ground. He had no form or beauty, that we should look at him: No charm, that we should find **him pleasing [desire him] (va nech'madehu וְנִחַמְדֵהוּ)**.

We would not desire to possess him.

Micah 2:1-2

1 Ah, those who plan iniquity And design evil on their beds; When morning dawns, they do it, For they have the power. 2 **They covet (vecham'du וְחָמְדוּ)** fields, and seize them; Houses, and take them away. They defraud men of their homes, And people of their land.

First one has the desire to possess, the means to do it, and then does it. This shows us how coveting or Chamad works.

Yehoshua (Joshua) 7:19-21

19 Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, pay honor to Yehovah, the Elohim of Israel, and make confession to Him. Tell me what you have done; do not hold anything back from me.” 20 Achan answered Joshua, “It is true, I have sinned against Yehovah, the Elohim of Israel. This is what I did: 21 I saw among the spoil a fine Shinar mantle, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, **and I coveted them (va'ech'madem וְאֶחְמַדֵם)** and took them. They are buried in the ground in my tent, with the silver under it.”

Clearly Achan was drawn to deeply desire these things but when he acting upon the desire he sinned. How many others may have thought something but did not act. Only he is shown because he acted out his desire.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 1:22

22 “How long will you simple ones love simplicity, You scoffers **be eager (cham'du וְחָמְדוּ)** to scoff, You dullards hate knowledge?

Here scoffers desire to scoff they enjoy it and want it and enjoy doing it.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 6:25

25 **Do not lust** (al-tach'mod אֲל־תַּחְמֹד) for her beauty Or let her captivate you with her eyes. (JPS)

Or

25 **Not do lust** (al-tach'mod אֲל־תַּחְמֹד) after her beauty in your heart and not let her take you with her eyes. (interlinear)

Here we are told not to go after this woman and want to possess in our heart. This shows that this is a deep emotional desire this person is not to have.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 12:12

12 The wicked **covet** (Chamed חָמַד) the catch of evil men; The root of the righteous yields [fruit].

The wicked desire to possess the catch of evil (harmful) men. They enjoy doing it and find pleasure in it.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 21:20

20 **Precious** (nech'mad /desired נְחָמַד) treasure and oil are in the house of the wise man, And a fool of a man will run through them.

The treasure here is desirable. Another instance of a positive aspect of chamad.

Tehillim (Psalms) 39:12 (11)

12 You chastise a man in punishment for his sin, consuming like a moth what he **treasures** (chomudo חֹמוּדוֹ). No man is more than a breath. *Selah*.

When Yehovah punishes sometimes he takes what we treasure most.

Tehillim (Psalms) 19:9-11

9 The precepts of Yehovah are just, rejoicing the heart; the instruction of Yehovah is lucid, making the eyes light up. 10 The fear of Yehovah is pure, abiding forever; the judgments of Yehovah are true, righteous altogether, 11 **more desirable** (ha nechomadim הַנְּחֹמָדִים) than gold, than much fine gold; sweeter than honey, than drippings of the comb.

Clearly here the precepts (piqudey) are to be desirable to us more than a deep desire for gold. More pleasant to us than sweet honey. Another positive action in chamad.

Tehillim (Psalms) 68:17 (16)

17 why so hostile, O jagged mountains, toward the mountain Elohim **desired (chamad חָמַד)** as His dwelling? Yehovah shall abide there forever.

So we can see instances where Chamad is used in a positive sense as well as a negative sense. Clearly there are cases when we are not to desire something. But some cases we are told to desire something this way. What are two things that we are to not desire emotionally with our heart? What belongs to our Neighbor and gold/silver from an idol.

Another word derived from Chamad is Chemed (gheh'-med) 2531, which is found in the NEHC on page 437 and in the BDB on page 326. It is a Masculine Noun.

Yeshiyahu (Isaiah) 27:2

2 In that day, They shall sing of it: “Vineyard of **Delight (chemed חֶמֶד)**.”

Chemed here is speaking of something delightful in the same sense of chamad.

Yeshiyahu (Isaiah) 32: 11-13

11 Tremble, you carefree ones! Quake, O confident ones! Strip yourselves naked, Put the cloth about your loins! 12 Lament upon the breasts, For the **pleasant (chemed חֶמֶד)** fields, For the spreading grapevines, 13 For my people's soil— It shall be overgrown with briars and thistles— Aye, and for all the houses of delight, For the city of mirth.

The fields of desire. Are ones we would want to possess.

Yehezkel (Ezekiel) 23:6, 12

6 clothed in blue, governors and prefects, horsemen mounted on steeds—all of them **handsome young fellows. [young men desirable] (bachurei chemed בְּחֹרֵי חֶמֶד)**

12 She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and prefects, warriors gorgeously clad, horsemen mounted on steeds—all of them **handsome young fellows. [young men desirable] (bachurei chemed בְּחֹרֵי חֶמֶד)**

Again a desirable to have or possess.

Amos 5:11

11 Assuredly, Because you impose a tax on the poor And exact from him a levy of grain, You have built houses of hewn stone, But you shall not live in them; You have planted **delightful vineyards (Vineyards of Desire) (bamei-chemed בְּרֵמֵי־חֶמֶד)**, But shall not drink their wine.

The vineyard you planted would have been one most treasured or desired.

Another word derived from Chamad is Chem'dah (ghem-dah') 2532, which is found in the NEHC on page 437 and in the BDB on page 326. It is a Feminine Noun.

Yermiyahu (Jeremiah) 3:18-20

18 In those days, the House of Judah shall go with the House of Israel; they shall come together from the land of the north to the land I gave your fathers as a possession.

19 I had resolved to adopt you as My child, and I gave you a **desirable (chem'dah חֶמְדָּה)** land—the fairest heritage of all the nations; and I thought you would surely call Me “Father,” and never cease to be loyal to Me. 20 Instead, you have broken faith with Me, as a woman breaks faith with a paramour, O House of Israel—declares Yehovah.

The land that a person would greatly desire to possess.

Haggai 2:5-7

5 So I promised you when you came out of Egypt, and My spirit is still in your midst. Fear not!

6 For thus said Yehovah of Hosts: In just a little while longer I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land; 7 I will shake all the nations. And the **precious (chem'dah חֶמְדָּה)** things of all the nations shall come [here], and I will fill this House with glory, said Yehovah of Hosts.

The desirable gold and silver things of the nations will come to the house of Israel

Tehillim (Psalms) 106:23-25

23 He would have destroyed them had not Moses His chosen one confronted Him in the breach to avert His destructive wrath. 24 They rejected the **desirable (chem'dah חֶמְדָּה)** land, and put no faith in His promise. 25 They grumbled in their tents and disobeyed Yehovah.

Again the land is desirable to possess.

Another word derived from Chamad is Machamudim (mah-ghamood-deem') 4263, which is found in the NEHC on page 687 and in the BDB on page 327. It is a Masculine Plural Noun.

Eykhah (Lamentations) 1:7, 11

7 All the **precious** (mach'mudeiha מְחַמְדֵיֶהָ) things she had In the days of old Jerusalem recalled In her days of woe and sorrow, When her people fell by enemy hands With none to help her; When enemies looked on and gloated Over her downfall.

11 All her inhabitants sigh As they search for bread; They have bartered **their treasures** (mach'madeihem מְחַמְדֵיהֶם) for food, To keep themselves alive.—See, O Yehovah, and behold, How abject I have become!

Those things we treasure or desire to possess.

Another word derived from Chamad is Mach'mad (magh-mahd') 4261, which is found in the NEHC on page 687 and in the BDB on page 327. It is a Masculine Noun.

Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 24:16,21,25

16 O mortal, I am about to take away the **delight** (et-mach'mad אֶת־מַחְמַד) of your eyes from you through pestilence; but you shall not lament or weep or let your tears flow.

21 Tell the House of Israel: Thus said Yehovah Elohim: 'I am going to desecrate My Sanctuary, your pride and glory, the **delight** (mach'mad מַחְמַד) of your eyes and the desire of your heart; and the sons and daughters you have left behind shall fall by the sword.

25 You, O mortal, take note: On the day that I take their stronghold from them, their pride and joy, the **delight** (mach'mad אֶת־מַחְמַד) of their eyes and the longing of their hearts—their sons and daughters

The desire of the eyes is that which is very treasured, pleasant, a desire to possess.

So we can see from all these that Chamad, Chemed, Chem'dah, Mach'mudim, and Mach'mad are all dealing with a desire which is emotional and some aspects a mental state. So when does a desire, which is not a bad thing, become something we are told not to do. Remember we say back in Shemot 20 and Devarim 5. We should not desire the

possessions of another in order to possess those specific items.. Are their examples of this in the Tanakh?

David and Bathsheba

Shemuel Bet (2 Samuel) 11:1-5

1 At the turn of the year, the season when kings go out [to battle], David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him, and they devastated Ammon and besieged Rabbah; David remained in Jerusalem. 2 Late one afternoon, David rose from his couch and strolled on the roof of the royal palace; and from the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, 3 and the king sent someone to make inquiries about the woman. He reported, “She is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam [and] wife of Uriah the Hittite.” 4 David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her—she had just purified herself after her period—and she went back home. 5 The woman conceived, and she sent word to David, “I am pregnant.”

Here we have an example of Desire crossing the line and possessing that, which was not his.

We also saw earlier another Hebrew Word tied to this which was ‘Avah. ‘Avah (ah-vah) which is from the root (Aleph-vav-hey). It is a verb and found in the BDB on page 16 and the NEHC on page 29. It is reference number 183 and 184.

Here are a few references from the Piel form of the verb.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 12:20

20 When Yehovah enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, “I shall eat some meat,” **for you have the urge** (ta’avah פִּי־תִאָוֶה) to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish.

Have you ever had a craving to eat something? This is being shown here.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 14:26

26 and spend the money on anything you want—cattle, sheep, wine, or other intoxicant, **or anything you may desire** (bakol asher ta’aveh בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תִּאָוֶה). And you shall feast there, in the presence of Yehovah your Elohim, and rejoice with your household.

At Sukkot you may use you money for that which you desire or crave.

Shemuel Aleph (1 Samuel) 2:16

16 And if the man said to him, “Let them first turn the suet into smoke, and then take as much as you **want (Ta’aveh תִּאָוֵה)**,” he would reply, “No, hand it over at once or I’ll take it by force.”

Eli’s sons were to craving of their part before it was even time.

Shemuel Bet (2 Samuel) 3:21

21 Abner said to David, “Now I will go and rally all Israel to Your Majesty. They will make a pact with you, and you can reign over all that your heart **desires (ta’aveh תִּאָוֵה)**.” And David dismissed Abner, who went away unharmed.

Yeshiyahu (Isaiah) 26:7-9

7 The path is level for the righteous man; O Just One, You make smooth the course of the righteous. 8 For Your just ways, O Yehovah, we look to You; We long for the name by which You are called. 9 At night **I yearn (ivitikha אִוִּיתִיכָא)** for You with all my being, I seek You with all the spirit within me. For when Your judgments are wrought on earth, The inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

We see from these this is also a desire or want of something in your heart, which appears to be a similar meaning to chamad. Clearly this kind of desire is good and desirable, but if focused on that which we should not possess (other peoples possessions) then when we do that we sin. In my understanding of the commandment to not covet it means to me that one should not desire to the point of wanting to possess the very thing the other man has. I see no problem to desire something that does not belong to another or to want something like another. But to possess that thing which is not to be possessed is what is being referred here.

A live case is if my neighbor has a tree that I like and I go purchase another like it I have not coveted whereas, if I desire the very tree go and uproot it and place in my land that is wrong. For it belongs to another.