

# Thou Shalt Not Covet

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

After the opening declaration of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord your God" we get action. All the commandments mandate some behavior: keeping the Sabbath, honoring parents, and so forth. Then comes the final commandment — "do not covet." This is not a behavioral prescription. How can the Torah tell us what to feel?

One explanation is that we do not covet what we know we cannot have. We don't yearn to own the stars. It is impossible. So if we think of that which belongs to others as simply impossible for us to have, we will not covet it. Another is that the Torah is really teaching we should not act on our coveting.

One compelling explanation recalls that in Hebrew the Ten Commandments are called *devarim* — words or sayings. So perhaps "do not covet" is actually a goal. If you live according to the preceding precepts, you will not covet. You will feel the richness of a life in God's presence.

Perhaps in watching certain advertisements we could emulate Socrates, who, when he saw various articles of luxury spread out for sale, exclaimed, "How much there is in the world I do not want." Feeling blessed is the opposite of feeling deprived. Not coveting may be less a commandment than a promise.