

DO NOT STEAL PART 1

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Having spent many months on the Mitzvo of returning lost objects we finally move on to a new, essential set of Mitzvot - those that are related to stealing. With superficial analysis, a person may believe that the laws related to stealing are irrelevant to him; he feels certain that he never steals from other person. However, the Talmud suggests that it is not so simple to avoid stealing from others. The Talmud confronts us with a surprising accusation - it states that most people stumble in the area of stealing[1]!

How can this be the case? It seems that the reason most people feel that they do not steal is because they have a very narrow definition of what it means to steal. However, the Torah, in its Infinite wisdom, defines stealing in a very different fashion. According to the Torah's understanding, it is far easier to stumble in stealing than one would have imagined.

In what way does our definition of stealing differ so drastically from that of the Torah? We tend to look at stealing as blatantly taking something away from someone else. Many people do not stumble in this form of stealing. However, the Talmud sees stealing in much wider terms. It sees stealing as including any unjustified way of depriving one's fellow of what is rightfully his. Some examples of this are; using someone else's item without his express permission; taking something as a practical joke; taking the most inexpensive item, such as a ketchup packet from a restaurant, or a towel from a hotel, without permission. In the coming months we will discuss in detail the numerous aspects of the laws related to stealing and we will hopefully develop a far more sophisticated sense of respect for the property, money, and privacy of our fellow.

1. Bava Basra, 165a