

DO NOT STEAL PART 4

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In the previous article we saw how it is forbidden to steal items of miniscule value and to steal as a practical joke.

It is also forbidden to steal from a child. Therefore, one may not take any item or food from a child^[2].

There are situations where one may feel that there is a benefit of temporarily stealing someone else's item. For example, one may want to take a friend's item in order to help him correct a negative trait. However, even this form of taking is considered stealing. Similarly, one may not take a friend's item in order to replace it with a better one, rather he should attain his friend's permission first^[3].

Based on these laws, is a teacher permitted to confiscate items from students as a disciplinary measure? The poskim^[4] write that this is in fact allowed; the reason for this is that a teacher has the right to discipline his students in the way that he deems necessary^[5]. It is preferable that the teacher return the item at a later date, however, if he feels that it is necessary to destroy the item for disciplinary reasons, then he may do so.

It is forbidden to steal in order to avoid sickness or pain that is not life-threatening in any way. For example, if a bully threatens a person to take his fellow's item or face the consequences of being punched, then he is not allowed to take the item. This is true even if he intends to repay the value of the item in full.

However, one is allowed to steal in order to save his life, but only on condition that he will pay the owner afterwards. For example, one is allowed to take someone else's medicine in order to potentially save a life, however he must be prepared to repay the medicine's full value.

* Much of the information for this essay is taken from "Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Yisroel Pinchos Bodner.

² In a later article we will discuss the laws of a parent taking his child's items or money.

³ See, "Halachos of Other People's Money," p.23, for a permissible way of doing this.

⁴ Poskim is the term used for Rabbis who specialize in rendering rulings in Torah law.

⁵ See "Halachos of Other People's Money", p.23 for more details.

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