

# RETURNING LOST OBJECTS PART 1

*by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen*

In the past weeks we discussed the Mitzva (commandment) of "Do not stand over your brother's blood." This taught us that we can not stand idly by when someone else is enduring some sort of difficulty, rather we must do our utmost to help him. The Torah does not restrict its concern for our fellow man to his physical or financial well-being. It also obligates us to develop a sense of responsibility with regard to his property. One Mitzva relevant to this is that of HaShavas Aveida which is loosely translated as, "Returning lost objects." It is a fairly common occurrence that we see various items lying on the ground or some other place in a fashion that strongly indicates that they have been mislaid by their owner. In the coming weeks we will discuss the numerous laws pertaining to this Mitzva.

The Torah commands us to strive to return the lost animal or object of another. "You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep or goat cast off. and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother. "

Philosophically this Mitzva is another prime example of how the Torah demands of us that we do not hide our eyes from the needs of our fellow man. A fundamental principle of Judaism is that we are obligated to adopt a pro-active attitude in all aspects of life. We must avoid the 'ostrich syndrome'. What is the 'ostrich syndrome'? An interesting aspect of this huge bird is its reaction to danger. When it sees a predator approaching the ostrich hides its head in the ground - this may be a kind of hiding technique but it symbolizes an attitude of avoiding difficult or uncomfortable situations.

This mode of behavior can be easily replicated by a human being. A good example of this is our attitude to lost objects. When a person is walking along on the way to his daily business he may notice an item that seems to be a lost object. It is very likely that his natural inclination is to figuratively 'put his head in the ground' and walk on, avoiding the difficulty of trying to return this object to its rightful owner. This attitude is alien to the outlook of the Torah. Rather we should overcome our natural desire for comfort and assume responsibility for our fellow's needs. We will learn that there are many scenarios in which a person is not obligated to try to return the object but the main lesson to be learnt here is that we should not simply hide from assessing the situation and determining whether we must really return the object or not.

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