

RETURNING LOST OBJECTS PART 4

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In previous weeks we began discussion of the lengthy laws pertaining to returning lost items. Last week we saw how one must assess whether an object is in fact lost or has been deliberately placed in that place and the owner plans to retrieve it. If this seems to be the case, then the 'finder' should not touch the object. If, however, he deduces that it is probably lost, then he may be obligated to try to return it to its owner. However, even if an item is lost, there are many circumstances in which it need not be returned to its original owner. In this piece, we will discuss some of these:

1. The obligation of returning a lost object does not apply to an object that is worth less than a prutah. A prutah was the lowest value of currency in the time of the Talmud. The modern day equivalent of a prutah is the lowest common denomination that can be used to purchase items. For example, in contemporary America, a penny or nickel cannot purchase anything, and even a dime can hardly purchase anything. Accordingly, if one found an item worth less than a dime he would not be obligated to return it. It is important to note that whilst one may take a lost item worth less than a prutah it is strictly forbidden to steal or borrow without permission such an item. Indeed, the Rabbis tell us that stealing items worth less than a prutah was one of the sins that the Generation of the Flood were punished for so harshly.
2. If an item falls into a place where under normal circumstances it will not be recovered, then it is deemed to be lost. Consequently, someone who then finds or recovers it may keep it. For example, if someone finds a watch that was dropped into the sea then he can presume that its owner has abandoned hope for it. Such an attitude renders an item hefker, which means that it is now considered ownerless and its finder can keep it. However, it should be noted that if the finder does identify the true owner, then it is praiseworthy for him to return it. One exception to this is if the finder is poor and the loser is wealthy.

We will continue with this list in coming weeks.

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

Text Copyright © 2009 by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen and [Torah.org](https://torah.org)