

## He searched; he began with the oldest and ended with the youngest; and the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack. (44:12)

Stealing represents a character defect – if the thief is an adult. The mere fact that a person is not affected by the pain he inflicts upon another person is in and of itself an indication of a flawed, even perverted, personality. When the thief is a young child, it is usually an indication of a lack of ethical values which were not inculcated in him by a responsible mentor. We will soon discern exactly who the responsible mentor is. While I often include a story only for the purpose of buttressing the lesson which the *dvar Torah* teaches, in this instance, the story is so compelling and the lesson so powerful, that I take the liberty of quoting it without an accompanying *dvar Torah*.

The story is quoted by *Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita*, in the name of *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*. **Horav Avraham Pam, zl**, venerable *Rosh Yeshivah* of Torah Vodaas, was asked to be *mesader kedushin*, perform the marriage ceremony, for a young man. (The story does not mention if the *chassan*, groom, was a student of *Rav Pam*.) Shortly before the *chupah*, the *chassan* broke down in bitter weeping. *Rav Pam* asked everyone to leave as he spoke softly to the young man. "Tell me, what is wrong?" the *Rosh Yeshivah* asked. "What provoked your sudden outburst of weeping?"

The *chassan* related the following heartrending story: "I was fourteen-years-old and studying in elementary school. One of the boys in the class had a trinket to which I helped myself. The victim of the theft was noticeably upset and complained to the *rebbe*. The *rebbe* immediately closed the door, not permitting anyone to leave, and then began to search everyone's pockets. I was quick with my hands, and I placed the trinket in the jacket pocket of another student. A few minutes later, the *rebbe* discovered the lost trinket in the pocket of the "innocent" student and declared him to be the thief!

"The *rebbe* did not leave well enough alone by simply sitting down with the student and talking about his lamentable disregard for another person's property; rather, he proclaimed that this student was a thief, mercilessly shamed him before the class, called his parents, and took him to the principal. The parents were devastated and terribly angry, refusing to believe their son's claim of innocence. Sadly, the cards were stacked against the boy. No one believed his innocence. After all, the trinket had been discovered in his possession. The strong punishment which the boy received, coupled with the horrible humiliation that he experienced, catalyzed a downward spiral in his *mitzvah* observance. He was angry that no one believed him, disappointed by the behavior of *frum*, observant, people, who should have been serving as an example for others to emulate. Eventually, he left *Yiddishkeit* and now is about to marry out of the faith! All of this is my fault. How can I go to the *chupah* knowing that I am the cause of another Jew marrying a gentile?"

*Rav Pam* looked the *chassan* in the face, and -- in his calm, soothing voice -- said, "There is no

doubt that you committed an act of theft, which is no simple matter. It is a *maase chamur*, egregious (sinful) act. You may not blame yourself, however, for the spiritual demise of your friend. The primary guilt lies squarely on the shoulders of his parents and *rebbe* for not believing him when he claimed innocence.”

Veritably, what kind of parent turns a deaf ear to a child’s plea of innocence? How can a person call himself a *mechanech*, educator, if he acts so heartlessly and does not attempt to ferret out the truth? When a child cries out, we should at least lend a compassionate ear and look for a reason to believe him. Otherwise, we are not worthy of the lofty title of parent or *rebbe*!