

If a person will sin and commit a treachery against Hashem by lying to his comrade. (5:21)

Stealing from a fellow Jew is certainly an act of evil, but is it treachery against Hashem? Does the thief take into consideration that “borrowing” from his friend with no intention of repaying the “loan” is not only theft, but also a perfidious act of betrayal against Hashem? There is no question that the thief is not a “good” person, his moral and ethical compass leaves much to be desired, but did he sin against the Almighty? It certainly was not his intention. The early commentators explain that one who swears falsely using Hashem’s Name in uttering the oath (claiming that he committed no wrong) is not only a liar and a thief, but he has also defamed Hashem’s Name. That is an act of treachery. While this might be true with regard to the case in which swearing was involved, what if he “merely” stole or lied without supporting his claim of innocence with a false oath? Is this, too, considered treachery?

Horav Nachman Breslover, zl, (Likutei MoHarn) writes that a person who falls prey to his desire for money to the point that he must have it – even if it means stealing it – indicates by his very action that he has limited belief in the Almighty’s “ability” to provide for his needs. Thus, if a Jew motivated by his desire – or need – for money transgresses any *mitzvah*, it is tantamount to idol worship. If he believes that Hashem will provide for him, then he would not resort to theft. His stealing is an act of faithlessness.

Let us put the *Breslover’s* exposition into perspective. A father who has been doing everything within his ability to provide for his large family is simply not making it. No matter what he does, they do not have food or decent clothing. They barely have a roof over their heads. I must emphasize that this is a man who is willing to work any form of labor, unlike those who are selective concerning what form of labor suits them. He looks at his starving children who must go to bed hungry, and he begins to wonder. Down the block is his neighbor whose two cars in the driveway cost more than his house, whose children eat snacks that cost as much as a supper in his house. Perhaps he could “borrow” something from his neighbor until such time that he could pay him back. After all, why not spread the wealth? Why should one person be extremely wealthy, while his neighbor is extremely poor? Here is a good person who is at his wit’s end, who can no longer take it, who can no longer watch his children suffering. So, he steals.

Another case is the man whose wife is very sick. There is a cure, but he has no insurance. He has received assistance from every organization available. Now, the physician claims that unless his wife receives a certain expensive medication, she will succumb to her illness. What does this poor man do? He has exhausted every legal avenue of relief. He is not going to stand idly by while his wife suffers. So, he steals.

Two very sad situations. Obviously, there are more. No one should ever be confronted with such a challenge. It does, however, happen. What is an observant Jew to do? The Torah teaches that

theft is treachery against Hashem. The answer is that, while to the secular mind this is an extreme situation that might allow one to break or, at least, bend the rules, we Jews answer to a Higher standard. We are deeply committed in faith to Hashem that He will provide. If we just open our eyes, we will see His salvation. It is a grave error to think that our actions will change Hashem's result. It is very easy to sit here and write, but we must take into consideration that once our moral/ethical compass is breached, regardless of how deep or wide is the crack, it is no longer the same. We have demonstrated that we trust Hashem only when it is convenient, when life is good. When the challenges arise, we take the law into our own hands. Is that not equivalent to idol worship?