

So it shall be when he will sin and become guilty, he shall return the robbed item that he robbed. (5:23)

The thief brings his guilt-offering only after he has appeased the victim by returning the stolen goods. Hashem's forgiveness follows after the thief has made his peace with his victim. Everyone wants to be observant, repent and return to good, spiritual standing. Hashem is not interested in pardoning one who has no respect for the feelings of his fellow Jew. Furthermore, one who steals indicates that he has no faith in Hashem's ability to provide for his needs. By his very actions, such a person demonstrates that he is more concerned with his own needs than with the feelings of others. His guilt-offering is certainly not sincere. Hashem responds only to heartfelt, sincere pleas for forgiveness.

Returning the stolen item is not always simple. First, one may have spent or used it. Second, he originally took it because he was in need. If the situation has not changed, to return it would place him in greater need. The following story is inspiring and gives us something to think about. A young man was the product of an American modern, Jewish background. (*Shabbos* was respected; his mother lit candles before they went out for the evening; meat and dairy foods were separated – at home; *Yom Kippur* was observed with the traditional fasting; *Passover* consisted of a family *Seder* together, regardless of the distance necessary to travel; integrity was paramount in the marketplace; business ethics and moral integrity of all sorts were not only preached, but adhered to; an elementary day school education, followed by high school was mandatory, and then off to work.) Upon his graduation from school, followed by marriage, this young man's father gave him start-up money to open his own business to provide for his family. He chose to enter the Styrofoam /plastic cup business. Apparently, everyone seemed to be earning a living in this field. The problem was the competition. The larger, more successful companies sold packaged multi-color cups, while his were standard white or clear. The markup was not much; one had to sell high volume in order to do well in this business.

The standard package was 150 cups per box. Due to the heavy competition, he was forced to lower his prices just to remain in business. This, of course, lowered his profit margin. One day, an idea dawned on him: if he would put 149 cups in the box instead of the 150, no one would notice. People did not open the package to count the cups. The altered weight was so minimal that no one took note. His profit margin was steadily rising. That one cup made quite a difference. After three months, he realized that one more cup (148) would not make a difference. No one noticed anyway. One year after his package "altering" scheme began, he was selling 146 cups at the price of 150 and realizing a healthy profit margin.

One year later, business was still good, but nothing like he had expected. His primary profit margin was a lie, as he was selling 146 cups for the price of 150. His family was unaware of his dishonesty. What people did not know did not hurt them – so he thought. Life was changing in his Jewish community. People were actually moving towards the right, towards greater religious

commitment and observance. His children's school upgraded their Jewish studies program, as did their synagogue. Now there were adult outreach classes in which attendance was in vogue. Their children were doing well; in fact, the entire family became much more traditional. Their son asked to have his *bar mitzvah* celebrated in *Eretz Yisrael*. The parents were not adverse to moving to the right. It was change, but they felt that change was for the better. The father attended *minyan* daily, and the mother attended Torah classes. They decided to make their pilgrimage to *Eretz Yisrael* in honor of their son's *bar mitzvah*. This would be a trip with religious meaning. Everything seemed to be moving in the right direction (religiously). There still was one issue that gnawed at the father: The cups he had been selling all of these years. His financial success was based upon fraud.