

Do not steal. (20:13)

The *Talmud Sanhedrin* 86a, teaches that the *Lo signov*, “do not steal,” associated with the *Aseres Hadibros*, Ten Commandments, is a reference to kidnapping. This is not about stealing money from someone; rather, it is a case of capital punishment for stealing a human life. **Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl**, points out that stealing is often viewed relatively. In other words, if someone appropriates an object illegally, his warped mind will likely convince him that this object is now his, and whoever takes it from him is the thief. This idea applies across the board to every case of monies finding their way into our possession, in a less than savory manner. We now think that since we have possession it is ours. This is the moral bankruptcy of a twisted mind.

Rav Galinsky relates an incident that occurred in which he was accosted by a less-than-observant Jew, who was furious over the successful efforts of *Rav* Galinsky and others like him, people who were sacrificing themselves to rescue lost souls who had been forced into abdicating their religious observance.

The man began the conversation with a shout, “Galinsky! When will you do *teshuvah*, repent?” *Rav* Galinsky immediately countered, “What sin have I committed that requires expiation?”

“You are stealing souls away from us!” the man yelled. “How dare you attempt to inculcate ‘saved’ Jewish children who have been force-fed with your archaic laws and rituals?”

Rav Galinsky replied, “At worst, we are guilty of being *gonev min haganov*, stealing from a thief. You grabbed innocent Jewish children from their homes, cut off their *peyos*, side-locks, and infused them with Communism, teaching them a godless lifestyle. All we are guilty of is taking back what is rightfully ours. Yet, you have the audacity to call us thieves!

“I remind myself of a story that took place in Russia years ago, before the Western Union telegram for wiring money. In those days, when one wanted to send money from place to place, he would dispatch a special messenger to deliver the money. Obviously, since this mission was fraught with danger, the messengers were not your everyday garden-variety citizen. They were powerful, strong and capable men, who could take care of themselves. When confronted with a gun, however, the hardiest messenger turns into butter.

“One such messenger was waylaid by a robber who demanded the money he was carrying in his pouch. Only a fool stands up to a loaded gun, so the messenger turned over the pouch together with everything that he was carrying in his pockets. He was left bereft of all valuables. The messenger asked the robber, ‘Can I ask you for a favor?’ (Apparently, it was a more ‘cultured’ thief.) The man who sent the money is a very suspicious person. He will not believe that I was robbed. Please shoot a hole in my jacket, so that I can prove to him that I was the victim of a robbery.’

“The thief was a practical person. Why not accommodate the victim. So he shot a hole in his jacket.

“‘You know, perhaps one is not enough. Can you shoot some more?’ Once again the robber acquiesced putting another two holes in the jacket.

“‘Just to be safe, can you shoot another bullet into the bottom of the jacket?’ the victim asked.

“‘I would love to help you out, but I am clear out of bullets,’ the thief replied.

“‘If this is the case,” the victim declared, “then you have no advantage over me.’ He immediately jumped on the thief and pummeled him quite mercilessly. Once he retrieved his pouch with the money, he heard the thief moaning, ‘Not only did you beat me within an inch of my life; you took away my pouch with my money!’

“‘Your money?!’ the victim screamed, ‘Your money? I took back what you originally stole from me!’”

Rav Galinsky concluded his tale, “We suddenly become the kidnappers, and you are the victims! We are only taking back what was ours to begin with!”