

## "He shall make restitution; if he has nothing then he shall be sold for his theft." (22:2)

The *gedolim* of previous generations would emphasize that one can learn *avodas Hashem*, the manner in which to serve the Almighty, from any individual -- even a sinner. The *Pardes Yosef* cites three scholars who derived lessons in *avodas Hashem* from none other than the *ganov*, thief. He mentions *Rav Bunim, z.l., of Peshischa*. *Rav Bunim* felt that three valuable lessons can be gleaned from the behavior of the thief. First, the thief is not lazy. Neither rain nor sleet, cold nor heat, prevent the thief from accomplishing his life's work. Indeed, the resourceful thief takes advantage of the inclement weather to further his chosen "vocation." Second, the thief does not give up. If at first he does not succeed, he tries again until his efforts prove fruitful. Third, the thief is not particular regarding the size of his target. He takes his work seriously and does not ignore the opportunity to achieve his aim.

The *Mezritcher Maggid, z.l.*, is cited as one who stresses the idea of deriving lessons from both a young child and a thief. A baby is always happy. Unless he is ill, he reflects a feeling of contentment and joy. Second, he never simply "sits around" with nothing to do. A young child is the paragon of industriousness. He is always looking for something to do, something to stimulate his intellectual curiosity. Last, a baby who does not have his way, who does not get exactly what he desires, inevitably cries. These attributes -- which range from an extreme level of satisfaction to total discontent -- teach us how to respond to life's changing situations.

The *Maggid* suggests a number of added lessons to be derived from the thief. A thief works primarily at night, disregarding the conventional leisure time. Because of the trust necessary for a successful "career," camaraderie among thieves is not only common, it is imperative. Finally, the thief loves his work. He would not exchange places with anyone, even one who is successful in a reputable vocation.

Probably the last lesson which was related in the name of the *Gaon of Gastonin, z.l.*, is simultaneously the most striking and the most demanding. He comments that a thief is not one who *knows* how to steal, but rather one who *actually* steals. The endeavor itself earns one his reputation, not merely his ability.

Likewise, while one might have the most remarkable mind with a potential that most of us can only dream of, it is the actual *Torah* study that earns one the title of *talmid chachom*, *Torah* scholar. Indeed, the *Tashbatz* writes, "A *talmid chachom* is one who occupies his time with *Torah* study, who diligently seeks to understand the profundities of *Torah* and labors to amass a vast storehouse of knowledge. One who is erudite in *Torah*, but does not study, is not a *talmid chachom*."