

## Do not steal. (20:13)

We all come across people whom we once trusted, until they took advantage of our trust – then we lost it. The problem is that, unfortunately, after one person hurts us, we tend to judge everyone according to that new barometer. Not all people are perfect, and some extenuating circumstances bring out the worst in people. Sadly, it is so much easier to think negatively than positively, because negativity requires less creativity. Once betrayed, we are inclined to dig in and ignore everyone, because we do not want to be hurt again – and again. While everyone deserves the benefit of the doubt, once someone hurts us, we are no longer likely to give the benefit of the doubt to anyone else.

A powerful quote expresses this idea well: “You never look good trying to make someone else look bad.” We know the proper way to act, but it is so much easier and less demanding to think negatively of someone. I write this as a segue to a meaningful vignette that occurred concerning the saintly *HaRav Zishe, zl, m’Anipole*.

The *Rebbe* had ten rubles, which was not a large sum of money – unless one was poor. Then every ruble was a fortune. The *Rebbe*, *Rav Zushe*, was destitute. He took his ten rubles and placed them in his *Chumash*, *Parashas Yisro*, *Aseres Hadibros*, *Lo signov*, “Do not steal.” This would be ample warning to discourage any would-be-thief, or so he thought. The *Rebbe*’s home was a public thoroughfare with Jews of all stripes and levels of success and poverty visiting for a blessing, words of encouragement, or just a place to sit, rest, and gather themselves together. The openness of the home also allowed for individuals of ill repute to scout out the crowd to see who could be relieved of some of their valuables. One such person saw the *Rebbe* place ten rubles in his *Chumash*. When the *Rebbe* turned away to attend to the many *chassidim* waiting for him, the thief took the ten rubles and placed five rubles on the *mitzvah* in *Parashas Kedoshim*, *V’ahavta l’reicha kamocho*, “Love your fellow as (you love) yourself” (*Vayikra* 19:18).

When *Rav Zushe* went to retrieve his money and found it missing, he kept on looking (perhaps he did not remember where he had put it) and found the five rubles on the other passage in the Torah. He remarked, “How holy are Your children, Hashem! How lowly is Your servant Zushe! Zushe had ten rubles and took them all for himself. This Jew (the thief), however, was able to take all ten, but understood the importance of sharing half with his fellow, in order to fulfill the *mitzvah*, “Love your fellow as yourself.”