

(If the thief is not found) then the householder shall approach the court that he had not laid his hand on his fellow's property. (22:7)

The householder here is not the *baal habayis*, owner, of the lost/stolen articles, but rather, the *shomer*, unpaid watchman/custodian who claims that he is not responsible for the item that is missing. It is not his fault. He must come to *bais din*, court (which is here termed *elokim*) and swear that he has not laid his hand on his fellow's property. In a homiletic rendering of the *pasuk*, *Horav Meir, zl, m'Premishlan*, explains: One who seeks to come close to *Elokim*, Hashem, must first be completely innocent of any sins concerning his fellowman. The Torah places a strong emphasis on ethical behavior and moral principles. How we treat others directly affects our relationship with Hashem. One who is lacking in his compassion and kindness to his fellow, likewise fails in his spiritual life. Our relationship with Hashem cannot succeed as long as our relationship with our fellow is a dismal failure.

Horav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, zl, the *Ravaad* of Yerushalayim, was extremely stringent with regard to *bein adam l'chaveiro*, any incursion between man and his fellow man. He would identify areas of impingement on one's fellow, be it his property, his sleep, his business, or his emotional well-being. He decried the fact that, when a great Torah leader was being escorted by a large crowd of students – whether it is to a wedding, a lecture, or a funeral – those accompanying him would push and shove against people's property without thinking about the damage they might be causing. He would reiterate that an individual who is extremely careful with regard to *mitzvos bein adam la'Makom*, yet does not think twice concerning those *mitzvos* that address his relationship with his fellowman, fails in both.

Rav Fisher would relate a story that, unfortunately, happens due to the small-mindedness of some well-meaning young people, whose myopia causes them to ignore the larger picture. A young Torah scholar, devout and extremely stringent in his *mitzvah* observance, married a young woman who, sadly, had lost her father. Her widowed mother went out of her way to provide whatever she could to assist the young couple. The young couple was to spend the first *Succos* after the wedding with her mother, so that she should not be alone. The mother worked extremely hard to prepare scrumptious meals for her children. The first night of *Succos*, the son-in-law walked into the *Succah* and noticed that the *schach* covering did not concur with the ruling of one of the more stringent *poskim*. He felt that, according to this specific *posek*, the *schach* was invalid. He refused to eat in the *Succah* and, immediately after the first night, took his wife and left. Apparently, it did not concern him that, as a result of his adherence to a *chumrah*, stringency, in the area of *hiddur mitzvah*, beautifying the *mitzvah*, he caused anguish to a widow who just happened to be his mother-in-law.

Clearly, this is not standard fare. This young man's lack of sensitivity was surpassed only by his immaturity. *Baruch Hashem*, the majority of young people would bristle at such outrageous

behavior.

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl, explained why the punishment for transgressing *mitzvos bein adam la'chaveiro* is so stringent. When one sins against his fellowman who lives in the present world, he is liable to punishment in this world. When one sins against Hashem, He waits until the aggressor's *neshamah* is in the *Olam HaEmes*, World of Truth, before He responds.

A close student of *Rav Chaim* had the noble practice of having a homeless man join their family for the Friday night *seudah*, meal. As a result of the man's unfortunate circumstances and his lack of access to proper hygiene, his body odor was offensive. His hosts would tolerate the smell because that is the type of people they were. When they moved to a different apartment, however, they did not inform the man that they had relocated. Furthermore, they asked their former neighbors not to divulge their new address to him.

Sadly, over the next few months, this man who had hosted the homeless man suffered a number of unusual misfortunes. He, of course, presented his tale of woe to his venerable *Rebbe*. *Rav Chaim* asked, "Perhaps you hurt someone, and it is a message to improve on your *bein adam la'chaveiro*?" When he told *Rav Chaim* that the homeless man whom they had hosted for some time was no longer coming because they did not tell him that they had moved, *Rav Chaim* said, "When you invite this unfortunate man back to your table, your troubles will cease." They listened, and the *tzaros* ended.