

He shall pay five cattle in place of the ox, and four sheep in place of the sheep. (21:37)

If one steals cattle or sheep and either sells or slaughters it, he pays not only the principle, but an added fine. If he steals, but neither sells nor slaughters the animal, he is fined *keifel*, double-principle plus one. The fines apply only to one who is a thief (an individual who conceals his act of theft). A *gazlan*, robber (an individual who steals brazenly without fear of people), pays no fine. *Chazal* (*Bava Kamma* 79B) record a dialogue that ensued between *Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai* and his students. They asked why such a variance exists in the reimbursement of the different violators. Why is the robber, who is more brazen and exhibits total contempt, not fined? The sage replied that the robber equates the honor of the servant – man-with the honor of the Master – Hashem. The robber fears neither man nor G-d, while the thief fears people. Thus, he conceals his felony under the cover of darkness, but does not fear G-d (since he has no problem stealing). The one who does not elevate man over Hashem gets off with the “gentler” punishment. We derive from here, observes *Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl*, that the strictness of the punishment is not due to the thief’s cavalier attitude towards his fellow man, but rather, to his lack of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven.

Rav Neiman observes that *Rav Yochanan ben Zakai*, who criticizes the *Rebbe* for his lack of *yiraas Shomayim*, is the same sage who is quoted in *Meseches Berachos* 28B as blessing his students (all of them distinguished Torah scholars), “May it be the will of G-d that the fear of Heaven be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood.” Apparently, regardless of one’s level of Torah erudition, he still requires a blessing to be G-d-fearing, to become fearful of Heaven as he is fearful of people discovering that he had acted inappropriately.

Apparently, explains the *Mashgiach*, all of our spiritual ills and deficiencies are the result of a shortcoming in *yiraas Shomayim*. We would never act questionably if people might discover how we have acted. This does not seem to prevent an individual from committing the sin behind closed doors. What about Hashem? He is looking and sees everything. This indicates a deficiency in *yiraas Shomayim*. When we see, to our chagrin, a nice boy who was an excellent student in elementary school alter his spiritual image later on in life; when the nice, honest boy becomes involved in activities that bespeak substandard ethical and moral behavior, it means that he had not been strongly educated concerning the significance of *yiraas Shomayim*. The culprit is not the parents for not disciplining him sufficiently, but rather, for not focusing more on *yiraas Shomayim*. The breakdown of our ethical and moral compass reverts back to our fear of Hashem. If we would constantly reflect upon the fact that we are always in His Presence, we would act in a manner that reflects *Yiras Shomayim*. The situation presents no middle road, no gray area; if one lacks *yiraas Shomayim* he has no limit to how far he can plunge into the abyss of sin.