



## **Sicha Summary**

Chelek 17 | Kedoshim | Sichah 1

### **Idolatry and Theft: Perpetual Incitement. The Conclusion of Sanhedrin. And the Imperative of Immediate Return.**

#### **The Verse**

The verse, “Do not steal” (*Vayikra* 19:11) refers to monetary theft. (*Sanhedrin* 86a)

#### **The Sages**

Concerning monetary theft, the Sages say, “When a person steals, it is as if he has worshipped idols.” (*Semachos* 2:11)

#### **The Question**

What is the thematic connection between idolatry and theft?

#### **The Groundwork**

Concerning an *ir hanidachas* (a city in which the majority of the population has been corrupted by idolatry) the verse says, “And nothing that is doomed to destruction shall cling to your hand, so that the Lord may return from His fierce wrath, and grant you compassion.” (*Devarim* 13:18) The concluding *Mishnah* of *Sanhedrin* comments: “As long as wicked people exist in the world, there is wrath in the world.” The Talmud asks: “Who are these wicked people? Rav Yosef said: They are thieves.” (*Sanhedrin* 113b)

The prohibition of benefitting from the condemned possessions follows the command to destroy all the city’s inhabitants. The Talmud therefore wants to know which “wicked people” the *Mishnah* refers to, being that there are

no longer idolaters in this world. Rav Yosef answers: It is the thieves who steal the prohibited possessions of the city.

Seemingly, the sin in this scenario is taking an item whose use is prohibited, not simple theft. Why does Rav Yosef use the word “thieves,” when the sin he refers to is more specific and severe than simple theft?

### **The *Mishnah* and the *Beraisa***

To understand this, we need to investigate a nuance in a *Beraisa* which expands on this *Mishnah*. The *Beraisa* says: “When a wicked person comes into the world, wrath comes into the world...” (*Sanhedrin* 113b) The word for wrath used in the *Mishnah* is “*charon af*,” a stronger, more emphatic form of anger. The *Beraisa*, however, uses the less severe “*charon*.” Why?

### **The Explanation**

The *Mishnah* is speaking about idolatry; therefore, it uses the harsher form, “*charon af*.” The *Beraisa* refers to all sins; therefore it uses the more basic term, “*charon*.”

The thread of the *Mishnah* and the *Beraisa* is as follows: By using the words, “as long as **the wicked** exist...,” the *Mishnah* makes clear that it refers not just to the presence of idolatry in the world, but to individuals who commit some sin related to idolatry. This, Rav Yosef says, is the theft of prohibited items from the idolatrous town. Theft is unique in that it is a perpetual sin. It is renewed every moment that the thief does not return the object or repay its value. The anger caused by the theft of an idolatrous object, therefore, is continuous.

The *Beraisa* adds that the same is true for lesser sins as well. The obligation to repent applies to the individual immediately after any sin. As long as a person chooses not to repent, he transgresses the positive command to repent. Therefore, “When a wicked person comes into the world, wrath comes into the world.” The wrath remains as long as the “sinner” does not repent.

## **Resolving the Original Question**

In light of this, we understand the similarity between idolatry and theft. The presence of idolatry in the world draws G-d's anger into the world, constantly. Theft, too, incites G-d's anger continuously because the theft is being perpetrated every moment. Other sins, however, exist only at the moment they are committed. Refraining from repentance is perpetual, but not the sin itself.

## **Further Similarities between Theft and Idolatry**

Specifically, Rav Yosef says G-d's anger is caused by the "*ganav*," a surreptitious thief, as opposed to a *gazlan*, a brazen robber. According to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, a stealthy thief is more disrespectful to G-d because he clearly fears human judgment and punishment, but he denies G-d's retribution. At least the brazen robber does not regard human judgment above Divine judgment. (*Bava Kama* 79b)

This further tightens the link between theft and idolatry: Both sins deny G-d's presence and providence in the world.

## **The Beginning is Rooted in the End**

In the beginning of the tractate, the *Talmud* discusses the obligation of the high court to leave its seat of power and travel to towns and villages, exhorting them to reform their behavior. The urgency for the members of the court to act in this way is clear from the conclusion of the tractate: As long as sin exists in the world, G-d's anger persists. The Sanhedrin cannot procrastinate in their efforts to ensure that the people repent.

## **The Lesson**

Do not delay repentance, and do not delay the performance of a *mitzvah* when the opportunity arises.