

Rabbi David Wolpe's

# *Off The Pulpit*

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## **Rabbi Yisroel and The Cat**

Once, right before Yom Kippur, Rabbi Yisroel Salanter was seen scurrying about, trying to get a cat to enter his home. His students were puzzled — why was their famous teacher bothering with a cat, and why on the eve of the holiest day of the year?

Rabbi Yisroel explained that he had borrowed some books. Since he would be gone all day on Yom Kippur, he worried that mice might come and gnaw at them, so he needed the cat to keep away the mice.

What is significant about this story is that Rabbi Yisroel always had books in his home, but he wasn't always chasing cats. He did not devote the same level of care to his own possessions that he gave to those he had borrowed. Keeping something belonging to another was a sacred trust. Indeed, any student of Jewish law knows that

being a shomer, one who guards an object belonging to another, is a complex field of Jewish law, with different kinds of shomrim enumerated, and their responsibilities spelled out.

Too often we care for what is ours and are negligent of the property of others. Next time you are tempted to be cavalier with someone else's goods, remember Rabbi Yisroel, learned, pious and renowned, chasing a cat.

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